TEACHER PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH ON FOOD INSECURITY, FOOD AND CULTURE, AND SCHOOL GARDENS WITHIN A LOW-INCOME URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

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This project utilizes participatory action research with a group of four veteran urban teachers to explore the differing ways in which food intersects with the lives of low-income youth in schools. There are two major aims for this research project. The first aim concerns the content of the projects: food and schools. Food deeply affects schools, students, and communities, yet it has not been given adequate attention by formal educators, education researchers, and curriculum developers. Through explorations of social, cultural, and economic dimensions of food in urban schools, our group strives to present a case for the relevance and importance of food in schools to formal educators.

The four teachers devise and implement their own action research projects to investigate the ways in which food intersects with the lives of their students in one low-income urban school district. Their projects include unit design and assignments about food systems and food & culture, creation of a backpack feeding program, a potluck for English Language Learner students and their families, an investigation of the ways in which a change in district food service providers changed the ways food insecure students eat in school, and a creation of an afterschool garden club focused on STEM concepts and project-based learning. Findings from these projects include an appreciation of the ability of food-focused curriculum to engage students, an understanding of the possibilities and challenges of implementing food assistance programs in schools, an awareness of the deep impact of district food service providers in addressing food

insecurity for students, and the potential for students to show ownership of garden projects. Findings across the projects include the importance of the perspective of teachers as school insiders for the design and implementation of projects about food in schools, the plethora of issues surrounding food in low-income schools, the importance of food and students' own familial food cultures within educational settings, and the pressing concerns of food insecurity for many youth in urban schools.

The second aim of this work is methodological. I am using a methodology I have termed teacher participatory action research (TPAR) to make a case that teachers who work with marginalized students have themselves become marginalized by association as a result of current neoliberal policies. As part of this methodology, the teachers conduct their own action research projects, while I explore and analyze the contexts in which they work that have led to their challenging contextual work conditions. To analyze their city, district, and school contexts I use a combination of place and neoliberal frameworks. I also document the ways in which the teachers have reported feeling marginalized within their jobs. I employ poetic inquiry to allow me to share their stories in ways that can be shared with larger audiences while also protecting them from political fallout since their identities are disclosed within the larger research project.

I hope that this project may serve as an example of ways in which university researchers and teachers can collaborate to share their respective strengths—for teachers, an emic knowledge about a place, school, and district context, and for researchers an etic view of these places within a larger context and training in research methodologies—while working to improve conditions for students and teachers.

This dissertation is dedicated to the four teachers, Matt, Person, Wash, and Tawny, who collaborated as co-researchers to make this project happen,
to veteran teachers who have spent most of their lives tirelessly serving other people's children with their utmost perseverance and heart,
and
to my mother who has been a dedicated teacher in urban schools for over thirty years and who has been a lifelong example to me of how to be a professional and a mother.

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Thank you to my committee members, Kyle Whyte, Laurie Thorp, Margaret Crocco, and Kyle Greenwalt, who have considered this non-conventional project with open minds and have been generous with support and feedback along the way. Thank you to Janine Certo and Laura Apol who shared their expertise and advice in poetic inquiry in reviewing the marginalization chapter. Thank you to my chair, Angela Calabrese Barton, for her rigor and expeditious feedback

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Design and aims of the project

This project utilizes participatory action research with a group of four veteran urban teachers to explore the differing ways in which food intersects with the lives of low-income youth in schools. There are two major aims for this research project.

The first aim concerns the content of the projects: food and schools. Food deeply affects schools, students, and communities, yet it has not been given adequate attention by formal educators, education researchers, and curriculum developers. Through explorations of social, cultural, and economic dimensions of food in urban schools, our group strives to present a case for the relevance and importance of food in schools to formal educators.

The second aim is methodological. I am using participatory methodology to allow a group of veteran urban teachers' voices to be heard above the din of contemporary discourses in which teachers are seen as problems to fix rather than professionals to support. My hope is to provide a vehicle through which these urban teachers can speak directly to larger groups—teachers, policy-makers, researchers, and food movement members—about important issues they face and see. Because their position often goes unheard, I aim for this work to model ways in which education researchers can support this teacher voicing. I hope that this project may serve as an example of ways in which university researchers and teachers can work together to share their respective strengths—for teachers, an emic knowledge about a place, school, and district context, and for researchers—an etic view of these places within a larger context and training in research methodologies. Moreover, I believe that there are too few structures that recognize the deep knowledge of context that veteran teachers can possess. I aim to demonstrate the importance of researchers collaborating with veteran teachers as a way to have access to context-

specific knowledge about communities and as a way to recognize and re-energize veteran teachers.

Why food?

Interest in local, sustainable, and/or healthy food has exploded in popularity in the US (Greene & Cramer, 2011; Parasecoli, 2008), from the slow food movement, to the local food movement, to the food justice movement, to the plethora of cooking shows and popular food books by authors like Michael Pollan. From the White House to the schoolhouse, gardening has wildly increased in popularity; seed companies and garden supply stores are reporting record sales and the National Gardening Association estimated an increase of seven million home gardens from 2008 to 2009 (Todd, 2011). The Oxford dictionary word of the year for 2007 was "locavore", referring to someone who eats only foods grown locally. Greene & Cramer (2011) note that, "It seems as if food, and the discourses surrounding it, are all over the place." (p.ix). Not surprisingly, food work has begun to spill over into schools. Interest in school gardens has taken off thanks to leaders such as Alice Waters and Michelle Obama, and there has been a corresponding surge of education research on school gardens (Williams & Dixon, 2013). A plethora of programs (e.g. Food Corps) have been working in schools to teach kids about healthy foods and have been working to improve school lunches. Issues of justice and sustainability are also starting to be discussed in larger food movements and in institutional structures such as school lunches (e.g. Morgan & Sonnino, 2008). And yet, despite the increasing presence of outside organizations focusing on food in schools, the curriculum in schools has remained largely silent on food issues. Given that what we choose to eat has implications for our bodies, the planet, and local and global economies, the resounding silence of the formal curriculum on food issues is striking.

For formal educators, food in schools is ever-present yet under-examined (Weaver-Hightower, 2011). For example, whether students qualify for free or reduced-fee lunch is used by educators as a proxy indicator of the socioeconomic status of students and school communities. However, food has typically been ignored by formal educators (Weaver-Hightower, 2011). Robert & Weaver-Hightower (2011) have argued that food has been ignored in education (as well as the humanities and social sciences) because it falls on the wrong side of the mind-body dualism split, being relegated to the body rather than the mind. But far from being an issue separate from education, Robert and Weaver-Hightower (2011) argue that, "food practices are a means of social reproduction, oppression, and resistance" (p.17), noting that, "for educators, researchers, and policymakers, this requires viewing school food as one of the central facets of school reform." (p.16).

Why urban teachers?

In my future career as a teacher educator, I will strive to create space through which teachers can be viewed and respected as intellectuals. I also want to create structures that recognize the perspectives and experience of veteran teachers. In an era where too many teachers do not remain in the classroom after their first five years, I hope to bring some hope and recognition for teachers to stay in the field. I aspire to be a researcher who does work *with* teachers rather than *on* or *about* teachers. This project is my first foray into developing research structures that recognize teacher expertise and knowledge and allow teachers to co-author research. I will be discussing this in depth in the methodology chapter.

Furthermore, the teachers, as school insiders, are well placed to devise projects that are needed and relevant to the school community. As rapidly as the school contexts have been

changing within this district, having teachers author their own projects has been crucial for being sure that each project is doable, since the teachers can adjust and adapt the projects as needed.

The need for educator voice in local and national food issues

My time as a participant in local food community activities has exposed a void in formal educator presence within this work. This absence is particularly apparent when discussions are about aspirations for farm-to-school work, school gardens, and exposing youth to healthy foods. At a local food justice conference, despite the existence of an educator and youth track and attempts by the programming committee to recruit local teachers, there were only a handful of formal educators out of nearly three hundred attendees. (This was apparent in our sessions aimed for educators and by my attempts to recruit teachers through a sign-up table during the morning forum.) An impromptu session I suggested for an unstructured time in the conference on the role of food in schools drew over twenty people who were interested in making these connections, but only two participants were formal educators; one of these teachers is now participating in this study. In conversations with people working in the food sectors, it is evident that their understanding about school curricula and school operations is understandably limited. Teachers have valuable perspectives to add to these food conversations.

The need for educator voice in food conversations is not just a local phenomenon: from chef Alice Waters' Edible Schoolyard initiative to Jaime Oliver's Food Foundation to FoodCorps, an Americorps-affiliate organization working to teach about healthy foods in schools and afterschool settings, all over the country this work is being done by people outside of formal education. In fact, in a conversation with a FoodCorps representative at a local food conference, I learned that no formal educators were part of the leadership of the organization despite the fact that the organization has worked with over 82,000 youth across 15 states primarily in classrooms

and school lunchrooms (FoodCorps, 2013). If we are to create relevant and important curricula around food, we must have more communication between formal and informal educators.

The teachers who have been working as part of the research team for this study have fascinating stories to tell about things they have noticed while working in a district where many students are dependent on food assistance. Several have talked about refrigerators kept in classrooms where teachers store food to provide hungry kids with snacks later in the day. One teacher mentioned finding a way to covertly stash leftovers from the breakfast program so that students could eat them afterschool. Another devised an afterschool "program" simply so that participating kids will be eligible to eat a district supplied snack. Still another has reflected on the many discussions that have occurred in the classroom involving ethnically important family foods. In essence, teachers are ideally situated, as insiders within the education system, to explore the complex ways in which food matters (or should matter) in schools and curricula.

Why transdisciplinary?

Given my disciplinary focus in science and environmental education, it would seem natural to collaborate with science teachers. Indeed, I began my search for teachers by starting with science teachers. And, after emailing a number of science teachers in the district with whom I had indirect connections, only one agreed to work with me. In the meantime, a social studies teacher was recommended to me and in meeting him, it was obvious that he was right for the project. The remaining two teachers I met at local food events—a food justice conference, and a school food committee meeting. Seeing that they were already engaged and interested in food issues convinced me that they had a place in the project. As a result, the team includes one science teacher, two social studies teachers, and one special education teacher.

A transdisciplinary group is exciting to me because many of the most important issues that we face environmentally and socially must to be addressed in transdisciplinary ways (e.g. Brown, Harris, & Russell, 2010), since artificially dividing them by subject area leads to falsely compartmentalized perspectives. Given that in my dissertation work I am not beholden to limitations of funding agencies, which may privilege science education over other disciplinary areas, I thought this was an important opportunity to explore transdisciplinary work.

While using disciplinary lenses to approach education problems is often helpful, it is not always helpful, and for some topics a single disciplinary lens obscures a large part of the picture. Food is such a topic for me: I believe that in order to craft better education about food (especially education that is appropriate for food-insecure students), we need to understand the issue as holistically as possible. When I was teaching about food issues in my environmental science class, I realized that these issues were seldom possible to isolate environmentally. Instead food is a context that is rife with social issues, cultural questions, and identity.

Furthermore, in keeping with participatory methodology, the teachers have had intellectual ownership over the direction of their projects. This means that some of their projects have taken turns that I myself would not have made. For example, nutrition has not been a particular interest of mine but it does appear in several of the teachers' projects. Surrendering my own disciplinary association as a researcher has been both exciting and scary.

The significance of place

Place is a rich theoretical construct that has been conceptualized in many different fields, from environmental education to critical geographies. Because place is an important construct in my work, I wanted for my dissertation to be situated within the context where I currently live.

Place shapes the contextual constraints that the teacher-participants in the project face within their schools. The teachers are all from the same urban district, which, like many urban districts, struggles with low test scores and high poverty. The district is nestled within an economically downtrodden city, whose population decline has forced major redistricting within the school system. Schools are regularly closed and teachers are moved to new schools. In an effort to further address budget constraints, the teachers have recently lost their planning periods. Though education research commonly speaks of such constraints, we do not reflect enough on the extent to which place shapes the context. The district context chapter seeks to provide a space where these contextual factors surrounding the teachers' jobs and this project are examined.

Since moving to the city where the work takes place, I have been amazed at the flurry of activities around food issues and I have become involved with a number of them for nearly three years. As a food consumer, I shop at a year-round weekly farmers market in my neighborhood, and I have been a member of several community supported agriculture (CSA) groups. As a food activist, I have participated in several local food justice conferences, and have attended other food justice events such as movie screenings and academic discussions. I have also been a member of both a youth gardening coalition and a school food work group.

Long before I arrived, this Midwestern city has been a hotbed of community food systems work for nearly 30 years, starting with community garden work through the local and very progressive food bank. Members of the food community report hundreds of existing community gardens within this small city. There is an impressive array of community organizations, non-profits, Community Supported Agriculture groups, university extension services, and state organizations that have been deeply engaged in local food access and democracy for the city and area. Through this work, the area is breaking new ground in many

food issues. For example, a neighborhood farmer's market was started by a local non-profit organization to specifically address the food desert of the city's east side, and was the first in the state to accept federal food assistance (Delind, 2011). Those working in this local food access sector are generally employed by non-profit and state organizations and many are Americorps volunteers. A Food Systems Work group was recently established by some local leaders in the food sector (some affiliated with university extension, others with the area food bank) to try to identify and fill remaining holes between the myriad of organizations working across the city to improve food access. This group—predominantly white and middle class--has been openly reflective that their membership doesn't reflect enough of the city's population. As a result they are actively trying to recruit low-income residents and/or people of color to work with them.

This city differs from many urban areas in that it is immediately surrounded by some of the most agriculturally productive land in an agricultural state. Founders of the Food Systems Work Group have described that over the years, small farmers from the surrounding areas have come into the city, hoping that the city's population could support them by providing a place for them to sell their products locally. As a result, this particular urban food community is focused not only on increasing access to healthy food for its low-income residents, but also on supporting local farmers. This dual focus on food access and sovereignty makes this city quite a special place. Furthermore, the proximity of a major land-grant public university, with its strong agricultural focus and interest in sustainability, further encourages and supports this type of work within the city.

Like many urban areas, the city has many low-income residents who are in need of better access to healthy food. These low-income residents are primarily white and African-American, but the city is also home to a surprisingly large and diverse immigrant population. Much of this

immigration has been the work of several socially active churches that have sponsored the passage of many families from UN refugee camps. The field of food justice (e.g. Alkon and Agyeman, 2011) explores such important issues around food availability for low-income populations. Though place is not typically an explicit theoretical frame in food justice, it is of paramount importance since the determination of justice issues, such as the presence of food deserts, is by spatial distance from a healthy-food source to homes. (According to the USDA, food deserts exist when 1/3 of an area's population resides more than one mile from a grocery store in urban settings and more than 10 miles from a grocery store in rural settings.) Adding a social dimension to space helps to show that typically the poorest communities and/or communities of color reside in food deserts. As such, power relations are articulated readily through space and place. The social dimension of food sustainability is place-dependent in that the cultural groups inhabiting a place help determine the types of foods available. For example, immigration greatly influences the types of food available in a place. As groups immigrate, a tremendous gift they bring to an area is their food (or at least as much of it as can be geographically transferred to this new place). Immigration patterns within a place have a significant temporal dimension, since the ebb and flow of social groups changes greatly over time. As a result, local food cultures found within any one place are always changing.

Project goals: the book versus the dissertation

The ultimate tangible goal of the project with the teachers is to co-write a book about ways in which food intersects with schools serving low-income populations. The teachers and I will be writing this book together over the months following the completion of this dissertation. I envision that several chapters of this dissertation will ultimately make it into the book, in somewhat altered form. We hope that the book will be something read and appreciated by not

just other teachers, but by a larger group of stakeholders including policy makers, administrators, education researchers, researchers working in food studies, health and nutrition, as well as those interested in food justice issues. At this point, the parts of the teacher chapters written by the teachers are early drafts that the teachers will eventually contribute to the book.

The dissertation stands apart from the book that the teachers and I are co-writing. This was necessary, first, because I could not have a co-written dissertation, and second, because I found the need to narrate and analyze much about the process of working with teachers.

My positionality

I understand that my positionality deeply affects how this story is told, so it is important to position myself. During the time of this project, I have been a doctoral student at the nearby public university. This means that, though I have visited the schools on many occasions, I have never worked in the district or schools in which the study is situated. I have also lived in this area for only three years. Though I have been very active and involved in the community as a homeowner and resident, I have not had a significant amount of time to develop a deep relationships and thick ties to the community. Therefore, I see my perspective on the community and district as being primarily etic. On the other hand, I was a teacher in public schools for six years and, while in my doctoral program, I have been teaching pre-service teachers at the tertiary level. For this reason, I believe my perspective on teaching and the work of teachers is emic.

I consider myself to be a teacher advocate and activist, and am greatly angered by the current reform movement that has discounted the importance of teachers' wisdom. Teaching is a large part of who I am, and a large number of people in my family, including my mother, are or have been teachers. Watching my mother receive little to no recognition as an intellectual, despite her tremendous skills as a teacher, catalyzed me to declare as a teenager that I would

never be a teacher. It took moving to West Africa to teach science to realize that teaching was what I was born to do. And, given that I loved teaching middle and high school, I wonder if I am earning a doctorate partly to gain more recognition as an intellectual—something I didn't feel I could ever truly obtain as a teacher. This realization both deeply saddens and angers me.

This anger has incited me to create a dissertation that speaks back to societal discourses that blame teachers for the low test scores produced by and problems faced in low-income schools. I wanted to create work that has activist aims by both improving the lives of some teachers with whom I work, and by generating research that could showcase the talents and insights of veteran teachers. I have appealed to the teachers in my study first as a former teacher myself, and I have been careful to position myself, not as a scholar, but as a teacher-advocate.

My food positionality

In terms of my own food narrative, food has been and is extremely important to my family and to me. Growing up, family meals were twice daily rituals: we had a large sit-down breakfast as a family every single day before school and work and, despite my father's brutal work schedule, we generally had dinner together every night, even if it meant waiting until he arrived home. What's more, my granddaddy—the most important person in my early life aside from my parents—was a tenant farmer in rural North Carolina. His farm was and still is one of my favorite places in the world. Every Christmas, my granddaddy would slaughter one of his cows and divide it among his children, so we always had "farm beef" in our freezer. Both of my father's parents came from a long line of farmers who had spent generations in the same rural North Carolina county. Having deep connections to agriculture in a geographic region with an incredibly distinctive (and indescribably delicious) food culture has greatly shaped my own food identity. Having moved away as an adult from my home region, I identify as a diasporic resident

and I understand, to some extent, how difficult it is to reside in a place where you cannot readily obtain home-culture foods. Having lived overseas in Africa, Asia, and Europe, I also understand just how challenging it is to maintain one's own food culture in another country. Perhaps for this reason, I have particular interest in and affinity for students who are part of diasporic populations within the US.

When teaching high school environmental science in California, food was a key part of my curriculum in numerous ways, for example, in examining the industrialization of agriculture and the environmental impacts of different kinds of meat. One year, a large percentage of my students chose to eat less/no meat as part of environmental impact projects in which they attempted to record and measure impacts of their personal actions. While this was great in many ways, I noticed some race and class-based variation across my students in their ability/willingness to change their diet. One Latina student expressed to me how difficult she found trying to eat vegetarian when her cultural and familial foods were typically meat-based. Being raised in the US Southeast to a family who often ate meat three times a day, I completely understood. As an undergraduate, my announcement that I had become vegetarian caused great consternation in my family. It was as if, through the seemingly simple act of not eating meat, I was questioning and confronting my family culture. My story is not unique. Peter Scholliers (2001) in his edited book, *Food, Drink & Identity*, recalls that his decision to stop eating red meat as a teenager forced him to "justify myself again and again, not only to my close relatives but also to a large number of people in various situations" (p.3). He notes that, "This struggle was hard because red meat was highly valued in my immediate and wider milieu (my grandfather had been a butcher), and it had formed part of my family's daily behavior ever since I could remember." (2001, p.3)

Scholliers recognizes "the role of food in the representation and identity of a person" and asks an important question about what role food plays in identity formation. He argues that we should look at food's role in *identification*, how our food choices reflect the kinds of social groups with whom we are (intentionally or unintentionally) identifying or being associated with by others. In a conversation I cannot forget, a Latino high school student of mine remarked to me,

> Ms. Stapleton, I went to Whole Foods the other day because you're always talking about how we should eat organic and everything, but I bought a jar of olives and it cost $8, and the only other brown people in the store were working there.

He was absolutely right. This particular store was in my neighborhood—a racially and socioeconomically diverse section of town—but despite the large number of nearby Latino residents, I had also seen a predominance of white customers. Was eating organic food seen as a white thing to do? Or was it the expense of the store that was most problematic? After all, as a teacher, it was an economic splurge even for me to shop there, let alone for my student who came from considerably less well-off circumstances. These issues began my thinking in this area, and years later I am still deeply troubled by the tensions between eating sustainably, eating affordably, and eating as an identity-laden practice.

In crafting my dissertation around food issues, despite my own identity as an environmental and science educator and researcher, I felt the need to explore the complicated food contexts around low-income urban schools. These varied experiences and interests that I have had with food have shaped my desire to approach food with a transdisciplinary or holistic lens. That I understood food issues to be very complex, particularly for low-income youth where food security might be a concern, has influenced me to create a broad search space concerning

food within this project. Moreover, my own food story undoubtedly influences how I have read the teachers projects. For example, Matt's project uses perhaps the closest lens to my own, as we talk about food, culture, and identity in similar ways. Person's project is perhaps the farthest from my own perspective because it comes from experiencing food insecurity, an issue I know of only second-hand.

The research questions

Three major research questions guide this study, and they are explored throughout various chapters within the dissertation. The questions are as follows:

1. In what ways do a group of veteran teachers working together on food-related action research make sense of food's relevance in their classrooms and schools? What food stories do they tell? How do these food stories connect to their working lives as teachers?
2. As these veteran teachers engage in PAR on food-related issues, what questions become important, what actions do they take, and how do the projects take shape over time?
3. How are the teachers' stories and projects shaped by the "places" in which they work? What might their projects teach us about the importance of place and action research on food-related issues in urban districts?

Dissertation structure

The structure of this dissertation, like the project itself, is unconventional. Rather than having separate chapters for the literature review, methodology, and findings, the findings chapters are interspersed throughout. The methodology chapter, the district context chapter, the marginalization chapter, and the teacher chapters, all contain findings from the study. Literature reviews are found in the methodology chapter, the context chapter, and the marginalization chapter. A dissertation writing group member described my project as being more like a vine

than a tree as is the typical research project. The chapters do not emerge from a central trunk or literature, but instead spread out, vine-like, sometimes seemingly separate from one another, yet ultimately tied together through shared roots. Below, I give a brief description of the purpose and makeup of each chapter in the dissertation:

Methodology chapter

The methodology chapter examines literature about participatory action research (PAR) in dialogue with the particular methodology I propose and use, teacher participatory action research, or TPAR. In this chapter, I speak of both the strengths and challenges of this methodology with teachers. Given that this chapter proposes a new variation of PAR, I hope to send some version of this chapter to a PAR journal such as *Action Research* or *Education Action Research*.

District context chapter

The district context chapter aims to answer research question *3. How are the teachers' stories and projects shaped by the "places" in which they work? What might their projects teach us about the importance of place and action research on food-related issues in urban districts?*

In doing so, the chapter references the city, the district, and the three schools where the work takes place using two conceptual frameworks together to explore the complicated nested contexts in which the teachers work. These two conceptual frameworks are place and neoliberalism, and I use them in conjunction to explore how decontextualized neoliberal policies created at the federal and state level interact with the local place constraints to create conditions which are challenging for teachers and students in the city. While neoliberalism and its impacts on urban settings and schools have been documented by scholars such as Pauline Lipman, I nonetheless find the use of this framework very useful in looking at the highly contextualized local. In this

chapter, I aim to set the stage for the various factors and conditions by which the teacher co-researchers have been and continue to be marginalized. As a final destination for this chapter, I may submit it in some form as a journal article. I will also include some form of it in the book to help readers understand the stage on which the teachers must perform.

Teacher Marginalization

In order to make the case that PAR is an appropriate methodology to use with these teachers, I needed to establish that they are a marginalized population. This chapter represents the many frustrations and feelings of marginalization that the teachers have shared during our work together and which have impacted both their projects and our overall project. I have employed the arts-based research method of poetic inquiry to craft poems primarily from the teachers' own words, so that their words might be shared directly with as little narration as possible, to transmit the power and poignancy of their statements. The poems are also more easily shared with non-academic audiences for the activist purpose of raising awareness about the teachers' marginalization. Furthermore, crafting poems has also allowed me to protect the teachers' identities in ways that would be more difficult if I were narrating more about and delineating their individual comments and experiences. Finally, the poems allow me to blend their voices in ways that distill the larger themes of marginalization. I utilize poetic transcription, a form of poetic inquiry that involves crafting poems from the actual words of participants (Glesne, 1997). This perspective is also known as Vox Participare, or "participant-voiced" poems (Prendergast, 2009). In addition, I have crafted a few poems predominantly from my field notes. These poems are referred to as Vox Autoethnographia (Prendergast, 2009), or poems written from the researcher's voice. My intention is to share the poems with various audiences to raise awareness of the teachers' perspectives and to submit this chapter for publication to a

qualitative methodology journal such as *Qualitative Inquiry* or the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*.

The teachers' projects

The teachers' projects chapter addresses research questions 1 and 2, describing the teachers and their projects. Each of the four teacher participants in this TPAR project has her/his own section. Each section consists of four parts:

1. An introduction to the teacher and who they are as is relevant to their individual project and our larger TPAR project.
2. A description of the teacher's project.
3. The teachers own writing about their project.
4. My reflection about their project and the process they enacted.

The teachers' writings are early drafts of the chapters that will eventually be included in our book. I have included these early drafts in the dissertation because I felt it important to have space for the teachers to speak directly about their work. Moreover, different teachers have had different levels of comfort and familiarity with writing so my intervention has not been uniform across these drafts.

I have sent each of them their respective section for feedback and review. This serves as a form of member-checking and also honors the transparency with which I have aimed to achieve in this larger project. The part of the chapters that I have written about the teachers and their projects are meant to reflect the work that I have seen them undertake from my perspective.

Discussions and implications

Finally, I conclude the dissertation by revisiting the major research questions, discussing the findings and how they speak to the literature, and considering the implications and significance of the project.

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CHAPTER 2: Methodology

It seems fitting that a description of my methodology should begin with explaining that I did not initially set out to use participatory action research (PAR) as my methodology at the inception of the project. While I did aim to work with teachers collaboratively and democratically on food issues facing students in a low-income district, my original idea was to conduct a collective ethnography, with each teacher exploring their own school contexts, with the intention of helping teachers know more about their students and the communities in which they work. I had no specific intention to work with veteran teachers. I also had no intention of including teacher marginalization as part of the project. Moreover, I had met many people involved in local food justice issues, and an absence of teachers in these food justice communities of practice made me think that local teachers might not know about the food insecurity and access issues their students faced. I thought that getting teachers involved in food justice concerns would be a useful move simply because food is an important part of the hidden curriculum of schools. As I assembled a team of four teachers, several aspects emerged. First, they were all veteran teachers with at least 15 years in this district. Second, their extensive knowledge of the community, the schools, the district, and of local and state politics amazed me. I quickly realized that these teachers already had so much to offer that I needed to adjust my methodology to accommodate they skills they brought to the project.

I knew that I wanted to position the teachers as co-researchers and suggested to them that we write a book together (a suggestion to which they responded enthusiastically). However, I did not know quite what to call the methodology I was envisioning. I began with group meetings with the teachers, and we started by each sharing our own food narratives. I did this because I wanted us to get to know each other and I wanted everyone to think about their own positionality

before we began the project. The narratives that were shared in our first meeting were fascinating and have, perhaps not surprisingly, shaped the projects the teachers have designed.

From our first meetings, it became clear to me that the teachers were faced with extraordinarily difficult circumstances in their teaching positions. In many meetings, the struggles the teachers were facing took a forefront to the food issues they were researching. I realized that an important part of the project and of our work together was to be able to tell about the ways that their school district context made their jobs challenging. I realized that a major part of my contribution to the project was to describe and analyze this complicated context and how it impacted the teachers' positions. The myriad of ways in which these teachers have been and continue to be marginalized as a result of the urban context in which they have chosen to teach has been unsettling to witness. In addition to student food issues, this dissertation is a story about the ways in which these teachers have been marginalized, the factors that have contributed to this marginalization, and the ways in which this research project has attempted to help make their lives a little bit better by giving them space to voice their insights and concerns.

In this chapter, I will explore literature on action research and participatory action research (PAR) and then describe the particular variety of PAR that we have engaged in as part of this project which I term "teacher participatory action research", or TPAR. Next, I will elaborate on how I have conceived TPAR within this project, explore the steps our PAR group has taken and describe my methods, data collection, and analysis. It should be noted that many authors use the terms AR, PAR, and PR somewhat interchangeably, so the designations below are not always distinct across the wide-ranging action research literature.

Literature on action and participatory research

Action research

Action research (AR) is the name given to a paradigm of (Pine, 2009) or orientation toward (Reason & Bradbury, 2008) research that involves practitioners, community members, or other non-researchers engaged in research to improve their communities, practice, and situations. Action research (AR) is accredited to a variety of sources, including Kurt Lewin's work in the 1940's (Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Reason & Bradbury, 2008) and liberationists such as Paulo Freire (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Philosophical roots of AR include pragmatism, phenomenology, critical theory, & social construction (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). AR has been has been utilized by practitioner-researchers in fields as diverse as industry, international and/or community development, and nursing (Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

Attempting to categorize action research in a concise way is difficult because action research involves a large variety of perspectives and approaches and comes from a rich lineage (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The execution of AR typically includes a spiral of steps consisting of planning, acting, observing, and evaluating the result of the action. Usually this process begins with a general idea that is agreed upon consensus by a group, and is refined throughout the steps (McTaggart, 1997b, p.27).

One defining characteristic of AR is a discontent with positivist paradigms, mainstream in academic institutions for decades, which privilege objectivity and decontextualized knowledge (e.g. Fals Borda, 2001; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Instead, proponents of AR argue that contextualized knowledge held by those who are insiders is valuable. As part of this, AR does not see theory and practice as belonging to different worlds; instead it is concerned with the development of theoretically informed practice (McTaggart,

1997a). In other words, AR values practitioner knowledge as much as theory. Reason & Bradbury (2008) describe that,

> Action research challenges much received wisdom in both academia and among social change and development practitioners, not least because it is a practice of participation, engaging those who might otherwise be subjects of research or recipients of interventions to a greater or lesser extent as inquiring co-researchers. Action research does not start from a desire of changing others 'out there', although it may eventually have that result, rather it starts from an orientation of change *with* others. (p.1)

"With" others is a particularly important rhetorical move that signifies ARs intention not to dictate to or study practitioners but to work alongside them.

Perhaps not surprisingly given the wide disciplinary spectrum involved in AR, there is a lack of consensus on several aspects. Specifically, Greenwood & Levin (2007) report on a split within AR between those who use it as a technique for improving practice and those who see it as a path toward addressing societal inequities. For example, McTaggart (1997) criticizes Kurt Lewin's work because it failed to interrogate power issues that may be implicit within diverse groups. McTaggart (1997b) argues that Lewin's writing does not adequately involve the participants in articulating their own theories. Instead McTaggart (1997a) argues that,

> Authentic participation in research means sharing in the way research is conceptualized, practiced, and brought to bear on the life-world. It means ownership…in the production of knowledge and improvement of practice. Mere involvement implies none of this and creates the risk of co-option and exploitation of people in the realization of the plans of others. (p. 5-6)

McTaggart's (1997) concern indicates that not all who practice AR think of participation in the same way in terms of intellectual ownership within a project.

Because AR often involves insiders (participants) and at least one outsider (e.g. university researcher), the role of the university researcher in relation to the participants is an important consideration. While some AR scholars insist that the topic or question(s) for a participatory project must originate with the participants themselves (e.g. Hall, 1981), others (e.g. Pine, 2009) note that researchers can and often do approach a group of participants with a question/topic in mind. When engaged together, Greenwood & Levin (2007) point out that an important outcome of researcher/participant interaction is co-generative dialogue. They argue that this type of dialogue brings together knowledge of an outsider with that of locals and "can transform the views of both" (p.155), bringing together the "abstractness" of the outsider's perspective with the "concreteness" of the insiders. They also note that the outsider can be in charge of the conceptualization of the process and how the project is presented externally (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). They note that, "Throughout the process, the outside action researcher plays a mixed role as instigator, process manager, advocate for groups not yet fully included, trainer in research methods, and, often chronicler of the activities" (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p.156). Hall (1981) notes that though the researchers are outsiders coming in to a given participatory project, they are nonetheless "committed participants and learners in a process that leads to militancy rather than detachment" (p. 8). Similarly, Sommer (1987) noted that researchers are not separate and neutral but collaborators, working as co-researchers with participants. (as cited by Gatenby & Humphries, 2000).

Participatory action research

Participatory action research (PAR) is a subgenre of action research that has taken a more decidedly critical stance, aiming to address issues of power (Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Miller & Brewer, 2003). The participatory genre of action research originated in the Global South through an international network of researchers operating both collaboratively and in parallel across a number of countries (Hall, 1981). Hall (1992) has recounted that in the mid-1970s, he and colleagues in Tanzania were working with a methodology they called *participatory research*, while simultaneously in Latin America, Fals Borda and others were working under the term *action research*. When a Latin American network coalesced behind the term *participatory research*, Fals Borda began calling his work *participatory action research*. Hall (1992) notes that PR and PAR indicate the same general process.

These participatory versions of action research see themselves as being different from the de-politicized versions of action research (Hall, 1992). In contrast to some types of AR which may prioritize problem solving (e.g. Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001), PAR is far more attentive to the *process* used toward knowledge generation, and to whose voices are being heard and how (Fals Borda, 2001). PAR typically involves working with individuals from marginalized groups for emancipatory aims (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). A number of scholars have noted that PAR has a double aim or objective (Fals Borda, 2001; McTaggart, 1997b; Miller & Brewer, 2003). Miller & Brewer (2003) note that PAR, "aims to produce knowledge and action directly useful to people and also to empower people through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge" (2003, p. 225). McTaggart (1997b) explains that PAR's "double aim" is to change not only a situation being researched, but to alter the researchers themselves. (p.40). Likewise, Fals Borda (2001) explains that, "Participatory action research has not been just a quest for

knowledge. It is also a transformation of individual attitudes and values, personality and culture, an altruistic process" (p.32).

Another key aspect of PAR is an expression of empathy with participant collaborators. A prominent scholar in PAR, Fals Borda (2001), describes how the field grew within conversations at the 1977 first World Symposium of Action Research where, "We found little use for scholarly arrogance and learned instead to develop an empathetic attitude towards Others" (p.31). Fals Borda (2001) explains that empathy in this way means to value symmetry in social relations, appreciating the wisdom of practitioners by listening to "discourses coming from diverse intellectual origins or conceived with a different cultural syntax" (p.31). In other words, being empathic in participatory action research means respecting participants as fellow humans, worthy of dignity, and in possession of their own wisdom, however different it may be from that of academics.

Gaventa & Cornwall (2001) probe which aspects of PR could make it empowering for participants. To answer they identify that PR challenges power relations through three major aspects: knowledge, action, and consciousness. They argue that knowledge is a form of power itself and impacts decisions. Action includes a focus on who is doing the actions to produce knowledge, and consciousness reflects how the other two processes have impacted the participants' perspectives. Pine (2009) reflects that PAR "assumes that ideology, epistemology, knowledge and power are bound up together" (p.53) and points out that for PAR, the knowledge and research produced are a political act.

Some describe participatory research that addresses issues of power as "southern PAR" from its historical affiliation with work with oppressed groups in the Global South (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). Though my work addresses power issues, it is not with a group from the global

South or another historically oppressed group, therefore, I term this research PAR rather than Southern PAR. Regardless, as Greenwood and Levin (2007) note, "Oppression is oppression everywhere it is found, South or North" (p. 158).

McTaggart (1997b) poses three important questions to govern PAR projects: 1. 'How is [any given project] an example of PAR? 2. What does [a given project] tell us about the criteria we might use to judge claims that an endeavor is PAR (to test our theory about what PAR is)? And 3. What contribution has [a given project] made to the improvement of the understanding, practice, and social situation of participants and others in the context described?" (p. 26). I will consider these guiding questions as I describe how PAR is conceptualized and used within this study.

PAR in this study: teacher participatory action research (TPAR)

I term the overarching research methodology used in this project *teacher participatory action research* (TPAR) to represent that it is a PAR project conducted in collaboration with teachers who are experiencing marginalization in their positions as teachers. While youth participatory action research (YPAR) has become popular in a number of fields including education, I have not encountered TPAR as a construct elsewhere in the literature. [That said, there are a few studies that use the words "teacher participatory research", but they do not define or theorize it as a construct, nor are they attentive to the principles of PAR. In other words, some studies have grouped the words together without intention, merely to describe teacher research done collaboratively.] I argue that engaging in PAR with teachers on the basis of their jobs leads to unique circumstances that may differ from PAR with other populations. First, teachers are tasked with working to help others (students), so their positionality is oriented around giving and providing support to populations that may be marginalized. This positioning has, in turn, made

teachers vulnerable, because they are associated with the problems of their students and even blamed for them. This **marginalization by association** is perhaps the defining feature of TPAR as I conceptualize it, and I argue that the methodology is most appropriate not for teachers who work with relatively privileged youth, but for teachers who work with marginalized populations.

While PAR projects typically involve participants researching the ways in which they *themselves* experience marginalization, I argue that TPAR as practiced in this project has a dual purpose:

1. To look at the ways in which the teachers are being marginalized, and
2. For the teachers to conduct action research projects that explore important aspects of their students' marginalization.

While teachers could in theory conduct a PAR project that was focused on their own marginalization with no research about students, exploration of student concerns can be a way for teachers to earn more credibility and respect for the work that they do, thus working toward the empowerment aspect of PAR. Given that teachers are typically judged for their ability to serve students, conducting research about their students' needs can demonstrate the depth to which teachers can perform their jobs despite formidable circumstances. Furthermore, McTaggart (1997b) notes that PAR "is concerned simultaneously with changing individuals, on the one hand, and, on the other, the culture of groups, institutions, and societies to which they belong" (p.31). In this way, working to alleviate teacher marginalization while also working to improve conditions in schools—the institutions to which they belong—fits nicely within a PAR framework.

This project is a bit complicated in its design. In brief, the overall project is TPAR, which means that it involves analysis of the ways in which the teachers have been marginalized as a

result of working with marginalized youth. The teachers have participated in this aspect by providing their stories and views during meetings. However, the projects that the teachers have designed and conducted themselves are not individual PAR projects, but rather, action research projects about food in schools. In this way, they are working on separate AR projects within the larger umbrella PAR project.

While it could be assumed that teachers are power-holders in schools given their positions relative to students, examination of contemporary discourses about teachers reveals a concerning lack of voice, empowerment, and self-determination, especially for teachers in low-performing schools. In this dissertation, the district context chapter examines factors that have shaped and constrained the institutions in which the teachers work. The marginalization of urban teachers chapter shows ways in which these particular teachers have reported experiencing marginalization in their positions. Both chapters provide important background context for why I have chosen to use PAR with this group of teachers in this place. Finally, given that "action research assumes caring knowledge is contextual knowledge, with the understanding that human actions always take place in context and must be understood in context" (Pine, 2009, p.31), this study is focused within one urban, low-performing school district.

I recognize that some may argue that this work could have been termed "teacher research" rather than TPAR. Similar to action research, teacher research began in the field of education in the 1940s and 50s with the work of people such as Stephen Corey at Teachers College, Columbia University (Pine, 2009). Also, similar to AR, there exists a split in teacher research between those focusing on practical solutions and those focusing on larger social problems. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1999) outline three major conceptions of teacher research: teacher research to improve practice, teacher research as a community inquiry done to improve

schools and specific communities, and teacher research as social inquiry aiming for social change. While these different trends reflect a range within the field of teacher research, it is generally accepted that, "Action research assumes teachers are the agents and source of educational reform and not the objects of reform" (Pine, 2009, p. 30). Furthermore, Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1993) point out that teachers bring an important emic perspective to research compared to the etic perspective of university researchers (as cited by Pine, 2009).

I have chosen TPAR as a methodology rather than calling this project "teacher research" for several reasons. First, like the larger field of action research, not all teacher research is political (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Much of the genre focuses on teacher research as a technical approach to improving teaching and curricula with no explicit political agenda. Second, teacher research is typically designed as a method for improving classroom practice and/or as professional development for teachers (e.g. Judah & Richardson, 2006). Only one of the teachers in this project chose to examine classroom practice, while the others have chosen to focus on broader issues facing their students. Furthermore, it was never my intention to provide professional development to these teachers. With their considerable years of experience, my intention was instead to showcase their knowledge and dedication. Within the teacher research literature, my work is perhaps most compatible with the ongoing work of Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1999, 2009) who advocate for teacher research as a political endeavor, and argue that education practitioner research should be recognized as valuable knowledge for the field of education. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009) also recognize the myriad ways in which accountability movements have neglected to recognize teacher knowledge and expertise, and argue that practitioner research is an important political move towards valuing their local knowledge. Based on this privileging of local knowledge, I view Cochran-Smith & Lytle's arguments as seemingly

consistent with many PAR arguments. However, the reasons that I have chosen to term this research TPAR rather than teacher research are the following:

1. To signal that the research is explicitly political and consistent with PAR ideology,
2. To illustrate that the project is designed around teachers as a marginalized population, and includes analysis of their marginalization within the project design,
3. To argue that teachers serving marginalized populations are particularly vulnerable by association, and
4. To connect with audiences beyond education.

Consistent with PAR ideology, I privilege the *process* within this project, making conscious decisions to give the teachers more space to design projects that they have created and devised. In doing so my purposes are to explore ways in which teachers make sense of food issues in their schools and to test the waters for researcher/teacher PAR collaboration. Although I could have taken a leading intellectual role with the teachers in designing the projects so that their projects are more closely tied to literature, I wanted to give the teachers as much intellectual freedom as possible so that I could explore the results of limited researcher influence in the design of teacher action research projects. I decided that starting with greater teacher autonomy would help me to understand how teachers might engage with PAR projects from their perspective. That I privileged the process is not to say that the product is neither important nor useful, and I believe much can be learned from the products of this PAR project, particularly because so little has been written *by and from the perspective of* teachers about food in schools.

I also need to address the notion that because the teachers were given freedom to design and author their projects, that I did not engage in the research process. To this concern, I emphasize that though I did not take a heavy hand in determining the direction of the teachers'

projects, I did take a strong supporting role with all the teachers, meeting with each regularly to discuss their project ideas, and asking them questions throughout the process to help their thinking and framing of their projects. I even took an active role in the recording of their stories to the extent that I recorded, transcribed, and edited two of the stories when the teachers requested help with the writing process. In other words, neither the projects nor their stories would have been generated without the project and without my coaching and support. Moreover, the aspects of the project surrounding the teachers' writing and work on food reflects my work as a researcher in analyzing the nested contexts in which the teachers work, capturing and reflecting the emotions expressed by the teachers about their current positioning as teachers in this district, and reflecting on the process of working with teachers in this collaborative manner.

Gatenby & Humphries (2000) note the importance of outside researchers on PAR projects being "reflexive and explicit about their own subjectivities because of their role in the knowledge we construct" (p. 103). As a former teacher, I have taken a pro-teacher role in the project, letting the teachers know that I am their advocate. I have not attempted to be neutral in the face of policies that compromise teacher autonomy and agency, such as NCLB. My primary aim is to recognize the teachers' experience and expertise and support them in any way I can.

The process: recruiting the teachers.

McTaggart (1997b) points out that the initial preliminary phase of PAR is the creation of a group or community of participants who will engage in the project. I used criterion and opportunistic (Patton, 1990) purposeful sampling to select participants. My initial criteria for teachers were that they taught in a particular city's school district, had interest in exploring food issues in schools or the city, and were willing to meet regularly with our group. I limited my search to teachers in one urban district because I felt that it would be important to focus on a

place whose student population faced concerns about food security. I knew that personal contact was necessary to find the right teachers for this project, so I spent several months searching for participants through networking and personal contacts. The four teachers who committed to work on this project are those that I met at local food events or through contacts from my university department. One was recommended by a fellow graduate student who thought the teacher was interested in food issues. Another was one of a few science teachers whose names were given to me by a faculty member. (Science is my disciplinary area, so I wanted to include at least one science teacher.) I met a third teacher at a local food justice conference in February 2014. I met a fourth teacher at a school food action committee meeting at a local community center. Before they agreed to participate, I met with each teacher individually to discuss the project, so I could be sure they were committed to participating.

The teachers have differing positionalities and teaching placements. The teachers have agreed for their names to appear in this dissertation, so I am including their names when it is helpful for clarity and when the use of their name will not make them vulnerable. Matt is a social studies teacher at a high school, Melissa (who prefers to be called "Wash") is a middle school social studies/health teacher at the same high school. After years as a middle school science teacher, Tawny started a new position in 2014-15 as a STEM support teacher at a STEM magnet school for 4-6 grades. Person works as a special education teacher at an alternative high school. Two are white females, one is a white male, and one is an African-American female. All are graduates of the university where I am a graduate student. Several of them have been active with our local university programs, from serving as mentor teachers to working on research projects with professors. These varying positionalities have helped to inform their projects and make our

collaborative work particularly rich and varied. The teacher's stories and projects are presented in chapters 4-7 of this dissertation.

The process: thematic concern.

McTaggart (1997b) recommends that after coming together, individuals working on a PAR collective project need to coalesce around a '*thematic concern*' (p.31). I initially decided to focus on food in a low-income school district and used that as a recruiting tool to find participants. Having agreed to this baseline theme, the teachers then brought their own interests regarding food and schools and, given their differing interests and job descriptions, it made sense for everyone to conduct their own project. At our first group meeting in April 2014, most of the teachers had a rough idea of what they were interested in with regard to food, but it took some time for us all to understand how the projects might work together. At our first meeting, I had proposed a focus on sustainability or food justice, but in the end we all agreed to keep the topic broadly conceived around food in their urban school district. We needed to negotiate to think about how their differing topics fit together. For example, in one meeting, one of the teachers whose project was slightly different from the other two projects being discussed wondered aloud if the project fit well enough with the others. Immediately, another teacher addressed how the projects helped to fill different spaces of a larger concern about food. Because I was guided by the aims of action research in valuing the knowledge of insiders (e.g. Fals Borda, 2001; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001; Reason & Bradbury, 2008), I was quite comfortable with each teacher following their own line of interest concerning food in their schools or classes. In thinking about how the projects fit together, Person articulately it poignantly, "I think of it as a tapestry that we are creating together…Tapestries can be prettier than quilts…they can have bling, no edges,

corners that connect…but they can tell a wonderful story that is fluid" (individual meeting, 6/19/14).

I had not intentionally sought veteran teachers, but as it turned out, each of the four teachers had fifteen or more years teaching in the city's school district and all have exhibited extensive knowledge about the community and the district. Their knowledge about the place and context has become an important defining feature of our project and early in our group meetings, the teachers agreed that, in addition to food, *place* was the central, unifying force across all the projects.

Methods

While PAR has guiding principles as a methodology, it is vague about methods within PAR projects (Hall, 1992). In this way, PAR could be considered an ontological and epistemological project with the criteria that any methods used must be consistent with the ideological underpinnings of PAR. As a result, the list of acceptable methods to use in PAR is not prescriptive (Pine, 2009) and as Hall remarks, "there are no methodological orthodoxies, no cookbook approaches to follow" (1992, p.20). In fact, Gatenby & Humphries note that, "the actual methods of participatory action research are diverse and often experimental" (2000, p. 89). The intent is to approach the work through the agenda of the participants (Hall, 1981; Miller & Brewer, 2003), using whatever methods are best suited for those purposes. Following the agenda of participants means a deep valuing of "local knowledge" (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). "The principle is that both issues and ways of working should flow from those involved in their context." (Hall, 1992, p.20)"Authentic participation itself might almost be seen as constituting the method" (McTaggart, 1997a, p.13).

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches can be used, though often PAR scholars particularly recommend qualitative approaches which make use of participant observation, interviews, and field notes because they see them as being most consistent with the methodology and doable by those not formally trained as researchers (e.g. Miller & Brewer, 2003). Within qualitative approaches to PAR, the methods used may be those typically found in other studies such as participant observation, interviews, field notes, & document analysis (McTaggart, 1997b).

Methods and data sources for this TPAR project

Given that PAR methods are non-prescriptive and varied, McTaggart (1997b) speaks to the value of principles in guiding PAR work. Thus, I created guiding principles to shape the methods for this PAR project. These were to:

1. Create space for the teachers to meet together for collaboration, shared experience, companionship, solidarity, and mutual support.
2. Create space for me to meet with the teachers individually.
3. Foster relationships between myself and the teachers.
4. Foster relationships among the teachers.
5. Create consistent contact without overburdening the teachers.
6. Have me be available to the teachers when they desired my assistance.
7. Help me understand more about their school/project contexts.
8. Empower, rejuvenate, and provide moral support for the teachers.

9. Recognize the teachers through their project work as dedicated, conscious, and competent professionals who have an important contribution to make to the conversation about food in schools.

In this PAR project, I use a qualitative approach, using methods such as group meetings, field notes, analytic memos, participant observation, conversational interviews, and emails. The methods used within the PAR project also provided the data sources for the dissertation.

Data sources.

Group meetings. Over the course of the year and a half we have worked together, we have had seven group meetings including the teachers and myself. (see Table 1.)

Meeting Date	Topic
4/26/14	Introductions
5/13/14	Preparation for food justice conference
6/11/14	Planning projects
8/26/14	District problems
10/25/14	Updates on projects/district issues
11/16/14	Updates on projects/district issues
5/9/15	Planning for food justice conference/updates

Table 1. Group meetings.

The seven meetings have been at least two hours in duration, with a total of over 15 hours spent in these meetings. The group meetings have all been held at my house and typically involve a meal, either that I prepare or that we have all contributed to through potluck dishes.

The venue (around my dining room table) and the meals allowed us to have a relaxed and enjoyable time, making it feel less like work and more like a support group. I typically created a rough agenda for the meetings but we ran the meetings informally, giving space for conversation and pressing concerns. The agendas included sharing ideas, our relevant personal backgrounds, project ideas, and project observations. The meetings also involved discussion of district policies, job pressures, district politics, and other issues. In our study group meetings, we have moved informally through a number of processes within the action research cycle, including identifying an issue, creating plans, and sharing findings. The group meetings were particularly important in the construction of the district context and teacher marginalization chapters, as this was the main forum through which I learned about district policies and politics and where the teachers vented and corroborated their sentiments about the problems they were facing in the district.

I audio recorded these meetings and took prolific notes throughout, trying to capture all statements made that I found particularly powerful or significant. Because many important exchanges happened informally as we interacted, (e.g. in the kitchen as we are preparing food or getting drinks) there were many moments when the audio recording was not particularly useful. In these incidences, I relied heavily on field notes, which I constructed as soon after the meeting as possible, using my written notes and memory of what transpired.

Individual meetings with teachers. I have met one-on-one with the teachers as needed to help support them and to learn more about what they are doing/planning. The meetings have both been elicited by me and by various teachers over time. My goals for these meetings were to help me understand more about the teachers' projects and for me to provide research assistance as requested by the teacher. I have met individually numerous times with each of the teachers to

learn more from them about their ideas, hear or see more about their school contexts, and discuss research-related work such as data sources, ways to collect data, and ways to create field notes. Table 2 outlines the time I have spent with each teacher within individual meetings.

Teacher	Dates	Number of meetings	Duration
Person	3/1/14; 6/19/14; 8/27/14; 3/7/15; 5/9/15; 6/28/15	6	18 hours
Wash	3/20/14; 4/26/14; 9/25/14; 1/21/15; 3/11/15; 4/3/15; 7/22/15; backpack distributions	7+	11+ hours
Matt	2/1/14; 6/20/14; 10/25/14; 1/17/15; 3/9/15; weekly informal chats	5+	11+ hours
Tawny	3/2/14; 7/1/14; 9/19/14; 12/15/14; 4/28/14; 5/7/15; 5/18/15	7	14 hours

Table 2. Individual meetings with teachers.

The times are approximate for Wash and Matt particularly, because I met with each of them on a weekly basis informally and did not record the duration of these informal meetings. Wash and I chatted many weeks before or after the backpack feeding program as I helped volunteer for a number of distributions on Fridays in the 2014-15 school year. I checked in with Matt regularly at the farmer's market since he operates a brewery start-up there and I am a regular farmer's market shopper. I took prolific notes in all individual meetings, which I turned into field notes. In my field notes, I also analyzed the meetings, looking more broadly at the topics discussed, the ideas and interests of the teachers, and the ways in which I attempted to scaffold the action research process.

School visits. I visited each of the teacher co-researchers' schools for a number of different reasons. I visited Person's school several times in the fall of 2015, once because she wanted me to see the cafeteria and the summer bagged lunch food distribution process, and

another time for me to attend open house. She also wanted me to become acquainted with some of her students and with the school in general since it is small and close-knit. I spent most of my time in Wash's and Matt's school because I was helping with the food distribution for Wash's backpack feeding program on a number of Fridays throughout the 2014-15 school year. This was helpful for me because I was able to get a feel for the school, the students, the teachers, and the general climate. While there for the feeding program, I also often stopped by Matt's class to say hello and check in, and/or pick up papers. I did meet Matt at the school for a couple of other meetings outside of the school feeding program, primarily because it was convenient for him to meet there. I had a number of individual meetings with Tawny at her school, which allowed me to see her engineering and lab space as well as the garden space. In the spring of 2015, I attended a number of meetings of Tawny's after-school garden club as well, held in the side yard of her school.

While I did not keep close records of my time in the schools, I spent approximately 4 hours at Person's school, 10 hours at Matt's and Wash's school, and 8 hours at Tawny's school. I took notes during these visits, looking at whatever the teachers wanted me to observe more closely as was relevant to their projects. I also observed their presence in the school, their interactions with others, and the overall climate of the school. I then typed field notes after the meeting, adding observations and analysis of themes. The reasons for school visits by teacher are in Table 3 below.

Teacher	Reason for school visits
Person	Open house, observation of summer feeding program
Wash	Distribution of food backpacks
Matt	Picking up materials, individual meetings
Tawny	Individual meetings, garden club meetings

Table 3. School visits.

Email/text correspondence with teachers. Emails between the teachers and myself have been a useful source of data, since it is a primary way through which we communicate outside of face-to-face meetings; we have exchanged at least one hundred emails over the year and a half we have worked together. I sent more emails to the teachers than vice versa, since I was typically the instigator of email threads. In my emails, I have shared relevant articles, references, questions, ideas, and announcements for relevant local events and conferences. I also have used email to schedule group and individual meetings or to ask questions about their backgrounds and contexts as I was writing. The teachers have sent me emails to ask me to meet, to come to their school, to reply to my emails, to send relevant articles, or to inform me about a relevant occurrence. I saved emails that had substantive discourse within them and coded them, noting particular observations. I also pulled several quotes for the poetic inquiry chapter from emails sent by the teachers.

Data collection.

The data collection for the dissertation portion of this project began with the recruitment meetings of the participants starting in February 2014 and has continued through July 2015. Even at this writing, the project goes on, and the teachers and I will, no doubt, be working on our co-authored book for a year or two after the dissertation itself has been uploaded into the university system. Moreover, many unexpected things arose which altered the direction of the projects, e.g. changes to the teachers course assignments both before the fall of 2014 and again before the spring of 2015. Since the teachers used and collected data to different degrees and fairly independently, below are the most important sources of data that I have relied upon for the dissertation itself.

Field notes from group and individual meetings. During all meetings (both group and individual) with teachers, I took prolific notes, complete with key quotes as I could capture them. Later, I transcribed these notes, expanding them to include other observations I made both during and after the meeting. In this way, these field notes serve as analytic notes as well. The field notes reflect the topics, concerns, priorities and observations of the teachers as a group and as individuals through my lens as participant-observer. I have also paid close attention to ways the group itself has seemed to influence the teachers (such as when they reference what we had discussed previously, or referred to comments made by others when discussing thoughts on their own project.)

Teacher narratives. To prepare for our first group meeting, I asked the teachers to write or brainstorm about their own personal story as a teacher, as a person, and how it connects (directly or indirectly) to their interest in exploring food in schools. We shared these in our first meeting to facilitate getting to know each other and to recognize the different perspectives that the teachers bring to our group. For example, one of them told us about growing up as a student in Lansing schools and reflected on how much school food has changed over the three decades that she has been in the district as a student and teacher. I have since heard several other teachers in the group refer to her experience in other conversations, so it appears these narratives can help position each person's experiences within the project.

Teacher chapter drafts. Each teacher has been writing observations and reflections about their work, which will serve as sources for chapters in a book that we plan to co-author and are currently contained in chapters 4-7 of this dissertation. Reading their work has also helped me to understand more about how they reflect on their projects. More specifically, I have examined the way they speak about doing research, their insights from their positions as teachers, and the

aspects that they have foregrounded in their retelling of their projects. I have also looked for similarities and differences across their work and explored themes about food in urban schools present across the projects.

Teacher audio recordings. One of the teachers used audio recordings as a way to organize her thoughts for her chapter. She had a recorder that she spoke into to record her chapter thoughts. I then transcribed her recordings and sent them to her as a draft for her chapter. Similar to the chapter drafts, this audio recording served as data for me to understand more about how she was framing her project and the story that she wanted to tell about it.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this dissertation has not been its own stage, but a reflexive process throughout the research (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). In addition, because each chapter of the dissertation nearly stands alone as a separate entity, the analysis for each chapter has been fairly contained/separated. Below, I will describe some of my general data analysis procedures and a description of chapter-specific data analysis descriptions. This section outlines the data analysis conducted as part of the dissertation rather than the data analysis done by the teachers within their projects. While I offered to involve the teachers in the dissertation data analysis process, their limited availability made it virtually impossible for them to work on this process. I have, however, checked in with them periodically throughout the data analysis process to elicit their thoughts and opinions. Each chapter is guided by a particular research question. For example, this methodology chapter is guided by the following question: *What might a participatory project with veteran teachers look like that honors their interests and skills? How might teacher participatory action research (TPAR) be conceptualized and conducted for this purpose?*

Analytic memos

One key aspect of data analysis for this project has been the writing of analytic memos. Morrow & Smith (2007) describe analytic memos as including "questions, musings, and speculations about the data and emerging theory" (p.290). As such, the analytic memos have helped me to think more broadly to get at more encompassing themes in our work. I created analytic memos specifically about the teachers' projects, which created space for me to think across the projects and look at differences, similarities, and emerging themes from among them. I have also written memos reflecting on the process of the research, its strengths and challenges, concerns, successes. These memos have helped me to think on a meta level about the processes of research. Many of my analytic memos were written in the process of trying to write the dissertation itself, because that process forced me to think across the teachers' stories and projects in ways that I had not done previously. I reflected on the methodological aspects of the work separately which allowed me to focus more directly on various aspects of the processes as they evolved over time. Because this research has been difficult in ways that I had not anticipated, I have also written analytic memos reflecting on my researcher positionality and ways in which this research has been unexpectedly ethically & procedurally challenging.

Chapter specific analyses

District context chapter.

The analysis of chapter 3, the district context chapter, was guided by the following research question: *How are the teachers' stories and projects shaped by the "places" in which they work? What might their projects teach us about the importance of place and action research on food-related issues in urban districts?* I began my analysis for this chapter primarily focused on place as a conceptual framework, but as I reflected on the topics discussed in our group

meetings, I began to realize that neoliberalism was a useful conceptual framework to use in conjunction with place to more fully explain the current challenges the teachers were describing. While the data informing this chapter stems primarily from local newspaper articles and internet resources, I used comments made by the teachers in meetings to shape my overall description and analysis of the context. I particularly drew from their comments to describe the school contexts. I focused on comments made within group and individual meetings when teachers were discussing the district, policies, politics, and city/school demographics. With the two theoretical constructs of place and neoliberalism, I used deductive coding to identify aspects of the nested contexts that reflected place-criteria and/or neoliberal moves and policies.

Urban teacher marginalization chapter.

In this chapter I use the arts-based method of poetic inquiry to share the teachers' stories of marginalization while keeping their identities protected. My data analysis for this chapter is more thoroughly described in the chapter itself, but in general, main data sources for the poetic transcriptions were the field notes from the group meetings and field notes from some individual meetings with the teachers. Because I was mostly restricting the poetry to the teachers' own words, I did not draw from my analytic memos for this analysis, except for using them to help me think about the many ways in which the teachers have expressed aspects I consider to be marginalization.

As I read through the field notes repeatedly, over time and iterations, I selected all passages, quotes, and events that I felt reflected some aspect of marginalization and placed them into one document. Next, I began grouping the quotes and passages and sorting them based on emergent themes. As a series of quotes representing a common theme materialized, I began playing with creating a poem from the passages in as direct a form as possible. The themes changed somewhat

as I began the process of constructing each poem. I continued constructing poems until every theme and issue that was brought up in meetings appearing in my field notes was represented.

Teachers' chapter.

The following research questions guided my analysis of the teacher project chapter (chapter 5): *In what ways do a group of veteran teachers working together on food-related action research make sense of food's relevance in their classrooms and schools? What food stories do they tell? How do these food stories connect to their working lives as teachers?* and *As these veteran teachers engage in PAR on food-related issues, what questions become important, what actions do they take, and how do the projects take shape over time?*

The teachers' chapter consist of four sections, one for each teacher. Each section is composed of an introduction to the teacher and their project written by me, an excerpt written by each teacher about their project, and a brief discussion written by me. I included samples of the teachers' writing within the chapter because I felt it was important in a PAR project for the teachers' voices to be directly present. The analysis that I have done around their food projects is less about critique of the content of the projects themselves and more about the process that I observed each teacher go through and how their backgrounds, perspectives, and teaching positions seemed to impact their work.

My primary sources of data for this chapter were field notes from group and individual meetings and email correspondences with the teachers. In synthesizing a picture of each teacher, who they are in relation to their projects, and what motivates them for their project, I needed to go back and forth in time to look at field notes from my meetings with them, looking at statements they had made, things they were wondering about over time and how their ideas, projects, and questions changed over time. Since people reveal parts of themselves at different

times and to different extents, I found that complete story threads, such as the importance of Person's church to her food work and interest in gardening, only became clear to me after multiple readings of various meeting notes. I also looked for repetition in the stories the teachers told and in the statements they made. Once I felt that I was hearing a repetition of thoughts, stories, and ideas, I felt that I was reaching data saturation (Bowen, 2008) for understanding the perspective and stories of each teacher. In other words, I knew I had collected enough data on each teacher's framing when I had heard their points repeated to the extent that I could almost anticipate what they might say. As a source of member checking and in accordance with my IRB protocol, I have shared what I have written about each teacher with each of them for their feedback and approval.

Trustworthiness/validity of study

Anfara, Brown, & Mangione (2002) recommend the following criteria for determining the trustworthiness of qualitative research: prolonged engagement in the field, triangulation, and member checks. Similarly, validity for PAR methods can come through triangulation of observations and interpretations, and participant confirmation (McTaggart, 1997). Following their recommendations, below are descriptions of ways in which these features have been executed throughout this study.

For this PAR study, I consider engagement in the field the time that I have spent with the teachers engaged in discussions pertaining to our work together. Over a period of 18 months, I have spent more than 14 hours in group meetings with the teachers (seven meetings, each lasting a minimum of 2 hours), and more than 55 hours in individual meetings with the teachers. I have also spent approximately 20 hours in the schools where the teachers are conducting their

projects, which has helped me to get a better understanding of their contexts. Additionally, I have exchanged hundreds of emails with the teachers during our work together.

I have used triangulation both across the teachers and within each teacher's comments. Across teachers, we have discussed their projects within our group meetings, allowing others to ask questions, and provide feedback, and give suggestions. When discussing the district and its politics within the group meetings, the teachers have compared their experiences, shared new perspectives, and corroborated each other's information. Within each teacher's story, I have listened over time to their perspectives, noting consistencies or inconsistencies in their observations and stories that they have shared over time.

I have used member checks with the teachers to elicit their feedback on my thoughts and ideas for the analysis chapters. I have discussed the district context chapter on numerous occasions with them, and I have shared the poems from the marginalization chapter with them. I have also shared the sections written about the teachers with each respective teacher. Member checks have been particularly important in determining that the parts of this PAR study not directly written by the participants is representative of them and their experience. Member checking has also been important for ensuring that the project is contributing toward "the improvement of the understanding, practice, and social situation of participants" (McTaggart, 1997b, p.26).

Challenges and limitations

In our second meeting as we attempted to find common ground, Matt said to me, "We're sort of all over the place, but there's some thread here…and you're kind of hitched to us, which must be a scary place" (personal communication, 5/13/14). This insightful quote captures much about our early work together: the teachers were all coming with their own thoughts and

frameworks and I was dependent on everyone particularly because I was writing a dissertation around the project. In addition to this complex situation, there were several main challenges that arose throughout this project including the problems of working with an already overextended population, knowing when as a researcher I should intervene, figuring out a way to work with each teacher based on their unique needs, voice, and making claims within a PAR project, and writing a dissertation when the co-researchers identities are fully disclosed.

Working with an overworked population.

Much of the teachers' marginalization is related to being overworked; therefore it seemed incongruent for me in this PAR project to further overextend them. While the teachers have told me repeatedly that this project has kept them going and reenergized, it has nonetheless been difficult to find time to meet both as a group and individually. Two of the teachers have been easier to get in touch with and have met with me more frequently, while the other two have missed meetings and had periods of lapsed communication with me. Indeed, at one point in the project, I worried that one or more of the teachers had lost interest. In their own PAR study, Gatenby & Humphries (2000) found that participants chose to participate to different degrees and that, "the amount of participation must be left to each individual, that this is one way in which participants maintain their own power" (p.95). They noted that it often depended on what was going on emotionally for the participants and how much the project connected to their lives at certain times. Certainly the teachers have all had major life events during the period of our project including the death of a parent, serious illness of a child, major injury, divorce, buying a house, and starting a business. Nonetheless, as I wondered if a teacher was still committed, I would receive an email request for a meeting and assurance that they were still eager and working on the project. When working with this overextended group, it seemed essential for me

to be flexible. For example, given hectic schedules, nearly every group meeting has had at least one teacher missing. While frustrating, it has been somewhat unavoidable. I have learned that it has taken both faith that the teachers would come through on their own time and persistence in scheduling meetings and getting responses to emails and questions.

Knowing when/how to intervene in action research processes.

Another challenge I have faced throughout the project has been knowing the extent to which I could or should intervene within' the teachers projects. This question of intervention is known in PAR projects: Gatenby & Humphries (2000) have noted that, "Decisions about what issues to raise with participants and how to raise them or lead discussion are often difficult" (p. 98). I tried to give the teachers as much room as I could to identify their area of interest, design a project, and make decisions about data collection and analysis. In particular, my orientation around data collection and analysis was quite different from several of the teachers and gave me pause about how much to exert my views about how they might go about constructing knowledge around their projects. For example, I suggested and hoped that a couple of the teachers would conduct student interviews, but I also did not want to push them, especially when they did not seem to share my vision. I erred on the side of least intervention because I wanted to explore and demonstrate projects that teachers would devise rather than those constructed by a researcher. As a result, the projects reflect far more of the teachers' own visions and knowledge than my own.

Working with the teachers as individuals.

As I struggled to find ways to help each teacher proceed with the writing of their chapters, it was clear that each one needed a different approach. Essentially, one teacher was much more comfortable talking through a draft with me, which I then transcribed at the teachers' request. Another was so orally articulate, that—at her encouragement—I transcribed her oral explanation to me as a chapter draft. Still another teacher wrote more independently, submitting written drafts after having discussed ideas with me. Another teacher was very independent, so much so that she did not complete her draft in time to be included in the dissertation. In all cases thus far, I have played a role as a sounding board for the teachers, listening to their ideas and providing feedback through conversation, suggestions, and questions.

Voice and making claims in TPAR.

Because this work is participatory and the teachers have had intellectual ownership in the creation of their projects, it has been important for their voice to be present in this dissertation. This is challenging for several reasons, one, of course, being that a dissertation is, by definition, sole-authored work. Another reason is that the teachers do not have the time or inclination to write for academic audiences. As I have written the dissertation, I have been conflicted about representing the teachers since writing *about* the teachers is potentially violating the participatory aspects of the project. That said, I cannot expect them to write solely for the purpose of the dissertation. To address the issue of voice, each teacher has composed a draft that will be aimed toward our book, and I have included these excerpts within the teacher chapters, so that each teacher can speak directly within this dissertation. For the chapters that I have written, including the poetic inquiry and the district context chapters, I have shared everything with the teachers for

their review. I have also shared everything written specifically about each teacher with them, so that they can edit as they choose.

How much and when to edit teachers' writing.

For the excerpts in the teachers' chapters that have been composed by them, I have been conflicted about the extent to which I should edit their words. On one hand, I do not want to appear as if I am censoring their work or taking a heavier hand than I should. On the other hand, I edit my own work heavily in the process of writing and the teachers have submitted drafts rather than final, polished versions of their chapters. Moreover, for several of the teachers, I transcribed chapters that they dictated orally. In doing so, I was not always sure whether I should leave in repetitions or colloquialisms made in their oral speech. Certainly the rules of typical transcription in which all utterances, repetitions, and slang would be recorded do not seem to apply when the teachers are attempting to dictate a draft. I struggled with knowing how much editing I should do, while thinking that the less editing I do leaves more work for the teachers. That said, I have shared my edited versions with the teachers they have been pleased with the results.

Identities disclosed.

That the teachers have opted for their names to be used in all of our work is both encouraging and challenging. First, to honor that they are co-researchers with ownership over the projects, I felt that giving them pseudonyms would undermine their position as co-researchers. On the other hand, they had told me a number of things (especially about their frustrations with how they have been treated in their jobs) that could render them vulnerable. I have been concerned about ethical portrayal of their insights without increasing their vulnerability. Using

poetic inquiry for the marginalization chapter alleviated many of my fears as I was able to blend their voices, and, through use of first person, hide their identities while still sharing their comments. I have also been consistent with my IRB criteria, which permitted the use of teachers' names with their explicit permission and approval.

Work accomplished as a result of the project

Patricia Maguire has noted that, "Action researchers are doers" (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003). This team has been engaged with the action aspect of PAR and tangible work that has been done as part of this TPAR project includes the following:

1. A backpack feeding program was created which put supplemental food into the hands of 15-20 students throughout the school year.
2. A unit was taught about food, culture, industrialized-farming and healthy eating to students who had little previous exposure to many of the food issues explored.
3. An afterschool garden club was created and is currently developing a school garden.
4. Two group presentations were given at a local food justice workshop.

Upcoming projects that we hope to still accomplish involve sharing our work with larger audiences. We will be writing a chapter for an edited book that is being organized through the food justice conferences we have attended. I will probably take the lead in writing the chapter, with written contributions from the teachers as they are interested. I will also be writing a chapter with one of the teachers for a book about school food. Finally, all the teachers are working on chapter drafts for a co-authored book about food in urban schools. This book will be aimed toward a mixed audience of people interested in food justice as well as formal educators.

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CHAPTER 3: The Urban District Context

In this chapter, my aim is to create a portrait of the larger nested contexts which shape the conditions the teachers face. This chapter represents the coming together of the experiences and views of four veteran teachers, who have collectively taught at multiple schools in this particular district for over 107 years, plus my perspective as an educational researcher. Though the teacher co-researchers know the context intimately and I am only a passing outside observer, they asked me to write about the district context with their input, thus freeing them to work on their action research projects. Moreover, an important aspect of PAR work is to consider contextual factors, by joining the participants' research with an analysis of the context in which they live and work (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). This contextual analysis is also meant to help the reader understand the conditions shaping the teachers' perspectives and school situations. Understanding these contexts is important for interpreting the teachers' situations since the teachers see their situations as being connected to larger regional trends and events. This chapter therefore is an in-depth exploration of the teachers' city and district contexts as they impact the schools in which they teach. I use two conceptual frameworks, place and neoliberalism, in combination to more deeply explore and explain the nested contexts in which the teachers work. In doing so, I examine the issues facing this place, what makes a place, how it is connected to other places, and how place-related factors are exacerbated by neoliberal education policies. Data informing this chapter arises primarily from discussions in our study group meetings, individual conversations, and email correspondences. Demographic and other district information was obtained from local newspaper articles and online databases. In the following sections, I will describe the frameworks and then apply each to the city, district, and schools within this study.

Place

Why place in education?

While we often use the terms "urban" and "suburban" in education research, Tuck & McKenzie (2015) recognize that rarely do we examine the deeper implications of these terms as they relate to place. Tuck & McKenzie (2015) instead encourage "research that more fully considers the implications and significance of place in lived lives" (p.2), a mode of study they call critical place inquiry. They point out that though social science research "takes place in a place" (p. 36), the places themselves in which research is situated are often overlooked. They add that, "social science research is always undertaken by researchers and participants embedded in places, places that are both local and global, shaped by and constitutive of culture and identity" (2015, p. 1). Likewise, education researcher Gruenewald (2003) notes that, "To enter into these politics in the context of our places, regions, cities, neighborhoods, and schools, one needs to become more conscious of the spatial dimension of social relationships" (p.633). As yet another reason to study place, Cresswell (2004) explains that,

> Place is also a way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world. When we look at the world as a world of places we see different things. We see attachments and connections between people and place. We see worlds of meaning and experience...To think of an area of the world as a rich and complicated interplay of people and the environment - as a place - is to free us from thinking of it as facts and figures. (p. 11)

It is my hope that exploring the place contexts of these teachers will allow for a more holistic understanding of not just *an* urban district but a *particular* urban district that faces layers of challenges resulting from its place in a broader world.

What is place?

Before exploring the specific place contexts relevant to this study, first I will outline some theoretical aspects of place that shape my analysis. Several scholars have pointed out the challenge of working with a term ubiquitous in everyday speech (Cresswell, 2004; McClay & McAllister, 2014). This can make the concept challenging theoretically as collective understandings of place are both simplistic and complex. Place has been used in many different disciplines, from geography and anthropology, to architecture and planning. This is not meant to be an exhaustive review of place literature across multiple fields, but rather a productive description of some themes that transcend disciplinary work on place. My place framing draws primarily from the fields of geography and education.

Meaningful space. Cresswell (2004) suggests that the most concise definition of place might be "a meaningful location" (p. 7) and explains that it is meaningfulness that differentiates place from mere space. McClay & McAllister (2014) differentiate space from place by recognizing space as abstract whereas place is "intimately meaningful" (p.2). Tuan (1977) compares space and place, noting that place differs from space because it involves people's attachment to it and a sense of identity as particular and unique. Hutchinson (2004) points out that the idea of place is an ancient concept that can be traced to Aristotle who used the term "*topos"* to indicate "feelings of belongingness that are evoked by the 'where' dimension of a person's relationship to the physical environment" (p.11). In essence, rather than just mere space, places are imbued with character, meaning and identity. As a result, some people may feel loyalty, concern for, or attachment to a given place, and there may be a broader recognition that a certain place has a particular character. Climate, topography, sports teams, food specialties, political leaning, region, state, nation—all contribute to a given place's character and identity.

Interconnected to other places. No person is an island, nor is any place; places are inextricably tied to other places near and far. Massey (1994) conceptualizes places as networks of social relations, noting how places are interconnected to other places through populations that have moved across borders and/or stay connected to those in distant places. Massey (1994) points out that the interconnectedness of a place to other places means that places have histories that are inextricably linked with external places. Massey (1994) notes that,

> The particular mix of social relations which are thus part of what defines the uniqueness of any place is by no means all included within that place itself. Importantly, it includes relations which stretch beyond—the global as part of what constitutes the local, the outside as part of the inside. (p.5)

Places are also connected to other places through policies that impact multiple places or seek to compare places to one another. For example, national policies on education, civil rights, and health care impact and connect places across a country through shared legislation.

Consisting of social constructs. While places may seem to be concrete and material by definition, several scholars argue that places are social constructs (Harvey, 1996; Hutchinson, 2004). For example, Hutchinson (2004) posits that, "the boundaries that define spaces and the utility to which spaces are put are often shared and understood by a community of people" (p.11). Place boundaries—whether they be politically decided or just socially accepted—are not inherent properties, but have been discursively created by people. In any social construction, there are differences in how a place is recognized by different individuals. Hutchinson (2004) points out that places can have many nested identities within them that are recognized in different ways by different individuals. Tuck & McKenzie (2015) reflect that, "places are not always named, and not always justly named. They do not always appear on maps, they do not

have agreed-upon boundaries. They are not fixed" (p.21). Likewise, Massey notes that "The identities of places are always unfixed, contested and multiple" (1994, p.5) since they are subjective and therefore differing across individuals and groups. In other words, different people may see a given place in very different ways.

Dynamic and constantly changing. That places are dynamic and always changing is perhaps among the most straightforward of place concepts, documented readily in place literature (e.g. Harvey, 1996; Massey, 1994; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). David Harvey (1996) writes extensively about changes in places and notes that "all places are in a permanent state of flux" (p.310). Demographics change as ethnic groups move in/move out or as economics change, and these demographic shifts, in turn, often change the social practices common in a place. These demographic shifts also impact the built environment, as buildings are gentrified or demolished in response to population shifts, and different types of businesses, such as restaurants and food stores, follow the migration of different groups. The built environment of places also changes as architectural styles move in and out of fashion, and in response to socioeconomic shifts in the population. That places are always changing means that theories of place must include a temporal aspect.

I argue in this chapter for the need to understand the context in which the teachers are situated by examining the *places* in which they teach. Through this analysis, I attempt to imbue character and meaning into this place where the teachers have spent the entirety of their professional lives. I show how this place is connected to other places through policies, economics, and population migration. I also explore the temporal moment of this place, by looking at demographic shifts and their impacts on the district and schools. Given that no place is likely to be understood in the same way by different individuals, any representation of places in

this project are from the perspective of the teachers and myself. Tuan (1977) has reflected that

> Many places profoundly significant to particular individuals and groups have little visual prominence. They are known viscerally, as it were, and not through the discerning eye or mind…Literary art can illuminate the inconspicuous fields of human care such as a Midwestern town…a big-city neighborhood…Literary art draws attention to areas of experience that we may otherwise fail to notice. (p.162)

It is in such a Midwestern town that would otherwise be deemed unremarkable which I hope to render more visible.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is described by Pauline Lipman (2011) as

> An ensemble of economic and social policies, forms of governance, and discourses and ideologies that promote individual self-interest, unrestricted flows of capital, deep restrictions in the cost of labor, and sharp retrenchment of the public sphere. (p.6)

Neoliberalism promotes the free market as the solution to all societal issues (Lipman, 2011; Steger & Roy, 2010). While this paradigm has become omnipresent in US society, neoliberalism has not always been a major influence. Unrest about equalities, inflation, and Keynesianism in the 1970's led to the rise of new paradigms that reimagined classical liberalism (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Steger & Roy, 2010). By the early 1980's neoliberal ideals of free markets and less government regulation reigned over world political and economic thought (Lipman, 2011; Steger & Roy, 2010). Neoliberal ideals have filtered down to the level of individual behavior and neoliberalism promoting a panoply of characteristics such as an emphasis on individualism, self-promotion, entrepreneurialism, and empowerment (Lipman, 2011 Jul-Aug; Steger & Roy, 2010). That these traits are so entrenched in the psyche of most Americans now indicates the extent to

which neoliberalism has pervaded our thoughts and values. Indeed, scholars (e.g. Lipman, 2011; Davies & Bansel, 2007) point out that neoliberalism has seeped into every segment of American society to the extent that it pervades individual consciousness.

That neoliberalism has brought sweeping changes in education has been well documented by many scholars (e.g. Davies & Bansel, 2007; Hursh & Henderson, 2011; Lipman, 2011). Some education scholars, such as Lipman (2011), argue that education as a bastion of the public sphere is an easy target for those who seek to privatize and diminish public funding of primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions. In general, neoliberalism in education translates to policies and practices that follow market-based principles, such as consumer choice, "accountability" measures, and the assumption that education should serve markets and further the US in global competitiveness. The promotion of charter schools—particularly for-profit charter organizations—is another manifestation of the neoliberalization of public education. An attack on teachers and teachers' unions has also been part of the neoliberal project in education (Lipman, 2011 Jul-Aug). Other aspects of neoliberal moves in the education sector are the labeling of "failing" schools/districts based on standardized measures, mayoral control of "failing" schools/districts, performance targets tied to incentives, and merit-based pay (Lipman, 2011 Jul-Aug). Lipman (2011 Jul-Aug) remarks, "In the neoliberal framework, teaching is driven by standardized tests and performance outcomes; principals are managers, and school superintendents are CEOs; and learning equals performance on the tests with teachers, students, and parents held responsible for 'failure'" (p. 118)

Recent education policies have reflected a neoliberal perspective, particularly the federal initiatives No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top. The very name "Race to the Top" connotes a construction of education as a competition with winners and losers and the policy

employs neoliberal ideals by creating a competition between states to reform their education systems for needed funds (Lipman, 2011 Jul-Aug). NCLB in particular has greatly impacted the district in which this study takes place and has, in turn, shaped the lives of the teachers. NCLB took effect in 2002 and was set to expire in 2008, but in 2015, US schools are still operating under its policies. NCLB puts great emphasis on testing, and "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) for Title 1 schools, schools with low-income populations of at least 35%. States set testing standards for particular groups of students (e.g. English language learners) and schools can be penalized if any group of students is not reaching the performance measures set by the state (GreatSchools, n.d.). Students in schools that do not make the testing targets are to be given the choice to attend other schools. There are increasing penalties for each year a school has not met AYP, with state takeover, firing of significant amounts of staff, or creation of a charter school as consequences after the 5th year of a school's failure to meet AYP. There are also grants available for schools to put into effect plans to help them reach AYP.

Lipman (2003) in her book, *High Stakes Education*, connects the impacts of neoliberal policies such as NCLB to places through locating the impacts on low-income, urban communities, and/or communities of color. It is important to note that low-income, urban districts and schools have been, in general, much more disproportionately impacted by the neoliberal move of high stakes testing (Lipman, 2003).

Place and neoliberalism in the city, the district, and the schools

The larger place context that defines this research project is a small Midwestern city, with approximately 115,000 residents (NCES, 2014). In thinking about how this place is connected to other places, the city is located in a state known for its industrial decline as the American automobile industry has taken a backseat to global competition. As a result, as the place literature

has reflected, this place has been ever changing through the years. The city is post-industrial, having lost several major employers. Its peak population was reached in 1970, and has declined ever since. In 1975, the city lost a major automobile manufacturer that was generally responsible for much of the city's growth. To help understand more about this particular city as a place, it is helpful to also recognize certain geographic aspects that contribute to its character. The city is among the cloudiest in the country (NOAA rates it as having 51% annual average possible sunshine), it is very cold for many months in the winter, and is not typically recognized as having beautiful geographic terrain. A river runs through the city, which adds some amount of scenic interest, but in general, people are not drawn to the city for its natural beauty. In fact, the city is socially constructed by many as being relatively devoid of scenic interest and socially engaging activities.

As recognized in literature on place, places are not timeless, and their identities are not temporally fixed. The city has seen considerable demographic changes in the last few decades. For example, white residents made up 86.4% of the population in 1970, but only 55.5% in 2010 (US Census Bureau). This upsurge in diversity is partly in response to an ever-growing refugee community. According to the Brookings Institution, the city is in the top ten in refugee resettlement among "medium-sized metropolitan areas" in the US (Singer & Wilson, Sept 2006). Close to 5,400 refugees were resettled to the city between 1983-2004 thanks to a national Catholic charity, several area churches, and a refugee development center (International Services Team, 2011). Refugees come from countries as diverse as Bosnia, Somalia, Liberia, Vietnam, and Iraq, many fleeing religious and other persecution and often arriving with nothing (Hillman, Feb 2014). Only a few arrive speaking English. In this way, the city also expresses Massey's (1994) conception of places as connected to many other places through people and their

networks. The ever-growing refugee population connects this small, rather geographically isolated city to a broader world through shared culture and family connections in other places.

The city has been subdivided into regions that are socially constructed (e.g. Hutchinson, 2004; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015) but nonetheless important to the place-identity of residents, indicating in some way how this city has been constructed into meaningful space for them. These regions are known by their cardinal directions as the Eastside, Westside, Southside and Northside. Each of these areas has its own identity in terms of demographics and socioeconomics. Of the regions, I will describe the Eastside and Southside in more depth because these are the regions of the schools reflected in the study. The Eastside is the most ethnically and socioeconomically diverse, because of its proximity to a nearby large land grant university and because it is the area where most refugees have resettled. The area is served by a progressive neighborhood non-profit that is very active in outreach and community events. I live and own a home in the Eastside, so this is the area of the city that is most familiar to me and I am active in Eastside community events, such as a year-round farmer's market. The Southside generally has the lowest socioeconomic levels in the city. It also has the largest concentration of African-American residents. While the city is often described as being more racially and socioeconomically mixed than most cities, the teachers have spoken in our meetings about the different identities across the four different sides of the city. Given this regional variation, I do not intend to paint the city or district with one broad stroke.

The school district.

Place. Compared to massive urban districts in the US, this Midwestern urban district is rather small, consisting of 26 schools in the 2014-15 school year, among which are three high schools, five 4-6th grade schools, four K-8 schools, and 12 preK-3 elementary schools. The ever-

changing nature of places has impacted the district in important ways since the district has felt the repercussions of a declining city population over the last forty years as industry has left the area, lowering job opportunities for residents. The population decline resulted in a decrease in approximately 3,500 students between the 1980's and the early 2000's (Sturm, 2003). Declining population has meant lowered school funding from the state: the 3,500-student decline led to an estimated loss of $23 million for the district (Sturm, 2003). By 2012, decline in enrollment had led to a 30 million dollar deficit for the district (Squiers, 2012). In addition to lowered enrollment, the dropout rate in the district hovers around 25%, the highest of any city in the state (Squiers, 2012). High dropout rates are typically connected to areas with high poverty, where students do not see the benefit that a high school degree might yield in terms of employment. Thus, the high dropout rate is also a symptom of place. While high dropout is itself problematic, it has in turn increased the deficit as the district has lost state and federal funding for these students.

To respond to the increasing deficit that has resulted from the steady decline in enrollment over time as the city's population has eroded, the school district created a reconfiguration plan in 2011 that resulted in the closure of four schools: three elementary schools and one middle school (Inglot, Sept 2012). This left five buildings owned by the district—four elementary schools and one middle school—vacant as of 2012. Empty school buildings can be sources of urban blight, and cost the district additional money to maintain the grounds (Ingot, Sept 2012). Indeed, many other urban districts have vacant buildings: a Pew Charitable Trust study found that in 2012, there were 327 school buildings empty and for sale in the US (Elliot, Feb 2013). These school closures have also meant a constant restructuring and shuffling of teachers and students, in what the teachers call the "reconfiguration". Thus, the reconfiguration

of the district could be seen as a direct response to the district's place context. In the reconfiguration, the district not only closed schools, but reorganized existing schools, adding seventh and eighth grades to the three high schools of the district and creating a number of 4-6th grade elementary schools.

These changes within existing schools have had tremendous impact on teachers and students within the district, as they attempt to adjust not only to new schools, but to new grade level compositions within the schools. As places themselves, the schools are meaningful and identity-important to many residents. A number of residents have expressed frustration about 7th and 8th grades being added to the high schools, and several of the teachers in this study have been dismayed by the loss of the 6-8th middle schools where they once taught. In informal conversations with a number of residents who grew up in the city, they have described watching in dismay as schools they attended have been closed and even torn down. One resident told me that she moved into a certain part of the city so that her son could attend the same elementary school that she had attended and loved. One year after he started there, the school was closed and he was forced to attend another school. Moreover, the school building was torn down shortly after which meant, she said, that she and her son could not even visit the old building.

***Neoliberalism*.** While I did not initially set out to examine how neoliberalism impacts this study context, political issues became a recurrent theme within our group meetings. For example, one teacher pointed out to me that, "Typically politics is out there, but for us in [this district], it's here." The teachers spoke of policies impacting their lives, their fears about losing tenure, how difficult it was to work at a school under threat for state takeover, and how much things had changed in the last five years. These discussions helped me realize that our study needed to address these issues in a systematic way.

School-of-choice laws began appearing in the mid-1990's, as part of a larger neoliberal movement and exist in more than 35 states (Sturm, 2003). In 1996, the state passed a school-of-choice law, permitting students in underperforming districts within the state to opt out of their assigned district schools to attend other public schools in the district or outside the district. Not surprisingly, from 1996 to 2003—the first seven years of the policy, over 1,200 students were pulled out of the city's schools and placed in neighboring suburban, more affluent districts (Sturm, 2003). Though students could opt into the district from other districts, in this time period, only 287 students from outside the district chose to attend the districts' schools (Sturm, 2003). In this first seven years, the school-of-choice policy alone was estimated to cost the district $6 million, or 3.5% of the district budget (Sturm, 2003). Thus, school-of-choice laws effectively decreased the district's already strained budget, adding to the strains on teachers.

In December 2012, the state became the 24th state to pass a "Right to Work" law (Gardner, 2013 Sept). This policy aligns with neoliberal aims as it dictates that teachers are no longer required to join a union (Huston, 2014 March). A main driver of this legislation a conservative "free market" think tank that has consistently attacked teachers' unions, teachers, and public education in the state. In a group meeting, one of the teachers explained to me that this center had created an "opt out month" which they coined as a month of "freedom from the union" in which teachers were no longer required to pay union dues. The attack on labor unions in this place is particularly troubling given that the state has historically been labor-friendly. Indeed, in a group meeting, another teacher pointed out the general "Mid-western eroding of laws" that formerly supported unions; an especially notable trend for a region that has been very supportive of them. Three of four of the teacher co-researchers are active in the local teachers' union and have mentioned events and discussions from union meetings within our group meetings. While

teacher tenure is still in place for the moment, there is much political movement to eliminate tenure for teachers state-wide.

Perhaps no impact of neoliberalism on this district is greater than the Federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. As is typical in high poverty areas, the district has struggled with test scores, and "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP) has become a mantra goal in the schools. Indeed, listening to the teachers, "reaching AYP" seems to have become an obsession within district communications and actions. For example, the district website proclaims that, "as a district, we earned Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status two years in a row, and 31 of 33 schools earned AYP status in 2008-09." That the district chooses to celebrate earning AYP for only two years in a row suggests that this occurrence is not taken for granted or even expected. The district explains in an annual district report letter to parents and shared online that the state has labeled many schools as "Reward", "Focus", or "Priority" based on the results on state tests, explaining that Reward schools outperform other schools with similar demographics, Focus schools have an achievement gap in 30% of students scores, and Priority schools fall in the bottom 5% in the state for "achievement & growth". As of fall 2014, the district had no Reward schools, one Focus school, and six Priority schools.

In an attempt to attract more students (or entice students to remain) the district has created a plethora of special options within existing schools. The district webpage outlines their new school offerings with the tagline "Your district of choice!" New options include STEM, STEAM, Spanish Immersion/Global studies, Chinese Immersion, International Baccalaureate, Visual & Performing Arts, and Montessori. While these options are not in and of themselves problematic, it nonetheless exemplifies neoliberal, market-related solutions to a problem fundamentally related to place.

The schools. It is important to note that schools are themselves places nested within larger place contexts. In this way, schools can both reflect (or not reflect) the larger places in which they are situated, and schools become meaningful space—with their own socially-constructed identities—based on the communities that comprise them. Like places, schools, of course, are also always changing, as their student populations regularly turn over and as they reflect demographic and population changes within their larger place contexts.

The four teacher co-researchers in this project currently work at three different schools in the district: a highly diverse 7-12th grade high school, an alternative high school, and a newly reorganized STEAM magnet 4-6th elementary. Below I will briefly describe how place and neoliberalism play out in each school context. While it is not always easy to delineate factors related to place versus neoliberalism within the schools, I examine each framework separately because I believe it provides more clarity between how these different forces impact the schools.

Alternative High School (AHS). *Place*. Though Alternative High School is located in the Southside, its students come from all over the district (and even outside of the district) since they have chosen or have been selected to attend an alternative program. For this reason, the school does not reflect place through representing the neighborhood in which it is situated; there is little to no connection between surrounding residents and AHS. Consistent with the Southside, however, students at the school are predominantly African American and are generally from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, giving the school one of the highest rates of free/reduced lunch in the district at approximately 98%. The school directly reflects place-related concerns of the district because it was created to address the high dropout rate (Squiers, 2012). The district, anxious to lessen this dropout rate, reportedly invested $5 million in the program (Squiers, 2012), a move that has drawn a number of skeptics (Kelleher, 2011). This program was

originally piloted as smaller programs within the district high schools before being consolidated into one school. The impact of creating one school to address students at great risk of dropping out has been to create a new place with a unique identity. Indeed, the teacher who works in this school speaks of the tight ties between the staff and the students and the concerted effort they have made to create a school community to support their high-need students. In attending the open house for families early in the 2014-15 school year, I was impressed by the sense of community that the school's staff and students exhibited. However, unexpectedly during the 2014-15 school year and as a result of the district-wide budget concerns (largely due to place issues as described previously), the district mandated that AHS increase their number of students while also cutting staff, making it more difficult to serve students adequately. As part of this move, the district administration decided to send the most behaviorally-challenging students from Multicultural High School en masse to AHS, both filling AHS over capacity and introducing a reportedly marked increase in behavior concerns within AHS. This decision was perhaps made in part because of MHS's insecure footing with regards to test scores (as will be described subsequently).

Neoliberalism. Directly under the school's name on the AHS sign is the tagline "A [company name] school". I find the article "A" noticeable as it underscores that this is only *one* school of many of the same type, with nothing in particular to make it special. I also find a company name so closely affiliated with a school title disturbing, as it does not make any attempt to disguise the fact that the school has been co-opted by corporate interests. The company is based out of Virginia and currently has contracts with schools in three states. The company's website proclaims their concern that every child can learn and that they are dedicated to student success. The language of the company's website is burgeoning with lofty statements such as their

motto: “To enrich lives and improve society through education—one student at a time.” Regardless of its stated lofty intentions, the company has created a for-profit business from high dropout rates. The company administers software, but outsources the personal connections to schools around the country. There is no mention of the number of schools with which the company works on their website, giving the impression that they are not a close network of schools. That AHS’s programming is essentially outsourced to a company demonstrates the extent to which neoliberalism has permeated this school.

According to the teacher who teaches at AHS, the company initially made grand promises to school staff about their “blended learning” model that combined online and face-to-face interactions. However, the teacher (who is among those responsible for the program’s implementation with students) complains that the company has instead delivered a strictly online program. She has also expressed frustration that though the program is entirely online, students are not able to access online resources beyond the company’s program-specific webpages. She believes that the company promised a vastly different product than it has delivered. The staff were informed by district administration at the end of the school year that the company’s contract would not be renewed and all materials (computers, furniture, etc.) within the school would be removed before the summer school session began in a few weeks time. The staff had created proposals for alternate plans to submit to the district months before, but had not received any feedback from the district, so the school’s future was in flux at the close of the 2014-15 school year.

STEAM Elementary School (StES). *Place*. The school is located near the socially-constructed border between the Eastside and the Southside. Because it is a magnet school, it attempts to pull students from all over the city. Thus, a move toward a magnet school could be

seen as a move toward placelessness, as the school no longer reflects the neighborhoods in which it is located. However, this is its first year as a magnet school and most of the students have remained the same through the transition. Only two new teachers, the principal and a STEM support teacher, were brought in from other schools in the transition, so the school has not seen a large change in its student body or faculty. As a result, it still functions as a neighborhood school. The teacher who works at this school reports that the neighborhood is a very active one, with an appreciable amount of parent and neighbor participation in the school. For example, at a school beautification in the beginning of the school year, neighbors helped with planting, weeding, and other yard work, and according to the teacher who works there, they have high turnouts of parents at school events such as the yearly talent show.

Neoliberalism. This school year marked the transition from the school as a neighborhood elementary to a STEAM magnet school, focusing on science, technology, engineering and maths as well as the arts. This was one of six new magnet schools formed this school year within the district in an effort to attract families to enroll their students in district schools. The school's website proclaims that the school is "is one of six new magnet schools in the [city] district that offers families a choice". This language of choice reflects a neoliberal framing of schooling, that it is the job of schools to attract customers and that options and choice are priorities. StES is not labeled as Reward, Focus, or Priority, so therefore at this point it has escaped the heavy pressure associated particularly with the labels of concern. Nonetheless, its conversion to a magnet school reflects neoliberal ideals.

Multicultural High School (MHS). *Place.* MHS is the flagship high school of the Eastside, and nowhere is the ethnic diversity of the city's Eastside (primarily the result of the refugee resettlement initiatives) more apparent than at MHS. According to the teacher co-

researchers, there are as many as thirty language groups in the school, making the school one of the most diverse in the state. Indeed, a website that ranks schools in the state for diversity lists MHS in the top ten (Niche rankings, n.d.). As one teacher has pointed out, "MHS is the welcome center for the state," since UN refugees usually end up in this school. The two teachers on this project who teach at MHS report that this constant influx of immigration has wide-sweeping effects on their classes. For example, one of the teachers had a student who had come directly from Afghanistan the week before showing up in class one day. Another group of refugees arrived this year from Somalia and not only do they not speak English, the teenaged girls had never been to formal school. In other words, the backgrounds of the youth from refugee camps are often quite complicated and they may arrive to the city and school with far less support that most immigrant groups, creating a challenging situation for MHS teachers. However, consistent with Massey's (1994) point that places are connected with other places through social networks, the students bring interesting connections to many other places in the world as they have come from nearly every continent.

Returning to Harvey's (1996) point that places are not temporally fixed, MHS has not always been so multicultural. The current school building was built in 1927 and MHS maintains a very strong alumni support network. Many alumni are still in the area and maintain strong ties to the school, for example, by hosting summer reunion events on the campus each year. Several of the alumni are volunteers in the backpack feeding program started through this research project. These volunteers, all white and modestly middle class, have reported how different the population of the school is than when they attended it and seem to be amazed by the diversity of the current school population.

Neoliberalism. Neoliberal policies have greatly impacted MHS and its teachers. Though

MHS boasts the highest test scores of the three high schools in the city, it also displays the widest gap between high and low students, which is enough to place it on the "Priority" list by the state based on policies established through No Child Left Behind. The teachers feel that the concern about MHS is a bit unjust given that the school hosts such a large refugee population. The penalties for this school after several years on the priority list are immense, ranging from going under emergency management, to firing 50% of the teaching staff, to becoming a charter school. The teachers explain that they had been making progress as a school in the last year, but still did not have high enough test scores to remove the Priority designation. They have also had leadership challenges: a group of teachers formed a task force to remove a problematic principal the previous year. The assistant principal was appointed principal this year, but the school has not had enough time with good leadership to turn things around.

The school has been in high gear trying to avoid state takeover, and, as a result, has instituted sweeping changes as part of the school's mandated transformation plan. One of the teachers in this project is a key member of the school improvement team and therefore has taken on a large amount of responsibility to design methods to address the test score gap and keep the school out of state hands. The current plan that the school is implementing was created by a group of teachers and administrators from the school that was originally proposed four years ago, but only received funding this year. The extra funding is mostly applied to the higher costs of busing since the plan extends the school day by an extra hour. They also created collaboration time on Wednesday mornings to allow teachers to choose what they need to work on in groups within that time.

Impacts of place and neoliberalism on teachers

The high district deficit resulting from the city's population decline and neoliberal school

of choice policies has forced the district to resort to numerous cost-cutting measures that have affected the teachers immensely. One such cost-cutting measure has been a freeze in step-wise pay increases and cost of living increases for teachers over the last seven years. Another cost cutting measure was cutting 87 positions from the district in 2013 (Eclectoblog, 2013 March). Many of these were art, music, and physical education teachers at the elementary level (Wells, Jan 2014). Not only did this harm elective teachers, it added to the load of general elementary teachers by requiring them teach "specials", the elective arts & physical education courses.

The arguably largest impact on general education teachers in the district has been the loss of a planning period starting in the 2013-14 school year. Though the district teachers did "vote" on this measure, when it was presented to them by the teachers' union in 2012, they generally understood it to be a straw poll. In this poll, the teachers were forced to choose between the loss of more jobs, a 15 percent pay cut, or a loss of planning periods. The majority voted to lose their planning periods in this survey and the union went immediately into negotiations, surprising the teachers by informing them later that the agreement had gone into effect. Many teachers felt that they had been caught unaware, misunderstanding the finality of their vote. Teachers who lost their planning period were promised a $5,000 stipend to make up for their lack of a planning period. However, the teachers reported in mid-November of 2014 they still had not received the stipend. One of the teachers pointed out to me that even with a $5,000 raise for each teacher, the district was saving a tremendous amount of money in salaries and benefits from the teaching positions they cut.

As yet another symptom of the declining enrollment and budget, teachers' course assignments have been changed repeatedly, sometimes in the middle of the school year. The two teachers in the project who work at MHS have had a revision in their teaching schedules at least

four times in the last year as a result of budget cuts and priority-school related changes. Neither teacher knew which classes they would be teaching until several weeks before the school year began. Then, their schedules unexpectedly changed mid-year in 2014-15 in response to the ongoing budget deficit that forced more teachers to lose their positions and remaining teachers to cover these losses. These schedule changes forced at least one of the teachers to alter her action research project to accommodate the drastic changes in her teaching load.

"Displacement" is a term used by this district and applied to teachers who are involuntarily moved within the district as a result of shifting demographics and budget cuts. It has become a ubiquitous occurrence. For example, two of the teachers in this project were "displaced" from the middle school where they had taught for years because it was closed in the reconfiguration. One of these teachers, who had taught at the middle school for 20 years, noted that she had never planned to leave the school before retiring. Additionally, mid-year, in December of 2014, 50 teachers district-wide were "reassigned", or shuffled around the district to different schools based on uneven enrollment. These "displaced teachers" were only protected from job loss by tenure.

Places, education, and education policy

> Nygreen (2006) argues that
>
> prevailing conceptual frameworks in urban education serve to *decontextualize* urban schools from the broader social context that maintains urban school failure. This decontextualized analysis is also a *depoliticized* one because it treats the problems of urban schools in isolation from broader political-economic structures and relations of power.

In contrast, this chapter has sought to contextualize this urban school district through a place

analysis and to politicize the current issues by looking at how neoliberalism is being enacted within this context.

In summarizing how place literature informs my analysis of the context in which these teachers work, looking at the concept of meaningful space from the literature (e.g. Cresswell, 2004; McClay & McAllister, 2014; Hutchinson, 2004; Tuan, 1977) I have attempted to breathe character and meaning into the spaces where this work has taken place and where the teachers on the team have dedicated most of their professional lives. Indeed, that the teachers who are part of this study have spent so many years of their lives in this school district implies that they are tied to it in complex ways and that the city, district, and schools contain personal meaning and significance for them as a result of extended time and memories in a place. In particular, the city and schools, as places, constitute spaces that create meaning for the residents, students, and teachers. Though these places may appear unremarkable to outsiders, as places embedded with meaning and identity, the city is home to its residents and its schools represent history, traditions, and memories. This place is also full of smaller places, each with their own character, from the regions of the city down to the individual schools within the district. As meaningful spaces, changes such as the displacement of teachers and students across the district to different schools impacts the identity of schools as places and, consequently, impacts the psyche of students and teachers. Indeed, though I only lived in the city for three years, upon moving to another part of the country, I was surprised by how much I missed this seemingly unremarkable place. Sometimes, places that have been subject to difficult circumstances respond with a heart and spirit that is impossible to measure, yet is somehow palpable to its residents. I believe that this city is such a place.

Place literature also speaks to the idea that no place is an island, but rather is

interconnected to other places, both through events and through social ties of people inhabiting different places (Massey, 1994). The city has been economically negatively impacted through larger trends in the global car industry and this has, in turn, adversely impacted the funding available to the district and schools. This larger economic downturn has also caused a steady decrease in population in the city and a lower-income student population. The population decrease has directly caused the closure of district schools and displacement of students and teachers. Meanwhile, there has been a shift in the population as increasing numbers of refugees are resettled in parts of the city. While this resettlement increases the social ties of the city (and schools) to other places around the world, it simultaneously presents challenges as many of these students are underprepared for formal schooling and require substantive supports within schools.

The social construction of places discussed in place literature (e.g. Harvey, 1996; Hutchinson, 2004; Massey, 1994; Tuck & McKenzie; 2015) supports an understanding of the various socially-constructed (not formal) boundaries between various regions within this city. These boundaries are not delineated on paper per se, but are generally understood by residents as dividing the city into identity-salient sections. These sides of the city then shape the identities of the schools within their areas. For example, the Eastside is reputed to be the most diverse socioeconomically and racially and indeed, Multicultural High School, the high school of the Eastside, is the most diverse school in the city.

Finally, as the place literature suggests (e.g. Harvey, 1996; Massey, 1994; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015) these nested place contexts—city, district, and schools—are all dynamic and constantly changing. They have experienced marked demographic changes over the last few decades, not only as the population has decreased, but as the population has become more racially diverse and lower income. This has impacted the schools tremendously in the three

decades in which these teachers have been working in them. The weight of these difficult changes has been particularly challenging for the districts' teachers as teaching jobs are continually cut, pay raises are frozen, and teachers are asked to do ever more.

Greunewald (2003) has noted that, "Contemporary school reform takes little notice of place" (p. 260). With neoliberal policies such as NCLB and the state's Right to Choose legislation, particularities of place are left out of the equation entirely. As a result, school communities, such as those within this city and district, are slammed by the compound effects of place and neoliberal policies. For example, refugees are being assisted to relocate to this safer, more stable place, but this influx of refugee youth is penalizing MHS because neoliberal policies insist that there not be large test score gaps, regardless of students' personal life histories. Teachers cannot be blamed for factors such as the downturn of the automobile industry, but yet, by holding them accountable for student test scores in these schools, they are indirectly being penalized for larger forces that shape the realities of students and schools in the city. Placeless education policies put impossible demands on real places and on the people in those places.

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CHAPTER 4: The Marginalization of Urban Teachers

My aim in this chapter is to represent the ways in which the teachers have reported experiencing marginalization in their positions as educators within their low-income urban district. With respect to the larger TPAR project, this chapter is important because it seeks to establish that the teachers are indeed a marginalized population and, as such, eligible to participate in PAR projects. My intention within the TPAR project is to give the teachers agency to design their own projects. However, it is important to note that the agency afforded to them within our project is an attempt to counteract the very real marginalization and lack of agency that they have reported feeling in their positions as teachers.

I have chosen to use the term *marginalization* because the definition, "to put or keep (someone) in a powerless or unimportant position within society or a group" (Merriam-Webster), corresponds closely to the situation about which I have heard the teachers testifying. Moreover, PAR literature uses the term *marginalized* to describe PAR participants, so it is a term with methodological significance. Certainly, the current plight of teachers is not an altogether new finding for education literature. Santoro (2011) recognizes that, "All professions periodically go through periods of crisis, or difficult times, and teaching is in the midst of one now" (p. 2). Santoro (2011) points out, however, that too often the problems are presented in the literature as being the result of individual teachers' weaknesses or as an inevitable result of working in low-income schools. Instead, several scholars argue that the rewards of teaching are becoming scarce given current pressures faced by teachers and schools (e.g. Nieto, 2009; Santoro; 2011). Nieto (2009) additionally points to NCLB as being detrimental to teachers' being able to access the moral rewards of teaching. Similarly, Crocco & Costigan (2007) reported that new teachers in urban New York City schools felt limitations to their autonomy because of NCLB policies.

Santoro (2011) notes that the construct of teacher burnout has been explored to some degree in education literature but argues instead for the use of the term *demoralization* to describe the situation facing many teachers because burnout places the blame on individuals while many current challenges teachers face, such as accountability policies, are institutionalized and beyond the control of individuals. Santoro (2011) conceptualizes demoralization as "a process of continually being frustrated in one's pursuit of good teaching" and that the "failure to access moral rewards is not the result of a lack of personal fortitude or moral sensibility but a fundamental change in the rewards available through the work" (p.17). While Santoro has written about this, there is surprisingly little literature about these issues and Santoro (2011) calls for more research on the demoralization of teachers both for those who leave the profession and those who decide to stay. While I agree with Santoro (2011) that the problems teachers face should not be primarily seated with individual teachers, I suggest that marginalization is a more comprehensive term than demoralization because it adds acknowledgement of powerlessness and lack of voice in issues impacting teachers' professional lives. Bailey (2000) is perhaps the most consistent with my own conception of what is happening to teachers and, incidentally, also uses the term *marginalized* to describe the ways in which mandated educational reform often positions teachers because by "telling them what to do" (p.113) rather than allowing them to be part of the process and have a say in it.

Poetic Inquiry as Method

Because the teachers' identities are disclosed in this project, speaking about the ways in which they have experienced marginalization may render them particularly vulnerable. While several of the teachers have expressed eagerness to make these issues public even if doing so jeopardizes their jobs, I do not want them to face consequences for speaking about the frustrating

conditions under which they work. I also desire to share their words directly with as little narration as possible, to transmit the power and poignancy of their statements. For these reasons, I utilize poetic transcription, a form of poetic inquiry that involves crafting poems from the actual words of participants (Glesne, 1997). This perspective is also known as Vox Participare, or "participant-voiced" poems (Prendergast, 2009). This does not mean that participants have participated in the actual crafting of the poems themselves, but that the poems have been crafted by the researcher using participants' words. The majority of the poems I have constructed I describe as Vox Participare which means that they are composed entirely of quotes from the teachers. My hand and voice are only visible in the quotes I have chosen and the way I have presented the lines and sequence of the poem. In addition, I have crafted a few poems predominantly from my field notes. These poems are referred to as Vox Autoethnographia (Prendergast, 2009), or poems written from the researcher's voice.

Rooted in the arts-based inquiry movement (Prendergast, 2009a), poetry is one method within a larger tradition of experimental writing in social science research. Arts-based writing methods seek to challenge the traditional ways in which data has been represented in social science research. Prendergast (2009a) uses "poetic inquiry" as an umbrella term to describe a number of types of social science research reporting that employ poetry. In reviewing over 230 studies with poetic representations of data, Prendergast (2009b) explains that most poetic inquiry has taken place in the last decade, though a few examples exist from as early as the 1980s.

Why bother writing poetry? There are a number of reasons why poetry is increasing in popularity among social science scholars as a way to convey their research. First and perhaps foremost, is the potential for poetry to express emotion and in doing so build empathy in readers (Prendergast, 2009b; Faulkner, 2007). Prendergast (2009a) suggests that poetry itself is helpful

"to synthesize experience in a direct and affective way" (p.545) and that it is most often used to address emotionally laden topics. About alternative writing methods in general, Eisner (1997) reflects, "Forms of data representation that contribute to empathic participation in the lives of others are necessary for having one kind of access to their lives" (1997, p. 8). Not only is poetry useful for expressing difficult subjects, poetry has the ability "to move its audience affectively as well as intellectually" (Prendergast, 2009b, p.xxii). In other words, the emotion does not reside only in the text within poetry, but in the reader's response to it. Brady (2009) remarks that "poetry can catch us in the act of being" (p. xvi), an incredibly important aspect of understanding the human condition.

The format of poetry itself can lend power and significance to the words. Eliot Eisner (1997) has observed that, "How one writes shapes what is said," (1997, p. 4) and indeed, poetry's particular form has great bearing on how it is perceived. Hanauer (2001) notes that poetry "combines attention to meaning with attention to form" (as cited by Hanauer 2010, p. 31). Poetry has been described as a "special language" (Faulkner, 2007, p.219) available to researchers when prose is not sufficient. Leggo (2008) writes that, "poetry invites us to listen" (p. 166), while Woodley (2004) suggests that poetry, "helps data to sing" (p.49). Calafell (2004) emphasizes the importance of poetry for privileging orality and that the "performance aspect…allows ownership of the words to the speaker rather than a researcher" (p.180). About poetic transcription more specifically, Calafell (2004) notes that it can be used "to highlight certain meaning and rhythms in language and choice of words" (p. 180). Cahnmann (2003) comments that,

> Just as the microscope and camera have allowed different ways for us to see what would otherwise be invisible, so too poetry and prose are different mediums that give rise to ways of saying what might not otherwise be expressed. (p.31)

Scholars using poetic inquiry point out that it helps us see the interconnections between the researcher and the participants by seeking to ameliorate the problem of representation by making it clear that the researcher's voice is present in data analysis and presentation (Glesne, 1997; Prendergast, 2009a). In other words, because it is evident that most people do not speak in poems, the hand of the researcher is perhaps more explicit than in typical qualitative research reporting of participants' quotes. Glesne (1997) points out that it is "representing a perspective or experience of the interviewee, filtered through the researcher"(Glesne, 1997, p. 213). Similarly, Prendergast (2009a) says that the researchers emotional response to the data informs the way poems are created. Glesne (1997) notes that "Poetic transcription creates a third voice that is neither the interviewee's nor the researcher's, but it is a combination of both," (p.215).

The openness of poetry allows readers to interpret in various and fruitful ways. Speaking about alternative data representation in general, Eisner (1997) argues that it fosters, "productive ambiguity" which in turn "generates insight and invites attention to complexity" (p. 8). For poetry more specifically, Leggo (2008) reflects that,

> In poetry I am not trying to close anything down; I am not trying to understand everything; I am not seeking control. Instead, I am open to the world, open to process and mystery, open to fragmentariness, open to understanding as an archipelago of fragments. (Leggo, 2008, p. 168).

With the understanding that some topics ask to be open and allow readers to bring their own experiences into play with the text, poetry invites us in.

A final advantage of poetry as a research writing method is the potential to be shared with larger audiences (Cahnmann, 2003; Cahnmann-Taylor, 2009). As an education researcher who uses poetry to share messages about the state of education, Cahnmann-Taylor (2009) notes that, poetry can be shared with larger audiences than traditionally read education research and with "more immediate and lasting impact" (p. 25). Cahnmann (2003) urges, "We must assume an audience for our work…that longs for fresh language to describe the indescribable emotional and intellectual experiences in and beyond classrooms" (p. 35). Cahnmann-Taylor (2009) calls on education researchers to "explore poetic techniques and strategies…to communicate findings in multidimensional, penetrating, and more accessible ways" (p. 26).

I must note that poetic inquiry has one distinct limitation: as an experimental research writing method that is still nascent in the social sciences, many social science researchers are as yet unaware of the method and/or are uncomfortable with it. Therefore, poetic inquiry is less accepted in the field and is often dismissed as being "unscientific" (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2009). The method requires researchers to be receptive to poetry and its aesthetic potential, but many traditional researchers are not accustomed to looking for the aesthetic or creative possibilities within research. While I believe that poetry is the most poignant way through which I can transmit the emotion, voice, and power of the teachers' accounts, no doubt, other researchers may prefer a more traditional data presentation. As Cahnmann-Taylor (2009) notes, "Poetry is a risky business (p.16)."

Deciding it is worth the risk, I have chosen poetic inquiry because I sensed that prose was not sufficient (Faulkner, 2007) to transmit the intensity of feeling that I have witnessed the teachers expressing over our year and a half of work together. I have also chosen poetry to conjure empathy (Eisner, 1997; Prendergast, 2009b; Faulkner, 2007) in readers for the difficult

situations in which urban teachers have been placed. Because marginalization is felt rather than shown through concrete evidence, poetry is an apt method to transmit these sensations. I also wanted to allow for productive "ambiguity" and "complexity" (Eisner, 1997) since these accounts may resonate with many readers who know of similar circumstances for teachers in other parts of the US, thus allowing readers to bring their own experiences into dialogue with those of these teachers. Additionally, so many of the statements made by the teachers struck me as being lyrical and poetic in their essence, that I wanted to showcase their eloquence through putting these words to poetry. These statements I would furiously write in my field notes, wanted to capture every word, recognizing their beauty and power. Finally, given the extent to which teachers have been written *about* in education research and disparaged in popular media, using their own words in poems is a deliberately political move I make to demonstrate the ability of teachers to speak articulately for themselves, without having a researcher speak over them through narration and analysis.

I have tried to preserve the teachers' exact wording as much as possible. Indeed, in the poems described as Vox Participare, I have restricted the poem to direct quotes from the teachers. All details, facts, and scenarios represented in the poetry are based on comments from the teachers that I recorded and/or transcribed into field notes or analytic memos, or were written by the teachers in correspondences within our group. Because many of these conversations were sensitive, and even dangerous for the participants, I did not record all of them. Therefore, my representation of quotes has been filtered through my ability to take rapid and accurate notes of quotations. In reading the poems that I have constructed, readers can sense some of the emotions that I have experienced as the teachers have shared their stories and concerns. However, my emotions are only expressed in the ways in which I have organized the poems. I have not

inserted any of my own thoughts or ideas directly into the lines of any of the poems. Where it may appear that emotions are inserted into the Vox Participare poems, these are, nonetheless, still direct quotes from the teachers as they emoted about their situation. Through the poems, I hope to convey the depth of my concern for these teachers and for other teachers in their position. Finally, I hope to share this poetry with audiences beyond education researchers so that the struggles these teachers face can be more widely recognized by a society that plays a major role in their treatment.

Data Analysis

In poetic inquiry, data analysis can unfold in similar ways as more traditional qualitative methods, for example, through the generation of themes and the categorizing of data. While there is no singular way to analyze data through poetic inquiry, the data analysis process I used is similar to that reported by Walsh (2006) in her work with female teachers. Walsh (2006) explains in the footnotes of her article that,

> I read and reread the transcripts, made notes, and delineated a number of recurring themes. I culled words and cut and pasted segments of conversation into specifically labeled files, then played poetically with the segments of conversation. In an attempt to distill themes and write succinct versions of them. (p. 990)

This process of thematic coding and sorting of data mirrors typical qualitative data analysis methods. However, poetic inquiry has an added aesthetic element. As Walsh (2006) explains,

> I tried to stay as true as possible to the original words of the women. I did, however, make choices that were both academic and artistic…I reordered phrases at times to improve clarity for the reader (p. 990).

Like Walsh (2006), my data analysis was a multi-step process. First, I read through my field notes (which included many verbatim quotes) from all group and individual meetings with the teachers, as well as through analytic memos and emails from the teachers, and I selected all passages, quotes, and events that reflected the teachers' frustrations, complaints, and concerns about their jobs. See Table 4 for a few examples of quotes that I identified through this process.

"I don't know how many other schools are having to do this or how many other teachers are being displaced. They've had some displacement meetings. We might get a couple of new faculty just because we don't have those positions filled, even though we had to get rid of others. Many of us are questioning how we're going to do this and still make AYP with just about everybody having their schedule changed in some manner." [name retracted] Indiv mtg, [date retracted]
"How are we supposed to have 5% growth [in test scores]?…if you let us measure it, we can measure academic skill set, attendance, & other things that are more appropriate; but the district comes up with their own data points to measure these kids" [name retracted], individual mtg, [date retracted]
"NCLB. We're leaving them behind in droves. In fact, we've got a bus that we're putting kids on and telling them, 'you're going to be left behind & we're taking you to the desert." [name retracted], individual mtg, [date retracted]
[name retracted]: "she's the outside evaluator for the priority schools, she's the henchman, she's known for cleaning house", group meeting, [date retracted]
"the measuring stick for are you a good teacher is based on test scores…85% will be done on test scores. The other 15% will be on what you contributed to the school beyond your normal working hours." (points out that walking out with the kids to make sure they're safe when they leave doesn't count) "I'm perplexed on a great many things in the field of education & what it is that they want." [name retracted], individual mtg, [date retracted]
"Starting this year, teachers have to demonstrate a 5% growth with their students, in their evaluations—something that the union said would never happen, but the never is here now." "We used to have layoffs according to seniority, but that doesn't exist anymore. Now layoffs are done by student test scores…this year new category on rubric is 'significant contribution'." [name retracted], individual mtg, [date retracted]

Table 4. Examples of raw data used in poems.

Wanting to use *Vox Participare*—the actual words of the participants—as much as possible, I primarily focused on selecting quotes that struck me as being particularly poignant and representative of the job frustrations expressed by the teachers in our meetings. In a few cases when I had description of a negative event within my field notes without direct quotes, such as the description in my field notes of one of the teacher's very difficult evaluation experience, I selected the relevant excerpts from my field notes. I then pasted all the quotes and field note excerpts into one document and read through them repeatedly, looking for commonalities between them. Once I read through the quotes and passages repeatedly to the point that I was intimately familiar with the data, I began sorting (or coding as in qualitative research) based on quotes and passages that seemed to speak to one another or shared a common concern. For example, some emergent themes (or codes) were teacher evaluations, issues with the priority school, times when the teachers did not feel respected or heard by administrators, and their utter exhaustion with their current situation. As I accumulated a series of quotes representing a common theme or concern, I began playing with creating a poem from the passages in as direct a form as possible. I kept quotes together in their entirety whenever possible, so that I could preserve the original meaning and intent throughout the analysis process. The themes of the groupings of quotes changed somewhat as I began the process of constructing each poem, and I moved and eliminated quotes as they no longer fit the emergent theme of a given poem. To quotes that I moved, I sometimes found a place for them in a different poem if they better fit the theme emerging in that poem. This aspect of the method is a bit more art that science, since I needed to pay attention to how specific quotes or passages worked aesthetically alongside others. Brady (2009) has observed that the writing of poetry can be a "tool of discovery" (p.xiii) in addition to a method for writing research. In this way, each poem's final theme emerged within

the poem creation process itself. I chose to construct free verse so that I could stay most true to original quotes without being restricted to rhythm or rhyming requirements.

To protect the teachers' identities, I have blended their quotes and stories in the poetry below, so that nearly every poem is an amalgamation of several teachers' words. Multiple teachers are represented within different lines or stanzas of each poem. However, to distinguish individual comments and thoughts, I have restricted each line of poetry to a single quote or idea expressed by one teacher. Because the teachers are not all the same gender, I have chosen not to use pronouns, so that this aspect of their identities remains hidden. I have, at times, reordered phrases and combined comments said on different occasions into dialogue. This is another distinct advantage of poetry that I am leveraging in this work: if I had presented the teachers quotes using a more traditional qualitative writing method, I would have needed to either build more context around the quotes (thus making it easier to discern which teacher said them), use pronouns (or awkwardly try to avoid singular, gendered pronouns) or isolate the quotes, making it easier to discern what was spoken by distinct individuals. All of these moves would make it easier for the teachers to be connected to their quotes—something that I have tried to avoid since many of the statements are dangerous ones for them to be making.

As I constructed the poetry, it seemed most appropriate to divide different themes into different standalone poems. The final product is a "cluster" (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009) of poems. While each poem can stand alone, together they create a more complete picture of the various strains and struggles the teachers have reported. Butler-Kisber & Stewart (2009) reflect that,

> "Poetry clusters help to show the tentativeness of individual interpretations, that is, how each understanding of a theme, topic, or concept is limited by the time, place, context and

> stance of the researcher at the time it is written. A poetry cluster that represents different events, moods, topics, etcetera, can acknowledge the "truth" of each of the poems in the series while simultaneously uncovering something more. The "something more" is the revelation that often occurs in the unveiling of a poetry cluster. The reader, and/or author(s) herself, can see for the first time dimensions of a theme that might not otherwise be revealed. The clustering of poems that are unique and at times even contradictory allows for an up-close and granular reading of a theme and a more general reading simultaneously. This simultaneous appreciation of experience removes the need to move back and forth from the particular to the general and, as mentioned earlier, provides a richer understanding of the phenomenon." (p.4)

My decision to create ten poems was not deliberate; rather, they developed out of the emergent themes. Through the poem construction it became clear that some quotes worked better with others, or that particular events or entities (like evaluations) needed to stand alone in their own poem. As I wrote poems, I read and reread the remaining quotes and field note excerpts that I had identified as relating to marginalization to see if their sentiment was represented by an existing poem. If it was not, I created a new poem around that particular expressed concern or theme. Once nearly all of the quotes and passages I had identified were captured within a poem, I knew that the cluster was representing the array of concerns expressed by the teachers. Indeed, when one of the teachers was reading the cluster after they had been written she remarked about how well the poems covered the range of issues they had discussed in our meetings.

A ubiquitous criticism of poetic inquiry is that the poetry should still meet aesthetic purposes—in other words, that it can stand alone as good poetry aside from its intent to share research findings (e.g. Faulkner, 2007). While I am by no means a professionally trained poet, I

believe that poetry ought to be a democratic art, not to be only allowed into the hands of a privileged few. I agree with Cahnmann (2003), who argues that, "We may not all write great popular or literary poems, but we can all draw from the craft and practice of poetry to realize its potential, challenging the academic marginality of our work" (p.35). While I do not aspire to be a great poet per se, I aspire to share the teachers' words and stories in compelling ways that have the potential to reach beyond a typical academic audience and I believe that poetry can be one such method for doing so.

I shared the poems with all the teachers via email so that they could check them for accuracy in representation and ensure that they were comfortable with the information being shared in this form. (In the email, I shared the poems individually within the email text and included this chapter draft as an attachment.) In their review of the poems, the teachers made two corrections to the dates listed in the poems. When meeting with one of the teachers around this time, she/he had not yet read through the poems, so I read the poems aloud to her/him. In doing so, the teacher repeatedly remarked about how true they were and how well the poems captured their situation. This participant particularly loved hearing her/his own words, nodding vigorously as I read them. This teacher was also relieved that the poems would not be shared with the district, for fear of district retaliation. Another teacher, whose particularly gut-wrenching experience is reflected in "One Evaluation," specifically agreed for this poem to be shared and thanked me for representing the experience. This teacher remarked that she/he liked the poems, saying that I was kind to create them. Another teacher reflected that, "I especially like the way they capture our perspectives in our particular contexts…what we see happening around us on a daily basis, from each of our viewpoints" (personal correspondence, 7/1/15). Similar to other

qualitative studies, this process of getting feedback from the teachers about the poems was important member-checking for this poetic inquiry process.

I hope that these poems invite readers to listen deeply (Leggo, 2008) to the emotions and experiences of the teachers. It is also my hope that the poetry not only allows the teachers' voices "to sing" (Woodley, 2004) but, by blending their voices, protects them from political fall out.

The poems

Being a teacher

I work more hours than the public thinks.

To feel appreciated and honored
for what I do as a professional
has become a rarity.

There's this weird idea that any *body* can be a teacher.

This poem is Vox Participare; it is derived entirely from statements made by three of the teachers. Two of the quotes—the first and final lines—were articulated in meetings and the middle line was written to me in an email. Each statement signals the teachers' awareness of the current lack of respect accorded to their profession by society at large. The first line illustrates that the teacher is aware that the long hours they work are not recognized by the "public", no doubt a reference to the common saying that teachers "only work until 3p" and "have the summers off." The middle line hints at a change in the amount of respect this teacher has felt over time by the choice of verb tense, "has become." In the final line, the teacher's spoken emphasis was on the word "body", pointing to the notion that society not only suggests *any*body can become a teacher, but, even worse, that the only criteria believed necessary is to have a

corporeal body. That this is a "weird idea" displays this teacher's awareness that so much goes into being a good teacher.

This year

This year, we had no planning periods.

This year, six teachers were on health leave from one high school.
(More than ever before).

This year, an eighth grade math teacher resigned.
She came from a Catholic school, so we weren't surprised.

This year, a 20-year veteran teacher and leader resigned
from the "priority" status high school
to work at the alternative high school.
She sent a big message to other teachers
about the state of the school.

This year, my doctor noticed a dramatic increase
in urinary tract infections
among teachers in the district.
We now have no time
to go to the bathroom
during the school day.

This year, there were no step-wise or cost of living pay increases in the district.
This year…and the six years before.

This poem is Vox Autoethnographia: rather than using direct quotes from participants, I constructed this poem through my field notes from our meetings. That said, all the lines came

from points the teachers' made and I have not added any of my own interpretations. In other words, I needed to rephrase their comments so that they would flow aesthetically within the poem, which is why this poem is a verbatim reflection of the teachers' statements. This poem is based primarily on conversations between the four teachers and myself as they detailed what was happening in the district within our group meetings during the 2014-15 school year. The only line that was not taken from group meetings was the description of the doctor's office visit, which occurred in an individual conversation with one of the teachers in the fall of 2014. There was much discussion in our meetings about how this school year was the most difficult year any of the teachers had previously experienced in the district, so I hope to capture the temporal urgency through this poem. The number of teachers on health leave was clearly an upsetting event for the teachers as the health problems being reflected in teachers seem to be a manifestation of the strains and stress that teachers are currently facing within the district. Given that the teachers have all worked in this district for decades, their perspective on the sudden and rapid negative changes that they experienced this year are particularly concerning.

Teaching in urban schools

Our PD is mostly about reading strategies.
They are alright,
    but where do we deal with the fact
    that these kids
    are poor,
    need a refuge,
    need to talk to someone?
We miss time to reflect on what we are doing
and how this fits with society around us.

We have kids with real problems

associated with poverty.
They are depressed, stressed,
sleeping in class, and need help.

The school improvement administrator told me,
"You teachers need to own that."
As if these problems of poverty
were those teachers should handle
rather than mental health specialists.
I suggested he spend some time in our schools
to understand the context and what we deal with.
He said he didn't have time.

Community is different in an urban school.
We know this.
But how do we solve the disparity?
It is fundamentally the lack of resources,
lack of exposure, lack of support.

There are limits.

This Vox Participare poem consists of direct quotes of two teachers shared through group and individual meetings. From these quotes, we can see that the teachers are painfully aware that their students come from challenging situations and need more help than the teachers feel adequately trained to give. This creates a frustrating situation for the teachers because they know that they are not fully able to meet the sizeable needs of their students. That the person hired by the district to support "improvement" does not have time or perhaps the willingness to understand the contexts of the students shows that the district's priority seems to lie in improving

test scores rather than in improving students' lives, an unfortunate symptom of the neoliberal reform movement that has taken such a stronghold in this urban district. The poem also suggests that giving space for teachers to explore food (or lack of food) in students' lives is particularly important, given the lack of space that is generally created for them to do this work. I felt like "there are limits" was a particularly strong quote by one of the teachers to signify the helplessness that they feel in being able to deal with the increasing level of problems their students face. Certainly, focusing on reading strategies just seems to be a drop in the bucket when looking at the larger contexts of their students' lives. The teachers understand this situation that the administrators appear to deny.

Teacher evaluations

In five years, it has all changed so quickly.
85%
The measuring stick for being a good teacher is [now] based on test scores.
Starting this year, teachers must demonstrate a 5% test growth by their students:
    something that the union said would never happen,
    but the never is here now.
We used to have layoffs according to seniority.
Now layoffs are based on student test scores.
If you let us measure [student growth],
    we can measure academic skill set, attendance,
    and other things that are more appropriate.
But the district comes up with their own data points
    to measure kids.
15%
This year the new category on the evaluation rubric is "significant contribution"
    (what you contributed to the school
    beyond your normal working hours.)
The district selects what is above and beyond.

So if I do home visits,
or visit a parent in the hospital or jail
to let them know how their child is doing,
that is not on the list of significant contributions.

Isn't that something?

This Vox Participare poem was created from the direct quotes of two of the teachers, spoken in individual conversations with me and in group meetings. The poem focuses on recent changes to teacher evaluations in the district, most of which have happened in the last year. These changes are part of larger neoliberal policies, such as No Child Left Behind, which assume that test scores are the most important indicator of a good teacher. The intention of this poem is to demonstrate how the sudden changes in evaluation have been experienced by these teachers. The percentages, 85% and 15%, are meant to represent sections of an evaluation form. These are the percentages appearing in the 2014-15 evaluation forms. In other words, 85% of the teachers' performance is now based on students test scores and 15% is based on their "significant contributions" outside of class. There are a number of particularly poignant quotes in this poem. For example, "Starting this year, teachers must demonstrate a 5% test growth by their students: something that the union said would never happen, but the never is here now." This quote shows how the teachers have even been betrayed by their own union, who promised certain measures would not come to pass, but then allowed them to occur. There is also a strong sense that teachers have good ideas for ways to evaluate that would be more appropriate to their context, but are not able to contribute their ideas. The teacher's pointing out that a number of things they presently do that seem above and beyond their job, such as home, hospital and jail visits, are not even considered by administrators to "count" as a "significant contribution" is also very telling of the ways in which

these teachers have felt unrecognized for the things that they do that are above and beyond their job descriptions.

One evaluation

Last year, between “effective” and “highly effective;”
I had difficult students.

This year, “barely effective;”
I have fantastic students.

One year difference, new evaluation system.
No explanation, just admonishment.

Outside evaluators created a plan.
No one asked me.

“Better lesson planning,” they said,
but provided no assistance for my 4-5 lesson plans each day.

On evaluation day,
new kids mid-year;

15 year olds who had never been to school,
just arrived from Africa.

Now I know better what they need.

Another teacher went home crying
after the outside evaluators rated her poorly.

She returned to school the very next day, ready to do her job.

But we are “not professionals.”

I was told to stop supporting students so much
outside of my classroom duties.

But I’m there for those kids.
I will not stop.

This poem is based on a conversation about a particularly difficult evaluation event that happened to one of the teachers in the spring of 2015. The words are very close to the words written in my field notes as I attempted to capture the words the teacher used, when recounting the story for us in a group meeting held May 2015, but since they are not direct quotes, it is a blend of Vox Autoethnographia and Vox Participare. The intention in the poem is to demonstrate a number of things. First, the poem discloses that a teacher has experienced a drastic change in ratings for no apparent reason except for a change in the way teachers are evaluated. Second, it demonstrates how little voice the teacher felt within this evaluation system. Third, it illustrates how little the evaluators knew (or cared) about the teachers’ context, since they arrived to evaluate the teacher just as the teacher received new students with high needs. They also seem to ignore that creating 4-5 lesson plans per day is not a small feat. It also shows that the evaluators dismiss the multitude of things this teacher does for students outside of school. The comment “but we are not professionals” shows that the teacher is aware of larger narratives about teachers not being professionals, while pointing out a particular teacher’s extreme professionalism in returning to school ready to teach after a brutal evaluation experience. Though I needed to recreate quotes, this poem is not an expression of any of my own feelings, but those of the teacher as the teacher was sharing the story with me. However, as a witness to this, I can attest to

how difficult it was to hear. The teacher was emotional and upset and I wanted to create a poem to honor this difficult experience that was shared with me.

"**We just can't sustain**"

We are all under similar kinds of pressures and all the extra, extra, extra stuff we're doing… it makes it hard to teach sometimes.

Teacher A

I didn't realize how much stress I had been under

until I was finally able to relax over winter break.

I didn't want to go back.

It wasn't just me.

Another teacher—a great teacher—

said to me, "I could walk away and never come back…"

Teacher B

I cancelled my summer trip.

It was too soon after school ended.

I didn't have enough energy left

even for fun.

Teacher C

I'm in Alcatraz.

I'm trying to get out of education the way it's set up in America.

It is overwhelming…it's too much.

It's pushed me over the edge.

Are you getting the picture about the stress levels?

This Vox Participare poem is a selection of statements made by three teachers in conversations with me and in our group meetings that reflected their deep exhaustion from being overworked, and their feelings of being overwhelmed with the current status of their jobs. While there is no obvious temporal component within the poem, these teachers are not speaking about their long-term careers as teachers; they are speaking about the recent changes that budget restrictions and NCLB policies have imposed upon them in the last several years. I make this claim because I have worked with the teachers for nearly two years and listened to their accounts of how very difficult things have become recently in their jobs. Given that these teachers have all stayed in their jobs for many years perhaps speaks to the fact that their jobs have not always been so difficult. I labeled teachers A, B, and C to signal how different individuals are struggling with similar feelings of being overwhelmed, tired, and frustrated with their current conditions. I also wanted to transmit the feelings of being overworked through their words such as "stress", "pressures", "overwhelming", "no energy", a desire to escape… The title "We just can't sustain" has quotes around it to signify that it is also a direct quote. I felt that this quote captured the sentiment that I wanted to portray through this collection of accounts.

Freedom?

In this formerly union-strong state,

they call it "freedom from the union"

and “right to work”.
Meanwhile, teacher tenure is slipping away.
And teaching jobs are lost every year.

Apparently, it is our right to freedom
from job security.

This poem plays on larger political messages contained by current Right to Work state laws that are attempting to lessen the power of teachers’ unions. Three of the teachers in this group are active union members, reporting often in our meetings about union meetings and messages. They have expressed deep concern about what they see as the steady weakening of their union at the hands of a particular Conservative think tank within the state. Given the importance of this issue to their larger feelings of job security, I felt it was important to include in the set. This poem is not generated from direct quotes, but from general ideas expressed by the teachers, thus it is Vox Autoethnographia. This poem is perhaps the one most loosely connected to direct quotes as the final line is one that I constructed based on playing with the ideas the teachers had expressed.

No Child Left Behind

We’re leaving them behind
in droves. We’ve got a bus
that we’re putting kids on
and we tell them,
You’re going to be left behind
and we’re taking you to the desert.

This Vox Participare poem consists of one direct quote from a teacher who recognizes the irony in the naming of NCLB and what this teacher sees happening to students as a result. The desert comment illustrates this teacher’s view that the students are not just being left behind their more

privileged peers; they are actually being penalized, left in a place of desolation. The quote is very powerful, not only for its lyricism, but for its demonstration that the teacher recognizes the harm being done to their students and the irony behind the naming of the policy which does exactly the opposite of its expressed intention.

"Someone else is driving the bus"

We have to adhere to their rules.

The district is always writing for big grants
by someone not in contact with teachers.
The programs often fail
with no input from the grassroots.

Teachers are told what they should do
and not asked about what they think.

Out of the blue, mid-school year,
the state legislature switched from the ACT to the SAT.
We're judged on these scores.
So the rules changed in the middle of the game.

The administration can move you anywhere.
Movement used to be based on seniority;
now it's just a principal's decision.

We have a top-down organizational structure
for penalizing people
in all the wrong areas.
(There are no rewards.)

Why do administrators not realize

that when they support their people,
they do better?

This poem, also Vox Participare, is crafted from the direct quotes of three teachers. The poem represents the lack of control, voice, and support that the teachers feel in their jobs. The title, "Someone else is driving the bus," was a quote from one of the teachers that I felt perfectly captured these sentiments. The stanzas reflect various incidences when the teachers have experienced a lack of control within the district. There is a strong feeling and use of "we" (teachers) and "they" (administrators), which further signifies the separation felt between these groups. Stanzas refer to teachers not being asked their opinion (even when they feel like they might have made better decisions). "Teachers are told what they should do and not asked about what they think" is a particularly jolting quote to me that shows the teachers being treated not as professionals, but as mindless workers, assumed to have no good ideas. The emphasis on administrator power and "top-down" structure also shows the lack of control that teachers are feeling in their positions. The last question, asked by a teacher, points to the bitter irony that the district is self-sabotaging by not making its teachers fell trusted and supported.

Priority school

The first thing we heard was how we'd be evaluated
rather than about how we might be supported
to deal with the huge challenges the school and students face.

My upcoming year's teaching assignments changed twice over the summer,
yet I remained hopeful that it might turn out okay.

I was given a one-line description
of a new course

that I was to create
with only a few weeks' notice.

Many of us are questioning how we deal with huge mid-year course assignment changes
and still make AYP
with just about everybody having their schedule changed
in some manner.

And we still don't know when the state tests will be.

The outside evaluator for the priority schools,
she's the henchman,
she's known for cleaning house.

This is definitely my most challenging time in education.

A priority school is one that has been designated in danger of not making Annual Yearly Progress for several years in a row. Annual Yearly Progress is the measure upon which schools are judged under No Child Left Behind, and is based on an expected increase in test scores. Schools serving low-income populations have been particularly fixated on AYP since their students struggle to perform as well as their more economically privileged peers on standardized tests. This Vox Participare poem is a combination of two of the teachers' direct quotes about the situation they have experienced this year, which has caused tremendous and unsettling schedule changes for teachers and students. Not only did the teachers not know what grade levels and courses they would be teaching in the 2014-15 school year until the end of the summer, they also (unexpectedly) had major changes in the courses they were assigned to teach in the middle of the 2014-15 school year. They were given approximately two weeks notice before the winter break

that their course assignments and students would change in the upcoming semester. This was because the school's budget was very tight and the administration threatened to cut 10 teaching positions mid-year. To avoid the cuts, the school used grant funds to save some of the positions, but also moved a number of teachers into support positions. As a result, nearly every teacher's schedule was impacted. At the start of the winter 2015 semester, I observed that many teachers did not know their students' names because they received so many new students mid-year. A sense of frustration and chaos was evident.

Discussion

In reading and analyzing across the poetry cluster, and with respect to the previous chapters, a few cross-cutting themes emerge:

Impacts of neoliberal policies and place on teaching.

Though neoliberal education policies are not necessarily directly mentioned in the poems, they are implicit in a number of them, including "Freedom", "Priority school", "No child left behind", and "Teacher evaluations". That students and teachers are solely measured on the basis of test scores reflects a neoliberal paradigm that reduces educational aims and aspirations to a one-dimensional attention to a standard measurement, as many education scholars have noted, (e.g. Lipman, 2011). As discussed in the district context chapter, that students and teachers in this urban context where poverty creates enormous contextual challenges are held to the same standards as their socioeconomically privileged peers also reflects neoliberalism's lack of attention to the contextual challenges faced by teachers and students in this place. As the teachers note in several poems, most especially "Teaching in Urban Schools", the "problems of poverty" that the students are dealing with are massive and easily beyond those that the teachers have been trained to handle, yet the administrators seem to blindly focus on test scores as dictated by

neoliberal policies. Indeed, the teacher's account within "Teaching in Urban Schools" reflects that a teacher even asked a district administrator to spend some time in the schools so that he could more readily understand the context in which the teachers were working, but the administrator claimed that he did not have time for that. His time, in other words, was accorded to solely improving test scores.

Another way that neoliberal policies are reflected is in the emphasis on *evaluation and punishment* that the teachers have expressed. A number of the poems include aspects of being evaluated. Two poems are explicitly about formal teacher evaluations while several others, namely "Priority School" and "'Someone else is driving the bus'", include aspects of being evaluated. That four poems of the cluster include direct reference to evaluation demonstrates the large impact that evaluation has played in these teachers' lives, despite that fact that all are tenured. In fact, the *threatening of their job security* through loss of tenure is yet another neoliberal aim as part of a larger movement to disarm unions of all kinds. Right to work laws as discussed in the district context chapter come into play here in these aspects.

Perhaps less apparent is the way in which the *temporal aspect* expressed in many of the poems also bears witness to neoliberal policies. Most of the poems have some reference to time, (most obviously the poem entitled "This Year"). This is important to note within a larger analysis of the marginalization of these teachers because they have emphasized repeatedly how much things have changed for them in the last five years. Each of the four teachers have 16 or more years in the district. In fact, one has 37 years, and two others have more than 20 years each in the district. As a result of their decades of experience, the teachers are able to take a long-term view of the status of the district and the ways in which their jobs have changed over time.. And, the teachers have reflected that larger state and national political pressures (based on neoliberal

policies such as NCLB) have only come into their lives as teachers in the last five years. The swiftness of these changes is itself cause for concern as is their extremely negative influence on the teachers.

Lack of control, autonomy, and not treated as professionals.

A larger theme of not being treated as professionals resonates across a number of the poems. Several poems speak more specifically to this question of teachers as professionals, none more than "Being a teacher". "One evaluation" includes a direct reference of the failure to view teachers as professionals in the line, "But we are 'not professionals'. It is particularly remarkable that the teachers fully recognize that they are not seen as professionals by the larger society and reflects the tremendous vitriol that has been aimed at teachers in popular discourse. As Goldstein (2015) notes, "public school teaching ha[s] become the most controversial profession in America."

As a symptom of not being seen as professionals, the teachers also expressed feeling a lack of control and autonomy in their jobs. While "Someone else is driving the bus" is the clearest example of this, a number of poems contain this theme. "Teaching in urban schools" suggests that these teachers have ideas about professional development that would better resonate with their context and help them meet the tremendous needs of their students. "Teacher evaluations" includes a teacher who would like the opportunity to contribute ideas for measurement to show student progress more "appropriate" to their context. In this poem, that the district selects what actions count for "significant contributions" also shows a lack of control on the part of the teachers. It seems then that the teachers are seeing the problems on the grassroots, yet are unable to give suggestions or even be heard at all by administrators (and even a larger society) who assume they have nothing worthwhile to contribute.

Concern for students and their larger life issues beyond grades and classes.

Consistent with these teachers' projects and our larger TPAR framework, even when considering ways in which they have been marginalized, the teachers continue to focus on the ways in which their students struggle, and wonder how they can best serve their students' needs. Several of the poems express attention to and deep concern for the lives of their students, particularly with respect to the urban context in which they live. "Teaching in urban schools" in particular focuses on the difficult events and situations that students are dealing with, such as homelessness, poverty, and crime, through the lens of teachers who are not trained to deal with these problems, yet are expected to work through them. The poem, "No child left behind," shows the teachers are aware that their students are not being given what they need to be successful in the ways success is currently measured. This attention to students, despite the pressures that they are facing by association with their students, speaks volumes about their continued professionalism in the face of tremendous pressure and adverse conditions.

Conclusion

Through the poetry cluster, it is apparent that the teachers have experienced marginalization through a lack of being heard, trusted, supported, and respected for their expertise and knowledge as professionals. Additionally, the poems speak to issues faced by these teachers as a result of working in a low-income district that faces pressures stemming from both the socioeconomic situation of students and neoliberal policies. Because this poetry is based on statements of four teachers in one urban district, it does not attempt to generalize to the experiences of all teachers. However, as poetry aims to portray the particular in the universal (Brady, 2009), these issues are likely not limited to these four teachers, nor to teachers in this urban school district.

Individually, each theme is not necessarily revelatory given that hardships for teachers have increasingly become part of public discourse, as in Dana Goldstein's 2014 popular book *The Teacher Wars*. Though academic literature exists that speaks about current struggles faced by teachers (e.g. Bailey, 2000; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Nieto, 2009; Santoro, 2011) and some of this literature ties these struggles to accountability policies (e.g. Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Nieto, 2009), this literature is not coherently tied together through shared terms or conceptions. My work seeks to add to the conversation by using language salient in PAR literature to bring to attention the systematic ways in which teachers are facing difficult challenges. Additionally, while some of the existing literature relies on qualitative narrative studies (e.g. Crocco & Costigan, 2007) my work adds to the literature by bringing in the new methodological genre of poetic inquiry. Additionally, much of this literature uses more traditional interview methods, while these poems were synthesized from discussions and meetings which were created as safe places for this group of teachers to vent and find mutual support; their comments were generated in open and unmediated discussion with each other. Because the group taught different subjects & grade levels across several different schools, their perspectives point to a consensus across an urban school district. That these themes resonate with other themes of teacher marginalization in the broader education literature (e.g. Bailey, 2000; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Santoro, 2011) speaks to their urgency and increasing universality within urban and/or low-income schools. It is not clear what it will take for us to finally reach a tipping point in education when policy-makers will listen to teachers' perspectives from the field, but until then, we need to hear them speak every chance we get and in every way possible.

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CHAPTER 5: The Teachers' Projects

The following chapter introduces and describes each of the teacher's projects and is divided into four major sections, one for each teacher. The research questions underlying this chapter are the following:

1. *In what ways do veteran teachers working on food-related action research each make sense of how food is relevant in their classrooms and/or schools? How do their perspectives on food in schools connect either to their working lives as teachers or to their personal interests and background?*
2. *As these veteran teachers engage in PAR on food-related issues, what questions become important, what actions do they take, and how do the projects take shape over time?*

Each section consists of the following:

- A description describing the teacher's background as is relevant to our work together
- A description of the teacher's project undertaken as part of our larger TPAR project
- A current draft of each teacher's writing. The chapters are based on their projects and reflect the messages that each teacher wants to share with a wider community about their projects, what they have done, and what they have learned.
- My reflection on their project.

I include the teachers' own writing within this dissertation because I believe it is important for readers to hear the teachers' voices and perspectives as unmediated by me as possible since this helps to make clear how they are seeing and defining the issues. In other words, if I instead summarized their projects or ideas rather than allowing them to tell their stories, I would be presenting my understanding of their work with my own biases and interests

rather than their own. Each teacher sees the issue of food in this district quite differently and has approached his/her respective project uniquely, both in the particular topic addressed and in the ways in which he/she defines and constructs the topic. By sharing their own extended narratives, the reader can get a sense of the scope and sequence of each teachers' thoughts on their project. By allowing their voices to be unmediated over an extended writing sample, readers can see now only how teachers have broadly framed their projects but how they have thought about various aspects of their projects. What they have chosen to present and discuss tells much about their thinking about the issues of food in their schools.

As I mentioned in the methodology chapter, my role was as a conductor, bringing together these four voices and perspectives, asking them to convene and share their ideas with each other and with me. I also coached and supported their ideas and interests to varying degrees, meeting with each teacher regularly to discuss their progress. I even assisted several in the writing process. However, as I discussed in the methodology chapter, it was important to me that the teachers saw these projects as their own and not mine. This is particularly challenging given the unequal power dynamic between researchers and teachers within research projects. Recognizing that the teachers could easily see me as the primary driver of project design, I intentionally gave them space to author their own projects so that I could see how the teachers themselves would define and approach them. Thus, my research questions framing this chapter are more about the teachers' processes and positionalities than about the specific content of their projects and its interaction with food literature. Furthermore, because most of the teachers' project work was initiated and carried out by them, I am somewhat limited in what I can say about the analytic and action steps they each have taken within their projects. In other words, I am restricted in my descriptions of their project and reflections to what they have articulated to

me about their own process, as it has come up in our discussions and meetings. I did not specifically interview them to obtain their data collection and analysis methods, and even when trying to elicit this information from them, the ways in which teachers speak and think about these processes are different from the ways in which formally trained researchers would. Furthermore, it is important to note that each teacher has devised a project based on their own interests and skills. As a result, each teacher has a slightly different interpretation of what an action research project consists of and a different extent to which he/she has utilized data collection and analysis.

Critically examining food insecurity from an insider's perspective:

Person Cole

Person's background

Person has taught as a special education teacher in the district for 37 years at a number of schools including Multicultural High School and a middle school that was closed in the district reconfiguration. She currently works at Alternative High School (AHS) and describes working with mentally fragile kids as her "area of expertise".

Person is extremely knowledgeable about the city and district contexts, likely a result of her many years working there and her involvement in the community. In fact, in the 2013-14 academic year she was asked by a university faculty member to speak with a group on campus about the history of the district. A professor who saw her speak at this time recalled her as being "incredible". Person is compelling, not only for her knowledge and insights, but because she is a wonderful orator. Indeed, when she spoke at a food justice conference with our team, she seemed to captivate the room. She began her talk by holding up a small foam lunch tray and asking if it looked large enough to feed a teenage boy. Immediately, the crowd was drawn in to her world.

Person visits parents in prison, conducts home visits and generally goes the extra mile for the students with whom she works. She knows many personal details about her students and has told me about struggles some students face. For example, as I visited her school and students walked by, she shared information about them with me so that I could understand a bit more of the many struggles they faced: one had diabetes but did not manage it well, another struggled with sickle cell anemia, another had come straight to school from having an appendectomy at the hospital because he thought that he could not miss school for any reason.

Aside from her role as an educator, she is involved in community outreach through her

church where she tutors adult English language learners from the refugee population in the city. She is also active in a church group called the Green Team which she describes as "an outlet for me to be involved in the community to do recycling, managing of natural resources, [and] improving neighborhoods by getting them involved with growing their own food to supplement family eating" (May 2014).

Person childhood was marked by hunger and she notes that this still impacts how she thinks about food security for herself and for her students. She speaks of keeping snacks around to feed students—especially those who are pregnant—and worries about whether her students are getting enough food to eat. She also worries about their access to nutritious food. As an adult, she is an avid gardener, partly because she sees it as a path to food security. Additionally, through the Green Team at her church, she tried to establish a community garden in one of the toughest areas of the city. She said that her work with the Green Team was motivated by her desire to "help people take care of themselves" (June, 2014). This complex background in relation to food makes her perspective particularly compelling and important for our research group.

Person's project

Person has been interested in the topic of food justice and food security from the beginning of our work together and for her project, she decided that she wanted to investigate food security within her high school since she recognized it was a problem. More specifically, in her project she sought to explore and investigate how food insecurity was manifested at her school. To do this she primarily made observations by taking notes of student eating patterns within the school, including school lunches and the vending machine. As part of her project, she worked closely with the school food coordinator, interviewing her about her systems and

procedures for feeding students. She observed what food was being served on a daily basis, who was eating, and what students were saying about the food. (She learned what students were saying about the food by listening to them during lunch and while they were picking out their lunch selections, and by talking with them informally.) She also observed the vending machine sales each week, noting how much of what items were being purchased. She took interest in a summer feeding program held at her school in the summer of 2014 and noted what was being served as part of the program, to whom, and what was being eaten. Additionally, she created a survey that she gave to students in the fall of 2015, asking their thoughts on the school food and about their own food security.

Person's project changed somewhat over our time together, primarily because the district changed their food service provider between the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years. Initially, when we began working together, she noted that her school was itself a food desert because of the poor quality and quantity of food being provided to her students under the first provider, Aramark. Through her observations, she noticed considerable improvements in the quality and quantity of food being served to the students at her school under the new food service, which she describes in her chapter draft below. In her chapter, she reflects on the changes she has observed in students' eating habits at lunch with the switch in food service providers.

Data she has collected within her project includes food security surveys that she created and distributed to students at lunch, observations and tallies of the amount of food purchased through the vending machine at her school each week, how often/with what the vending machine is filled, informal conversations with the students about what they are eating and how they feel about the food, observations about what the students are choosing to eat in the lunch menu, and conversations with the food service director at her school. In addition to this data, much of her

chapter is autobiographical inquiry (Florio-Ruane & DeTar, 2001), in which she reflects on her own experiences with childhood hunger and puts those into dialogue with the experiences of her students.

Person's writing

My background.

What makes a food desert? In an urban area it's a mile from a grocery store. I would definitely say I grew up in a food desert. We did not have access to food; we did not have access to a grocery store. Back in the '60's we had community grocery stores and how close you were to the grocery store would depend on where exactly you lived. I lived on the West side of Detroit and you had to get on a bus to go to the grocery store. The closest store to me was in a concentrated area of people, but still a mile and ½ away from my house. We walked there sometimes. My grandmother helped us a lot with groceries because she had a car and she was able to get to a market. Up the street from me was a corner store that always had out-dated food. The bologna was green with fur, the bread was green, and there was no other place to go, so you got what you got, scraped off the green and called it a day. In the '30's where I lived had been a Jewish community—a Jewish ghetto. Then people moved out and African American people moved in; it was already a ghetto and it became more that way. When you concentrate a pack of people together who don't have access to many things, they don't flourish. They become non-functional, really. The high school was Central HS. It was known for poor education, hooligans, gangs. My mother was supposed to go to Central, but she dropped out of school in the tenth grade, I think because she was pregnant with me.

This concept of food security, the issue of having food, is significant to me because

growing up, I did not have access to food. I lived in the city until I went to college. When I went to Michigan State, I'd never seen so much green in my life. I'd never seen a cow up close. I didn't know that thing between their legs was called an utter—it was very frightening to me. But I got to listen to people from other places. I was from the city, but there were people from farms. And I was intrigued by this one young lady. I just loved her. She was from a rural area, she wanted to be a veterinarian. She had been involved with the birthing of horses, cows, pigs which was fascinating to me. She would tell me that her family wasn't wealthy; they had a few cows, some horses and some pigs and they would sell the pigs for money to buy clothes unless her mother made them. And she would tell me, "Sometimes the only thing we had to eat was steak & eggs." And I was shocked. Steak and eggs! And that was the only thing?

I had a little joke: "If you can see the light, then you're hungry." What that meant was that the refrigerator had a light and when you opened it up, if there was no food it in, nothing around it, then the only thing you see is the light. That's how I grew up. We had this thing called oleo for cooking and sometimes the only thing left, when we had no food, was oleo. So when she told me steak & eggs, I thought, "If I have to be poor, let me at least live where I can grow something. At least I could eat."

Though I have no idea how she did it, my mom bought our first house when I was 14 years old. But, my mother didn't grocery shop. That was not her way. So we lived in a house, but we were hungry. Near us there was an open fruit market where they set up a tent, and people would bring in eggs and milk. A group of us—my two brothers, the two boys across the street, their sister, and myself—would walk to the market. We would climb under the tent and sit under the table & whatever stuff dropped on the ground, we'd put in bags. That was how I learned to love grapes and apples and pears. I had a summer before I turned 15 when all I ate was fresh fruit

from that market. They knew that we were—I guess sort of stealing—but we were under the tables, we didn't bother the customers, so that's what we ate.

We were hungry, so we'd eat a can of potted meat or Vienna sausage. To this day I cannot eat them…They were little cans, so we would steal them and put them in our pockets. We would steal to eat.

At school, even though we qualified for free lunch and free breakfast, we could not mention that or my mother would be very upset. She demonstrated that when we were in elementary school and my brother went into the cafeteria and told them he was hungry, so they gave them cereal & offered some to me. He ate, but I didn't because I knew we'd get in trouble—which was kind of dumb—I should've eaten; I was in trouble anyway. My mother told us,

"We will never mention free lunch."

When I got my first job, I was able to start feeding myself. And, when I got my job, I always bought and paid full price for my school lunch.

This thing with food that I have, it's because of my lack of food as a child.

Food insecurity and security at AHS.

I work at Alternative High School (AHS), a program that specializes in working with high at-risk students. My school is an alternative education high school and I have worked with this population for over 15 years. My school is not in a traditional school with access to a kitchen, so the food is pre-packaged so that it can be heated in an industrial oven. The food is "bussed" in and the students eat from elementary school foam trays. Because our district meets the federal guidelines for free lunch, every kid gets free lunch and free breakfast.

Before September 2014 I wrote the following:

> My school does not have access to the food that the other high schools have which means that the most marginalized students in the district have the least access to good food. If a food desert in an urban setting is a place with limited access to fresh food/quality food, then my school is a food desert.

The at-risk students I work with do have access to food through the free breakfast and lunch program, but the food quality has been less than ideal. The food choices in my school over the last 15 years have been foods that lead directly to obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, and are a breeding ground for a host of other destructive health issues. My students get 97% processed food, white flour-based breads, canned fruits, and sometimes apples, oranges, and bananas as fresh fruit. Access to quality food is extremely limited. To add insult to injury, we have one vending machine with snacks and one vending machine with pop. The standard breakfast has consisted of Pop tarts, milk, apple sauce, yogurt and/or cheese sticks, or cereal (Sugar Pops, Frosted Flakes, Froot Loops, Golden Grahams, Raisin Bran, Frosted Mini Wheats, Plain Cheerios.) A typical lunch consists of an 8oz milk, pizza, nachos with "plastic cheese", corn dogs, spicy chicken patties (mystery meat?), chicken nuggets, and fried cheese sticks with marinara sauce. Lunches are slightly better because students can get a vegetable and fruit. The fresh vegetables are broccoli, carrots, or cauliflower. Students can get salads (if you call iceberg lettuce a salad), but the only dressing available is ranch.

Before September 2014, food insecurity for our students at AHS was an issue. When we first started this project, the district was still working with the company Aramark. Aramark treated delivering food to my school as if it were an elementary school, sending so little it seemed like food rationing to me. There was no variety and there was a limited amount of food. Students complained about the terrible food. It was horrible. Aramark sustained heavy damage

because of the publicity from a prison scandal and fortunately, the district cancelled the contract with Aramark and signed up with a new company called SedexoMagic. Sedexo is a joint effort with one of our city's famous people, Magic Johnson, who attended one of the district high schools as a student years ago.

When the new food company came in, they brought in more variety and more food. The daily standard food is a spicy chicken patty (which the children love), a regular chicken patty, and chicken nuggets. Even though the kids still have spicy chicken patties, they can get *two* spicy chicken patties if they like. Last year they never served fish, but now during Lent, they serve fish once a week and the fish patties are of nice quality. The variety is exciting; there is corn on the cob, potato wedges made from real potatoes, and baked fried chicken once or twice a week. The baked fried chicken looks fried, but it's baked. They even have baked-fried drumsticks; you don't have to ask if it's chicken. There's chicken bones, gristle…it's amazing. Aramark never served anything like that.

On February 1, 2015, the new company served kids rib tips with real barbecue sauce, collard greens, cornbread muffins, and sautéed apples. A picture of this meal alone shows improvement. Food programs do not take into account the ethnicity of food, the diversity of food. When Sedexo served rib tips, collard greens, and corn on the cob in our predominantly African American school, there wasn't anything left. When one child saw another's plate, they'd ask, "Where did you get that?" More and more kids who normally don't want to eat were eating. Some asked, "Are y'all doing this for black history month?"

Sedexo has provided food for the afternoon kids who go to school from 1-5p whereas last year, the afternoon students didn't have any food. Last year, to supplement the afternoon students, the teachers would bring in crackers and snack pretzels and one of the teachers would

request at least ten milks. Now, there is a whole hot box with food for at least 30 kids, and in the afternoon at 3:30p, there's a line. More kids are eating. So that's a very positive thing. If I think about food security, there are more kids eating food. When they leave the school, if they got food at 3:30, then they've got something in their belly and they can wait until the next day.

Sedexo has brought in more variety for the kids, more food for the kids, so more kids are now eating. I find that fascinating. I don't hear the kids complaining. I did a survey asking kids what they thought about the food this year and most of them feel pretty good. I wish I had given surveys to students when Aramark was in our district. They would have written, "The food here is horrible". They complained a lot then, but now I'm not hearing complaints. So, to answer the question, "If you serve better food, will more kids eat?" I'm going to go with "yes", especially if the food is familiar to them. There has been a change in food security for our students at AHS. This new company provides a larger variety and the kids notice it, like it, and they're eating. I'm excited about that.

I think the school food coordinator also does a phenomenal job in addressing the issue of food security with our students. She has been working with me on this project. The district wasn't going to send us enough food because we accept children out of the district (because it's an alternative program, we have all kinds of special programs). The district keeps careful records of all food distributed. But the food coordinator has her system. When she makes a plate, she records a hash mark and counts all the sides for that plate, even if someone asks for just one item (so sides are left over, but they are accounted as being used). If they send over 100 broccoli packages, for example, she may give out 60 broccoli packages, so 40 broccoli packages are left. But, instead of giving back the extras, she serves them to the afternoon students. Then she can tell the district, I went through 100 in a day, so I need 100 tomorrow, too. That's how she feeds

the afternoon kids. I think she is being wise. She's demonstrating that there's not waste. If she has 40 spicy chicken patties, she puts out half for morning and half for afternoon so that they last to the afternoon.

She's also creative in her food presentation and in getting food into the kids. When she serves nachos, she always puts a little extra something on them. She orders jalapeños and sour cream, and when she makes the nachos, the kids just love how she puts that together. She also insists that the kids get a vegetable. She says,

"Before I hand you whatever, what vegetable?"

"I don't want a vegetable"

"I'm putting a vegetable on this plate, so tell me, do you want the lettuce or the green beans? I told you I'm putting a vegetable on this plate. You have to have a fruit and a vegetable."

That's her mantra: you have to have a fruit and a vegetable. Sedexo now prepackages their servings of fruit and vegetables. So, half an apple is a serving and they cut it already in their packaging. The lunch coordinator gives it to them and tells them they can throw it in their backpack. It's wonderful.

On student hunger.

From our school improvement report our documented free & reduced lunch rate is 97%. Everybody in our school gets to eat for free. And you would think that since everybody gets to eat free, they would come and eat. But they don't. I have kids who say, "I'm not going to eat that," because they don't know what it is.

"Ms. Cole, I'm hungry."

"Why don't you get lunch?"

"I'm not eating that food."

"Oh, so you'd rather go to the vending machines?"

"Yes, because I'm not eating that food."

"Right, so you're not that hungry then."

You don't ask high-risk children, "Do you get enough to eat?" You don't ask that because you've got a fight. You don't ask them, "Do you have enough food at home?" No, you don't ask high-risk children that—especially a teenager or young to late adolescent. There's the wall of pride and the wall of shame. And the wall of pride is huge—you can't get through that. And the wall of shame? You not getting through that. Unless there is a deep, penetrating relationship, kids are not going to discuss food security. They're not.

The vending machine.

Even though the food is better, more kids still buy from what I call the junk machine. Last year the supplier came once a week and filled the vending machine with approximately 40 bags of Hot Cheetos, 20 bags of potato chips (BBQ & regular), 30 bags of Doritos, 50 candy bars, 20 cookies, 30 gum, 10 peanuts/raisins. This year, we have more students and she comes 2-3 times a week to fill the machine. When she comes, the machine generally is 70% empty.

Food security and the school surroundings.

AHS is located in a food desert. The closest grocery store is 2 and ¼ miles away from the school and this is in a community where there are a lot of people. Where the school is, there are five apartment complexes on just one side of the road. So it's not easy to get fresh fruits and vegetables there. My students get hungry and they want food. But they don't know how to easily get it and there's not a place for them to easily get it. Some of their parents will note when the mobile food pantry is going to be in their neighborhood. Near the school, there is a church with a

monthly food drop. When mobile food pantries are going to be in my area, we usually get a flyer sent to us and we're to tell the kids. You've got to be careful how you say it, like I said, that pride and that shame. You just can't go up to a kid and say, "Hey, the mobile food truck 'gonna be in the neighborhood. Tell your ma." We cannot do that. We post the information and make a general announcement. We don't single out anybody.

My children (my students) do not seem to understand the social implications of food security. When I gave them surveys using the term "food security", every student asked me what it meant. (I had never heard of food security myself until I went to a local food justice conference.) They're disconnected from their lack of food, the causes, and what they can do themselves to solve the problem. This situation keeps this group confined and perpetuates the continuation of food insecurity for them. It's cyclical. They don't recognize that there's not a grocery store with fresh food at a price that's not ripping them off. There's a little convenience market and a gas station across the street. There's also a dollar store—you walk in the dollar store and every bell goes off as you're moving through the store. So that's where families go and purchase stuff. They just know that is what they have there, but don't ask why they don't have a grocery store or think that maybe they should petition for one. In their mind, they haven't figured out why Burger King, McDonald's, and Wendy's are not peppered in their community. They have to travel 2.5 miles to the nearest fast food place. So that's even out of reach for the people in the community where the school is located. Even if they have money to buy things, they still have to travel to get it. There's no walking to get it; they need vehicles. Food justice wants people to have many things including good food and good practices for how food is created and developed. The food justice literature takes in that global perspective, while albeit noble my kids aren't there at all. There's no connection to the global, or connection to the critical issue of food

and food justice. They just want to eat.

Food security in the city.

Two years ago, I helped build a community garden as part of service learning program through my church. The garden was not in my community; it was in one of the most economically depressed areas in the city. This area is down the street from the zoo, but people in that neighborhood have probably never been to the zoo. We got permission from the land bank, cleaned the land, tilled it, and put in a garden with all kinds of materials. We raised funds through scrap metal sales and spent our own money on the community garden. Even though we talked to a few of the neighbors, telling them, "This is your garden," the only people who were interested in the community garden were the people from the church. The church family weeded the garden, harvested, and tried to give the food to people in the neighborhood but they looked at the garden like, "I'm not going to take care of that. That's not mine."

I was puzzled why the people in the community didn't want to participate in this garden because it was food for them. And we—the Green Team—discussed where we went wrong. The consensus was that we didn't ask the people in the neighborhood if they wanted a garden. That echoed so loudly in my ear. It took me back to a local food justice conference when a gentleman pointed across the street and asked, "Why we don't go across the street and have those people over there do a garden? Those people across the street don't want a garden. Why? Because it's out of their experience, and since it's out of their experience there isn't a thought of having a garden." We forgot to ask the community—the people in that neighborhood—if they wanted the garden.

In 2013, I went on a garden tour through the area food bank, and I was interested to see who was gardening. I thought that was important, because gardens are a way of enhancing food

security for the community. We toured the gardens in surrounding communities and small towns, too. We went to a demonstration farm and lo and behold, I saw people from Bhutan. (I knew them because I had been teaching them English at my church.) I saw Beema and her husband, one of their cousins, a couple from an African country, a different Asian group from Bhutan, and a Hmong family. I wondered why I did not see an American individual. The biggest community garden we visited was the Western Neighborhood Garden. This garden was built in what was meant to be a new residential area, so they had roads and water, but the developer ran out of money. They made it a community garden, which was fantastic especially because it had a source of water. In that community garden, I saw the other set of people that I teach English to at my church—those from Nepal. They had family members who had brought seeds from home, and they were growing particular peppers from their native land. This garden was wonderful!! But the people who gardened there didn't reflect who lived in that community. The trip ended with the gardens at an elementary school which is right in the middle of an older community that is about 70% African American and 30% a mixture of everyone else. At the garden, I saw asparagus the size of a fairy tale. It was enormous. The collard greens were ginormous. And who do I see working the land? The cousins of the people from Nepal. The only farm where I saw any American people, was one where they have internships and grow food for a local farmer's market. This farm has become profitable through federal grant dollars that have allowed them to expand. They take two interns per year and teach them growing and about the business side to help them make money. By making money, you can live better, and I love this concept. But, overall, I was distressed that the only individuals working on community gardens in our city were refugees.

The issue of food security in my urban center has caused me to do a lot of soul searching

and thinking. As a child growing up in the '60s, I was very aware of no food, lack of food, being hungry, and not knowing what I could do about it. Now I'm well past childhood and I still have that sense of food insecurity, and concern about a lack of food for urban kids. Food security and the whole system of where food comes from & the transportation and all that—I learned it through the resources Sarah gave me—and I'm amazed at where food has come from globally; when things are shipped all over, there's a price we have to pay for that. Food security is very complex issue and even though there are grassroots efforts to try to remedy food security in general, I'm left with these questions: ***who* is in the grassroots, *where* is the grassroots work being done, and to benefit *whom*?** As I thumb through books on food security, I am *overwhelmed*. Globalization is what's being talked about—but that's not the universe I'm in.

There is still a great disconnect in dealing with food security issues. Key stakeholders are not involved in the conversation of food security. In community planning, "food deserts" are still being created which continue to undermine the goal of addressing hunger. If a grocery store does exist in these areas, the prices are higher. Food security has been executed poorly in the school and community where I work.

My reflection on Person's work

Person's perspective and background are integral to the project that she has devised and the questions that she ponders. In her chapter, sharing her personal experience with hunger as a child helps establish Person's credibility to speak about food insecurity for youth from what she sees as a "grassroots" perspective. Her story is powerful: growing up in the infamously blighted urban center of Detroit, living in a food desert complete with out-dated food at the corner store, having a mother who was pregnant as a teenager, having to steal to eat. Her "light in the refrigerator"

comment in particular gives a stark description of the extent to which her home lacked food. These reflections give an important first-hand account of the direness of hunger for many children in the US. They also explain why Person is attentive to the details of food security for her students.

Person outlines a number of formative events in her background that are enlightening accounts of the experience of hunger as a child and its later impact on adulthood. Surviving a summer by eating fallen fruit at the fruit market sets the stage for her love of fresh fruit and vegetables as an adult. Meeting a young woman with a rural background at her university speaks to the impact that interactions with others from different backgrounds can have on urban youth. In fact, it seems Person was so influenced by the encounter with her rural classmate that as an adult, she has chosen to live in rural settings where she can grow her own food.

As is evident in her account, Person recognizes and is troubled by the paradoxes of food insecurity. She notes the paradox that people in low-income neighborhoods of the city seldom have gardens, despite the fact that they have yards and little money for food. She is concerned that the only people she has seen participating in community gardens are refugees and/or recent immigrants when so many longer-term Americans live in poverty in these communities and wonders what can be done to encourage these residents to garden. Her experience with a failed community garden speaks to the difficulty of this task. Person is also troubled by the fact that her students and their families do not seem to look to the larger systemic issues surrounding them and governing their availability of food choices. This Wendell Berry (1990) quote seems to resonate quite a lot with Person's perspective about the need for people to grow their own food:

> We still (sometimes) remember that we cannot be free if our minds and voices are controlled by someone else. But we have neglected to understand that we cannot be free

> if our food and its sources are controlled by someone else. The condition of the passive consumer of food is not a democratic condition. One reason to eat responsibly is to live free.

For herself, she has found peace in growing her own food and she seems to want to share that with others who are experiencing food insecurity.

Person's last paragraph speaks to a larger theme that I have witnessed her expressing throughout our work together: her frustration and disdain for academic language about food security and the ways in which it is framed by policy-makers and academics. I have loaned Person books on food security, and upon reading, she has expressed frustration with them. Person is dismissive of ivory tower perspectives on food insecurity seemingly because she believes the work does not connect closely enough with her own experience with food insecurity. Indeed, she has noted the large disparity between what she sees and has experienced in the "grassroots" and what she reads about from an academic perspective. Person appears bothered by power within academic food discourse, both in who has the power to make decisions and who has the power to name, and therefore define, the problems. She has continually questioned the terminology "food desert" and "food insecurity". For example, she has noted, "Food desert. That term is funny. I am not going to tell my family in Detroit that they're living in a food desert…they understand 'urban jungle' but food desert?" (5/14/14) And, "'Food security'. I'm still blown away that there are words like this" (5/14/14). She has shared with me on several occasions that her students do not understand the term "food security," noting that when she titled her survey for students "Food Security at AHS," her students asked what it meant. When she explained in her own words, e.g. "You need food and you don't have food," they understood immediately since the issue hit so close to home for them. Person recognizes that those who

coined terms such as "food insecurity" and "food desert" were generally referring to *other* people. In doing so, she brings up an important point about *who* names phenomena about *whom*. This concern for her seems to be longstanding; she has shared with me her dismay in her undergraduate sociology class when she realized how academics were portraying and talking about her people, her family, by using jargon with which she neither understood nor identified. Person has no desire to be part of those who have the power to name others, but rather to be a voice representing those who have been othered through food discourses. That said, she does use the terms "food desert" and "food insecurity" in her work, perhaps because she wishes to engage with an audience who uses these terms.

Through her project, Person has continually questioned *who* gets to make the decisions around school food and *to what end* are they are collecting data about who is given food (rather than about the rates at which food is consumed). Her sentiment is echoed in a comment by Robert & Weaver-Hightower (2011b) that "asking who feeds whom, what, how, and for what purpose reveals a great deal about how children are cared for by a society" (p.205). Person cares for her students deeply—she knows about their lives, their struggles, their successes—and she is clearly bothered by the lack of care they are shown by society through the food that they are given in school.

Person's project itself, which records the qualitative transformation in the food provided to her school across two food service companies, is a fascinating account that demonstrates the extent to which a school district's food service contract can impact the daily lives of students. Her project suggests that feeding food insecure kids in schools can be surprisingly precarious—both dependent on a company contract and on an individual staff member's prowess. In explaining the difference that one clever and committed food service director can make, for

instance, Person describes in her chapter how this food service staff member knows how much to order, how to make food stretch to feed afternoon students, how to "doctor" the food to make it more tasty, and how to encourage the kids to eat fruits and vegetables. Interestingly, after Person composed this chapter, she shared with me in our meetings that tragedy struck in the food service director's family, forcing her to take a leave of absence. With the food director's absence, Person reported observing the quality of food immediately drop, as the staff tried to scramble to feed students that week. Though they did receive a replacement food service staff person, Person reflected that the food amount and quality continued to decrease. This seems to point to the fact that even individual food staff members can make a large difference in food security for students.

Person's interest in and frustration with the frequent use of the vending machine by students at her school reflects several concerns that she has voiced. One concern is that students have and continue to eat junk food, despite the quality of food present in the cafeteria. Interestingly, her finding is corroborated by the literature, as Sandler (2011) notes, "Today, when children do not eat a school-staff provided breakfast and lunch, it is usually not because it is unavailable to them…but because they are eating food from school vending machines, snack bars, contracted private food providers, or supplementary programs" (p. 36). Sandler (2011) makes this point in reference to the increasing privatization of food available to students. In contrast, Person is concerned, first, that the vending machine food is nutritionally void and, second, that these low-income students spend a large amount of money paying expensive prices to eat out of the vending machine. This second point reflects her concern about budgeting and paradoxes within food insecurity.

Person's work is particularly important for educators because she has the unique lens of one who shares the experience of food insecurity with her students. Not only is she someone who

has grown up food insecure and is willing to discuss it, she works with students who are in similar situations. Her recollection about her own mother not allowing her to sign up for free lunch is an important insight for educators about the real barriers to food security that can occur within schools even when free and reduced lunches are readily available. Person's insight about the walls of pride and shame attached to poverty is powerful because she has lived with them herself and can see them reflected in her students. Equally important is her recognition that the only way around these walls is through deep personal connections. This opens a window within a difficult topic for educators who are close to students to be able to make a difference in their lives.

"*If you are what you eat, then who are you*?"

Bringing *history, food, memory, culture, and traditions* into the classroom:

Matt Jason

Matt's background

Below is Matt's written introduction for a food justice conference for which our group presented in May 2014:

> My name is Matt, and I've been teaching in the city's school district for 15 years, one of which was spent in the city's sister city in Shiga, Japan. As a social studies educator, I've taught grades seven through twelve, and subjects such as geography, history, economics, and an elective I designed called multicultural studies. Throughout my career, and across all these subjects, even teaching English in Japan, food has been a connecting point.

Matt is an active, involved community member and reportedly gifted teacher. As mentioned above, Matt has taught for 15 years in this district. He has completed some coursework towards a master's degree in American studies, for which he worked on a thesis project exploring pan-Asian identity among youth in the city. He taught for seven years at a middle school before it was closed in the district reconfiguration. This closure moved him to Multicultural High School (MHS) where he still teaches and serves as a key member drafting the school's transformation plan required under NCLB.

Matt stands out for many people as a brilliant educator. Another teacher on our project, Wash, who works at the same school, says how much he does for their school (he is part of the committee to design a transformation plan and has been in charge of revamping the student data system) and speaks admiringly of his teaching. Matt's student teacher told me when I visited their classroom in the winter of 2015 that he felt very lucky to have been placed with such a

great teacher. (He did not elaborate on what he meant by great, but knowing Matt's analytical and creative orientation toward curriculum design and observing him interacting with students gives me some indication of the qualities to which his student teacher was referring.) Matt has been an active teacher participant in university programs: he has been involved in a social studies project with a professor and has served as a mentor teacher to seven different student teachers. Matt has served on the board for Mid-MEAC, a regional environmental organization. This year he opened his own brewery business with a partner. Their brewery sells beer through the Eastside farmer's market and it is evident from all the times I have dropped in to visit with Matt at the farmer's market that he is well-known and respected within the community. I have been impressed by the excitement and success of his brewery but I see this success as bittersweet, as it may pave the way for him to leave the stresses of the classroom, thus causing MHS to lose one of their—by many accounts— best teachers.

Prior to this project, Matt had already pursued a number of projects related to food in schools. He had attempted to obtain a grant to work on school food waste through worm bins. He had also tried to get a hoop house for early season gardening built for MHS. (Unfortunately, the Title 1 funds set aside for the hoop house in the school budget had been diverted by "someone downtown", and the MHS principal at the time had not confronted the district administration on the issue.) Matt had also previously introduced food into his teaching. One example was an assignment for a world history class in which students researched the origin of ingredients in their favorite foods using a New World vs. Old World lens. For extra credit, students could bring in the foods to share with the class. Matt noticed through these discussions that nearly every kid seemed to have a "family dish". Matt had also taught about child labor and trafficking within the chocolate industry. As part of this exploration, he showed the documentary *The Dark Side of*

Chocolate and asked students to follow up by calling chocolate companies to inquire about their labor practices.

Matt explains that, "Primarily, my concern is with cultural sustainability and historical memory/knowledge." He is interested in students' food stories as a way to understand more about student identities and cultures. Matt himself is the grandson of Polish immigrants; a narrative account he shared early on with our team spoke of eating pickled herring and other identity-rich ethnic foods as a small child with his grandfather. At MHS, he had noticed how cultural foods already seeped informally into school life, for example through the Asian American group at school who sold egg rolls every year, or the Latino groups selling tamales, or the Hmong students (mostly from Laos) who brought in Southeast Asian-style wrapped spring rolls.

Matt's project

Matt's project was to further incorporate food and students' familial cultures into his curriculum and reflect on this process to share with other teachers so that they might be encouraged to use food in their curricula as well. His project consists of two different instructional interventions: 1. an oral history interview assignment in the spring of 2014, and 2. creating and teaching a unit about food in the fall of 2014 for a 9th grade study skills course. Of the group, Matt's project is most similar to action research typically conducted by teachers in that he created a teaching intervention in his classroom and then examined its impact. He reflected on the results by looking at student written work on their assignments and observing in class by writing notes of their comments and participation. His written data consisted of student responses on handouts, essays, and interview assignment reports. Matt also had observational data from his

teaching of the unit and in his discussions with students in and out of class and with his student teacher (who was co-teaching with him).

Oral history interviews.

This part of Matt's project consisted of modifying a pre-existing interview assignment to include a focus on food. The assignment was for students to interview an elderly person to learn more about their perspectives on times when they were young and write a report about what they learned in the interview. Matt explains:

> Towards the end of each school year I have students complete a culminating project in which they interview a person and write that person's life story. This oral history project is a great way for students to explore the past through the lens of a grandparent, neighbor, or possibly even a complete stranger. This year I've added food as one of the themes students will be investigating. Along with questions like, "How was your life as a teen different from the lives of today's teens?" and "Who was your favorite president?" students will also be asking interviewees about their favorite foods as children, and how food has changed over their lifetimes. My hope is that students will get their own sense of historical change, and be able to situate the life of their subject within the larger historical narrative that they have been building over the course of their lives.

The assignment description is as follows:

> *This two-week assignment requires you to: find either a veteran of the U.S. Military or someone over the age of 60, and then interview that person with the aim of understanding more about their life and the different periods of history that they have lived through. You will finally write a summary of your interview that sums up what you learned in the form of a short paper.*

Following the assignment description was a list of potential interview questions. As part of this project, Matt added the following food questions that he and I had brainstormed together:

What are some foods that you ate growing up?

How has food changed in your lifetime?

Can you tell me about some foods or dishes that are special to you? (Why?)

Do you eat the same way that you ate growing up? Why/why not?

To analyze this data, Matt highlighted and photocopied all relevant sections from student interview reports, and I compiled them into an Excel spreadsheet, which I sent to Matt so that he could more easily read across the student responses. Though the students were not required to ask the food questions, Matt found that about a third chose to write about food in their reports.

Ninth grade study skills class food unit.

The largest component of Matt's project was the design and teaching of a food unit for a 9th grade study skills course in the fall of 2015. The unit lasted for 12-14 class periods and was based around the guiding question: "*If we are what we eat, then what are we*?"

The unit included the following lessons:

1. Watching the documentary *Food, Inc*. along with a viewing guide and frequent mini-discussions (Days 1-3)
2. Introduction to food, the unit question, brainstorming about their favorite foods, their thoughts about foods, investigating ingredients in packaged foods (Day 4)
3. "Healthy" versus "unhealthy" as open-ended questions for students to brainstorm about; journal entry about why people choose to eat the food that they do (Days 5-6)

4. Creating infographics about the food production system and/or the connection between food and the environment. Watching a clip of Michael Pollan discussing changes in food production over time. (Day 6-7)
5. Reflecting on their diets and thoughts about the current USDA recommendations through MyPlate (Day 8)
6. Reflecting on the recommended menus on USDA's MyPlate website and creating their own menus based on the MyPlate guidelines (Day 9)
7. Making connections between food and culture through reflection and discussion of a Samoan family's food ritual and the Mexican celebration Dia de los Muertos (Day 10)
8. Exploring "what the world eats" through Peter Menzel's photographs of families in different countries and the foods they eat in a week (Day 11)
9. Watching fast food commercials from China, Japan, and South Korea. Using these to define "American food" (Day 11 cont.)
10. Researching, preparing, writing "Culture and Food" essays. The essay assignment description reads:

    Today you will research and begin to write about a dish or item of food that represents your culture. Remember, culture is "the way of life of a group of people." Do you see yourself as Mexican-American, white, Asian, mixed, American, etc…? People can also be members of many cultures at once, so your choice is flexible. First, pick your food. What food best represents your family background, heritage, and culture? This should be a dish of food that is not necessarily your "favorite," but is one that symbolizes some aspect of your own "culture" in US society. It can be a food your grandmother always makes at a certain holiday, or one that you see as special to you and your family, for

example (remember the foods you saw in the clips on Monday from Samoa and Mexico). Specific examples could be: tacos, papaya salad, greens, sauerkraut, homemade pecan pie, and MANY, MANY others. Pick a food that you see as a part of who you are, and a dish that you or someone in your family makes from scratch.

Matt took prolific notes of student comments in class during the process of this unit, which is his primary source of data in his following draft. He also selected specific questions on the student assignments to review more closely. He shared the student papers with me and I compiled the responses to the questions he selected into Excel spreadsheets so that he could more easily make comparisons and tally results for his writing.

Matt's writing

When I first spoke with Sarah I was immediately interested in what she was trying to do: bring food, an elemental and basic part of our everyday lives, into the fore of the school curriculum. "Food" has always been an important part of my life. Whether it was simply the experience of eating an enjoyable meal, cooking with my family, or helping harvest fruits and veggies from my grandparents' gardens, food simply is a part of who I am. And yet, this necessary thing has received such little attention, from my experience, in the school curriculum for most Americans. Something so connected to our health, environmental issues, cultural practices, and indeed our own enjoyment of life, is discussed and studied too little.

Food, that which gives us everyday sustenance and pleasure, has been a point of interaction amongst my students, between my students and me, and as a way to access the state mandated curriculum that I teach. Whether studying the industrial food production facilities of modern America, the agricultural advancements of medieval China, or the live fish I willingly

consumed with my colleagues in Japan, my students always seem to have a visceral reaction to food when it is embedded in the curriculum. Approaching an historical topic from the angle of food brings a certain level of awareness to all students, regardless of their reading level or socio-economic background. It's a common language that all people speak, and one, I believe, that can be used by teachers to reach their students in ways that are distinct from other common classroom themes and strategies.

As a high school social studies teacher I have increasingly worked to bring food issues into the curriculum of my courses. Several years ago, I found that the typically dry subject of economics was fascinating for my students when we used the food industry and food production and consumption issues as case studies. The movie King Corn jarred my students with the reality of the omnipresence of corn in their diets, and the U.S. agricultural industry. "Everything has corn in it!" became the common reaction. My own personal interest in food issues propelled me, but I found that students perked up and were more engaged when we worked around issues of food. As my teaching assignment changed over the last three years, I came to solely teach world history, and I was more limited in the ways I could use food. Still, classroom activities like viewing examples of Aztec art with chillies and tamales, and mapping the spread of foods like tomatoes and sugar, helped my students understand the interconnected nature of human life in the past, and into the 21st century. So, when Sarah approached me during the second half of last school year to consciously plan some activities and even a unit around food, I was excited by the opportunity to thoughtfully put together a food-centered curriculum for at least part of my world history course.

Interestingly enough, my teaching assignment changed just prior to this current school year to incorporate four sections of a "Freshmen Leadership" course in addition to two world

history sections (one with freshmen, one with seniors). I was told this class should have a "home room/advisory" component, in which I would check in with students in regard to their academic progress, as well as cultivate critical thinking skills and reinforce the school-wide instructional strategies that were being implemented. All the details were left to me. I was simultaneously excited and overwhelmed. This was happening amidst major restructuring of my school, which had been labeled a "priority" by the state government over five years ago. Essentially, since my school, one that has a large population of refugee students and economically disadvantaged students, has had test scores considerably lower than the state averages several years in a row, we were being forced to lengthen the school day and offer more help to struggling students, or be taken over by the state. This new course was then meant to support my students in their other classes and in their success in school in general. While incredibly ambiguous and lacking support, this class gave me the opportunity to have freedom to do some things that I've always thought were important but found little time to do with all the history content that I've had to deliver.

In addition to helping my freshmen set goals, create their own organizational systems, keep up on their grades and homework assignments weekly, hone reading and writing strategies, and follow the relevant current events of the day, I saw this new course as a way to do something substantive around food issues with my freshmen. The work I had already done with Sarah and our group compelled me to push my students to stop and look more deeply at the role food plays in our lives. In order to give structure to the class throughout the year, I developed thematic units for each month. We started the year in September with a focus on self, and October shifted to communities. My thinking was that we would segue into food for November, which leads up to Thanksgiving as well as marks the end of the harvest season here in Michigan. What I came up

with consisted of a unit composed of three main themes: food and the environment, nutrition, and the cultural aspects of food.

Since I was accompanying a group of students to Boston the first week of November, I left plans with my intern to show and analyze the movie Food Inc. as a way to "hook" students and introduce them to some of the themes that we would be studying during our unit. When I returned, I was blown away by the reactions of the students. The first fifteen to twenty minutes of each of my classes became a discussion (that I did not plan for) about the movie and the students' feelings about what they saw. In my mind, the movie and it's issues were old news, as it had been released and popular over five years ago, and many of the "foodies" I knew were well-versed in its exposition of the American food industry and diet. However, it was clear that many of my students had not seen the movie and were unfamiliar with the issues it presented. The very first thing I heard in the first class I saw Monday morning was, "Oh my gosh, that movie you made us watch was horrible. I'm never eating meat again! I told my mom she can only get organic meat or nothing from now on!" This reaction, or something similar, was the main sentiment in every class. And the really surprising thing, at least to me, was that these reactions were coming from students that often complained about the work we did in class, and were not ones that I would identify as socially conscious. Evidently I was wrong!

Tawana, the student quoted above, had been a thorn in my side for the previous two months. Sitting right up front, she loudly voiced her displeasure with my assignments and complained that the things we were doing in class weren't relevant to anything, at least anything she thought was important. Suddenly, she was asking me more about Food Inc., and the issues it surfaced for her. "You mean they really treat chickens that way?" summed up her overall reaction. In the following hour a male student loudly declared, "Humans are disgusting! I can't

believe anyone would do what those people were doing to animals." I was truly surprised, and I have to admit, more than a little pleased, to see that my students, some of whom seemed so disengaged from what I thought were serious and important topics before, were now asking to know more. As the conversation continued in each class I would probe a bit more, asking what else students got out of the movie. Inevitably students would remark about corn, "It's in everything!" I have to admit that I set them up for that slightly, as I used one of the Food Inc. website's lessons, "Evaluating Information on Food Labels," to introduce the film and prepare students for some of what they would see. While many of the issues Michael Pollan discusses are complex, the idea that all of these different corn derivatives were in our food really seemed to resonate with my students, or at least the fact that something was odd about the pervasiveness of these products, resonated with my students.

Looking at food as a topic in class, my students learned so much about the way food was produced and consumed in this country. I think that our unit gave them a framework in which to understand issues such as why ingredients like corn predominate in many of our foods, and what some of the consequences of our industrial food system are. In this way the topic of food helped my students understand so much more about how Americans interact with the natural environment, and with each other. When using food as a lens, as in viewing past events or other cultures, it is more complicated. In viewing the world through food, my students saw that there are major economic inequalities across the globe, and in their own society. They also saw that food can represent traditions and changes over time that have a much wider-ranging significance than just something we put in our mouths to survive.

This project has caused me to think very differently about food in the curriculum. I was amazed at how engaged my students were with food-related topics, and how naturally having

food as a focus led to deeper understandings of other big issues like the environment, economics, culture and history. As something that brings life and enjoyment to everyone, food was naturally compelling. When I witnessed my students' reactions to "Food Inc.", and they way they passionately discussed the ingredients that they were learning were in their foods, I realized that food was an untapped part of the curriculum that teachers could be harnessing much more.

My reflection on Matt's work

As he has described, food is personally important to Matt and he sees food as being relevant to numerous aspects of students' lives and identities. Given its relevance, Matt notes food's surprising absence from formal curricula as he argues that, "Something so connected to our health, environmental issues, cultural practices, and indeed our own enjoyment of life, is discussed and studied too little." Through his unit, he demonstrates that he thinks about food broadly and considers it from many aspects—social, economic, and environmental. His work therefore serves as an important example of the myriad ways through which to look at food and incorporate it into varied curricula as well as the positive impacts of doing so with youth in low-income urban schools and/or youth with diverse cultural backgrounds. More specifically, by including food in both social studies and study skills courses, Matt has shown that food can be an integrating topic across a variety of subject areas beyond the more traditional health/science perspective. Though he had originally planned to design food-based curricula for world history courses, being forced to work with a study skills course allowed him to incorporate broader food themes, such as food production and health.

Matt also points out that focusing on food has seemed to positively impact student engagement. Matt notes that food is "a common language that all people speak…that can be used

by teachers to reach their students in ways that are distinct from other common classroom themes and strategies." As Matt explained in his chapter draft, he observed that the topic of food seemed to increase student engagement among students who had previously not shown much interest in his course. His observation that food was engaging for students who had previously showed little engagement in class is testimony to its potential for school curricula.

From his oral history interview assignment to the "Culture and Food" essay within his unit, Matt demonstrates a particular interest in the ways in which food connects to identity and sees the importance of this theme for building culturally relevant curricula. The stories Matt tells about food and identity connect to his training in anthropology, his teaching of social studies, and his deep personal interest in food and food culture. Indeed, there is considerable literature—primarily from anthropology—that connects food and identity. This literature argues that food connects us to others and serves as a way to build and perpetuate community, support group identities, and signal group affiliations including class, race, gender, age, and ethnicity (e.g. Caplan, 1997; Cosgriff-Hernandez et al., 2011; Greene & Cramer, 2011; Karaosmanoglu, 2011). Greene & Cramer (2011) point out that we "identify with others based upon the types of food that we eat such that we may feel a common bond with people who have similar eating habits to ours" (p.xii). Robert & Weaver-Hightower (2011) note that, "Food establishes who we are in gendered, sexualized, raced, and ethnic senses, and who we are through food has social consequences" (p. 14). Matt's project is an important response to a call by Robert & Weaver-Hightower (2011) that, "Educators would do well to understand...food cultures in schools, for social relations are in part based on these cultures" (p.14). Matt's focus on food cultures with students, many of whom are from immigrant families, speaks to the literature by applying their concepts to practice, helping students to become more aware of the ways in which food can tie

them to their families, cultures, and identities.

Matt has also expressed interest within our discussions in helping to preserve family food traditions over generations. Matt shared with me his observation of the following themes across the oral interviews: food as "bringing people together", that many families used to grow their own food, that eating out used to be only a very special treat, that food was often seen in nostalgic ways, and that families used to eat together most all the time. Based on these themes, the oral history interviews seemed to yield useful insights that could be used to think about food sustainability and/or the maintenance of food cultures across generations. These findings build on work by Walters (2011) who found that students discussed the important role their families played in shaping their personal food decisions, especially referencing important dishes made by elders in the family.

A particularly interesting finding of Matt's that he shared with me in a meeting in January of 2015 (but is not reflected in his draft above) is that he observed that his students who had recently immigrated—particularly Asian and Latino students—had no problem identifying their own familial cultural foods while his white and African-American students seemed to struggle to select foods that were particularly culturally resonant to them beyond foods that they merely consumed often. He also reflected that students who were bi- or multi- racial, for whom identity and cultural issues are often particularly complex, sometimes found identifying cultural foods to be challenging as well. Matt shared with me that the multicultural classes he took as part of his teacher preparation work in the 1990s were mostly about how to teach African-American (monocultural) kids rather than about how to teach kids from so many various and diverse cultural backgrounds. We both thought that this aspect might be an interesting area to explore for future research. Matt's observations are also consistent with those of Caplan (1997) in the food

and identity literature, who argues that cultural majority foods—not unlike racial majority culture—are typically far less visible or apparent than cultural minority foods.

Another potentially important aspect of Matt's work with food and culture is the context in which it has taken place. His project demonstrates that though the vast majority of students in his school are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches and many may be food insecure, they can nonetheless have important family food cultures. Often, when discussing food-insecure students, the focus rests (often necessarily) on the food that they lack in their homes. This lack of food may be interpreted as a lack of family food culture or tradition. However, despite being food-insecure, these families may possess particular dishes—ethnic or otherwise—that are significant and meaningful to their family. In doing so, his work adds an important element of how we might incorporate students' cultures, despite their socioeconomic situation, into curricula in authentic and meaningful ways.

Robert & Weaver-Hightower (2011b) suggest that, "Reforming school food needs to be a much broader and complex endeavor that can—and should—contemplate the ecology within which food is produced, distributed, consumed, and learned about" (p.202). Matt's work both in the past and in his unit attend to this broader ecology of food, looking at its production and some of the negative repercussions as a result of our current industrialized food system. Matt's findings from his study skills class about the students' reactions to factory farming are particularly interesting given that his students typically were unaware of its existence and of food discourse within popular culture in general. Matt shared with me in looking across the unit written responses that about 40% of the students expressed anger, disgust, or frustration about the poor treatment of animals within factory farming. This data implies that students from low-income households can care about how animals are treated within food production. Matt's

discussion of his student, Tawana, who surprised him by her concern about the treatment of chickens, reminds me of one of my former students, Mario. Mario was not particularly interested in science or environmental issues. However, when we studied factory farming, he wrote a poem about the experience from a chicken's perspective. His poem was the most authentic and sincere piece of work I received from him all year and its poignancy brought tears to my eyes. Though both Mario's and Tawana's families probably could not afford to buy organic, pasture-raised chickens, as individuals they nonetheless felt compassion for factory-raised chickens and were troubled by their treatment. Too often assumptions are made that those with low-incomes simply do not have to space or capacity to care about issues such as factory farming. In other words, that ability to pay has somehow become intertwined with ability to care. Matt's and my own experience with students suggest otherwise.

Finally, it seems important to note that Matt's analysis of his data changed somewhat over time as he more closely examined his students' written work. In composing this initial chapter draft, Matt mostly worked from his in-class observations. For example, he notes specific comments that students made as they were participating in class discussions. Matt shared with me that he changed his mind to some degree about what his students understood after looking more deeply at his written data from student responses. He realized that, for example, though his initial impression was that the students did not pick up on culture as readily as other themes within the study skills unit, he saw from analyzing their written responses that they mentioned culture as often as the unit's other main themes. After writing this draft, he also began to look more closely at the students' oral history reports and, in doing so, was able to see connections between the interviews and the food unit. His experience in analyzing different aspects of his data speaks to the potential for teachers to triangulate their data sources for more robust analysis.

"I want to walk the talk": addressing food insecurity in school:

Melissa Washburn (Wash)

Wash's background

Wash has a master's degree in sport sociology and coaching and has completed some doctoral work in sport history. Wash has been teaching for 31 years, 24 of which have been in this urban school district. She spent her first few years in education as an athletic director and coach for a day school and a private liberal arts college. In this district, she has taught health, physical education, social studies, and English Language Learner (ELL) study skills. She taught at a middle school in the district before district's reorganization moved her to Multicultural High School (MHS) where she has been for three years. Though she is placed at a high school, she teaches seventh and eighth grades since these middle school grades were recently merged into the high school.

Wash is very active in the community and school, primarily through her interest and expertise in sports. She referees several sports during the year including field hockey and basketball. Wash is the only non-special education teacher who supports the Special Olympics team from her school, going to many of their sports events and outings. She volunteers as a score keeper for several of the school's sports teams. Wash also works with a professor at the local university so that undergraduate freshman can conduct service work within her courses. In the fall of 2014, these undergraduates created a pamphlet describing city services that could be provided to ELL families.

Wash has done a lot to get food into the hands of kids over the years. In past health classes, she made smoothies using healthy ingredients, such as different types of fruit and yogurt. On a number of occasions, she has acquired local apples—both donated and bought with her own

money—for her students. When I met her in the spring of 2014, she had recently begun an after-school activity program for the express purpose of getting district provided snacks into the hands of kids, since snacks were only provided for those participating in school-sanctioned activities. She described being required to fill out substantial paperwork to get this district-supplied food for students after school. The program that she ran attracted 15-20 kids twice a week after school.

Wash has also been involved in a number of district food-related committees. She has been part of the committee to rewrite the health and wellness plan for the district which sets a number of food policies for the district; I met her through a school-food action committee formed by some active community members, non-profit staff, and university extension staff on which she had been asked to be the teacher representative. As part of this committee, we were working to improve the quality of school food in part by connecting food service personnel with local food producers.

In addition to her extensive background in sports and health, Wash has a deep interest in local food and gardening. When she was growing up in a suburban area, though few people in her area grew their own food, her parents had an enormous garden from which they sold vegetables. Once her parents retired, they bought land in a rural area, and Wash still spends many of her weekends at this farm and plants trees for harvesting annually. Wash is a local food advocate, shopping at our local farmer's market and buying a share of a pig each year from a local farm. Thus, as a health educator, athlete, and with a family background in gardening, food has been of great personal interest to Wash for years and she had already carried this interest into her work with students prior to this project.

Wash's project

Wash's project has two main foci: food and culture and student hunger. The two action projects she has completed have been to

1. organize a multicultural potluck after school for her ELL students and families, and
2. create and maintain a weekend backpack feeding program at MHS.

Her work has been particularly action-oriented primarily because that is the strength and interest she brings to her project.

The potluck, a one-time event in the fall of 2015, was the smaller project of the two. It consisted of a shared meal after school at MHS. Her goal was to foster community between the school and ELL families through the sharing of culturally-typical food and/or dishes important to individual families. She invited ELL students, parents, other ELL teachers, and their students, to come and bring dishes to share. She worked with another teacher to send invitations to parents, to a few other district officials and to our research team. At the event, she had a number of students attend, but very few parents. She was disappointed and wanted to try again at another time to see if she could attract more parents. This project encouraged her to articulate questions about why parents of ELL students do not typically attend school functions. These questions are spelled out in her draft.

The larger part of her project has been creating and implementing a backpack feeding program for MHS. Several backpack feeding programs exist at elementary schools in the district, so the logistics for the program beyond MHS were already in place. However, she has had to create the logistics for the program within the school, raise funds for the program, and find volunteers to staff it. Hers is also the first backpack feeding program at a level other than elementary school in the district, so it has served as a pilot for older students. Wash was able to

initiate the program early in the fall of 2014 and the program has run weekly throughout the 2014-15 academic year, distributing food to approximately 15-25 students each week. To research this part of this endeavor, she has informally asked students about various aspects—whether they liked the food, what suggestions they have for the backpacks. She also created several surveys for the backpack recipients asking about their opinions of the program.

In March of 2015, I was approached by members of a food justice workgroup at the university who had funding available for food justice work and knew of my work with the teachers. In conversation with Wash, she and I decided that we could use funding to supplement the feeding program to include local vegetables and fruits each week. We had discussed repeatedly that the food in the packs (as is typical with emergency assistance food) was not very nutritious, composed primarily of processed food. Through conversing about possibilities together, I suggested that we might use the funds to supplement with healthier food. Wash agreed and proposed that we focus on local fruits and vegetables. Wash recommended that we approach a local non-profit organization that has created a system to connect local producers with small bulk-purchase buyers, and we were able to become part of their system. Wash arranged for the vegetables to be delivered, ordered a refrigerator to store them before distribution at the school, and organized systems of sorting and packing the vegetables before the distributions. Wash noted that from her conversations with them, the students were thrilled with some of the additions, most particularly local apple cider. Several weeks into the project, however, the university funder abruptly decided to no longer fund this endeavor, so we were unable to continue the healthy supplements to the feeding program. Nonetheless, Wash did a lot of quick groundwork to make it possible for students to have healthy, local food and, should funding be found in the future, she

may be able to resume this part of her project.

Wash's writing

My background.

I'm Wash, and I have been teaching since 1983 in a variety of areas and levels in the Midwest, from a small private school, to a small college. I've been in this school district for the last 20 years, working first as a sub and then as a regular teacher. I have taught and coached all grade levels. I've found my niche at Multicultural High, despite the tremendous pressures we are under this year.

What's my motivation for this project? I think it started way back when I was young, when my parents—unlike most of the people in our neighborhood— had a huge garden. We had fresh vegetables all fall, and we sold vegetables, gourds and pumpkins. When my parents retired in the late 70s, they moved to Michigan, bought a farm and had another huge garden. The farm was pure sand and many crops did not grow, so they settled on growing red and white pine trees for harvesting. Part of the land was very acidic with peat moss, so we grew blueberries as well. Being asked to teach health encouraged me to do more things with nutrition. In working with students in my health classes, to my surprise, I found that they like vegetables and fruits. I was truly amazed by how many kids like fresh pineapple. And, they liked kiwi, carrots, and broccoli (though they must have ranch dressing with the broccoli). They have mentioned that they would like to have more fresh fruits and vegetables with their school breakfast and lunches. The school food company does serve them, but they seem to be older or of lesser quality. They do like healthy food and they know the difference between poor and quality food. I like to eat, and the kids get a kick out of it. I think that sharing food can allow you to bond better to students and

may help the kid think, “My teacher cares about me a little more, and we’ve got something special”.

In February of 2014, a person from the university’s extension offices approached me to see if I wanted to be on a local nutrition committee as the teacher representative for the district. About a month later I met Sarah, a PhD student interested in food, sustainability and justice, who asked if I wanted to join her group; I jumped on the idea. So my interest in food stems from a combination of my parents’ gardening, teaching health, and joining a wonderful group of teachers from my district and Sarah.

For this project my goals were multiple: 1. When I learned that I would be working with ELL students, I wanted to do something with them to celebrate their various backgrounds from around the world, 2. I wanted to create an international baccalaureate unit dealing with culture and food, and 3. I wanted to create a weekend backpack feeding program at my school.

The ELL potluck.

MHS has a huge population of students from around the world. Our community gets 1% of all immigrants coming to this country, so we have a multicultural, diverse population which is one of the reasons why I work at MHS. For the first time in a few years, we finally have some English language classes for these students. In the 2014-15 school year, I taught their study skills class and had students from Cuba, Mexico, Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Nepal, Thailand and Somalia. It was a very interesting group of students. My first project in the fall of 2014 was to have a potluck with my ELL (English Language Learner) students and their parents. I wanted to do this to meet their parents and to have a tasting event with food from their countries. I picked a date in November and invited the two other ELL teachers to get involved and they jumped on board. One of the teachers created a formal invitation that the students could take home to their

parents. I invited district administration and a few others I have worked with in the community, including Sarah and the teachers in this project.

The potluck was held at MHS, shortly after school ended. Six or seven students brought dishes to share. There were 3-4 main dishes, including chicken, rice, beans, fufu, and some cheeses. I brought a cake and a veggie tray, another teacher brought beverages. Mostly seventh and eighth grade students came, many of whom were siblings. A couple of parents came and brought some food, which was nice. We were able to talk, and the students had a great time. We decorated the room, and had table clothes, and name tags, but it was still pretty informal. The downside was that not very many parents came. I had hoped it would be an experience where we were going to meet the parents as well as taste their food. I had asked everyone to bring in a recipe, so that we could make it if we wanted, in our own homes, but this did not work out. Questions I have about this are why were our students reluctant to make food and why didn't the parents come?

For other events when we invite parents, such as parent conferences, the families of our ELL students rarely come. I would like to understand why. Are they are not engaged, or is it because of a language barrier? Is it because they don't know about it? Maybe they are working or don't have transportation. One of the neat things about MHS and the district is that we have a hotline with eight or nine different languages, so if you're having difficulty communicating with a parent because of language, you can call the hotline and tell them what you need to talk about and an interpreter will help with communicating with parents. It could be a positive thing or something a student is not getting in regards to his or her classes, or they're getting in a little trouble, but we are able to provide some of those services. So we did do the potluck. For the

folks who were there, it went well, but I was looking for something bigger and better. Perhaps next year we will try it again.

IB unit.

Another project I planned this year was to create an international baccalaureate (IB) unit on food and culture. Our school is an IB school and we create units based on their template. I was going to do one on culture for my seventh grade Eastern Hemisphere class. It was going to be in the second semester, and it was going to deal with food as the primary unit. My main theme was going to be about the role food plays in their lives as well as across generations in their family. The plan was for students to talk with their parents or grandparents to see if there was a specific recipe that has been passed down for generations in their household that they like. And they would talk about that through a written or oral explanation, then create a recipe and from there I had hoped to maybe create some of these, either from my room we have an area in the kitchen where we could have made this. Because my class schedule changed second semester, I was suddenly no longer teaching seventh grade Eastern Hemisphere. I was disappointed in some respects that I was not able to try my IB unit.

Backpack feeding program.

My main project at Multicultural High this year was a weekend backpack feeding program. I was introduced to backpack programs last spring by a university extension agent; before that I had never heard of them. Though these programs have been done in other secondary schools, in our district for the last few years they have been done only in elementary schools. These programs are feeding about one thousand students (around 9 to 10% of our population) every two weeks. The program is conducted by a non-profit organization which takes donations for each of the schools and buys food from a food bank. It involves grassroots organizations,

with people volunteering all along the process. Each Wednesday or Thursday, volunteers go to another high school and sort and package literally tons of food into two gallon Ziploc bags. A typical bag includes crackers, macaroni and cheese, a canned vegetable item, tuna or beans, some soup, oatmeal packets, individual servings of breakfast cereal, and a recipe. I wanted to see if this program could work at the secondary level, and I wanted to see how students would respond.

Having been in the district for almost 25 years and seeing the poverty in our schools, the need, and wanting to do something for our students other than providing paper and pencil, knowing that I like to eat, knowing that if you're fed you'll do better in school—you have more initiative, more energy—I felt our students needed this. Last year, our school district had approximately 600 students who were homeless out of approximately 12,500 students. Besides complaining about the school food, I just felt in my heart that I needed to do something for my kids. There's literature that says, if you are fed, you do better in school. One of the ways to do this is to provide food for our students, so they have at least something over the weekend. When I learned more about the program, and how successful it has been in outlying areas, I thought, I could do this. It became my goal; it became a part of me. To walk the talk. I have grand ideas about things and frequently they're just ideas. But this was something I could put my hands to.

Getting the program started. In the spring of 2014, I presented the idea to my principal who encouraged me to go for it. I did more research, and shared a couple of pages of what the organization does—how it supplies the food for the backpacks—with school staff. My original goal was to feed 100 students through 10 distributions per year, every other week, starting with the seventh and eighth grade students. We needed roughly $4000 to do this, so I did some fundraising to cover the costs. I tried to raise money through teacher donations and our Parent Teacher Student Association and I received some donations from friends and from the Elks. Our

school applied for a huge grant from the state which we learned we received in late August. (As a priority school, we're not doing well on testing and with making yearly progress (MYP), for a variety of reasons and we have to do various new academic things in order to get off the high priority list. Our school received a grant of a few million dollars over the next five years and the high school principal has included money for this program within the grant. I believe we did get some of this money, although it was a hassle with the department of education.)

In the fall of 2015, an alumnus of MHS said he and his wife and their organization, the Elks, would be willing to help with the program. The Elks were willing to donate nylon backpacks with their logo on one side and our high school logo on the other side. Trying to get that through our administration downtown took 6 to 7 weeks, but we did it. The Elks donated 150 bags and the idea was to put the 2 gallon baggies into the bags so that people would not know what was in them, and so that the food would be easier to carry. I numbered the backpacks and the goal was for the students to bring them back each week.

We came up with a plan to distribute the packs in our welcome area on Fridays after the food is delivered to the school. We purchased a huge laundry cart to help transport the packs within the school. In mid-September of 2015, my contact from the university extension office said that we were going to be included in the backpack program. I did a happy dance when I found out about that—something I was doing was finally going to come about. It meant a great deal to me personally. Once we got this notice, things began to fall into place.

Selecting students and distributing packs. I decided that we should serve students who needed it, and/or who wanted it, with no questions asked. As a social studies teacher, I told my classes about this, and I went to the other social studies teachers in seventh and eighth grade and told their students about the program. I asked the students to write yes or no and their name on a

piece of paper, with yes or no indicating their interest in getting a backpack. Because our numbers were pretty low—about 15 students originally—I got permission from the organization to supply the packs every week instead of every other week. The non-profit organizations required parents to sign a permission letter, which was difficult to get returned and lowered our numbers as well. We raised the number to about 25 students by December, thanks to other teachers coming on board and through word-of-mouth. The second semester, more students participated in the program, giving us about 30 to 35 participating students.

I came up with a pass system where the students would go down on Friday afternoon, leaving from their last hour class to pick up the backpack. We ran into a couple of glitches where a number of students weren't coming down. I gave the pass to their teachers and sometimes the teachers forgot to give it to them. For a while it was a little difficult to find students because all students schedules' changed mid-year. Though I sent an email to all of the teachers with a list of students, the rumor is that some of the teachers forgot and some wouldn't let students come down. Therefore, the beginning of March we switched to after school distribution to see if more students would show up. I have wondered if students don't always show up because they're not being let out of class, or they've forgotten, or they're embarrassed. There's got to be a better way to distribute for our students who have signed up to get these and we will continue to work on this.

Future possibilities. The trial run this year has been okay but I think we could make it bigger and better next year; that is my goal. I originally wanted to see if we could reach 100 students, though I'm not sure we could do it every week. I need to do a better job of raising money so that we can continue the program. Some ideas for next year are to put program information in the welcome packets in mid-August so a parent could sign up then. That way we

could go ahead and start from the beginning of the year with a cohesive list of who's interested, while also taking more kids as the school year goes on, since we are a pretty transitory school. We also need a better way of distributing the packs to our students on Friday afternoons.

The end of the first semester, I did a survey asking them how things were going, and the majority of the students who came to pick up their backpacks felt that it was a good program, and they liked most of the food. One of the things of possible interest if we have a larger population of ELL students participating in the program, is to include food that would be more culturally appropriate. Other than including rice, a staple for many of these families, the students say they like the current food. However, what we get is what the food pantry has, so we are somewhat limited in the food that is given to us. One of the things we are working on is getting healthier food in the backpacks. I'd love to get our grant back to get fresh foods again for the backpacks. We want healthier food for our kids that is locally grown this is a win - win for local farmers and the kids.

From talking with the kids, I don't think much of the food has been thrown away (unless the kids are lying, but the kids don't tend to lie about stuff like that). From the surveys, no one said that they had been picked on or made fun of because of receiving the food. I think that is a wonderful thing; one of my concerns at the beginning of the year was that kids would be picked on for getting packs. There's a core group of students that wants them and needs them.

Sarah was walking up the stairs with two boys after their first backpack reception, and one boy said to her, "This is cool. My mom works two jobs and we really need this." And the other boy said, "Yeah. We need this too." This is what makes me think that what I'm doing here at MHS is needed. The kids who get packets seem to have a lot of gratitude. Many of our students live day-to-day, week-by-week. They don't know where their next meal is going to

come, they don't know what shelter they might be in. And that's a sizable percentage of our population, so they have bigger things to worry about.

I don't think outside folks or other teachers realize the need for food for our kids. People don't think about a kid being hungry because they don't see it. We can see the same kid wear the same sweatshirt daily. These are my students and I need to do the best for them. This program been succeeding on several levels and I'm really happy about that personally, professionally, and for the kids. I wanted to do something for our kids, something tangible, and it's a year-long project, not a one-day deal where they come in and taste foods. Sometimes it's been hard to keep it going, but it's a good project and I hope it continues for several years.

My reflection on Wash's work

Wash sees food's relevance to students in her school from a very practical perspective: she recognizes food's necessity for kids to function as students and humans and is aware that many students at her school lack access to sufficient amounts of food to meet their basic needs, let alone to help them flourish academically. Wash is aware of the locally high incidence of food insecurity, where one in four children in the state live in poverty (Children's Defense Fund, 2015) and she has told stories about the ways in which hunger negatively impacts students' academics; a view supported by data. For example, Rodgers & Milewska (2007) have reported that, "Food insecurity can potentially affect children's school performance through a number of channels, including inability to concentrate, lack of suitable nutrients for cognitive development, poor relationships with other people at school, and stress and anxiety about getting enough to eat" (p. 75). Wash also recognizes that food has important relevance to culture, and appreciates

that her immigrant students have unique food backgrounds worth sharing together to build community.

In connecting Wash's background with her project, it seems that teaching health and getting involved in school food committees eventually led her to organizing the backpack feeding program. Wash took on the feeding program in response to two successive events: shortly after agreeing to participate in this project with me, she was approached about starting the backpack program by a university extension agent. Moreover, I asked her to participate in this project after meeting her on a school food action committee where I had heard her speak passionately about the need for quality food for students. Her teaching of health classes and collaborating with local health initiatives as part of her classes, in turn, introduced her to these outside food committees. This demonstrates that timing of events and prior participation in activities may guide teachers in constructing action research projects.

Wash's work exemplifies the clearest example of social action as her project actively works to ameliorate student hunger. Wash's determination to help alleviate food insecurity for her students shows that teachers can take on roles serving their students in non-academic ways. A key line in Wash's chapter that stands out to me is this one: "It became a part of me. To walk the talk." Indeed, "to walk the talk" has seemingly become her mantra through our work together as she has reiterated this in meetings, conversations, & presentations. This statement reflects her comments that she feels she is finally doing something to address significant life issues faced by students in her school. Her statement, "It became a part of me," signifies how much this project has meant to her; that it has been primarily an emotional endeavor, a labor of love and care. School food scholars Morgan and Sonnino (2008) have argued that,

> The school food service is surely the most germane context in which to think about a moral economy, because the consumers in question are *children*, who need protection, guidance, and nurturing. In this sense, we argue that the moral economy of school food needs to be underwritten by, and integrated with, an *ethic of care.* (Morgan & Sonnino, 2008, p.166)

This quote emphasizes that our moral obligation as a society toward food distributed by schools matters primarily because the consumers are children. This brings an interesting aspect to the foreground in Wash's backpack feeding program. Wash has started the first feeding program at a high school in the district, while most of the elementary schools in the district already have these programs in place. It is an interesting statement about an ethic of care that the food assistance organizations would target elementary schools for feeding assistance *before* high schools. Perhaps they feel that high school students are starting to become of age to earn their own money (though asking a high school student to earn money through a part time job to feed themselves is undoubtedly problematic). Or, perhaps they have assumed that high school students would be too proud to take the assistance. Indeed, it has been a question about which Wash has wondered. However, an important reason to give older students weekend food assistance is brought up by Rodgers & Milewska (2007) who found that a number of middle school and high school students receiving food assistance were also responsible for feeding younger children in their house. This fact lends considerable support to the need for distributing backpack food assistance to high school students.

In terms of the actions she takes, Wash's project may seem atypical for action research, but on closer inspection, her project includes planning, acting, observing, and evaluating the result of the action: all aspects of action research. She spent several months planning both

projects. She acted by hosting the potluck and running the backpack program. She observed the impacts of each through chatting with students and observing their responses, observing the participation, and making notes. She evaluated through written surveys about the backpack program and informally through conversations with students. In evaluating her work, Wash is critical of her actions, reflecting honestly about what has gone well and what has not gone as well as she hoped. Furthermore, much of action research is meant to improve practice or address social inequalities; Wash's work addresses social inequalities directly by putting food into the hands of food insecure students. Above all, I think that Wash's project exemplifies the description of Morgan & Sonnino of an ethic of care:

> An ethic of care has to do with relationships. As some feminist authors have argued, far from being formal and abstract, caring is tied to concrete circumstances, and it is best expressed not as a set of principles but as an activity. For feminists who champion an ethic of care, 'morality is not grounded in universal, abstract principles but in the daily experiences and moral problems of real people in their everyday lives.' (Tronto, 1993, p.79 as cited by Morgan & Sonnino, p.166).

It is Wash's unwavering attention to actively getting food into the hands of students who need it which underlies the spirit and truth of her project. For her, the moral response is *action*.

In addition to action, Wash does ask a number of questions within the process of her work, which she articulated in her chapter draft: Would the backpack program work at a high school? Would students be ashamed or embarrassed about getting packs? Would students feel bullied if they accepted packs? She found that for the steady group of students who came each week, these did not seem to be problems. Of course, she also found that the numbers of participating students were lower than she had hoped: an issue she will continue to sleuth

through in the upcoming year. She also learned that students receiving backpack assistance are "regular kids" (personal communication, 5/15) whose families just need a little help. She has told the story of the boy who mentioned to me that his mom worked two jobs and they could use this help in her chapter. Again, her observations are supported by literature: Rodgers and Milewska (2007) reflected that, "One important reason children appear to need assistance is that the children's parents work but cannot make ends meet" (p. 82).

In terms of the contribution of her project, her action-based work on the backpack feeding program has answered a tangible question for the local food assistance organizations about whether the program could function in a local high school. With respect to literature, Rodgers and Milewska (2007) have reported that though backpack feeding programs originated in 1995, there have been few studies about them. Wash's project may help to bring more awareness about these important supplemental food programs. Her work toward getting local and healthy food added onto the backpacks could also be an important contribution. Rodgers & Milewska (2007) report that a complaint about backpack programs is the processed nature of the food given. They note that some schools requested healthier foods, like fresh produce and meat. But they reported that there are logistical challenges in delivering perishable foods efficiently to a large number of schools. This speaks to the potential of Wash's model, which involves a dedicated school coordinator to make the connections to healthy food for a given school. Her model was also particularly innovative because she partnered with a local producers group to get deliveries that were not only healthy, but also locally sourced.

Looking at how the potluck portion of her project took shape and unfolded, Wash has mentioned that she got the idea from one of Matt's descriptions in a group meeting as he told us about asking students to bring in cultural dishes for class. Additionally, being asked to teach ELL

students recently immigrated from all over the world presented her with an opportunity to bridge cultural divides. Through the potluck project, Wash presents an interesting idea of using food as a way to build bridges between communities that may not have a lot in common with American school culture and as a result, may have a difficult time communicating with US schools. Food as a universal language may help lessen these barriers. The potluck incited Wash to ask many questions about why parental involvement of ELL families was typically low: "Is it because of a language barrier?" "Is it because they don't know about it?" "Maybe they are working or don't have transportation?" In this way, it seems that action projects can serve as catalysts for more research down the road, as it encourages teachers to ask questions that they may not have previously considered. Indeed, as university researchers are often prompted to further research based on issues that present themselves within a research project, so too may teachers be incited to continue their action research as new questions arise.

Finally, Wash has shared stories about the ways in which food has helped to build community between her and students. Her observation that students see teachers as caring when they bring in food for them speaks to the idea that when teachers attend to student needs beyond the classroom, students notice. Her reflections are supported by literature; Rodgers and Milewska (2007) shared observations of school personnel that students participating in a backpack program showed more trusting, better relationships with people at the school as a result of the program. Moreover, Wash is very concerned about the difficult life circumstances that many of the students in her school face. It seems that being able to address some of these issues, even in a small way, has helped her to feel better about herself professionally, even though this work is technically outside her job description. Indeed, she has reflected that this project has given her confidence and helped her feel more positively about her job as a teacher.

Using a school garden to teach project-based STEM learning:

Tawny Alvarado

Tawny's background

Tawny has been teaching at the upper elementary and middle school level in the district for 23 years. She spent 20 of those years teaching at a middle school, where she had planned to stay for the duration of her career until the school was closed three years ago in the district restructuring. As a result, she spent the last two years at an elementary school before accepting a position as a STEM coordinating teacher at a district 4-6th upper elementary school recently reorganized as a STEAM magnet school (StES). She has a degree in K-8 education and a masters in education administration.

Tawny has been active in various leadership initiatives within the district over the years. She currently serves both as a member of the district instructional council and as co-chair of the district science steering committee to incorporate the *Next Generation Science Standards* (NGSS) into district science curricula. She ran an after-school tutoring program at her previous middle school. She has also participated in teachers' union activities. In her current position, she also has responsibilities in larger school decision-making and is sometimes tasked with administrative duties. For example, in the spring of 2015, she was the school's career day organizer.

Her experience and training are primarily as a science teacher and she has strong interest and expertise in STEM education. As STEM coordinator, she has been tasked with running science & engineering programming for students at her school. She has reported investing a great deal of time into creating community partnerships to supplement the school's programming. She leads an after-school robotics club for 4-6th graders at StES and has taken them to several

competitions in the past year. She also organized a school-wide Great Lakes worm watch, a citizen science project in which students extracted worms from the soil to send to scientists.

In terms of our TPAR project, Tawny is the only teacher who grew up as a student in this district. In her narrative that she shared with us at our first meeting, Tawny reflected on how much the district food situation had changed over time. She explained that when she was a student in the district, the students all went home for lunch and no meals, that she knew of, were served through the schools. She noted that the demographics have changed substantially since that time. As a teacher, she has watched the district food situation decline steadily. At first, the middle school where she taught always served a hot breakfast and the teachers had access to a soup and salad bar at lunch. Starting four or five years ago, the hot breakfast ended and teachers began serving breakfasts in their classrooms. The items served were cold, pre-packaged foods such as cheese sticks, milk, juice, Chex mix, cereal with milk, or Pop-tarts. She reflected that the students were served Pop-tarts, saying that this "drove me crazy" because of their high sugar and low nutritional content (group meeting, 4/26/14). She said that in the breakfasts, mini pancakes in plastic wrappers were occasionally served, but that they were sometimes delivered to students partially frozen. When this occurred, she heated them in a microwave she had brought in for her classroom. She also observed the lunch quality decreasing over time.

She admitted that if there was extra food after an in-class breakfast, she would covertly collect it and put it away instead of returning it as she was told. She did this so that she could bring it out to serve students whom she tutored after school. She had noticed that students would often get hungry later, so it was very helpful to have these snacks. In fact, she even kept a refrigerator in her room so that she could provide snacks, such as milk, to students. She has reflected that many teachers similarly kept refrigerators in their rooms so that they could feed

kids. She explained that breakfasts moved back to the cafeteria so as a result, she no longer sees what they are eating daily. She reported that she had one student in the 2013-14 school year who brought his/her own lunch, but that all the rest were dependent upon the free lunch provided by the school.

Tawny has also used food in her curriculum to some extent prior to this project. For example, she read *Esperanza Rising* with her class, a novel about Mexican farm workers in the US and hosted an in-class mango tasting to accompany the book.

In addition to her concern about the school food situation for students, Tawny expressed interest in school gardening. Tawny knew that she would become the STEM coordinator for StES when I first met her, though she had not yet begun the position. She agreed to be part of the project readily, perhaps because she envisioned that food and gardening could align well with STEM content.

Tawny's project

Tawny's project was to start an after-school garden club with 4th-6th graders at her school, based on the principles of project-based learning and STEM education. Tawny had originally wanted to work on the garden as part of teacher's science classes, but given the teachers' lack of time, Tawny decided that an after-school club would be a more realistic possibility for this school year. Tawny has mentioned that one of the tenets of project-based learning is for students to show ownership of projects. In that vein, a major goal she has is for the garden to be student-centered and student-directed, such that students are asked to make major decisions about planning and creation of the garden. Her second major goal has been to help students think about STEM concepts through the design and monitoring of the garden. For example, she wanted students to create lab notebooks where they would record observations of the changing garden

and record measurements of plant growth. She also wanted them to think about soil testing, growing regions, growing seasons, and plant compatibility from a science perspective. In essence, she planned to infuse science and engineering concepts into every stage of the gardening process.

Tawny's project began by collecting information about the history of the garden at her new school, since there had, at one time, been a garden on the campus. In fact, there was a relatively new fence surrounding an area that had been set-aside as the garden, but it had been overrun with weeds. She started by having conversations with faculty in her school about the history of the school's garden through which she learned that it had been five years since the garden was active. She was told that the PTA built the fence around the garden site, but that the community/families were not helpful in the summer, which is why the garden fell out of use. The garden had contained mostly tomatoes and pumpkins. Tawny thought that there had been a 5th grade project related to the school garden based on food as energy. She also learned that the current school faculty desired a vegetable garden with mostly fall crops, such as pumpkins, that would be producing when school was in session. She said that she thought the teachers would be supportive, but that they were currently overwhelmed since they had all lost their planning periods. Together with volunteers from the local state university and her principal, in early April 2015, Tawny spent a Saturday clearing out debris and overgrowth from the area that used to be the garden.

For the garden club, Tawny began by asking students to complete a brief application, which also required a parent signature. At the first meeting, she made a folder for each of the students containing graph paper, a tentative schedule of club meetings, and numerous handouts describing different aspects of gardening. Tawny scheduled garden club meetings for 1-2 times

each week starting in April of 2015 until the end of the school year in early June. She created a basic plan/objective for each club session. Below is a brief description of various garden club sessions:

Measuring the garden space

Constructing raised beds

Researching and planning what to plant

Preparing the beds (soil mixture)

Planting the plants

Monitoring the growth

Harvesting

Taste testing

I attended several of the early sessions and observed some of the initial activities. The first task the students had was to measure the garden space using meter sticks, though Tawny noted that they would have to use the side with inches because garden information was not in the metric system. This was perhaps Tawny's first discovery in terms of using gardening to teach science—that the measurement system is not ideal for science. The students did have to calculate area, which was something they as fourth graders had not done before. The next session, the students built raised beds from kits that Tawny had purchased through funds available through the school's magnet grant.

I was not able to attend later sessions of the garden club because of schedule conflicts, so I cannot report on what transpired. Tawny has reflected that she wished she had started the club sooner in the school year since it took the students longer to do things than she had expected. Additionally, there were many other competing after school activities such as practices for a

school talent show and robotics club. In fact, she had to jointly run robotics and the garden club at the same time on a number of days.

Tawny's writing

[I was not able to obtain Tawny's chapter in time for this draft, so I am presenting some of her written comments from our end-of-project survey.]

The school that I am assigned to focuses on project-based learning. This means that students are given a real world problem and use their knowledge and skills in all content areas to solve that problem. The garden project makes the students want to research the type of soil in the garden, nutrients necessary for optimal growth and production, which plants are "friends" with each other, the care and maintenance of the garden, and what will be done with the food when it is harvested. Students are truly the innovators and creators of the school garden. Actually, I felt more like a facilitator instead of a "teacher". The students are responsible for their own learning. They are learning the science behind gardening, the importance of how food affects our lives both on a global spectrum and personal spectrum, and eventually I want to bring in marketing and business part of the food industry and production.

In this project I learned so much from the students and I know that they learned from each other. It truly was an experience that benefited all involved. I think at some point it would be beneficial to actually have the students present what was gained from a student perspective.

My reflection on Tawny's work

Tawny sees food as being relevant to students' lives in a number of ways. First, she sees food and gardening as relevant contexts for learning about STEM concepts. Second, she sees that gardens can be a great site for project-based learning. Third, she recognizes "the importance of how food affects our lives both on a global spectrum and personal spectrum," and she is concerned about the quality of food to which her students have access at school and at home. Tawny's project directly reflects her professional expertise in STEM and her school's focus on project-based learning, as well as her personal concern about the quality of food her students are eating.

Tawny has told a number of stories about the poor quality of food that students are given in schools and she sees school gardens as a way to encourage healthier eating. She has discussed having taste tests of various vegetables with the students to help get them excited about what they might like to plant, since it was clear from their conversations that the students had not tried many of the vegetables on the lists of potential plants for the garden. Her first homework assignment for her garden-club students was for them to read the list of vegetables she provided and mark which ones they had tried as well as which ones they knew they liked. She then planned to bring in samples of vegetables that they had not tried so that they could experience them first-hand. That students do not know many of the vegetables grown, especially in gardens in northern regions, has been reported in the literature; Blair (2009) has noted, "Gardening in America's northern regions during the school year requires elongating the growing seasons in both spring and fall, thus stretching children's knowledge and taste for cool-season vegetables, particularly for dark leafy greens. Because of our supermarkets' global reach and constant supply of heat-loving vegetables, many cool-season crops remain unfamiliar" (p. 18).

Tawny has also shared that she does not think her students know much about how food is produced or what goes into food production. As she as noted, these things are seemingly "not part of their world" (first group meeting, April 2014). From her responses above, it is clear that she is interested in helping students to understand more about the larger food industry, a broader perspective that is often left out of youth gardening (Weismann, 2015).

Tawny's primary focus for her school garden club is for it to be a project-based STEM learning experience. She sees that STEM-related learning is inherent in all stages of gardening, beginning with the planning of a garden. She points out particular science aspects in her reflection above, noting that students could "research the type of soil in the garden, nutrients necessary for optimal growth and production, which plants are "friends" with each other, and the care and maintenance of the garden." (By "which plants are 'friends' with each other," she is referring to companion planting, a method that partners different species of plants to minimize harmful pests and maximum support for biodiversity and plant productivity—all important science concepts.) She has also talked about having students research growing zones and seasonal growing times for different species of plants as part of the planning process.

Tawny's goals for her school garden appear to be well supported by research on school gardens. This literature has discussed the academic benefits of gardening (Thorp, 2006; Williams & Brown, 2012), how gardening connects to curricular goals (Gaylie, 2011; Thorp, 2006), how gardening encourages children to eat vegetables (Thorp, 2006; Williams & Brown, 2012), and other ways in which gardens are assets for schools. Furthermore, in a review of 152 articles on garden-based learning, Williams & Dixon (2013) found that, of all school subjects, school gardens had the highest impact on science learning. Moreover, Tawny's interest in project-based

learning appears to be supported, as Blair (2009) cites that a number of garden studies recommend a non-structured, discovery-based approach for learning.

It is worth noting that Tawny's project (as is perhaps evident through her lack of writing) was perhaps the most difficult of the four projects to launch, no doubt in part because creating a school garden is a large endeavor that requires considerable work on the part of teachers. In a review of school garden studies, Blair (2009) cites a number of studies that have found that teachers need assistance from master gardeners, volunteers, or even paid coordinators and noted that across garden studies, because teachers' lack of time and knowledge was a major concern. Blair (2009) also notes that, "Teachers are the mainstay of school gardening. However, gardens require embedded support mechanisms that lighten the teacher's burden" (p. 35). While there are several non-profit organizations in the city that provide some material and informational support for district teachers, these groups do not provide volunteer labor or curricular support. As a member of the youth gardening coalition in our city, I have described the contextual challenges which teachers in this district face (from no planning periods to extreme testing pressures) within garden coalition meetings and have suggested ways that these non-profit staff might better support district teachers in garden projects. As part of these conversations, and at their request, I presented about the *Next Generation Science Standards* to this group in the summer of 2015. My goal was to help non-formal garden educators understand more about the curricular needs of teachers and ways through which they can help meet teachers' needs.

There are some gaps in the school gardening literature to which Tawny's project could potentially contribute. Williams & Dixon (2013) note that given their place in schools, "there is need for evidence about the extent to which garden-based learning meets academic outcomes if school gardens are to gain legitimacy" (p.212). From this it seems that Tawny's rigorous focus

on STEM concepts and her expertise and ability to connect garden activities to curricula across a number of grade levels could be helpful. Wake (2008) has also reflected that adult agendas rather than the interests of children typically determine the direction of children's garden programs. Tawny's intent to make the garden-club student led could be another contribution. Given that teachers play such a central role in school gardens, there are too few examples in the literature, e.g. Thorp (2006), where accounts of school gardening are told directly from a teacher's perspective. That Tawny's story will be told from a veteran teacher's perspective who has considerable expertise in STEM education and 20 years of curricular knowledge is another way in which Tawny's work could eventually contribute to the literature on school gardens. That Tawny is conversant with the *Next Generation Science Standards* also furthers her potential to frame garden-based learning in ways that are useful for new directions in science education.

My role within the teachers' projects

While my role in the TPAR project was primarily to convene and facilitate our group meetings, record the contextual factors impacting the teachers, and bear witness to the ways in which they were experiencing marginalization as a result of working in low-income urban schools, I also played varying roles within the teachers' individual action research projects. As the primary initiator of individual meetings, I acted as a cheerleader and coach, giving suggestions where I could about ways in which they might each think about project framing, data collection, and analysis. That said, given the lack of agency they have expressed feeling with respect to their teaching positions, I wanted to be sure that the teachers felt agency within their projects. Thus, I only suggested ideas as the teachers asked for my thoughts, and I was conscious not to push my own agenda. Below I describe the specific role I played with respect to each of the teacher's projects.

My role in Person's project

Person was very independent in the design and execution of her project, so the role I played in her project was minor. I suggested that Person record her observations and potentially use a student survey. Given her hectic schedule and the fact that her school is across town from where I live, I did not meet with Person regularly, but when we did meet, we spent hours upon hours together, talking about the project, the district, and food issues. Person is a remarkably gifted speaker and her chapter draft was basically transcribed from her direct words in a meeting that we had together in the spring of 2015. I had been recording the meeting and remarked to her how easily her account could be translated into a chapter draft. I asked if she would like for me to transcribe it, and, though she had worked on some parts of her writing already, she readily agreed for me to type it. I transcribed the meeting and, with her consultation and approval, edited

it for written consumption. She then read the draft during a later meeting and heartily approved of the edits. I should note that the edits were all mechanical and not based on content. In some places, I reorganized her account so that it flowed better as a work of writing.

My role in Matt's project

Matt was very independent in his unit design, analysis, and writing, so the role I played in his project was also minor. Matt and I began discussing our ideas about food, families, and culture from our first meeting and found that we shared a similar perspective. I helped Matt construct the questions for the oral interviews, but he designed the study skills unit primarily on his own. We typically met informally most weeks at the local farmer's market, and in these meetings, I served as a sounding board for him to reflect aloud about how his project was progressing. He bounced ideas off of me in conversations throughout his project, and I believe the impact of my intervention was simply to draw out his ideas about family food cultures and identity. Additionally, I believe that asking him to write and reflect on his students' ideas through close analysis helped him to take a bit more time to process his students' ideas about food.

I played a tangible role in his data analysis by typing up student written responses from the unit selected by Matt into Excel spreadsheets so that he could more easily look across the responses and identify themes. I also typed all food excerpts from the oral interviews into spreadsheets. Matt reported that the data I entered into Excel was "really helpful" in that it helped him to see it all in one place and allowed him to work on it when he had a spare hour or two, wherever he was. Because I had had to persuade him to let me do this (I think he did not want to give me more work), it was interesting to hear that he found it helpful. Having responses

typed onto spreadsheets has also seemed to help in being systematic in his analysis, as he reports that he went back and counted specific themes from the spreadsheet data.

My role in Wash's project

Wash and I have worked very closely over the past year. She has elicited my suggestions and advice and our work has been quite collaborative. She has described struggling with writing and reflected that she did her best thinking about the project in conversation with me, so we decided in the fall of 2014 that we would tape our conversations and I would transcribe them. In addition to this, I suggested that she talk through her chapter draft, since she found it easier to speak aloud about her ideas than write them. She liked this idea and dictated her initial chapter draft into a recording device, while talking with me. I then transcribed, did some initial oral-to-written language editing, and emailed her the typed draft to further edit. She was pleased with the result.

Wash's food distribution project has required logistical help since it involves quite a lot of people hours. She organized Elks club volunteers for most Friday distributions, but I also attended many distributions, sometimes when the volunteers could not be there, and other times just to provide extra hands, eyes, and ears. I have also tried to help Wash think beyond the surface logistics for her chapter in terms of what might be interesting to a broader audience. For example, she has been quite focused on the logistics of her project, but I tried to push her deeply, to think about how her positioning as a teacher allows her to see things about the kids and food insecurity that might be invisible to others outside of formal education.

My role in Tawny's project

Tawny has been very independent in her project, though we have met on a number of occasions to brainstorm about possibilities for a STEM-focused garden program. As part of this I

encouraged her to use the planning stages of the garden as science learning rather than focusing on the finished product, and growing/harvesting. I have also suggested a number of ways to collect data about the project. For example, I suggested that she collect information about the garden's history at the school since there had previously been a garden that was now defunct. I also encouraged her to take notes about the progress of the garden club, especially thinking about comments students are making, her plans for each session, and reflecting after each session. I have encouraged her to record everything, either by writing it down, or by making audio notes. I attended a few of the initial garden club meetings as my schedule permitted as well.

As we discussed data collection possibilities, she immediately thought of sending a survey to the students to find out about their interest in gardening, which I thought could serve as excellent baseline data for her project. I also suggested Likert items about their feelings and experience with gardening, and she seemed to really like the idea. She ended up only getting surveys out to the students who applied to join the club, and I typed these responses for her into an Excel sheet as I had done with Matt's student work.

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CHAPTER 6: Discussion and Implications of the Study

On activism and activist research

Hale (2001) argues that "activist research" is 1. Aimed toward understanding the causes of human struggle/suffering, 2. Executed alongside people experiencing these struggles, and 3. Used to devise strategies for improving the conditions being faced. Similarly, in speaking about activist research in urban education, Nygreen, (2006) posits that in addition to seeking to understand issues, activist research "aims to change educational structures and institutions as well as the social conditions that shape them" (p.2). In line with these scholars, I consider this research project activist research for its attention to the ways in which the teachers are experiencing marginalization professionally, its focus on working with the teachers closely throughout the project, and for its action in the form of teachers' articulating their struggles and recognizing their insights afforded through their creation of projects. The teachers would not have written these accounts without partnering with me and engaging in explorations within their schools and communities—in other words, they were neither already writing these stories nor were they pursuing these projects. Rather, the act of including them in part of a research project created the impetus for action and reflection. In this way, I see this project, in part, as research into the conditions education researchers can put into place to encourage teachers to engage in action and reflection.

Hale (2001) notes that an important aspect of activist research is asking participants to contribute to knowledge creation and analysis of data. Hale (2001) also recommends that participants have the opportunity to make their own conclusions about the data and that these conclusions be compared with those of the researcher. Asking the teachers to construct their

projects, analyze them, and write about their learning for broader audiences is an example of participant knowledge creation within this project.

The stories that have come out about the context, constraints, challenges, and difficult emotional circumstances the teachers face are another research aspect within this project. This part of the project considers the personal stories and accounts the teachers have shared with me and with each other and paints a portrait of troubling times for teachers in this urban district. My reporting of the teachers' narratives has been done in response to prolonged contact, prolific note taking/data recording, and shared communications over time. I have employed standards of qualitative research (especially those used in ethnographic work) to do this and have carefully constructed themes based on corroboration across the teachers' accounts. Because we have not yet figured out a way to make this situation better for teachers, I argue that education researchers continue to need to document the hardships that our current reform movements are having on real places and people. Bringing a place analysis into conversation with neoliberal policies is intended to shed more light and nuance on how these issues are the combined results of policies encountering real places and seeks to contextualize problems within urban education, a move recommended by Nygreen (2006). The poetic inquiry chapter is primarily aimed at demonstrating a new methodology for sharing words of teachers in ways that might reach new audiences. This is important since we are responsible as education researchers to do more to make the current struggles of many teachers real, heard, and accessible.

Hale (2001) notes that activist research is most starkly different from traditional research in the validation of its results. While validation of results typically comes from other researchers in a specified field of study, Hale (2001) argues that validation of activist research should be judged by whether it produces knowledge to help address the problem posed. He also argues that the

knowledge produced be useful to others. While the teachers' individual projects were not designed with a researcher's intention to change what we know in the literature, I do think a great deal can be learned about the *combination* of the projects, *who* has done the projects, *where* they've done the projects, and *how* researchers might work together with teachers more collaboratively to recognize the deep contextual knowledge that teachers can bring to projects. I don't expect that we will change US policy overnight with this project, but I believe that the teachers' work is an important contribution to hearing from teachers about ways in which they see food operating within urban schools.

My first goal for this dissertation was to experiment with working with teachers in a way that recognizes them as professionals rather than subordinates within a research project. The second aim was to examine a topic that has received very little recognition to date from formal educators. By showing the teachers' projects through their own words, I hope to show (not tell) broader food and education communities that teachers care about issues beyond test scores and formal curricula and that teachers have potentially a lot of interesting and important things to say about food in schools.

Revisiting the research questions

To reflect on the findings from this project, I will revisit each research question, discussing the findings associated with each question.

1. *In what ways do a group of veteran teachers working together on food-related action research make sense of food's relevance in their classrooms and schools? What food stories do they tell? How do these food stories connect to their working lives as teachers?*

The teachers have taken up an issue that is peripheral to their immediate jobs but nonetheless extremely important in the lives of their students. Their projects were each different

yet worked together to tell a larger, more complex story about food in their school district. Despite the fact that the teachers work in the same district, the variety of stories that the teachers told through their projects demonstrates the many ways in which food can and does impact students and schools, particularly in low-income communities. In doing so, their projects and stories illustrate that there is not one singular story about a topic as complex as food within one school district or even within the same school, as Matt's and Wash's project's—both at MHS--have shown. Rather, there are multiple possible stories and projects, the framing of which depend on the particular positions, interests, & backgrounds of the teachers engaged in the projects.

Person's project tells the story of the complexity of food insecurity for urban students. As part of her story, she describes how a change in food service contractors made a tremendous difference in the quality and variety of food available, and, in turn, students ate the food more readily than before. Her point that even food insecure students will refuse to eat low-quality school food raises an important issue around what it means to ensure food security within schools. In other words, it is not enough to simply provide free food for food insecure students and check off boxes that these students have been fed. Instead, Person suggests that the questions to ask should be about what students will actually eat rather than what they are served and whether the food provided to them is of sufficient quantity as well as quality. She also brings to light an issue that different schools in the district may be treated differently, especially if they serve special populations and/or lack kitchen facilities. Person also identifies that the skills of a food service staff person at such a school can make a large difference in getting kids to eat food. Person points to larger systemic issues within her school and community in which students and families do not ask critical questions about their own food security, and resulting paradoxes incur

whereby people do not grow their own food and do not critically question the quality and price of the food available in their neighborhoods.

In his project, Matt told the story of the many ways in which food can creatively be used in a number of curricula, as well as the benefits of focusing on food in terms of student engagement. More specifically, he demonstrated that food is connected to numerous aspects of students' lives and family cultures and can be brought into social studies and study skills courses. Matt learned that his students, even those who were not typically engaged, were surprisingly engaged when they studied food and its production system. He also found that his students were beginning to wrestle with the ways in which food connects to family culture. Indeed, asking students to conduct oral interviews to investigate food culture from a historical perspective yielded productive findings that could be used to probe more deeply issues of food sustainability and the preservation of food culture across generations. Matt's project also illustrated that it is difficult to predict which students may be concerned about animal welfare within food production systems. Finally, Matt's project shows that even in schools where most of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, they can still have their own food cultures at home, and food is a relevant topic to all students—no matter what their background.

In her study, Wash told the story of trying to help her students by organizing weekend food assistance and by trying to build community with her ELL students through food. In engaging in her projects, Wash learned that a backpack feeding program was doable at the high school level and some high school students are eager and grateful to receive weekend food assistance. She realized that it is not always easy to get food into the hands of students who need it, thanks to challenges with scheduling and communicating within the school. She also learned that it is possible to supplement with healthy and local food, if funds allow it, and that the

students can be very appreciative about these additions to the packs. Wash recognized that it can be difficult to get ELL families to come to school for a potluck, but that it is worth pursuing despite barriers. Wash has also reported that being able to get food into the hands of hungry students has helped her to get through a difficult (because of the extended school day and other priority-status related issues) year at her school.

Tawny's project tells the story of the ways in which school gardening can be a useful and relevant site for project based learning around STEM lessons and her deep expertise in STEM principles and her knowledge of curricula across the elementary and middle grades means that her perspective is potentially valuable to the school gardening literature. In her project, she learned that hosting garden activities afterschool was an easier route for starting the garden than trying to work with teachers' classes. She also found that even young students bring useful ideas for creating gardens, and that allowing them to take the lead in designing a garden is a fruitful approach.

Though each of these projects is different, there are several threads that speak across them. First, Wash's and Person's projects both address food insecurity in the district. Person takes an observational and philosophical approach to reflect on food insecurity for students, while Wash takes an action-based approach to try to directly improve the situation for her students. Both teachers come from a place of concern; however, Person speaks from a place of knowing what it is to be food insecure, while Wash speaks as someone who has always had access to good food and wants to help her students experience this. While their approaches attack different aspects of the problem—Person looking at the underlying systemic issues of hunger and Wash addressing its more immediate problems—both projects speak to the simultaneous pressing needs of daily student hunger and longer-term food insecurity. From their differing

approaches we see that teachers' personal experience with hunger can directly impact how they design projects to explore, discuss, and investigate food insecurity within schools. From my view, Person was more comfortable being critical about issues of food security and people who face them, no doubt because she has experienced their subject position. While I think it is very important that teachers' understand more about food insecurity, it seems particularly important to have teachers on a team who know it first-hand. While that might not be possible, having teachers spend time hearing narratives about what it is like to be food insecure may help bridge this gap.

Matt's and Tawny's projects, to differing degrees, are both curricular interventions. Though Tawny has created an afterschool club, she has discussed and could envision this being applied to STEM-focused classes within her school and it is meant to supplement and support science curricula. Matt's work, in part, seeks to help students understand the larger food system in all its complexity, while Tawny's work mostly zooms in on the needs and production of plant-based foods. Together, their two projects speak to the plethora of ways in which food is relevant to different school subjects, from social studies and study skills, to science and engineering. Moreover, their projects represent two nearly counter approaches to studying students' diets: Matt hopes to build relevance by tapping into students *existing* family food traditions and the ways food helps them to express their identities and familial associations, while Tawny is hoping instead to *introduce* students to new foods beyond what they typically eat at home. Through these two somewhat dichotomous approaches, we see that there is space for appreciating the foods already important to students and their families, while also attempting to increase students' exposure to fruits and vegetables. School garden projects, like Tawny's, often focus on the foods that youth do not know, helping them to expand their healthy eating repertoire (e.g. Thorp, 2006;

Williams & Brown, 2012). While this is definitely an important aim for school and youth gardens, some of the work Matt has done to bring in foods that are important to students' families might be a helpful addition to garden programming, especially in planning gardens that are culturally responsive to their student populations. To date in the school and youth gardening literature, there are only a few examples (e.g. Cutter-McKenzie, 2009) of learning gardens that intentionally attend to and are designed around the cultural backgrounds of the participants. Klindienst (2006) has written a book to tell the stories based on interviews of fifteen ethnic gardeners, tracing the importance of gardening in their personal cultural preservation across migration. While her work is not about youth or school gardens, it could serve as a discussion starter when working with immigrant youth and gardens.

While food and culture is most prominent in Matt's project, it is an undercurrent in all the teachers' projects. Matt foregrounds food and culture in his work by creating assignments that look specifically at the role of family foods in students' lives and in the lives of family elders. Wash also includes an element of food culture through her ELL potluck, hoping to create space within a foreign environment for students and families to bring in parts of themselves through their home dishes. Tawny has discussed surveying students to see what vegetable-based foods were important to them and their families to investigate which of these might be able to grow in their school garden, based on soil and climate needs. Person observed how readily and eagerly her African American students responded to a soul food meal served through the school food program, noting the importance of serving students food in schools that reflects their cultural backgrounds. As Matt as well as the food and identity literature readily reflect, food connects all of us in visceral ways to who we are and connects us to groups (Caplan, 1997; Greene & Cramer, 2011; Cosgriff-Hernandez et al., 2011; Karaosmanoglu, 2011). What the teachers' collective

projects add to this literature is practical application and concrete suggestions for ways food can be used to increase the cultural relevance and connection of education to students' lives. This seems particularly important in a district such as the one in this study, which serves students from widely diverse cultural backgrounds.

In thinking about how their food stories connect to their backgrounds, each project is uniquely a reflection of each teacher's interests, training, and background. Matt, as a social studies teacher, grandchild of immigrants, and foodie, brings food, culture, and study of food production into his curriculum. Wash, an athlete, coach, and former health teacher, is interested in doing more than talking about healthy food with students, but is "finally" getting food into the hands of kids who are hungry. Tawny, a STEM teacher, develops an after-school garden club to help teach STEM concepts through project-based learning. Person, who experienced hunger in her own childhood and works at a school where food security is an issue, shares her insights and concerns about food insecurity for youth in her school. While each teacher could have taken various paths in designing their projects, looking at their stories, it is evident that each project took shape based on each teacher's particular circumstances and perspective.

2. As these veteran teachers engage in PAR on food-related issues, what questions become important, what actions do they take, and how do the projects take shape over time?

In answering this question, it is important to note the extent to which the teachers had to be flexible and adaptable in their project design, given their changing contexts. Matt's and Wash's teaching assignments changed during the time that they were engaged in the projects. This happened both before the fall 2014 and spring 2015 semesters. In fact, immediately after teaching his unit, Matt's schedule changed so that he no longer taught the study skills course for which his unit was created. From the start of the spring 2015 semester, Wash—as she reported in

her chapter—was no longer assigned to teach a course for which she had hoped to create a food and culture unit. Tawny had originally planned to use the garden with other teachers' classes at her school, but the teachers were overwhelmed without planning periods to the extent that she taught the school's STEM classes herself. This meant that she had little time during the school day and moved the garden activities to after school hours. Person originally planned to collect data to reflect that her school was a food desert, since the food provided to the school was of such poor quality and so few students were eating it. However, when the school food provider changed, she instead ended up documenting changes in food and student eating habits as a result.

Each teacher asks a few key questions throughout their projects. Wash wonders if a backpack feeding program can work at the high school level, if students will be embarrassed or bullied if they participate, if students will eat the food. She also wonders how to encourage ELL families to feel welcome at school and wonders if using food-related fellowship can help build bridges to reach them. Matt wonders if food can be used to help students recognize, honor, and bring their family, group, and cultural identities into the formal curricula. He also wonders how low-income students will respond to learning about the food production system. Tawny wonders if school gardens can be used to learn STEM concepts in an open-ended, project-based learning way. Person wonders who makes decisions about school food, how they make these decisions, and to what end, recognizing that data is collected on food distributed, but not on food consumed.

Looking at how the teachers engaged in their projects, not only was the substance and focus of each project very different, each teacher approached the action research process uniquely. Matt exhibited perhaps the most traditional approach to action research for teachers in that his project was a curricular innovation that he created, applied to the classroom, and then

evaluated its impact on his students. His data was also perhaps the most straightforward: he took notes on students' in-class comments and analyzed their written work. Wash's project was perhaps the least typical of teacher-conducted action research in that she spent most of her focus working to address and remediate student hunger, not a typical goal for teachers. As part of her project, she planned and organized the logistics for the backpack feeding program and potluck, implemented both with students, made observations, talked with students and created written surveys for students. Person's project included asking critical questions about the food served in her school, making observations of student eating patterns of school lunches and vending machine use, communicating closely with the school food service staff member, and polling students informally and through written surveys. Person additionally added her own narrative experience to her analysis since she had also struggled with food insecurity as a child. Tawny created an extra-curricular intervention and implemented it, making written observations as the club met and reflecting on those observations. Looking across their processes, each teacher planned, implemented, and evaluated within their projects. Interestingly, they all seemed to rely most heavily on their observations rather than on written data collected within their project analyses. This point indicates that it might be helpful to provide more scaffolding of the research process with teachers so that they see the potential for written data in addition to their observations.

In terms of what questions became important within our larger TPAR project, the marginalization that the teachers were increasingly facing in the district often took center stage in our group meetings. Teacher marginalization was not an original part of the study design, but the marginalization that the teachers were experiencing in their positions was so overwhelming that food was put to the side in many of our meetings as our focus was instead on the district, its

increasingly difficult politics, and the resulting pressures the teachers were feeling. In other words, while our agenda was to discuss their projects, major obstacles to completing these projects kept presenting themselves, which the teachers needed to discuss and process. Once I realized the extent to which their experiences of marginalization were impacting our work together, I decided that I needed to reflect it in the study since it was an important part of the context shaping their work. As discussed in chapter 4, the teachers expressed feeling marginalized in the following ways: in the evaluation and punishment so readily apparent within their positions, by the increasing pressure from neoliberal policies such as NCLB, and not being treated as professionals as evidenced through feeling a lack of control/autonomy and lack of support by administration. This marginalization, at times, specifically interrupted and wreaked havoc with their projects as they had planned and devised. For example, Tawny's move to an afterschool garden club was in response to the pressure teachers felt at her school as a result of the change to a magnet school and no planning periods. Matt and Wash were often haggard and overwhelmed by the rapid changes at their school as part of its priority status and this took away from their time and energy to devote to their projects. Person's school was overpopulated and understaffed, which led to her working long hours and having little extra time. Also, as I have discussed previously, both Wash and Matt experienced sudden, last minute changes in their course assignments, which forced them to modify their projects in different ways. These unexpected course changes reflect in a small way the lack of control that the teachers reported in their jobs. The last minute nature of these course assignments also showed little respect for teachers as professionals who need and deserve time to prepare and plan for new courses.

There were many other less direct connections between their feelings of marginalization and their projects, mostly because the various aspects of marginalization—from the lack of

control, to the lack of being treated as professionals, to the increasing pressures from neoliberal policies—created an overwhelming sense of demoralization, exhaustion, and frustration. When people face tremendous pressure and receive little support, it impacts them systemically, and the teachers were often too exhausted or overworked to do as much with their projects as they had originally hoped to do. This is why I found it imperative to include a full chapter (chapter 4) to share the hardships that these teachers were facing. I was a witness to their struggles and I recognized that this meant an obligation to speak out about them on their behalf. Given that these types of struggles are becoming increasingly apparent among teachers in the US, e.g. Goldstein (2014), capturing these sentiments through research also seemed like an important move as a teacher educator and activist.

3. How are the teachers' stories and projects shaped by the "places" in which they work? What might their projects teach us about the importance of place and action research on food-related issues in urban districts?

As explored in the district context chapter, the teachers work in a city that has seen decades of declining population as a result of fewer economic opportunities. This situation had resulted in a $30 million dollar budget deficit for the district by 2012 (Squiers, 2012), and a consequent need to continually close, leave empty, or tear down schools, layoff teachers, and shuffle remaining teachers and students around the district. Indeed, all the teachers in this project had been moved to different schools as a result of the reconfiguration process. The district's highest dropout rate in the state, at around 25% (Squiers, 2012), has deepened the budget crisis and indicates the depressed economic situation of the city. Changing demographics in the city to a more diverse population—partly the result of the city being a highly active site for refugee resettlement—have also impacted the population demographics of the district.

Neoliberalism has been felt in the district through six schools being labeled as priority schools under No Child Left Behind and therefore in danger of state takeover for low test scores. Neoliberalism has also been felt through state school of choice laws, which have allowed in-district students to opt out of the district to enrol in higher performing districts. School of choice laws have further cost the district $6 million in lost enrolment in the first seven years of the policy. Neoliberal right to work laws at the state level have removed teacher union membership requirements and are now aiming to remove tenure for teachers. The district has also followed neoliberal trends by creating new magnet schools in attempt to attract students back to their schools.

The schools where these teachers work have experienced place and neoliberal impacts in numerous ways. Person works at an alternative school, created to reduce the dropout rate and whose programming is (true to neoliberal aims) outsourced to an external company. In an attempt to lighten the pressure of MHS's priority status, some MHS students were sent to Person's school in the fall of 2014, but these numbers far exceeded the school's capacity. Tawny school was created as a STEM school in response to larger neoliberal emphases on STEM education and also in response to the district's continual loss in enrolment to neighboring districts. Matt and Wash work at a school with an extremely high influx of refugees, which means impressive diversity but an increase in academic need. As a result of the test score gaps at their school, it has been put on the priority list by the state, which means that the school has to undergo extensive measurements to turn their test scores around. Some of the impacts of this push at the priority school have included an extended school day, creation of new classes, creation of support staff positions, an all-school focus on reading & testing strategies, and a new external teacher evaluation system. Throughout the schools, the continual need to combat an

ongoing budget deficit while meeting the needs of students with high needs has created an atmosphere of tremendous pressure. And, in the midst of increasing pressure, demands, and scrutiny, neoliberal policies are attempting to eliminate tenure protection for the teachers.

More specifically, the teachers' projects have been impacted and/or afforded by these place and neoliberal influences. First and foremost, given the poor economic situation of the city, the vast majority of the students in the district are low-income and all are provided with free meals from the district. This has impacted the overall context of all the teachers since their students in general have reduced food choice available to them, during the school day and beyond. When Matt agreed to be part of the project, he was teaching history and social studies courses, and planned to create a food unit for these classes as his project. However, before the 2014-15 school year began, he was informed that he would instead be teaching mostly sections of a freshman study skills class, a course created in response to the school's priority status. He had to adjust his thinking to accommodate how he might incorporate food into this new course instead. Wash's project has been affected by place and neoliberalism-associated issues because she also has dealt with unexpected schedule changes resulting from the priority status of the school. These schedule changes meant that she was given an ELL study skills course to teach, which inspired her to create the ELL potluck. However, she also was unable to complete a food and culture unit that she had planned because her schedule changed in the middle of the year—a change that was in response to the school's priority status and its place-related budget deficit. Tawny was able to obtain financial support for materials and administrative support for her STEM-based garden project thanks to grants available to new magnet schools. Moreover, her position as STEM teacher is made possible through temporary magnet school grant funds. The fact that many of the students at Person's school come from out of the district means that the

district does not automatically provide food for them, which has led to some interesting findings for her study, such as the innovativeness of a school food staff member to acquire food for these students. Furthermore, Person's critical thoughts about school food service contractors mirrors a wider neoliberal trend in school food. As Sandler (2011), points out, "The explosion over the past twenty years of contracting out food services to private providers, specifically, is part of a broader move toward privatization and contracting of all school services" (p.27).

Further discussion and implications for food and education

Food in education is deeply under-researched but extremely relevant (Weaver-Hightower, 2011). Robert & Weaver-Hightower, (2011b) posit that with regard to food and communities,

> We believe teachers know a lot. Yet, how much are teachers taught about their students and their communities, and how much are they taught about how to get to know them through everyday contact and research? How much are teachers taught about the structures of poverty, the constraints of school funding, and education politics? How many administrators encourage collaborations across disciplines or between the classroom and the cafeteria? Knowing content and pedagogy are crucial for learning but so too is knowing the context in which one educates. (p.207)

I agree with Robert & Weaver-Hightower that teachers know a lot, but I believe these authors might be surprised, as I have been, at how much veteran teachers can know about their students, communities, poverty, and education politics when given the chance to share their knowledge as has happened in this project. From these teachers, I have learned that their extensive knowledge about the city, its changing contexts, the communities within the city, and the politics within the schools resulted not from being taught it in professional development, but from living and teaching in the same district for years upon years. Indeed, the very design of the projects relied

on the teachers' extensive knowledge about their place and school contexts. I hope that this project contributes greater recognition to the potentially significant contextual knowledge of veteran teachers and the ways in which this contextual knowledge helps them to ask interesting and contextually relevant questions for action research about food and schools.

In a survey of over 1000 K-8 public school teachers, a "Hunger in the Classroom" report (APCO, 2012), found that 6 in 10 teachers surveyed had students that regularly came to school hungry and 4 in 10 saw hunger as a major concern. More than half the teachers said that they purchase food for hungry children in their classrooms (APCO, 2012). These statistics are consistent with the stories told by the teachers in this study—e.g. of keeping refrigerators in their classrooms and being sure to have food available for students—and indicate that teachers are on the front lines of hunger in classrooms. However, what statistical studies fail to provide are more in depth perspectives from teachers about food and their students. Indeed, little to none of the literature on school food has been from or even included teachers' perspectives on food in schools (Weaver-Hightower, 2011). For this reason, I believe that a key contribution of this project to literature on school food and/or food justice is that it is told entirely from the perspectives of teachers. Several of the teachers have used the term "trenches" to describe their placement within the system. Person has noted that, "As teachers, we see stuff long before the rest of society…we see it happening in our classrooms every day. We are in the trenches, we are the front line" (5/9/15). Wash has noted that this project also helps to show "how teachers are involved with their students other than textbooks and coaching" (6/28/15). This work is from the perspective of people who are insiders to schools and are therefore privy to countless conversations, politics, and knowledge that would not be available to outsiders. For example, at a food justice conference in May 2015, an attendee asked the teachers how they knew what they

were able to share about individual students' situations of food insecurity and Person replied that it was based on relationships. She explained that if students trusted you, they would share more than you ever wanted to know about their lives. The audience members—all activists and academics in food justice—seemed to be quite moved by this perspective; that the positionality of teachers afforded them a unique view on complicated issues such as food insecurity within schools and for individual students.

According to a study by Walters (2011), high school students may be more aware of the messages they receive about food than they are about the food system itself. Likewise, Tsurusaki & Anderson (2010) found that only 53% of urban students were able to make a connection between a hamburger and a cornfield—fewer than their suburban and rural counterparts. The authors also found that students tended to neglect thinking about the infrastructural issues around food distribution, with only 1⁄4 of the students mentioning transportation in the hamburger supply chain. This work suggests that Matt's inclusion of food production within an industrialized agriculture system is needed and it supports Matt's surprise at how little his students seemed to know about the industrialized food system. It also suggests that helping students understand more about growing food (such as in Tawny's project with school gardens) is helpful for increasing the awareness of students in urban areas about food production and the food system at large.

Walters (2011) has reported that youth professed that their education experiences were more impactful than the media and advertising in influencing their food choices. This finding suggests that a more prominent examination of food systems through formal curricula, such as Matt and Tawny have shown through their projects, is both needed and useful. Moreover, if we expand our conception of education experiences to include the food that is served in schools,

such as Weaver-Hightower (2011) recommends, Person's and Wash's projects matter for their critical examination of what kinds of food we are distributing to students through schools and the students' reactions to this food. Robert & Weaver-Hightower (2011b) have urged that, "Eating in the cafeteria is not a benign, apolitical activity. Children are taught a curriculum for life in the cafeteria, canteen, or school patio" (p.204). Sandler (2011) has noted that, "Whereas in the 1960s who was fed was the primary concern of activists, today what is fed in schools is the main topic of US public and political debate over school feeding." (p.36). Person's careful attention to the food that students are served—and the message this transmits to them—demonstrates that she understands the importance and the political nature of the food students are served. Wash's attention to the quality of the food in the backpacks also demonstrates her awareness that we teach students through the food we give them, and therefore it is important that we give food that is as healthy and local as possible. What's more, Sandler (2011) points out that, "More inner city children are receiving a higher percentage of their daily calories from services provided at…the school than ever before" (p.36). That this school district serves free food to all students, and that some of the schools, such as Wash's and Matt's, serve three meals a day to students speaks to this point. When Tawny shared that, in her elementary class last year, only one student out of her entire room brought their lunch, this illustrates (albeit anecdotally) just how few students in this district seem to opt out of the school feeding program. These circumstances indicate the importance of ensuring that the food provided to students in such low-income districts is of the highest possible caliber, since they are so dependent on it.

Morgan & Sonnino (2008) have pointed out that,

> The American system has regressed since the National School Lunch Act (NSLA) was approved in 1946. One of the original aims of the NSLA was 'to safeguard the health and

> well being of the Nations' children'…a public ethnic of care that atrophied in the final quarter of the 20th century (p. xvii-xviii).

All the teachers have expressed repeated frustration and dismay at the state of school food for their students, and have registered their disgust at the food company whose contract was fortunately discontinued after the 2013-14 school year. Their views of the district, spanning multiple decades, has allowed them to comment on the steady decline in school food quality over time. For example, Tawny told us that when she was a student in the district, no meals were provided that she knew of and students went home for lunch. She also noted specifically that as a classroom teacher, she observed hot breakfasts being phased out and replaced by packaged convenience foods. Given the shifting demographics in the district to an increasingly lower income population that is more food insecure that ever before, a decrease in school food quality within this district seems particularly unethical. Person has observed just how much difference these food service companies make in terms of food actually consumed by students, which speaks again to the importance of ethical school food practices. While Person has observed the improvements in the school food over the last year, she has noted that the food is still largely processed (e.g. chicken patties) and not always as healthy as she would like it to be.

Though the projects were different, they speak to a larger theme of the ways in which food intersects with the lives of students in this urban district. These ways include examining food insecurity and how this can be exacerbated by poor quality school food, how school-based food distribution can help address student hunger, how food culture and production can be incorporated into a variety of curricula, and how school gardens can be used to teach STEM and project-based learning concepts. That each teacher created a project that related heavily on his/her own personal and professional background speaks to the need for diverse teams when

executing TPAR projects, since the teachers have shared insights related to their positions. Moreover, the issue of food is sufficiently complex such that even this project, which contained four different projects, has only scratched the surface. There is much about food and schools that we have not yet begun to explore. For example, none of the teachers in this project chose to explore the extensive environmental implications of food, from issues of sustainability about agriculture, to the science behind it. Human labor injustices associated with current industrialized agriculture is another area that is important to include within curricula, but was not directly covered in these projects. Given the expansive and substantive ways in which food can be a relevant context across many subject areas, the relative absence of food issues thus far in school curricula, and the increasing public interest in food, the need for more teacher research in these areas is evident. Because teachers may not have the time, training, or inclination to read academic literature in food studies, this project suggests that academics teaming with teachers to design projects while sharing their respective areas of strength might be productive. For example, teachers could provide deep contextual knowledge and understanding to design projects around food that would be most appropriate for their school and students, while partnering academics could provide the requisite knowledge of literature to advise where projects might be most needed in relation to the literature. While I tried to provide this guidance at some points within this study, my primary goal was to understand what kind of projects the teachers would create without being directed by a researcher. That said, if teachers and researchers partner on food projects, researchers need to be very conscious of the potential power imbalances since university researchers are typically given more voice and authority within research projects.

Other implications of the study

As discussed in the methodology chapter, TPAR was not the original design of the study, but one that I arrived at as the pressures, frustrations, and lack of voice that the teachers were sharing became central to our project. Based on the principles of PAR, giving these participants agency to design their own action research projects is an important counter-action to the marginalization that they face in their teaching positions. I have proposed a variation of PAR with teachers that not only involves teachers in doing research as more traditional teacher research initiatives have done, but explores the ways in which teachers may be marginalized as a result of working with marginalized youth populations, such as those in low-income urban schools. While PAR has been conducted with many different marginalized populations, I have yet to encounter PAR literature that recognizes "marginalization by association" as I argue is the case with urban teachers and I suggest that this aspect is a potentially new contribution to conducting PAR with teachers. In this project, I have conceptualized teacher participatory research (TPAR) as consisting of the following aspects:

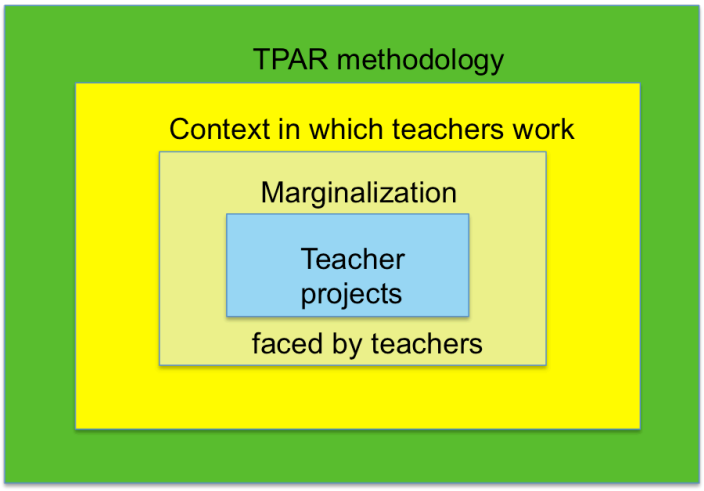

Figure 1. TPAR framework.

As the frame indicates, TPAR is the overall methodology used within the project. While TPAR includes all the nested smaller frames within it, any frame by itself is not necessarily TPAR. Rather, TPAR stems from the combination of elements: teachers engaged in action research projects, a larger exploration of the ways in which the teachers are experiencing marginalization within their positions, and an exploration of the context (place, etc.) in which the teachers work and which shapes their situations. More specifically, the marginalization faced by teachers is that which results from working with students who are themselves marginalized. The teachers' projects are focused on factors related to their student population. The colors indicate who is responsible for each part: blue is work devised and authored by the teachers, yellow is work primarily devised and analyzed by me but with input from the teachers, green indicates where the teachers and I collaborated in the design. TPAR could perhaps be seen as a methodology within a methodology—each participant does their own action research projects, these are combined to tell a larger story, and then layers of analysis are added about their contexts and shared situations.

While most PAR studies involve participants who are marginalized and research ways in which their own marginalization plays out, my TPAR model suggests that teachers looking at issues concerning their students might be a more effective move toward increasing their status, since they are judged by their responsiveness to students' needs. The nested system has allowed for a more holistic view of the settings and contexts in which teachers work and by which they are judged. This nested system is a potential contribution to PAR literature in that it explicitly structures ways to evaluate teachers' working contexts with an eye toward marginalization.

While I believe that TPAR needs to include analysis of marginalization as part of the overall project, true to the tenets of PAR as an ideologically guided methodology, it is not meant

to be prescriptive. As a result, the *how* of TPAR is dependent on the individual project and participants. My primary guiding principle for this project was to honor and respect the skills and interests of teachers. Thus, I have attempted to support them in conducting research that is personally interesting and enriching to them, and which showcases their knowledge of their schools and students. Working with teachers in a participatory way has proved both challenging and rewarding. I have faced dilemmas about the extent to which I could or should intervene in teachers' projects or writing. For example, for several of the projects, I would have liked to see slightly more systematic data collection and analysis, but I was conscious that I was working with volunteers who were not formally trained as researchers. In the end, my goal was not to turn the teachers into researchers per se, but to give the teachers a forum to share their personal and professional insights. Since this was a PAR project, I felt it was important to be sensitive to the marginalization these teachers reported facing and not add to their stress and overall workload. I prioritized this aspect over trying to get the "best" (in the eyes of researchers) data collection and analysis. I wanted to see what stories the teachers would choose to tell from their own perspectives and priorities. On the flip side, the teachers have taught me volumes about the district, its politics, and its challenges. They have also been not only colleagues for me in what is often a lonely dissertation endeavor, but friends and cheerleaders.

I have needed to be flexible in my expectations about products and timelines, given the teachers' voluntary participation. The support needed for each teacher to both execute their project and write about it was very different. Typically, the teachers were quite independent in their execution of projects, but requested more support when writing about them. As a result, I have provided more writing support than might be typical within research projects with teachers. I wanted the teachers' voices to be directly heard in this dissertation, but I found that I needed to

scaffold this process for several of the teachers who struggled with writing or with finding the time to write. Several of the teachers were fairly independent writers, though, as a result, one of them did not get a draft to me in time for this dissertation draft. Because the teachers are ultimately volunteering their time and interest, it is important to meet them where they are, and allow them the level of participation that they desire (Gatenby & Humphries, 2000).

This project gave teachers space and autonomy to invent projects of their own design. As a result, the teachers expressed excitement and motivation to execute these projects with little assistance or encouragement from me. Additionally, they all agreed to participate with no expectation of pay or professional development credit. I was not offering money or time, just a forum and space to talk and think about issues. Yet this was enough for the teachers to pursue these projects, come to meetings, and communicate with me regularly. Matt even described our work together as a "compelling" force for him to design his unit. I see this type of partnership with teachers as both encouraging them to try new things and supporting them to be creative. Despite being overworked, teachers showed eagerness and enthusiasm to engage in this project. This seems to indicate that giving teachers agency to explore issues that are important to students and to themselves can be rejuvenating. Also, giving teachers a supportive outlet to air their frustrations has seemed crucial.

The teachers have showed me tremendous gratitude for being included in the project. Each of them has expressly thanked me and they have even gifted me with multiple items to show their appreciation including homemade quiche, homemade pie, beer, coffee, flowers, local meat, maple syrup, and even a lawnmower. One took leave from school to attend my doctoral graduation ceremony. Creating a TPAR research team has meant not only that we have worked together, but that we have developed relationships of trust and mutual respect. Meeting in my

home, eating homemade food together reflects the intimacy that I have aimed to foster with the group.

Finally, within teacher research, this work aims to demonstrate how to bring in PAR methodological principles to further the political thrust of teacher research. For example, my goal for speaking out about the ways in which the teachers have experienced marginalization is to take an activist stance on their behalf. To do this means to help to share their stories with larger audiences. By using poetic inquiry, I have attempted to create work that speaks to the research and the experiences of these teachers that can be readily available to non-academic audiences. As educational researcher, Cahnmann-Taylor (2009) has pointed out, poetry can more easily be shared with different audiences and can be an important way to make educational research more accessible. Using an arts-based qualitative approach in my dissertation has been an initial foray for me into creating more publicly accessible scholarship.

Final note

This non-traditional dissertation has represented my desire for a non-traditional approach to academic scholarship and this project has been extremely influential to me and to the scholar that I am becoming. I had hoped that my dissertation could involve meaningful work that could help others. Though a dissertation is just a beginning of an academic life, I wanted my first major research endeavor to set the stage for an academic life that is relevant to people beyond academics. As a former teacher, daughter of a teacher, and now teacher educator, my role is to help teachers help their students, and to serve as an advocate in this time when teachers—especially those serving students who need them most—have become heavily targeted by society, and state and national policies. I hope that my work might encourage other educational researchers to think more deeply about the tenets of PAR, and how the political aspects of PAR

translate to teachers' positionalities. I am immensely glad this work has positively impacted four teachers. I am deeply grateful to Matt, Wash, Person, and Tawny for their willingness to work with me and for approaching this project with open minds and eagerness. They have each left an indelible mark on my academic and personal life.

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