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Good Intentions Are Not Enough: An Examination of Service-Learning On A Public Charter High School Campus

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Good Intentions Are Not Enough: An Examination of Service-Learning

on a Public Charter High School Campus

by

Jane Wyche-Jonas

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

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Good Intentions Are Not Enough: An Examination of Service-Learning

on a Public Charter High School Campus

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to students and communities I have had the opportunity and privilege to work with and learn from.

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ABSTRACT

Good Intentions Are Not Enough: An Examination of Service-Learning

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This qualitative case study examines the service-learning program at a charter high school (Austin Charter Academy [ACA]). The two-fold purpose of the study was to: (a) describe and explore the service-learning experience at ACA with attention to the structures of power shaping the program and (b) to examine the role of a White, female administrator in the service-learning program. The research questions for the study were:

- How does one high school charter community describe their experiences in service-learning programs?
- Who is being centered and what logics are being reinforced in service-learning projects?

The study employed a decolonizing, critical community-based service-learning framework (Santiago-Ortiz, 2018) as its theoretical framework, adding an examination of decision-making processes, structural designs, and power dynamics, and highlighting where ACA's program perpetuates colonizing notions often found in traditional, mainstream approaches to service-learning.

By exploring the experiences of multiple stakeholders, this case study presented a holistic understanding of ACA's service-learning program. Data for the study were collected through in-depth interviews with ACA staff and community partners, alumni focus groups, document analysis, and autoethnographic data. Using an inductive approach to data analysis, emergent themes were identified across data sources.

Findings indicated although ACA's approach to service-learning has good intentions, when examined with a decolonizing framework one can see misalignment between vision and outcomes for students, staff, and community partners. Without a clear vision and approach, staff have diverse interpretations of service-learning, resulting in confusion for students and families. Additional findings highlighted access to programs have not been equitable, leading to disproportionate outcomes and the need for supports to be put in place. Examining the program from a decolonizing lens presented the ways the current program has upheld colonial notions and centered the academic setting and student need over the community.

The findings supported the need for ACA to build in reflective practices to shift their service-learning program from performative to providing authentic, meaningful learning experiences for all parties, in line with a decolonizing framework. Recommendations for policymakers and administrations include revisiting policies and program documentation with a decolonizing framework.

PROLOGUE

The date is July 4, 1993. I am 8 years old. My friends and I are running down the parade route in my hometown. We are dressed as Native Americans, complete with fringed leather vests, feathered headbands, and face painting. As we run the parade route, we offer face painting to bystanders. Our fathers walk with us, many carrying imitation tomahawks and drums. Every so often you hear our group chant, hitting our mouths with one hand making repetitive vowel sounds. Our leather vests are not only embroidered with our adopted Native American names (mine was "Little Cloud") but they are also adorned with patches received for the different acts of service we had provided to the community over the year. I was extremely proud of how many patches I had on my vest, a visual representation of how much I had served others. My participation in the father-daughter program, known at the time as Indian Princesses, was my introduction to cultural appropriation, and the experiences I had in this program shaped my understanding of service from a young age.

The cultural appropriation that took place in this program was harmful, disrespectful, and racist, and by actively participating in the program, I, too, was harmful, disrespectful, and racist. This program laid the foundation for my understanding of service. From this experience I was taught to believe community service could be defined by the options an organization provided to me, whether those options were actual needs of the community or not. I believed if I did the volunteerism asked of me, I would receive another patch for my vest, a bragging right to my peers; because the more patches one had, the better person they were. I believed service was an act of charity and I should strive to be a "do-gooder" in a world as it desperately needed people to care about serving others.

This mentality and approach continued with me well into my high school and college years. The high school I attended had a community service requirement, and I chose to complete my hours by gathering school supplies to donate to an elementary school in what I and my peers considered "the poor part of town." Because of a lack of exposure to conversations centered on racism, I continued to see race as binary, failing to have any actual understanding of White privilege and the implications my privilege had on my mindset, approach, and on communities identifying as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC).

My involvement with missionary trips began in high school and continued into college. I chose to spend my spring break building houses in Mexico, and I saw myself as superior to others for choosing this path. There was no learning about the communities we visited ahead of time. We showed up, we "served," we left. I recall one time even spending the night in the home of a family associated with the church with which we partnered. We were unable to communicate due to our language barrier, and this family cooked meals for us and even offered their beds to us at night. This was presented as an opportunity to get to know the lifestyle of those we were serving. There was no reflection or discussion on the inequities staring us in the face. My desire to be a "do-gooder" hit an all-time peak as I organized a service-learning trip to east Africa for my collegiate soccer team, partnering with a sports ministry organization. Looking back, Saad's (2020) words rang true:

> Though well-meaning, such volunteers often travel to these countries with not much more than their passion and their desire to do good. Little regard is paid to understanding the historical background and cultural contexts they are entering. Much emphasis is placed on such volunteers having the right solutions to the country's issues without listening to and partnering with the people they intend to help. (p. 149)

White saviorism ran deep on that trip. When I returned home, I decided to become a teacher; and this mentality, along with my Eurocentric, paternalistic, traditional understanding of community and service were deeply embedded in my approach to teaching. It was not long before I began organizing trips for student groups to visit other cities, such as San Francisco and Washington, DC. I saw these trips as another act of service I was providing to them. I saw myself as a savior for my students, helping them escape the daily realities of the communities they lived in. All these events benefited my own ego, and although they provided smiles for my students, they did nothing to actually address the systemic issues facing their communities. Deeply embedded in all these experiences was the assumption the students and community needed skills, knowledge, and resources I had to offer. This deficit mindset was rooted in my actions, and my actions perpetuated White supremist culture, White exceptionalism, and existing power dynamics between academic spaces and local communities.

Although that 8-year-old running the parade route feels like a stranger to me in many ways, I am aware of the oppressive practices deeply rooted in my being. As I look back on that experience almost 30 years later, along with a robust timeline of service-learning trips, organized both personally and as an educator, I am most disturbed by the intent present with each of these experiences. Illich's (1968) addressing of the dangers of paternalism inherent in any voluntary service activity rings loud and true for me: "To hell with good intentions . . . You will not help anybody by your good intentions" (p. 2). Conducting this case study, and specifically including the autoethnographic process, revealed to me many things about myself, my practice, and my fellow ACA community. It also revealed to me what I believe will always be true for anyone working as an educator, and that is that there is always more to learn. This research project has

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been a labor of love, rooted in my desire to be a better ancestor to our Black and Brown communities. What follows is greatly influenced by this self-reflective work and is humbly presented to my fellow readers.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> The world's greatest problems do not result from people being unable to read
> and write. They result from people in the world—from different cultures, races,
> religions, and nations—being unable to get along and to work together to solve
> the world's intractable problems. (Banks, 2004, p. 298)

It is the responsibility of educators to create the diverse spaces for students to engage in

experiential learning Banks (2004) described. Although Dewey (1938) supported a curriculum

that focused on the application of information acquisition and imagination to improve the social

condition, Freire (2018) pushed for schools to be places for cultural reconstruction. Both scholars

placed student experience at the center, arguing education needs to be a process drawing on

people's ideas and perceptions and pushes their critical thinking and awareness to question

injustices seen in the world around them. Specifically, Dewey (1938) believed all individuals in a

society have a responsibility to participate in critical thinking and act in a socially responsible

manner to improve the quality of human interactions. It was through the development of social

skills and helping others he believed human interactions would be improved; and therefore, to

help others voluntarily would enhance people's engagement in service toward their community.

Freire (2018) posited "education is not just about learning to read, but learning to question the

conditions that leaves many without access to education, economic opportunity or political

power" (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 132). In this vein, service-learning should assist participants in

critically perceiving how they exist in the world, recognizing the world is not a static reality

where peoples function by the rules and norms set by dominant culture, but rather as a process of

transformation (Freire, 2018). Although service-learning reflects both Dewey's (1938) and

Freire's (2018) strands of progressive education, the manners by which schools and educators

have implemented this framework have yet to reach the intended outcomes for all students and communities.

According to Jacoby (1996), service-learning is "a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development" (p. 5). This definition combines the on- and off-campus learning common in service-learning programs, with the desired outcome of bridging the students and community through a reciprocal process. A growing field for quite some time, it was not until the 1970s that a group of scholars posited service-learning was a teaching method with the capability to apply the principles of Dewey (1938) and Freire (2018) in a manner that could transform one's practice (Seitsinger & Felner, 2000). In 1984, only 2% of schools had a service-learning program. However, as of 2008, approximately 30% of schools were implementing service-learning (Bridgeland et al., 2008). This increased growth mirrored the popularity of student engagement and volunteerism in both the local and global communities (Hammersley, 2012). In 1999, the Learn and Service America National Service-Learning Clearinghouse estimated around 6 million middle and high school students participated in service-learning (Seitsinger & Felner, 2000). Around the same time, school reform recommendations called for standards-based improvement and a focus on meaningful, developmentally appropriate teaching, higher order thinking and real-world application of skills, all of which were evident in high-quality service-learning (Seitsinger & Felner, 2000; Spring et al., 2008). This call to action brought a renewed interest to how schools could integrate student experience in community settings, and the result was two different approaches that have become intertwined in many cases: community service and

service-learning. Kackar-Cam and Schmidt (2014) explained the difference between these terms in the following manner: community service exists mainly to fulfill a school requirement and may not be integrated into a school's curriculum, whereas service-learning is strongly connected to the curriculum and reflection is a central component to the project. Elaborating on these two categories, Kackar-Cam and Schmidt named community-based community service learning as an approach focused on cultivating on a "sense of belonging, caring, and responsibility for one's community" (Seitsinger & Felner, 2000, p. 4), often implemented through a club or extracurricular activity.

Despite growing interest in service-learning and recommendations for school reform taking place throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the authorization of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) shifted emphasis toward achievement in English and math and away from more applied learning opportunities such as service-learning. In private schools, which were not required to follow district-wide implementation plans, service-learning remained an integral part of the curriculum. A study published in 2015 found 82% of private schools had a service requirement, compared to 37% of public schools (Ballard et al., 2015). There are also differences in the percentages of schools with service-learning based on the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Schools with less than 50% of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch were more likely to have service-learning than schools with 50% or more of their students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). In 2010, the National Center for Serving and Leadership conducted a 50-state policy scan on service-learning and community service (Rautio, 2012). As of 2011, 42 states mentioned service-learning in state policy, up from 27 states in 2000; 18 states awarded credit toward graduation for

service-learning or community service, up from seven states in 2000; and service-learning or community service was included in assessments and instructional strategies throughout most states standards or frameworks. Although service-learning has appeared to be on the rise in recent years, there has been a need to better integrate problem solving, experiential learning, and real-world application into the curriculum. As schools have continued to be faced with competing interests, Barlowe and Cook (2016) asked:

> Isn't it time to consider an alternative approach to assessing what students know and can do—a new paradigm in which all students can contribute, learning from and with each other in a process where a variety of academic, intellectual, and social skills can develop—an approach which results in greater equity? (p. 99)

I believe the role of the social justice leader is to answer this question with a hearty "Yes!" and I believe one vehicle for educators to leverage in doing so is community-based service-learning.

Context for the Case Study: Austin Charter Academy

This dissertation focused on one charter high school's experience with community-based service learning. A charter school is a public school operating as a school of choice, and although they exist in a district, they tend to have autonomy on programming and financial decision making. Since its inception in 2000, Austin Charter Academy (ACA) has provided students in Grades 9–12 with a unique learning environment using service-learning to inspire students to find authentic meaning in their studies. ACA's founding mission statement focused on providing "vibrant" and "innovative" education including engagement with the environment and community. The most current version of their mission statement at the time of this study included a reimagining of what education could look like for low-income communities of color specifically, focused on preparing students to become "conscious, critical thinkers." Although the mission statement had been revised to state more explicitly the school's commitment to its

community, the value placed on using the environment as a learning lab and empowering students to become stewards of their communities has never faltered.

ACA's design principles have included a small learning community, a challenging, interdisciplinary core academic curriculum, authentic challenges culminating in service-learning projects, and partnerships with the local community. Teachers at ACA have been known for, and evaluated on, their use of learning expeditions, problem-based learning, thematic interdisciplinary instruction, and service-learning instructional strategies to make connections, so students can apply content standards to real-world problems in the local community. The network has focused on the intersectionality of social and environmental injustice in their curriculum development and assessment design. Many units of study and projects designed by staff have narrowed in on environmentalism and sustainability in the local community. ACA has believed students will be empowered to become stewards of their own communities through service-learning projects rooted in community partnerships.

Entanglement of Terms

It is important to note in this multitiered and multifaceted approach, the concepts of service-learning, community service, and civic action have become entangled, leading to confusion about their meanings and purposes. In addition, service-learning, community service, and civic action were positioned as pieces of the school's larger environmental learning mission, adding an ideological layer to the service-learning program that is not always aligned with community needs for partnerships. One of the teacher development tools used at ACA has been a rubric of what have been considered the organization's best practices. In the category "environmental and experiential learning," standards for proficient implementation of service-

learning and civic action were listed, intended to guide teachers' practice. Other sections in this category were project-based learning and outdoor education. This was where the entanglement of environmental and experiential learning with service-learning and civic action became quite clear. Because service-learning and civic action were conflated, one reading the rubric would have assumed the two terms were interchangeable. The presentation of them under the umbrella category of environmental and experiential learning, and alongside sections such as outdoor education, signaled a connection between service-learning/civic action and environmentalism.

Adding even more complexity was seen in the ACA handbook where an entire page has been devoted to explaining the environmental and project-based learning approach. This section speaks to the benefits of presenting students with authentic challenges with real-world applications. It specifically stated that using environmental service as a context for learning has proven to be an effective learning methodology, especially for closing the achievement gap between traditionally underserved populations and traditionally higher achieving groups. Upon reflection on this document and the teacher development rubric, it is clear there is an entanglement of terms. Not only does this create a lack of clarity for staff and students, but it prevents programs from reaching the outcomes desired. In addition, the language used in these documents to describe the approach to service-learning is problematic in that it remains student focused and is disassociated from the communities' actual needs or desire to be in partnership with academic settings such as the ACA campus. This language and the approach taken by ACA are in line with the dominant discourse in the field of environmentalism, a discourse centered on the privileged narratives of a field of predominately White voices (Taylor, 2014).

Service-Learning at ACA

In understanding the context of ACA's service-learning program, it is important to examine historical documents outlining the desired approach and programming, as there appear to be discrepancies between what was communicated historically and what is currently being implemented. Although the term service-learning was not actually present in the ACA 2020-2021 handbook, there was a section describing the community service requirement. In it, students were called to be "stewards of their community," using the following definition: "A steward is a person who contributes and gives back to his/her community" (20-21 Handbook). The etymology of the term steward reveals an Old English origin linked to the conquest, with meanings like guardian, overseer, and supervisor associated with the term. Merriam Webster Dictionary defined a steward as "one employed in a large household or estate to manage domestic concerns (such as the supervision of servants, collection of rents, and keeping of accounts)." Using this term to define the role students should take in a service-learning program is problematic because it places the student above the community, reinforcing the notion that the academic space should manage the community. ACA's handbook complicated the relationship even more, stating that by being a steward students will give back to their community. This notion reinforces the assumption that communities lack resources and desire the help of schools, specifically students, to fill whatever perceived need or gap exists.

Additionally, the language in the ACA handbook encouraged students to "seek non-profit, governmental, or religious organizations," to serve; because of this, many students seek out churches as locations for their community service to take place. With the deeply rooted colonial and missionary ties to service learning (Langbehn & Salama, 2011; Priest & Priest,

2008), this approach perpetuates problematic relationships between those serving and those

being served. It is problematic the students and families, many of whom were hearing about

service-learning for the first time, did so through this language in the handbook.

It is also important to note that the term community service appeared in the ACA student

handbook in the discipline section as well. If a student found themselves on a progressive

discipline plan because of a recurring behavior or behaviors that was impacting the learning

environment, they entered into a contract with administration as a means of support. The

handbook stated the contract may include but is not limited to tutoring, counseling, community

service, parent/guardian attendance in class, probation, suspension, and expulsion. This coupling

of community service and disciplinary action can impact the way students perceive service and

the attitudes they carry into service opportunities.

Implementation of Service-Learning at ACA

The intention behind service-learning at ACA has been rooted in academic rigor,

supporting students in developing their knowledge of self, and actively addressing injustices that

affect the students and school communities. By giving students access to methods in research,

program development, and program evaluation that are usually only available to professionals,

the service-learning program has equipped students to look at their own lives and communities as

legitimate objects of study. ACA has believed this to be a pedagogically responsible practice that

recognizes their students' agency and redefines their role in the community as well. The school's

approach to service-learning has been multitiered and multifaceted. Some components have been

required of all ACA students, such as the 80 hours of community service; however, there are

other components that students have been able to opt into, such as partnering with different organizations for weekend activities.

Graduation Requirements

The service-learning program at ACA has been part of a rigorous academic program requiring students take the most rigorous course load available and earn at least a C in all classes, including 4 years of math, history, and other core subjects. Students graduate from ACA with the A–G requirements needed for admission into the California State University and University of California systems and are required to apply and be admitted to a 4-year college. Another graduation condition has been a twofold service-learning requirement. Students completed 80 hours of community service as well as a senior project. One component of the senior project was for students to complete civic actions. For this they partnered with community organizations to complete civic actions related to their topics. The civic action project required students to complete 20 hours of service, and this could also count toward the 80-hour requirement for graduation. However, the required 20 hours of community service tied to the civic action project asked students to bring in a level of advocacy and organizing that was not needed in their service hours prior. The guiding question for students listed on the civic action project description is the following: "What does it mean to be an active citizen?" The project focuses service around policy, law, advocacy, and organizing community outreach. Although this is one avenue for being an active citizen, the approach taken by the project centers student perception rather than actual community need.

The unidirectional nature of the different service-learning graduation requirements does not leave much room for the perspective and voice of the community to be at the forefront of the

work (Santiago-Ortiz, 2018). Having different approaches and terms when referring to program components, confused and complicated the purpose and value of service for students, families, and staff.

How Service-Learning Is Supported at ACA

Program components are supported in different ways. The required community service hours are supported and tracked through the school's advisory program, where each student works with the same advisor throughout their 4 years at ACA. Additionally, the counseling team offered support for students struggling to reach the required hours. Other program components that are optional for student involvement were supervised by specific teachers or staff members. The time students spend with these programs has often been used for their community service hours as well. Table 1 provides details about some of the service-learning opportunities historically available to students at ACA.

Table 1

Components of ACA Service-Learning Program

Program component	Participants	Timeframe	Location	Supervision	Objectives and requirements
Community service (CS)	All students	20 hours each year; total of 80 hours by graduation	On ACA campus or off campus at partner site	Advisory teachers help students find opportunities for CS and track hours	Graduation requirement
Civic action project	All grade 12 students	20 hours, typically from Fall to Winter of senior year Hours can be used for CS requirement as well	Civic action content introduced in class Civic actions take place outside of the school day; location determined by each students' project	Government teacher teaches civic action content and grades students on different project elements	Graduation requirement; project includes argumentative paper and final presentation
Outdoor education weekend trip	Students selected via application process	3 weekend (Fri.–Sun.) trips per year, plus one lunch meeting to prepare	Off-campus in Southern CA	Teacher (same each year; stipend) in partnership with representative from the partner	Students receive community service for participating in trail maintenance and clean-up
Summer bridge mentor	Grade 11 and 12 students selected via application process	2 weeks in summer, 8am–12pm	ACA campus	The counseling team selects mentors, trains them, and supports programming	Students attend planning and reflection meetings Students serve as mentors for all incoming grade 9 students in summer programming, and receive 80 hours of CS

Table 1 (Continued)

Components of ACA Service-Learning Program

Program component	Participants	Timeframe	Location	Supervision	Objectives and requirements
Internship	Grade 10-12 students interested in receiving internship credit	~ 4 hours per week Meets after school 1–2 days per week on campus Excursions take place during school day or on weekends	Regular meetings on ACA campus Occasional off-campus excursions	Specialist plans and implements this program, working with community partners for excursions	Students learn about environmentalism and sustainability by working with community partners
International trips	Any student interested and able to financially sponsor the trip	Varies by trip	Varies; previous trip was to Spain and future trip is planned for Panama (pending COVID-19)	Teacher initiates a trip and works with outside provider to plan and chaperone trips	Students participate in immersive experiences by travelling overseas to partner with different cultures

As Table 1 shows, the community service and civic action projects required of all students have been supported by the teaching and counseling staff, as well as by the administration. Optional service-learning programs, including the outdoor education weekend trips, Washington DC trip, summer bridge mentoring, internships, and international trips, have been supervised by specific teachers or staff members.

Reviewing the different roles ACA has had in place over the years reveals that at different times there has been different support for ACA staff, students, and community partners for service-learning programs. At one point in time, there was a part-time service-learning coordinator supporting the program. When that person left ACA, the role was split into two part time roles, with one focusing on community outreach and the other focusing on student learning.

Examining the requirements listed on the job descriptions for these roles one notices a shift that has occurred over time. On the service-learning coordinator job description a "basic knowledge of service-learning" was listed as a prerequisite for applicants, whereas on the one of the subsequent roles it added "knowledge on the community and organizations." All of these roles required the person to create community partnerships, inviting them to class and campus, and to provide services to the school; however, there was no mention of how partners were included in this process, how relationships were cultivated, or if compensation for partners existed. Additionally, this role was listed as someone who provided community service opportunities for students and as someone who ran service-learning projects such as the after-school Internship program. It is important to note the ways this role has shifted over time and the ways it supports the desired outcomes of the service-learning program.

As a former administrator at ACA one of my job responsibilities was to oversee the different service-learning programs. This included assisting teachers in creating partnerships with community organizations through research and outreach efforts. For the teacher evaluation process, I, along with the principal, scored teachers on a 4-point scale rubric on how well they implemented service-learning components into their practice throughout the year. Additionally, my role included holding students accountable to completing their graduation requirements related to service-learning, including community service and civic action. Finally, I was responsible for cultivating specific partnerships connected to different components of our service-learning program.

Problem Statement

Similar to most service-learning programs, the program at ACA has aimed to provide students with opportunities to apply their classroom learning with real-world application, learn about civic responsibility, and take actions to create change in their communities. Historical documents, such as the charter petition, parent/student handbooks, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation reports, job descriptions, and grant requests lay out the intentions and plan for reaching these outcomes; however, data showed the program is falling short of its goals in these areas, particularly for historically marginalized students and community partners.

Disparate Outcomes and Experiences

First, graduation data indicated an ongoing trend of specific subgroups of students, including students with exceptionalities, English learners, and students identifying as Black or African American, struggling to meet the service-learning graduation requirements. This included students with exceptionalities who qualified for an Individualized Education Program (IEP) as well as students who qualified for a 504 plan. Created under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a 504 plan provides equal access to education for students with exceptionalities who need accommodations such as the ability to leave the classroom or additional time to take a test, and it is much less involved than an IEP (Kassab, 2021). Data indicated students with exceptionalities and those with 504 plans frequently enter the spring of their senior year with fewer community service hours than their peers and are faced with the challenge of making up missing hours to graduate. This highlighted the unrealistic expectations being set for students, often resulting in these students volunteering to help maintain campus at lunch or after school to receive the hours

needed to graduate. Although they may have ended up receiving the hours needed this way, they missed out on working with community partners, and often sacrificed participating in other lunchtime clubs and after school programs because of it. In addition, data showed that these same marginalized groups of students frequently struggle to reach proficiency on the grade 12 civic action project. Failure to reach proficiency in the civic action project means students also do not receive credit for the community service hours involved in the project (typically the entirety of the 20 hours required for the year) and thus are not able to walk in graduation. These disparate outcomes are especially important to note as they contrast the desired outcomes previously mentioned in ACA's handbook.

Not only are there inequitable outcomes taking place, but there has been an inequity in types of experiences students have access to at ACA. For example, some students completed their community service hours participating in an internship program after-school or during weekend events or throughout a program over the summer. Some examples of experiences that took place off campus and outside of schools hours included volunteering to support young children with autism, presenting ethnic studies curriculum ideas to teachers, interning with an outdoor education organization to clean out invasive species at a nature preserve in Maui, Hawai'i, supporting former elementary and middle school teachers with classroom activities, tutoring students from the Gardena juvenile justice intervention program, and volunteering hours at local church and sporting events. In contrast, other students completed their requirement working on the ACA campus, where they had access to very different experiences. Some examples included picking up trash at lunch, watering the plants, helping a teacher make copies, and purchasing tissues and school supplies for a teacher. It is important to note these vastly

different student experiences as they are the result of structural and programmatic decisions in place at ACA.

Inequitable Access

Second, there is an inequity with the access students had to different programs in how opportunities were advertised, how students were selected to participate, and when programs took place. Students and families received a handbook at the start of each school year. In the most recent 2020-2021 version the handbook stated, "A calendar of volunteer opportunities often is published in the office, special events are announced in the bulletin, and students may find their own volunteer or service opportunities." Advisory teachers have been expected to read the bulletin to their class so students are aware of the events and they are expected to remind students about the resource in the office; however, this has not always happened in every advisory class. Because of this, many students have relied on finding their own volunteer or service opportunities. The process students were asked to complete to access certain service-learning programs also presented barriers to access. Certain programs had prerequisites for joining, such as receiving passing grades in core classes or having previously attended other service-learning opportunities. In some classes, there was an application process, and the process itself was a barrier for students, particularly students with exceptionalities. For example, for one program, the process included an application, references, and an interview. In my experience as an administrator, students have also shared they did not apply because they were not sure who to ask as references and they did not feel confident enough to participate in the interview. For another program, the process was different. It was often the students who were the first to sign up who were selected. As mentioned previously, this was unfair in that different teachers shared

opportunities at different frequencies. Additionally, there was a perception among students that to hear about opportunities and have access to programs it largely depended on who you knew and how close you were to the staff member leading the opportunity.

Another barrier to access was when and where most service-learning opportunities took place. The ACA handbook stated that service hours "should take place outside of the school day . . . outside of the immediate family (no babysitting) and must be for organizations, not individual people." Most opportunities ACA offered took place outside of the school day, either after school or on the weekends. This resulted in different barriers for students, such as transportation and time commitments, especially for students who had commitments with their families outside of school hours. In my experience as an administrator, I continually heard the narrative that because of barriers such as these, certain students might not have opted into these opportunities and were then forced to complete any service-learning requirements on the ACA campus, rather than in the community. This exemplifies the ways in which the school is deciding what does and does not count as service, rather than rooting the work in community need.

Lack of Feedback

Third, there was no existing framework for program evaluation or reflection for the service-learning program. Because of this, neither qualitative or quantitative data existed on how the different stakeholders experienced the programs or were impacted by them. This is especially problematic when one considers ACA's desire to build partnerships in the community, as at the time of study there was no plan for gathering feedback on the programs they were implementing. The ACA charter described the following benefits:

> Service-learning programs help students to develop a sense of responsibility for their community's health and well-being. Such programs promote an understanding of the

important roles they have by guiding them through experiences that foster communication skills and self-awareness, and help them acquire a sense of stewardship for their community.

As previously stated, the call to be "stewards for their community" is a problematic approach in that it follows a traditional, Eurocentric perspective. This language also begins with and continues to focus on ways the programs can help students, and this centering of student benefits is in line with the traditional approach to service-learning that centers academics over community need.

Despite not having a system for reflection or evaluation of the service-learning program components, ACA did implement a teacher reflection and evaluation system. As previously mentioned, ACA had a teacher development tool, which included descriptors for how a teacher can be proficient in including service-learning in their practice. Historically, teachers self-evaluated and received an evaluation score on how well they implemented service-learning in their classrooms each year. In analyzing the 2014–2015, 2015–2016, 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 teacher development evaluation scores the following were revealed (see Table 2).

Table 2

Teacher Evaluation Scores

Year	Admin score	Overall average
14-15	2.2	2.9
15-16	2.4	3.05
16-17	2.3	3.06
17-18	2.2	2.6

In the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 school year teachers were not evaluated on this element. Of the five categories, teachers received the lowest overall score each year, except for 2016–2017 where it was the second lowest, in the experiential and environmental learning, and

this is the category that houses the service-learning and civic action section. This shows that teachers have continually scored lower in this section on the rubric comparatively to how they have scored overall on the rubric. Although teachers are asked to reflect on their practice, they do so in isolation from the experiences of student and community organizations involved in the programs.

In addition to the tool, growth guides have been created for each category to further support a teacher in their development. The description on growth guides for the service-learning sections shared this work is rooted in academic rigor, supporting students in developing their knowledge of self, and in actively addressing injustices that affect our students and school communities. It continued to share one hope of this work is for students to look at their communities as objects of study. The language here continued to center student experience in this work, going so far as to recommend communities be seen as objects at the disposal of the school. Having teacher development tools including problematic language such as this reinforces these notions among staff and can trickle down to students as well. Additionally, although these tools exist, most ACA staff were not aware of the tool or are not in agreement with how the tool has been meant to be used for support in terms of their growth.

On further examination of the tools, the entanglement of terms surfaced again. One of the suggestions for staff to consider growing toward proficiency in the service-learning and civic action section listed out youth participatory action research as an approach to consider. Although youth participatory action research might be an appropriate and beneficial approach to consider, it is a different framework and approach than in place at ACA. For it to be impactful and done well, it would require more intention and thoughtfulness by teachers and the ACA staff. This

exemplifies how yet another approach is being referenced for ACA staff to consider when implementing service-learning. Having suggestions and ideas written into documents and tools for teacher development without allocating time and thought to ensuring the language is aligned with current practices adds to the entanglement of terms and confusion among staff. This also hints at a performative culture at ACA, where the intentions and ideas written into documents and tools are not what is seen in implementation.

Intention Versus Impact

In my own experience, I have observed a disconnect between the intention for connectedness and reciprocity between campus and community envisioned by ACA's service-learning programs and the implementation and impacts stakeholders are experiencing. One example of this has been highlighted by the community service component. Setting community service as a graduation requirement has presented the assumption students have not been involved in their own communities and would not be unless required by their school site. This assumption has revealed a lack of awareness of practices in communities of color where this has often been already an established way of living in community together (Mitchell, 2008). Students may have already served their communities in authentic, meaningful ways built out of the community's needs; therefore, forcing students to participate in community service and telling them what activities do and do not receive credit based on ACA's guidelines has been problematic as it has continued to position ACA's perspective and needs above those of the community. Research has begun to critique the relationship between students and the communities they serve. D'Arlach et al. (2009) posited how service-learning programs are often responsible for creating or perpetuating the very problems they are seeking to alleviate. These

findings have supported the notion when done in isolation service-learning projects can pose consequences for both sides of the partnership. In both my role as a former teacher and as a current administrator implementing these programs, I have continually witnessed a lack of reciprocity with community partners on the ACA campus and a lack of awareness around the community's needs.

On a broader scale, researchers have given a more critical eye to the components of service-learning, and yet, there has still been minimal literature on how to examine this field from a decolonizing lens, for both the students involved in the programs and the communities with whom they have partnered. Specifically, research on community-based service-learning programs has seldom explored how different subgroups of students experience service learning differently, resulting in different outcomes for themselves and the communities they serve. For this to happen, data must be collected from the parties most affected: the students and the community stakeholders (Pearson & Peterson, 2019). This study responded to this gap in the existing research.

Purpose of the Study

This case study accomplished two objectives. First, it described and explored the service-learning experience at ACA, and second, it examined specifically the role of a White, female administrator in the service-learning program. By investigating the program holistically, I provided a thorough understanding of the experiences of each stakeholder. The purpose in analyzing the program was to highlight the experiences of students, staff, and community members. This analysis revealed trends in the access and barriers that exist with these programs on the ACA campus and puts a spotlight on the gaps that exist in the intended outcomes for

community-based service-learning and the actual outcomes taking place for stakeholders. As I explain in further detail in the theoretical framework section of this chapter, I used a decolonizing lens to analyze the data collected for this case study. Using the decolonizing lens made sense given the participants in the study and the community groups involved with the service-learning program; by using this lens, the research identified tensions integral to the service-learning program. Additionally, by applying the decolonizing lens I was called to examine my own positionality in the service-learning program and raised questions about the power dynamics at play. Exploring the role of a White, female administrator at ACA this study provided a detailed look at how decision-making, program implementation and accountability impacts this work and opened a space for dialogue around these topics. Additionally, by including an autoethnographic approach I provided a unique, firsthand perspective on the program at ACA and examined a different approach than what is consistently seen in the literature.

By conducting a case study, including autoethnographic data, this study explored the complexity of creating and implementing community-based service-learning programs. With experience as both a teacher and administrator on the ACA campus, I was uniquely positioned for this project. As a teacher implementing service-learning programs, at ACA and in my previous teaching experiences both locally and globally, I have carried with me traditional approaches that are problematic. As an administrator I inherited a teacher evaluation rubric and approach to service-learning at ACA that perpetuates power dynamics, leads to disparate outcomes for students, and is built on a colonizing approach for community members. Most school administrators in our country identify as White females, and like many, I have been guilty

of upholding these practices. This study provided a better understanding of all the intricacies of the current program, supporting my ability to make recommendations for how to shift our practice at ACA. Simultaneously, adding the autoethnographic data provided a self-analysis and critique that can be a roadmap for other White, female administrators, challenging them to analyze their own programs and their role in them. Overall, this case study provided a counter-narrative to the existing literature, as the literature has continued to showcase service-learning programs highlighting school site benefits and leaving out the voice of community organizations and marginalized students.

On a larger scale, exploring the experiences of participants in service-learning programs through a series of interviews this study contributed to existing research on the community-based approach to service-learning. Additionally, this study aimed to have an impact on current practices, assisting administrators in making decisions about the service-learning programs, or lack thereof, at their school sites. Uplifting the voices of marginalized and underserved communities, the interviews challenged and provided a counter-narrative to the existing dominant narratives to inform critical community service learning for high school programs in the stages of planning, implementation, evaluation, and project development. The narratives of how low-income students of color and their communities experience service-learning added to the existing research on how service-learning can be implemented in a way that does not perpetuate existing inequities. It also highlighted the role of the teacher or coordinator leading the service-learning program, offering ideas for other sites to consider in their own program implementation. Additionally, this study confirmed the need for uplifting the voices from the community partner. Finally, this study contributed to existing research on critical community

service with a decolonizing lens in hopes of reframing service-learning for high schools so it not only encompasses a global or local perspective, but also results in a transformational experience based on co-constructed, reciprocal processes between school sites and community organizations.

Research Questions

To gain a holistic understanding of ACA's service-learning program, including past and present decision-making processes, an exploration of the experiences of multiple stakeholders needed to be accomplished. This included an examination of the logics at play, such as structural design, decision-making processes, and power dynamics. This entailed using a decolonizing lens to examine my own positionality through autoethnographic data. Therefore, this study focused on the following two research questions:

- How does one high school charter community describe their experiences in service-learning programs?
- Who is being centered and what logics are being reinforced in service-learning projects?

Theoretical Framework

Decolonizing Critical Community Service-Learning

What has often been missed from critical community service-learning (CCSL) has been an explicit addressing of settler colonialism and the inherent connection has played in service-learning. Santiago-Ortiz (2018) recognized this was a consideration needing to be attended to; and therefore, I leaned into her framework for this study. Santiago-Ortiz argued adding an anticolonial stance to CCSL would require three things: (a) acknowledging settler colonialism in

academic spaces, (b) including decolonizing methodologies to counter dominant narratives, and (c) changing the way partnerships between institutions and communities are envisioned.

Traditional community service-learning "serves as a vehicle for connecting students and institutions to their communities and the larger social good, while at the same time instilling in students the values of community and social responsibility" (Neururer & Rhoads, 1998, p. 321). A critical service-learning pedagogy "not only acknowledges the imbalance of power in the service relationship, but seeks to challenge the imbalance and redistribute power through the ways that service-learning experiences are both planned and implemented" (Mitchell, 2008, p. 57). In this manner, the power relations in society and in the actual service-learning relationship have been addressed in the stages of planning, implementation, evaluation, and project development. Because of this, students begin to see themselves as agents of social change and are encouraged to transfer the skills experienced in service-learning to address other injustices seen in communities. Additionally, it has centered reflection and reciprocity throughout this process (Jacoby, 1996; Seitsinger & Felner, 2000), as CCSL has sought to create partnerships between students and communities no longer perpetuating inequalities or reinforcing an us versus them relationship, which has often been noted in traditional service-learning.

Bridging the CCSL approach with a decolonizing lens in this study provided a framework that "incorporates an explicit acknowledgement of power and systemic inequality in the classroom through critical pedagogy by uncovering the political nature of education, providing deeper reflection on and critique of the supposed neutrality of education and its complicity with structural oppression" (Santiago-Ortiz, 2018, p. 43). This approach added an accountability layer to CCSL, ensuring all parties involved were equal participants in all stages of the process.

Hernandez (2016) called for a decolonizing of service-learning curriculum due to the binary relationship between theory and pedagogy often seen in traditional programs. She pointed out although the theory (i.e., curriculum and learning) took place in academic setting, the actual pedagogy (i.e., application and service) took place in bicultural communities; however, often without community input. Including this decolonizing component to CCSL countered the traditional hierarchical process and moved service-learning toward more reciprocity and solidarity with the communities' educators have served (Santiago-Ortiz, 2018).

Significance of the Study

Service-learning has had numerous benefits such as increasing student engagement and learning outcomes and shifting attitudes toward community service and social justice (Becker & Paul, 2015; Blouin & Perry, 2009; Sanmiguel et al., 2019). Service-learning has posed many risks, such as further entrenching racial stereotypes and bias (Becker & Paul, 2015). Because this case study examined the historical and current practices around service-learning on one campus it greatly benefited the ACA school site, organizational network, and community. For service-learning programs to be effective, Bridgeland et al. (2008) called for integration into curriculum, reflection, inclusion of student voice, progress monitoring, diversity, development of reciprocal partnerships with communities, and a significant duration that leads to meaningful service. Hearing from the different stakeholder experiences at ACA highlighted where the program has been successful in these areas and where changes need to be made. Using a decolonizing lens to look at the different program components surfaced any dialectical tensions existing in these spaces and brought to light whether the ACA program was moving toward disrupting and dismantling existing power dynamics or perpetuating them. Moffa (2016) suggested without

strong implementation and support, instead of questioning and confronting their notions of privilege, students' actions can end up perpetuating the existing power dynamics that exist. Ensuring both the teachers and the students have challenged any neoliberal lens they brought to the work was an important step in this process. Specifically, examining the role and positionality of an administrator through a decolonizing lens in this case study benefitted ACA and the organizational network. If it is the role of administrators to ensure teachers and students implement service-learning programs, it is the responsibility of administrators to understand the context in which they serve, question their knowledge base and assumptions, and continue to build their critical consciousness to model for others what it looks like to challenge the status quo of the social order and address inequities in the larger society (Johnson, 2006). Specifically, exploring the role of the administrator in this study provided a space for examining how policies have been created in ways that disenfranchise certain groups of students, creating oppressive practices. Although this study focused specifically on the service-learning program at ACA, carrying this lens to other programs at the school site and in the larger organizational network to continue to push administrators and directors to move toward a more decolonizing program overall. Additionally, this study was significant because in reading this case study, other administrators could reflect on their own practice and make the changes necessary to implement a decolonized program benefiting schools and community partners. Through service-learning one can confront issues of power, privilege, oppression, and inequality (York et al., 2019) and it is the role of administrators to keep this at the forefront of their mind.

     Service learning has not been offered on all high-school campuses across the nation. Even those campuses offering it (such as the focus site in this study) seldom have had the

structural or administrative support to ensure equitable access to these programs for all students. Most schools implementing service-learning programs have used after-school programming or weekend events to engage students in partnership with the community and real-world skill application. Not embedding these programs into the daily school curriculum has led to inequitable access to these spaces, often resulting in low-income students of color not being able to participate. Additionally, it has been assumed community organizations would participate when and how schools need them to, not considering their actual needs in the planning phase. Disparities in the research literature have highlighted an absence of students and community voices in sharing their experience with service learning, particularly in communities of color. As a social justice leader, it is necessary to not only grant access for all students to these programs but to hear from marginalized communities about their experience with the programs preexisting structures. Santiago-Ortiz (2018) challenged school leaders to decolonize service-learning programs, ensuring that existing power dynamics between students and community partners are not replicating economic and social inequalities. As a social justice leader, it is imperative these programs must go beyond one course or experience but be framed in a way that students see themselves as change agents in an interconnected world (Garcia & Longo, 2013). In this vein, this study will benefit administrators, specifically those identifying with a positionality similar to mine, by introducing a decolonizing lens as a tool that can be used to study their own service-learning programs and make recommendations for change.

Research Design and Methodology

This case study relied on in-depth interviews with key stakeholders on the service-learning experience at ACA, including alumni, teachers, administrators, and community partners.

Using in-depth, semistructured interviews created space for interview participants to contribute their stories and analysis in ways that spoke to the roles of power and privilege in the service-learning experiences while valuing different epistemological beliefs. Through the sharing of stories, this narrative design supported societies understanding on how individuals and people groups past experiences impact the present and potentially the future (Mills & Gay, 2019). This meaning making process aimed for readers to better understand the experiences shared by the different participants. One of the characteristics of this design central to my study was equity of voice. As an administrator on the ACA campus there was an existing power dynamic between me and the participants. In an effort to intentionally shift that, build a strong relationship with my participants, and create spaces that allowed for the participant to feel empowered to tell their story, I hoped to learn the ways ACA's service-learning impacted each participant, and gain ideas for future program refinement. To support this, I had our interviews take place in a naturalistic setting, creating a level of trust and reliability between researcher and participants (Mills & Gay, 2019). This collaborative approach placed the focus on the experiences of individuals, leveraged their knowledge and supported the construction of life stories, which was in line with my research questions.

Defining the Case

This case study focused on the service-learning programs at ACA, located in Southern California. ACA has been a part of a growing network of schools serving students in grades 6 through grade 12 in Southern California. There have been two middle schools and two high schools in the network. With an average of 87% of ACA students qualifying for free or reduced lunch, ACA has historically received Title 1 funds, which is federal funding assistance for

schools to meet the educational needs of students living near or at poverty level. At the time of the study, there were approximately 520 students in grades 9 through 12 on the ACA campus, with a teaching staff of 32, and roughly 20 classified or part-time staff. The racial demographic breakdown of the student body during the 2019–2020 school year was the following: 81% Latino, 10% African American, 5% Caucasian, and 4% Asian. For the past 5 years, ACA has had a graduation rate of 96% or higher, and a 4-year college/university acceptance rate of 95% or higher.

Participants

Because this case study aimed to provide a holistic understanding of the service-learning programs at ACA, a variety of participants were included, each with a different stake and perspective on the programs. It also included autoethnographic data from the researcher, who served as a former assistant principal on the site, and recently moved into the role of humanities specialist for the network. The following participants were included:

- Founder, former executive director, and current director,

- Former service-learning coordinator,

- Administrator,

- Four teachers,

- Three recent alumni (graduated from ACA between 2020-2021),

- Six older alumni (graduated from ACA between 2014-2019),

- Three community partners, each with varying degree of partnership with ACA, and

- Self (researcher and assistant principal).

Sampling

Including the founder, former service-learning coordinator, and administrator provided access to historical documents and an understanding of the foundation and purpose behind the initial programming decisions. Teacher participants revealed different experiences in implementing programs as an employee on the ACA campus and explored the current service-learning program at ACA. This study presented three different partnerships with community organizations, revealing the different types of partnerships that exist. Community organizations used in this study were determined by the type of service-learning partnership in place and the extent of the culminating project being worked toward. Alumni participants ranged in gender and race/ethnicity; however, students identifying as White/Caucasian were not considered for this study, as the focus was on the experiences of students of color. Purposeful sampling was used, and in addition convenient and snowball sampling were used to gain alumni participants. This ensured there was a diverse representation of student experience present. I chose to include alumni to gain retrospective insight on the impacts participating in these programs had on students at ACA and to remove the power differential between current students and myself as someone who works directly with their campuses.

Data Collection

Data were collected through individual, online, semistructured interviews. Interview questions were created and shared with participants ahead of time, providing time and space for feedback and cocreation of interview questions. This served as a way for me to check my bias, assumptions, and positionality at the onset and build rapport with participants prior to the interview. I formatted the interviews, both individual and alumni focus group, as dialogues. This

structure ensured that participant voice and opinion was highlighted, which was necessary for me to gain insights from them on how to shift and create new approaches to service-learning at ACA moving forward. I included autoethnographic notes from my experience as well. Additionally, before, during, and after the interviews, participants had the opportunity to share artifacts relevant to their service-learning program experience to reflect and share their learning.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

Limitations of this study included the interview process being used as the methodology. This self-reporting approach relied on the participant's willingness to be open in their responses. Asking participants to bring artifacts to exemplify their experiences and learning put the trust in the participants to be honest and authentic in what they chose to share. Additionally, the case study research design allowed for data to only be gathered from one site. In that, this study focused on students of color and did not consider students identifying as White/Caucasian. Finally, the timing of this case study was a limitation in that the 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic was taking place during study design and data collection. Because of this, students at ACA were not exposed to the same type of service-learning projects as they normally would have been; therefore, it impacted the way recent alumni reflected on the program. For example, the opportunity to participate in international and national service-learning trips that required transportation were cancelled. Another shift in programming was certain requirements being waived for students. Additionally, because of the timing, the interviews were conducted via Zoom (www.zoom.us). A potential limitation of this was staff not having a space quiet from distractions on campus during the interview. It also used purposeful and snowball sampling, and

for alumni who identified as students with exceptionalities accessing the zoom platform and handling all communication related to the study via email and zoom proved to be a challenge.

Delimitations of this study included the decision I made to focus on one school site, limiting the scope of the study to only include experiences from the ACA campus. In that, I also chose to include alumni so the perspectives shaping the study came from a retrospective view. I made this intentional choice in sampling so a holistic understanding of ACA's programs is provided. Additionally, including the autoethnographic data collection is an element that shaped the study by recognizing the role I have as a researcher and an active participant in the study itself.

An assumption I had going into the study was service-learning was a valid way for high schools to engage students in learning, partnerships with communities, and address social justice issues. I assumed there should be a place for service-learning on all high school campuses; however, I believed the way a school plans and implements service-learning needs to be decolonized. As a White female working in a network of schools serving primarily students of color, it was important to note my positionality in relation to the topic of this study. The experiences I have had as a student and educator with service-learning, at the global, national, and local level have highlighted the harmful impacts the traditional approach to service-learning can have on a community. I chose to focus on service-learning programs at ACA because of my belief that although the current programs being implemented contain strong examples to be considered for replication on other sites, there are also problematic practices that need to addressed.

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter 1 explored what service-learning is and how it has evolved to be included in high school curriculum and campus projects. I provided context for the current study by sharing an overview of the ACA campus and service-learning program. I also shed light on some of the current problems existing in service-learning programs and highlighted the need for a decolonizing lens to be included in the critical community service-learning framework. I finished the chapter by laying out the design and methodology for the study as it currently stands. Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature on community-based service-learning programs, focusing on who does and does not have access to these programs. From there, it examines the experiences of school communities in their service learning programs, with the aim of identifying trends and gaps in relation to the frameworks being used. Chapter 3 revisits the aim of the study and provides a detailed explanation of the methodology, including limitations, delimitations, and assumptions. Chapter 4 focuses on presenting the data collected in response to the research questions. Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the data as it relates to the literature, discusses findings and considerations for future research, and includes a space for reflection and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review begins by sharing an overview of service-learning. It will then highlight the community-based approach, focusing on its strengths and offering a critical lens for readers to consider moving forward. From there, it will focus on literature exploring outcomes one can expect from service-learning programs, emphasizing the experiences of historically marginalized students in comparison to their counterparts, those leading the program, and partner community organizations. Because project impacts are contingent on the experiences or lack thereof by participants, and participation is often determined by the access or barriers that prevent access, it is hard to disentangle these concepts in the literature. This review will explore each concept while making connections along the way, weaving the theoretical framework throughout to affirm where the literature lines up with a decolonizing, critical-community based lens and where it falls short.

The purpose of this review is to share with readers a specific approach to service-learning that focuses on the community partnership needed for such projects to take place. By critically examining the access students have to such programs, the barriers preventing program participation, and surfacing the experiences of students, staff, and community members, readers will recognize the need for a shift in the way service-learning programs are implemented. This review will also reveal the need for future studies to highlight the voices of marginalized students and communities involved in service-learning programs, specifically as it pertains to forming reciprocal partnerships.

The What and Why of Service-Learning

In discussing service-learning it is important to acknowledge the different terms practitioners use when describing this field. Because of the various terminology used it can be confusing to understand what approach school sites are implementing. This is important to note because the different approaches are rooted in different pedagogies and foundational planning processes, leading to different implications for stakeholders involved. Table 3 presents definitions for the various terms used to describe the work in the service-learning field.

For these reasons I explored the community-based approach with a critical service-learning lens in this study. The community-based approach has grown out of a focus on the student and community partnership, bringing service-learning as an institutionalized pedagogy back into the mainstream conversation. Even in the community-based approach there still exist several categories that service-learning projects may focus on at a school site, such as vocational, civic-minded, environmental. The service-learning program at Austin Charter Academy (ACA) included multiple categories and by exploring it from a critical lens I aimed to highlight which program pieces were in line with the community-based approach and which were not.

Table 3

Key Terms

Term	General summary	Citations
Service-learning	An approach to experiential education where students address a community need by engaging with community partners; Projects are often embedded in curriculum	Jacoby, 1996; Moffa, 2016
Traditional service-learning	The main focus is on promoting student learning through academics, practical experience, and civic engagement; Often involves community service as the vehicle for students to connect with communities	Clayton, 2016; Jacoby, 1996; Mitchell, 2008
Community service	Refers to activities performed by individuals of schools that provide a service to communities, often employing a charity-based approach of "doing good for others"; Implemented through a club or extracurricular activity	Santiago-Ortiz, 2018; Seitsinger & Felner, 2000
Community-based service-learning	A more critical form of service-learning where projects are guided by community needs, including collaborative design and shared decision making; Project design often seeks to challenge the imbalance of power and redistribute it	Blouin & Perry, 2009; Crump, 2002; Mitchell, 2008; Neururer & Rhoads, 1998
Critical service-learning	Acknowledges the systemic inequities and power dynamics at play and empowers people to expose and dismantle those inequities; seeks social justice over the more traditional views of citizenship seen in traditional approaches	Hayes, 2011; Mitchell, 2008; Santiago-Ortiz, 2018

Note: Adapted from "Whom Does Service Learning Really Serve? Community-based Organizations' Perspectives On Service Learning" by D. Blouin & E. Perry, 2009, in *Teaching Sociology*, *37*(2), 120–135, copyright 2009 by Sage Publications; *Framework for service-learning at TAMIU* by P. Clayton, 2016, Texas A&M International University, copyright 2016 by Texas A&M International University; "Learning By Doing: Implementing Community Service-Based Learning" by J. Crump, 2002, in *Journal of Geography*, *101*(4), 144–152, copyright 2002 by University of Minnesota; "Critical Service Learning and the Black Freedom Movement" by K. Hayes, 2011, in *Critical service-learning as revolutionary pedagogy: A project of student agency in action,* pp. 47-69; *Service-learning in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices* by B. Jacoby, 1996, in The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series; "Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning: Engaging the Literature to Differentiate Two Models" by T. Mitchell, 2008, in *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *14*(2), 50–65, copyright 2008 by University of Michigan; "Fostering Global Citizenship Dispositions: The Long-Term Impact of Participating in a High School Global Service Club" by E. Moffa, 2016, in *The Social Studies, 107*(4), 145-152, copyright 2016 by Taylor and Francis Online; "Community Service: Panacea, Paradox, or Potentiation" by J. Neururer & R. Rhoads, 1998 in *Journal of College Student Development*, *39*(4), 321–330, copyright 1998 by John Hopkins University; "From Critical to Decolonizing Service-Learning: Limits and Possibilities to Social Justice-Based Approaches to Community Service Learning" by J. Santiago-Ortiz, 2018, in *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *25*(1), 43–54, copyright 2018 by University of Michigan; *By Whom and How is Service-learning Implemented in Middle Level Schools: A Study of Opportunity-To-Learn Conditions and Practices* by A. Seitsinger & R. Felner, 2000, in American Education Research Association Annual Meeting, April 24-28 2000.

Program Elements

Service-learning focuses on a specific curriculum that impacts a community, and the

learning experience is an integral piece of the learning process for students (Moffa,

2016; Seitsinger & Felner, 2000). This highlights the importance of how the curriculum is being

implemented and the relationship that is built between those serving and those being served.

Dymond et al. (2008) spoke to the authentic connection that can take place between students and

communities when a service-learning project offers a hands-on, problem-based learning

approach centered on meeting community needs and strengthening the school-community

collaboration. Many institutions now follow a three-part framework for service learning,

focusing on academics, practical experience, and civic engagement (Clayton, 2016). In these

pillars, research has posited that service-learning can address community, national, and global

needs, while also cultivating critical thinking among students (Adarlo et al., 2019; Becker &

Paul, 2015; Fiske, 2002; Sanmiguel et al., 2019). Dymond et al. (2008) offered up four

components to be considered in all projects: learning (in the form of project preparation), service,

reflection, and celebration. In the literature, it is widely believed service-learning can assist

students in gaining a better understanding of the root causes of social problems, understanding

the structural and institutional origins of poverty and race, and can push students to change

preexisting beliefs about marginalized populations (Becker & Paul, 2015; Jacoby, 2003).

Over time, several models of service-learning have appeared, including discipline-based,

problem-based, capstone courses, internships, and community-based (York et al., 2019), each

with their own set of intended outcomes. It is important to note the range of approaches that can

exist even in these different models. Projects can be mandatory or voluntary, arranged and

recognized by the school, or organized by the students themselves, existing as a single project or an ongoing project that takes place over time (Bennett, 2009). Each of these elements impacts the outcomes of the service-learning project and the relationship that exists between school sites and community partners.

Community Service and Service-Learning Partnerships

Historically, service-learning courses have used their local community as a classroom, where the community or community partner acts as a vehicle for instructing students on different methods of service. As Blouin and Perry (2009) stated, there is "an implicit assumption that service-learning courses enhance student learning and provide service to the wider community" (p. 121). However, the process is transactional, task-oriented, and often exploitive, valuing the students' learning above the needs of the community partners' (Adarlo et al., 2019; Clayton et al., 2010; Derreth, 2019; Enos & Morton, 2003). Sulentic Dowell (2008) claimed this approach can "promote paternalistic, charitable, or even missionary orientations" among students (p. 14). This speaks to the growing concern around how service-learning programs often accentuate the power difference between the server and the served, rather than building a reciprocal partnership, further entrenching an us versus them mentality (Adarlo et al., 2019; Becker & Paul, 2015; Blouin & Perry, 2009). On the contrary, service projects intentionally structured with local partners to help address disparate community conditions will move from placing the power and control in the hands of the student, teacher, and school acting as the server, but will "include collaborative design, shared decision making, reciprocity, and non-academic expertise" (Blouin & Perry, 2009, p. 131) alongside the community being served. When planned and implemented effectively, service-learning projects provide space for teachers

to combine Bloom's taxonomy levels of learning with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, creating an environment for students to build bridges from their school to their community and from their adolescent selves to adulthood (Myers, 2016).

Community-Based Service-Learning

There has been a great deal of research on community-based service learning (CBSL), highlighting it as an approach centered on the relationship between the school and community partner. In contrast to the passive environment often seen in a traditional, lecture-oriented classroom, CBSL pushes educators to connect students with real world challenges, taking their learning outside of the classroom walls and into the community. Bennett et al. (2016) noted the traditional approach to service-learning may not be adequate to overcome many of the barriers that exist for students, and Hammersley (2012) surfaced the negative consequences a traditional approach can have on community organizations when a community-based lens is not established at the onset of service-learning projects. Where the traditional approach is heavily student-oriented, paternalistic, and built out of a school requirement or need, CBSL is not necessarily integrated into the curriculum, and it typically contains reflection, addresses authentic needs of a community, and includes an organizational piece that focuses on a community partner.

Reciprocity Between Schools and Community Partners

Therefore, adding the term community-based to this approach was not accidental. By adding community-based to the title, it shifted the focus from the traditional lens of what students and schools learn and gain from the project and centers the community aspect in the work. Working from this lens, the community does not remain a site of learning, but rather their interests and needs become integral to the curriculum and project design (Crump, 2002). Going

further, Crump (2002) acknowledged CBSL differs from traditional approaches to service-learning because of the intentional engagement with issues of social justice, oppression, poverty, and inequality. When looking at CBSL from a critical lens, one recognizes the importance of reciprocity between the school site and the community in this process. Crump touched on this when positing finding an appropriate community partner is an essential piece to a successful project. Ensuring there is alignment between the needs of the community partner and the course learning objectives requires long term planning. This process is critical to establish a reciprocal relationship between schools and community organizations.

Service-learning literature has often explained reciprocity in terms of the relationship between those providing the service and those receiving the service, paying close attention to the interests, needs, and outcomes of both groups. Hammersley (2012) added to this notion with her belief "such service-learning exchange avoids the traditionally paternalistic, one-way approach to service in which one person or group has resources which they share 'charitably' or 'voluntarily' with a person or group that lacks resources" (p. 176). In this vein Hammersley confronted the assumptions often coming with the word service, pointing out these are often relationships taking on a giver–receiver stance, defined by a level of superiority on the side of those doing the giving. This leads to the assumption communities lack specific skills or knowledge; whereas, those coming from the academic sector can support with resources or solutions to fill this deficit. Hammersley pointed out this problematic stance leads to service-learning projects perpetuating existing power dynamics, rather than transforming and empowering communities. Therefore, ensuring reciprocity throughout the service-learning

project is crucial, and the community-based approach pushes school sites to focus on this key ingredient throughout the planning, implementation, and reflection process.

Impacts of Community-Based Service-Learning

Studies have confirmed CBSL projects are linked to improved outcomes academically and socially for students in both the short term and long term. Although there is still little known on the metrics used to evaluate and document these impacts, what is known appears problematic in terms of who benefits from the programs. This section will begin by highlighting some of the most noted outcomes, discussing the impacts these outcomes have had on participants. This will include an exploration of the experiences of students, school staff, and community organizations have with programs. Organizing in this way will reveal commonalities and discrepancies of impact across participant groups. It will end with a critique of a few known evaluation metrics used by administrators to exemplify the need for more extensive decolonizing work in this area.

Benefits of Community-Based Service-Learning

The success participants find in using a community-based approach for service-learning can be attributed to the four Rs offered by Butin (2003) often woven into project design: respect, reciprocity, relevance, and reflection. Placing these four pillars at the center of project design provides both the school site and community partner space to ensure their voices are heard and needs are met. Additionally, each of these components is necessary if school sites hope to achieve the potential benefits CBSL can offer, and there are many benefits. Bennett et al. (2016) highlighted the following strengths coming from CBSL: (a) promoting personal growth, (b) civic responsibility, (c) positive self-worth in the short term, and (d) an increased interest and likelihood in voting and volunteering in one's community in the long term. Dymond et al. (2008)

added to this list, reporting CBSL can lead to an "increased appreciation for diversity, heightened self-esteem and motivation, access to relevant learning contexts, development of citizenship skills, understanding of how to work collaboratively with others, and establishment of connections to community" (p. 20). Crump (2002) spoke to the benefits of CBSL all parties involved: (a) students learn about real-world problems, (b) teachers/program coordinators gain insight on challenged faced in work outside of their profession, and (c) community organizations gain support in meeting community needs. Although the strengths are many, it is important to note the impact of service-learning varies greatly across participants.

The literature has been clear about the benefits of service learning including enhanced engagement in academics and civics, growth in social skills and self-esteem, and a better understanding of social justice. Tharp (2012) shared the vast array of impacts studies have found, be it academic achievement, personal growth, social skill enhancement, vocational development, or a better understanding of civic responsibilities. It has been said the positive impacts of CBSL are twofold, as students work with community partners to gain an interest in civics while increasing their compassion for others and being provided structured spaces to apply their academic skills (Myers, 2016). As Myers (2016) and others pointed out, the impacts are plentiful; however, much of the research is student-centered, in a process that very much involves community partners. Highlighting the most common outcomes students have reported by being involved in these programs will lead us to better examine their actual experiences in these programs.

Academics and Civic Engagement

One of the driving forces of many school programs is the tie to academic achievement. Service-learning is no exception and there are ample studies making the argument that these programs can positively impact not only academic achievement but civic engagement in the short and long term, as well as exploring career options (Furco & Billig, 2002; Myers, 2016). One 3-year study posited students fare better on standardized assessments when in classrooms focused on real-world application and co-constructed inquiry with community partners versus classrooms with lower inquiry-based approaches (Friesen, 2010). One of the reasons academic achievement may be positively impacted is based on another outcome researchers have noted when students participate in service-learning programs. Increased attendance and overall engagement in class has prevented students from dropping out of high school and instead has led to an increased motivation to achieve in courses (Bridgeland et al., 2008). More specifically, Bennett et al. (2016) explored two urban high schools implementing mandatory CBSL and found student participants in both schools shared an increased interest in not only academics but a positive shift in disposition toward future engagement with varying occupations, and a higher chance of being involved in civic engagement in their futures.

Social Skills

The positive impacts service-learning programs have for participants in the way they communicate, recognize others, and build community are well-documented (Tinkler & Tinkler, 2020). However, it is important to note many of the benefits related to social skills and communication have resulted from a community-based program, rather than the traditional community service or volunteer-based program. Gilster (2012) put a spotlight on the difference

between volunteerism and activism. She claimed volunteering traditionally happens through formal organizations and activism/civic-mindedness happens through some type of social or political change and is linked to a sense of empowerment. Building on this, her study compares neighborhood-focused activism and volunteerism, and she proposed although both have benefits, the empowerment piece only comes from activism leading to enhanced psychological well-being. She found student participants in activism resulted in improved mental health, an increased feeling of control over the neighborhood, and a higher feeling of social connectedness. These findings call to attention the way a shift from volunteerism, which focused on helping individuals, to activism, which focuses on social change, can be a way for student participants in service-learning programs to build their social connectedness to a community. In a related qualitative study, Afzal and Hussain (2020) explored the impact CBSL programs can have on the social skills of students. Their participant group consisted of 25 students from five different schools, situated in a middle socioeconomic locality. Findings from their work spotlighted the positive impact service-learning can have on social skills and learning experiences for students. More specifically, this study speaks to the power of communication and relationships between students and communities. Students were able to have more insight into the importance of community work and those with more prosocial behaviors at the school level were projected to continue this interest in community involvement into their future (Afzal & Hussain, 2020). Following this line of thought, studies have documented service-learning programs can increase social capital for both rural and urban students in how they are a vehicle for expanding and strengthening ones' social network (Koliba, 2003). Because of these benefits, researchers have recommended for schools to create more inclusive models for their campuses moving forward, a

recommendation connecting the question around access and barriers that exist for students in regard to participation in service-learning programs.

Social Justice

One of the most important, relevant, and noteworthy outcomes documented in the research on service-learning has centered around social justice. There are ample studies pointing to ways participants, specifically students, shift their awareness and understanding of issues such as race, poverty, and power after being present for a service-learning project. Bennett et al. (2016) referred to this growth as crossing transcendence levels, noting that through discussion and reflection students can move from surface level thinking and takeaways to deeper level thinking focused on social justice issues and how to enact future change. Holsapple (2012, as cited in Niehaus & Rivera, 2015) shared findings from a review of 55 studies on the way service-learning has been connected to diversity outcomes. Key findings were: (a) confronting stereotypes, (b) gaining knowledge about the population students worked with, (c) an increased belief in the value of diversity, (d) a heightened tolerance toward differences, (e) interest in future engagement with different cultures, and (f) recognizing commonalities with different cultures (Holsapple, 2012). Adding to this list, a recent quantitative study centering on the experiences of both native English speakers and international English language learners in a CBSL program, the pretest and posttest results showed growth for both groups in cultural awareness and intercultural competence (Collopy et al., 2020). When working with other cultures, as if often the case in service-learning programs, there can be an emotional impact for all parties. To be mindful of this reality, it is critical to build in opportunities for reflection at multiple stages throughout the project. The way these mini-reflections and debriefs are structured

can draw attention to social justice issues at hand, such as power, privilege, and cultural awareness (Akhurst, 2016). Another outcome reported to have come out of built-in reflection has been the challenge of and reduction of stereotypes participants may bring to a project (Espino & Lee, 2011; Mitchell, 2008). Niehaus and Rivera (2015) added to this when they reported service-learning could increase students' feelings toward equality in a positive manner. Without reflection serving as a key element to service-learning projects, many existing stereotypes or beliefs around social power and class can be perpetuated. When those facilitating a project are not aware of their own racial identity it can impact the participants and their ability to grow in a negative manner. This was noted in Dunlap's (1998) study, where 30 students were involved in a multicultural service-learning project. One of the strongest findings from this work was the need for facilitators to evaluate themselves and their own racial awareness and understanding prior to a project so they could be mindful of this impact ahead of time. Specifically, for White students, these projects can assist them in recognizing their own privilege and power in their community and the world at large (Dunlap et al., 2007). This was also noted when Ballard et al. (2015) studied programs at two private high schools and student participants expressed awareness of their privilege and how they felt responsible to give back to the community. Although awareness is an important first step, their feeling of responsibility and desire to give back to the community are problematic, as they continue to build on the notion the community has a deficit needing help and support of those in positions of power. This study, among others, reminds one of the need for a critical lens to be included in all service-learning projects, and it makes one wonder about the impacts service-learning has on students and communities of color, a group whose experiences are often missing from the literature.

Autonomy, Competence, and Self-Worth

Some of the strongest outcomes of service-learning programs for student participants are improving their self-concept and self-worth (McKay-Jackson, 2014; Morgan & Streb, 2003), building leadership skills (Billig, 2002), and enhancing autonomy and self-determination (Kackar-Cam & Schmidt, 2014). In a study focused on high school students participating in CBSL, Kackar-Cam and Schmidt (2014) reported a positive increase in students' feelings of autonomy, competence, relatedness, and willingness to continue community involvement in the future. Important to note is student participants consisted of White, females from a middle-upper class background, all of whom reported a religious motivation for their involvement in the project. Therefore, one cannot assume these outcomes would carry over to student groups of differing demographics. Similarly, McKay-Jackson's (2014) study on the Chicago freedom school recognized service-learning projects can assist youth in dealing with feelings of disconnect and isolation by promoting self-worth and self-efficacy. By featuring the voices of student participants, she shed light on the value these projects have for young people in relation to enhancing their self-identity and social-emotional learning. Her study reminds one of the importance in hearing from program participants to better understand program outcomes; however, it also surfaces the recurring need for the voices of community partners to be documented. From a critical lens, it should be noted the service-learning projects in this study were primarily out of school programs, begging the question of who has access to these opportunities.

Diverse Experiences With Community-Based Service-Learning

A shortcoming of much existing research on service learning has been the exclusion of voices of marginalized populations. Yeh (2010) called to attention the stark reality that most research around service-learning has focused on the experiences of White, middle-class students working with populations racially and economically different than themselves. Despite most of these studies taking place in the international or college level context, their findings are still applicable to this current study's focus on service-learning in high school because the impacts and trends will most likely trickle down and be mirrored as programs are created and continue to rise at the high school level. Additionally, Kackar-Cam and Schmidt (2014) reminded one of the importance in separating out the experiences of students, school sites, and community partners because research has shown that there are inconsistencies in perceptions and experiences of each group. To disentangle these experiences, this section will attempt to parse of the experiences of each participant group, and also highlight the experiences of historically marginalized student groups.

Experiences of Language Learners and Students With Exceptionalities

Schools are continually trying to support two departments through a variety of programming, funding, and structural systems on their campuses: special education and English language development. It comes as no surprise there are additional hurdles in place for these student groups when it comes to service-learning programs; however, there are also benefits schools should take into consideration in providing access for all students to these programs. A language barrier can often reduce the likelihood of participation in service-learning programs (Bennett, 2009). Although this is often the case, Schneider (2019) surfaced the rising interest in

bringing service-learning into teaching English to speakers of other languages programs and through his action research case study he was able to uncover the positive impacts this type of program can have for English as second language (ESL) students, emerging teachers, and community partners. His findings confirmed those of previous researchers as well–CBSL programs have offered numerous benefits for language learners and emerging ESL teachers, specifically around promoting student identity and forming new perceptions of immigrants and ESL learners. Alongside an increased interest in the ways service-learning can promote growth for language learners, there has also been an increase in schools considering how to use service-learning as a pedagogy for students with exceptionalities. Dymond et al. (2008) documented methods for including students with exceptionalities into service-learning projects while also surfacing the barriers existing for this group in the traditional approach to project planning. They found, by creating inclusive service-learning programs, students with exceptionalities gain career awareness, are more likely seen as contributing members of society, and are supported in their transition from high school to adulthood (Dymond et al., 2008).

Experiences of Students of Color

Although many of the studies documenting the outcomes of CBSL programs have focused on and assumed student participants were White and from the middle-upper class, recent literature has begun to explore the potential impacts these programs could have on students of color. Taking a critical approach highlights the contrasting experiences students of color may have in their involvement with CBSL programs and brings to light additional benefits for a group of students often overlooked. For example, a recent study by Mungo (2017) questioned if service-learning programs were a factor in closing the gap for collegiate students of color in

relation to retention, graduation rates, and grade point average. She found students who participated in a service-learning class ended up with a higher grade-point average and were more likely to graduate than students who did not take the class. More specifically, students who took the course graduated at a rate 2.4 times higher than those who did not take the class, and 47.7% were predicted to graduate rather than drop out of college compared to the 34.4% of students who were predicted to graduate without having taken the class (Mungo, 2017). With the overall graduation rate at the university being 34.3%, Mungo (2017) underscored how service-learning has the potential to increase graduation rates for students of color.

Researchers have noted students of color not only have different experiences in the classroom component of service-learning projects, but also in the actual service component (Gilbride-Brown, 2008; Niehaus & Rivera, 2015). In a study by Bennett (2009), he examined trends around minority youth in urban high schools related to their interest in service-learning programs focused on civic participation and engagement. Some key findings were minority and immigrant youth consistently showed lower engagement in projects, Latino youth consistently were the least engaged of all racial and ethnic groups mainly due to family responsibilities and additional commitments in the home, African American youth consistently were the most engaged of all racial and ethnic groups, and White and Asian students consistently were most likely to engage in the volunteering aspect of these projects (Bennett, 2009). It is important to keep these results in mind and question the reason behind these findings. What led to the lack of engagement for some and the increase for others? What are the implications for service-learning when White and Asian students are most involved in the volunteering portion of the project? These questions are important ones to explore as we explore the different experiences students

have with CBSL. Not only are the relationships students of color and their White counterparts have with community members different, their experiences in planning the projects can result in vastly different impacts as well.

As teachers/coordinators and students plan and prepare for service-learning projects, students of color can have stronger feelings of discomfort or even alienation. Previous studies have shared students of color may have hesitated to speak up in class to not appear overly sensitive, to not offend their White counterparts, and to avoid being seen as the spokesperson for their entire racial group (Guiffrida, 2003; Novick et al., 2011; Seider et al., 2013 as cited in Niehaus & Rivera, 2015). Additionally, Gilbride-Brown (2008) found the students of color in her study did not wish to relate the term service to their work, as the perception around the term was tied to a "White do-gooder activity" (p. 3). Following this notion further, it has been argued with service-learning comes a "pedagogy of Whiteness" and although program efforts may be well intentioned, they often "marginalize the experiences of students of color" (Mitchell et al., 2012, p. 617). These points must not only be considered but seriously addressed by school sites implementing service-learning programs, especially those serving a diverse student population.

In addition to the student experience in the classroom and planning portion of service-learning projects, there are also pitfalls to consider for students of color when working with community partners. Both students of color and their White counterparts bring their understanding of their own racial identity into service-learning projects. Although White students often approach community partnerships in terms of differences in privilege, students of color often approach partnerships to see commonalities or to point out differences to not be linked to those being served (Espino & Lee, 2011). These findings can have major implications on how a

partnership is set up and how a service-learning project can impact both student participants and a community. It has even been noted White students might carry more angst when working with community members who have a different cultural background from their own, leading to smaller benefits from them working with racially different communities (Niehaus & Rivera, 2015). Conversely, Niehaus and Rivera (2015) posited there was a greater benefit for students of color when working with racially similar communities, although it appeared as though the racial component of community members mattered less to students of color than their White counterparts overall. This benefit for students of color could be linked to service-learning projects being a way to gain self-worth and confidence, as working with racially similar community partners provides an opportunity for students of color to explore and build on their own racial identity, something that may be missing from the classroom component of their educational experience. These findings remind one of the importance in not assuming students participating in service-learning projects, specifically in communities of color, do not already have similar real-world experiences; because in doing so, it continues to center the experience of White students at the forefront of project design and planning.

Although this study focused on high school students, another historically marginalized group worth mentioning are low-income, first-generation college students. The findings seen in Yeh's (2010) exploratory study, one of the few studies focused on this participant group, highlighted the way service-learning could lead to the persistence of low-income, first-generation college students and could inform high school educators about some key points to consider in planning service-learning programs. Yeh's findings pointed to development of resilience, enhanced personal meaning, and continued development of critical consciousness for student

participants. Her study also reminded one of a simple, yet important fact: the experiences of low-income, first-generation college students are vastly different than their White, high-income counterparts. For this reason, it is important for schools to steer clear of traditional forms of service-learning and community service, for those structures in and of themselves can reinforce barriers for low-income students when it comes to engaging in this work (Bennett et al., 2016). In a previous study conducted by Bennett (2009), he posited a family's social economic status could also impact the experiences of student participants in service-learning projects. Due to a lack of access to news information and limited conversations with household members around civics coupled with lower levels of civic knowledge and education by the parents, his study found students coming from lower socioeconomic status families can be at a disadvantage when trying to get involved in service-learning projects (Bennett, 2009).

Experiences of Staff and Community Partners

There is minimal documentation on the experiences of teachers, coordinators, and administrators implementing service-learning programs. However, Smith (2008) posited because students show growth in the aforementioned areas, it would only follow suit adults involved in service-learning projects would show growth as well. She continues to share ideas for how programs can promote adult learning in cognitive development, moral development, and psychosocial maturity (Smith, 2008).

Compared to the documentation of student participants, there has been minimal research showing the impact on community partners involved in service-learning projects, especially when student groups work with communities of color (Gilbride-Brown, 2008. Butin (2005) pointed out in studies of service-learning projects that consider race, the focus was usually on

differences between students and community members. Numerous authors have noted the omission of community partners' voices in extant service-learning research (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Carlisle et al., 2017; Crabtree, 2013; Nickols et al., 2013).

The documented experience of community partners can be quite telling for those looking to implement projects in the future. It has been reported sending students from racially or socioeconomically privileged background into disenfranchised communities can perpetuate paternalistic and hegemonic mentalities, resulting in harmful impacts on the community (Schneider, 2019). On the other hand, Tinkler and Tinkler (2020) spoke to the positive experiences community partners can have through service-learning projects when they are included in the process. Specifically, they found when ongoing meetings and reflection for community partners and school sites were built into the project participants were able to make changes in structures, allowing the project to be responsive to arising needs and ultimately leading to better outcomes for all parties involved (Tinkler & Tinkler, 2020).

Research has shown a consistent lack of inclusion in the planning stages, formation of methodology, and creation of survey instruments (Hammersley, 2012), leading to community organizations not seen as coeducators or collaborators throughout the project. Because of this initial barrier, those implementing service-learning programs should be cautioned against assuming the experiences of student participants have been mirrored by community participants. When projects are organized to honor the community organizations' voices, the practitioner is allowed to then include their voices in program analysis, which would add this much needed perspective to the research.

Much of the existing research on community organizations' experiences has fallen under transactional rather than transformational. Using a reciprocal service-learning approach, Collopy et al. (2020) shared CBSL projects can either foster intercultural competence or reinforce privileged perspectives, maintain deficit thinking, and perpetuate existing power dynamics. Findings in their study encouraged school sites to shift from the traditional service-learning approach, centered on transactions between the school and community, where both were involved in an exchange of goods or services, to a transformative approach, centered on shared voice and decision making (Collopy et al., 2020). This transformative approach was in line with a critical community-based framework as it allowed space for both the school and the community to be seen as knowledge holders and learnings were shared across community members of different backgrounds and levels of privilege. A partnership built on this type of reciprocity required valuing community members' knowledge, invested time, and thoughtful planning for building relationships and reflection into the process, and understanding with this dialogue comes discomfort and space for learning (Collopy et al., 2020). Moving forward it is essential for school sites to see community partners as coeducators, colearners, and cocontributors to the service-learning project; and it is equally as essential for researchers to document the experiences of community partners, specifically those from historically disenfranchised communities.

Access to and Barriers Preventing Students From Experiencing Service-Learning

The impacts of service-learning programs and the experiences documented previously have only existed for those with access to such programs. When discussing access, one must also consider barriers, as the two go hand in hand. Because of the positive outcomes associated with

service-learning programs, there has been a rise in popularity for implementation. Although public schools are infusing programs into their campuses, the reality remains, "schools serving higher income populations are providing more rigorous and challenging learning opportunities than schools serving lower income populations" (Bennett et al., 2016, p. 587). As more schools seek to implement service-learning into their programs, it is necessary for them to do so to grant access to all students, and limit whatever barriers might exist. Many of these disparities tied to equity have come from existing systems in school sites, such as the lack of a coordinator who can assist in navigating barriers around transportation or community partner flexibility. The following section will highlight common point of access and potential barriers, organized into the following categories: structural, resources, and student capital.

Structural

Looking at some of the logistics that go into service-learning programming highlights the role that structural supports can have for students in being able to access those programs. Whether or not a program is mandatory for students, the planning (or lack of) that goes into the program, student club logistics, and competing schedules are all structural factors that can be barriers for students in accessing service-learning opportunities.

Mandatory Versus Voluntary Requirements

It is important to note the way a project is set up by the school, in terms of being mandatory versus voluntary, can either grant access or increase barriers for participants. Studies have reported mixed findings and there has been no conclusive evidence that one approach has provided more access for students than the other. Kackar-Cam and Schmidt (2014) spoke to this as their findings revealed similar levels of desire to continue with service-learning projects for

both students involved in projects voluntary and those involved due to a mandatory requirement. Other studies have found students involved in mandatory projects were only interested until the service-learning credit was received. Bennett et al. (2016) reported a portion of student participants noted due to the mandatory nature of the project, their interest in sustaining the project itself diminished once the service-learning credit was met. Bennett's (2009) previous work posited when community service was mandatory for students, "it can be seen as involuntary servitude, in which students do not derive any benefits" (p. 365). Contrasting this belief, Schneider (2019) advocated due to the benefits service-learning programs can have for English learners, schools should require mandatory participation. So, what is the suggestion for sites moving forward? Sites should focus on providing high quality experiences for students (Kackar-Cam & Schmidt, 2014). And this comes from critically examining the ways programs are or are not granting access to all students.

Competing Schedules

Participation from students can be limited based on the actual schedule set forth by the school and the time requirement associated with the project (Bennett, 2009; Crump, 2002). If a project has not been scheduled into the school day with release time, then the expectation has been for students to use personal time after school or on the weekend to complete the requirements. This can be a barrier for both students and community organizations. Students might have other commitments during these hours and organizations might not remain open outside of the school-day hours. Specifically, this scheduling can be a barrier for students with exceptionalities or any student needing additional academic support as they might attend tutoring or additional classes after the school day ends (Dymond et al., 2008). Crump's (2002) study

spoke to this difficulty, as students reported a barrier to completing the project due to time constraints. These constraints were anything from trying to find time to meet with the community organization to working under two different sets of deadlines: one from the school's requirements and one from the community organization's project calendar (Crump, 2002).

Student Clubs

Although many schools have tended to use student clubs as the hub for service-learning projects, Moffa's (2016) work uncovered one of the pitfalls schools have faced has been the lack of structural support when establishing these clubs. This leads to a lack in optimizing critical justice aims as schools can lose sight of the community partners' needs and goals. If service-learning projects are not rooted in the needs of the community, participants may end up not receiving proper preparation for the project and may result in a failed attempt to develop their critical consciousness. Moffa (2016) warned this could lead to furthering inequality and privilege. Without proper and effective structuring of the clubs, students in these programs can miss opportunities to learn about social injustices, and they may neglect reflection on how their project is impacting those they are working with. Going further into detail, Moffa (2016) suggested without strong implementation and support, instead of questioning and confronting their notions of privilege, students actions could end up perpetuating the existing power dynamics that exist. These findings supported the previous notion stating when done in isolation, service-learning projects can pose consequences for both sides of the partnership.

Planning

The key to ensuring scheduling of service-learning projects promotes access rather than serving as a barrier is planning. Planning can ensure needs of the school and the community

organization are considered. When Dymond et al. (2008) explored experiences in service-learning programs for students with exceptionalities, they presented methods for effective inclusion that would not only benefit students with exceptionalities but would benefit all students in gaining access to these programs. Their findings called attention to the importance of early collaboration between teachers and being clear about the activities and structures that would take place during the project. This detailed planning allowed for high expectations to be maintained for participants, and ensured the schedule and structure of the project was not a barrier for students and community organizations.

Resources

The resources a school provides (or does not provide) for students is one of the biggest levers in whether or not students have access to service-learning opportunities. While resources is a general and broad term, looking specifically at the role transportation and personnel play in regards to service-learning speaks to the importance both have in whether or not students can access different opportunities.

Transportation

Whether the school has structured service-learning into the school day has determined the need for students and families to provide transportation to and from sites where service-learning projects has taken place. If the project has taken place outside of the school day, it has placed a barrier on students and families to either provide a vehicle for transportation or provide the financial means for a student to take public transportation. In the latter scenario, it has been cited for families living in low-income communities there has been more limited and inadequate public transportation, posing an additional barrier to this demographic (Bennett et al., 2016).

Going further, Dymond et al. (2008) underscored the need for schools to consider transportation and financial resources needed for students with exceptionalities to be able to participate fully in service-learning projects. Not only would students need to access transportation after school or on the evening, but they would potential need wheelchair access or adult supervision when travelling, posing additional barriers for some students (Dymond et al., 2008).

Personnel

The access students have to adults throughout the service-learning project, coupled with the expertise of those adults, can either serve as a lever for promoting access for students or acting as a barrier. Findings in the research have been consistent as programs have needed a coordinator overseeing the project from start to finish to be successful (Bennett, 2009; Bennett et al., 2016; Dymond et al., 2008). These studies noted the importance of the coordinator focused on this role, rather than a teacher taking on additional duties with often competing responsibilities. Students reported having access to a coordinator for mentoring and support throughout the project was necessary because the coordinator was able to assist with overcoming any barriers that might exist (Bennett et al., 2016). This rang true especially for low-income students, as it was seen with less access to community adults and mentors throughout the projects compared to high-income students, students had a harder time finding success in service-learning (Bennett et al., 2016). Besides having access to a coordinator throughout the project, Dymond et al. (2008) pointed out the need for the adults involved in service-learning to have certain attributes and experiences to support students and the project. Specifically, their study shared the need for knowledge around special education, training on how to form relationships between

student groups, and an understanding of community perceptions of students with exceptionalities.

Student Capital

Considering the assets and skills students have and bring to the school setting is important in this discussion because it can also bring up the inequities present in certain communities. A consideration of cultural capital and confidence reveals how these two factors can impact a students' access to service-learning opportunities.

Cultural Capital

There has been a gap between students wanting to participate in service-learning and those with access to it, especially when looking at minority students (Bridgeland et al., 2008). Highlighting the ways service-learning can be used as a tool to prevent high school dropout, Bridgeland et al.'s study (2008) reported "81% of dropouts said schools should offer more real-world learning experiences such as internships and service-learning" (p. 6). The same study also reported schools offering these programs had a 60% participation rate overall; however, the participation rate dropped to 44% when zooming in on students classified as at-risk. One of the main reasons for this decline was attributed to students not having access or knowledge of the service-learning programs existing on their campuses (Bridgeland et al., 2008). This finding was mirrored in Mungo's (2017) work, when she shared those lacking cultural capital were often unaware of the programs and activities existing to supplement traditional instruction in a school setting.

Confidence

Adolescence is a tricky time and students often struggle with self-confidence during their high school years. Although gaining confidence has been a noted outcome of service-learning projects, it has been difficult for students lacking confidence to take the initiative to get involved. Dymond et al. (2008) pointed out for students with exceptionalities this has been especially true, as they have often been more shy or nervous about participating in these projects. Service-learning projects require community involvement, and it can be intimidating for youth to create relationships with adults and others in the organization or neighborhood where a project is taking place. Bennett (2009) surfaced the role of neighborhood vitality in service-learning, speaking to the collective efficacy needing to take place over the span of a project. For students to be fully involved in this process, they need to have confidence to take on a role in the community. If students have not had a lot of experience working with adults, this can be a difficult entry point for them into the project. Other factors can also impact a student's level of confidence in joining a project. For example, Bennett et al.'s (2016) research discussed religious dynamics. They reported female students working from a certain religious background did not feel confidence working with the opposite sex or showing up to a community organization where their own clothing style was vastly different than those with whom they were working. These cultural differences left them feeling unsure about joining the project.

Metrics Used for Documenting Service-Learning Impacts

It is the administrator's role to evaluate programming at school sites. Although researchers have shed light on a spectrum of impacts coming from service-learning there is still little known on the metrics used to evaluate and document these impacts, and what is known has

been problematic. Specifically, at the high school level there has been a lack of clarity on what measurement of a service-learning program should look like and the literature has been full of inconsistencies and controversies (Bennett, 2009). Measuring and evaluating community-based service-learning programs in and of itself can be a problematic practice, as each community and program are vastly unique and different, requiring one to have an in-depth understanding of all the logics at play. For example, Furco and Billig (2002) referred to the Furco Rubric for Institutionalizing Service-Learning in Higher Ed, a tool used by more than 200 colleges and universities. The tool was meant to help leaders gauge progress of service-learning programs on their campus; however, the tool did not consider how the differences in context and design could impact a project. Even more so, the tool was meant to support schools in institutionalizing service-learning and streamlining evaluation efforts. Part of the colonization seen in service-learning has come from approaches such as this, where the school site has entered with a tool created by their team to evaluate and measure the project with a community partner. Oftentimes, administrators and school leaders have placed the value on the wrong things in their tool creation and evaluation process, furthering their own agenda and perpetuating the power differential already existing.

Current literature has shown school leaders have placed value on measuring their programs quantitatively; for example, a specific percentage of students completed a program or received credit for a program. On the qualitative front, the literature has shown evaluation processes and measures of success built from what school leaders have deemed important. An example of this can be noted in the community-based learning impact scale (CBLIS) referenced by Carlisle et al. (2017). Piloted in the university setting, this longitudinal study examined

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undergraduates pre- and post-test responses in regard to charitable and social justice responsibilities when participating in a CBLIS course. Using the CBLIS, researchers used five core themes (i.e., civic engagement, academic learning, psychological well-being, professional development, and institutional relationships) to document the experiences of and impact on student participants. The results of this study showed students reported a positive increase in these themes, and students were unsure how to use their power and privilege to benefit society. Additionally, it is important to note results showed a belief service-learning projects had a mutual benefit for students and community organizations; however, only student participant perspectives were accounted for when using the CBLIS. This exemplifies although researchers decided what a successful program would entail, consideration of racial demographics, structural supports, and the other barriers often existing in service-learning programs were not addressed.

As noted in the previous study, it also appeared existing qualitative metrics have focused on the experiences of and impacts on the students, and rarely, if ever, have considered the experiences or impacts related to the teachers/coordinators running the program, or the community organizations with which they have partnered. Horgan and Scire (2007) attributed this to the complexity around access and outcomes existing for students when participating in these projects. Additionally, Kackar-Cam and Schmidt (2014) pointed out the difference in how participants have reported service elements, showing even with a specific service-learning project there be a lack of common language and understanding around the desired outcomes, and different stakeholders have often reported different experiences in the same project. Horgan and Scire (2007) offer up a tool kit containing an evaluation metric being used in New Hampshire, as a response to this dilemma. The tool includes various participants to measure how effective

partnerships are between school sites and community partners. It considers levels of "trust, stakeholder representation, reciprocity, goals and mission, objectives" (Horgan & Scire, 2007, p. 90). Although this may be a promising tool for certain contexts, the tool creation has remained problematic as it has been crafted by school personnel, rather than co-constructed with community partners. This could potentially lead to furthering the school site's agenda and desired outcomes, failing to consider metrics that would potentially disrupt and shift the current practices at school sites.

In the limited scope of qualitative research, focused primarily on student benefits and experiences, the sample size has often come from students from high socioeconomic backgrounds (Bennett, 2009). Researchers have continued to highlight the need to hear from historically marginalized students, such as English learners and community partners, so there is a more holistic understanding around the impacts of service-learning programs (Bennett, 2009; Bridgeland et al., 2008; Hammersley, 2012; Schneider, 2019). In hearing from these participants, specifically community partners, one can compare perspectives and experiences with student participants. This is important because evaluation or measuring of a service-learning program needs to have an equal balance of power between all stakeholders to truly reflect and shift practices to better serve disenfranchised stakeholders. This current study added to the existing dialogue taking place around school and community partnerships and confront the one-dimensional understanding of service-learning programs often reported in the data. Hammersley (2012) pushed researchers to bring attention to the partner perspective, providing space for participants to challenge the dominant power relations that might exist, and this study aims to do just that. This study added to the existing dialogue and highlighted the importance of

administrators ensuring all program participants have their voices included and heard throughout the service-learning project.

Looking beyond the United States, one metric Akhurst (2016) discussed, the activity theory model, exemplifies this gap. This study, focused on international service-learning partnerships, spoke to the benefits reported by students—a shift in perspective and an enhanced awareness of social issues—and acknowledges the impact for the community partners was not only short term, but also questionable at times. Although the study aimed to use the activity theory model to explore and compare findings across student, staff, and community partners, there was less research on the community partners' and staffs' perspectives than those of the students; and therefore, most of the findings focused on the student participant group. This affirms what has been seen in the research related to benefits of service-learning programs and barriers that exist for certain groups of students. The literature has shed light on the fact these areas have been all too often thought about in a one-directional way. Shifting to a decolonizing approach to service-learning requires educators to think differently, and ultimately, recognize they must approach evaluation and measuring the success of programs differently.

Decolonizing Service-Learning

Much of the research around service-learning has not been critical and, for the most part, it has centered the experience of students and school sites. Framing the research in this way does not provide space for reciprocity with the community. There has been a growing body of researchers who have brought this critical lens to the field. Reviewing their studies and work here highlights why a critical, decolonizing framework was necessary for this current study.

Ideological Influences

Service-learning programs have been informed and influenced by ideologies deeply embedded in colonialism and imperialism. This historical foundation has infiltrated and impacted projects, specifically in the collaboration, participation, and interactions with community partners; and although the intention behind many programs aims for collaboration between the researcher and researched, that has often not been the reality (Hammersley, 2012). Therefore, it is vital for current studies to make it a priority to analyze power relations of the school site and community partnerships to deconstruct some level of mutual reciprocity. Kahn (2011) pointed out minimal research in this field has recognized that because of the way imperialist attitudes have remained embedded in service-learning frameworks an intentional process of decolonization is needed in the field moving forward. Continuing to center the dominant narrative and voice in service-learning projects, which has been built around Western concepts most of the time, does not lead to authentic community engagement. Hernandez (2016) posited for a decolonizing service-learning praxis, one must have a strong understanding of the relationship between theory and practice. Specifically, she shared, "What is of absolute necessity is a commitment to working with communities, in a way that centralizes community solidarity and recognizes the complex dialectical nature of the colonizing/decolonizing enculturation process within the mainstream context of service learning and the need to transform it" (Hernandez, 2016, pp. 174–175). Shifting from traditional service-learning frameworks to one built from a critical, community-based framework will hopefully provide space for a reciprocal exchange process to take place. For this type of decolonization to take place, Hammersley (2012) pointed to practitioners as the lever for change. She called for those in the field to not only

recognize the way these ideologies were rooted in the way one conceptualized service-learning, but to "reimagine service-learning in a way that incorporates the historically unheard voices of community partners whose engagement with students allow the enterprise to function" (Hammersley, 2012, p. 180). A critical, community-based approach to service-learning would center the voices of community partners and be built from a place of community needs. Explicitly stated, in this type of approach, the "voices of the marginalized can be heard and the inequities of the system can be exposed" (Furman, 2004, p. 215). A handful of researchers have believed one way to accomplish this shift in practice is for service-learning practitioners to consider alternative paradigms, such as participatory action research, feminist community research, and postcolonial research as approaches supporting community partners in taking on more of the direction and planning in a way that will support their needs (Crabtree, 2013; Hammersley, 2012). These approaches can shift the approach to service-learning programs by providing principles and guidelines for collaboration, common language around values and critique, and a process for creating shared goals that can lead to reciprocity between school sites and community partners.

Service-Learning as an Act of Charity

Traditional service-learning programs have a reputation similar to helicopter research, where the practitioner or group of researchers swoops in and out of a community (Haelewaters et al., 2021). This approach often leads to the researcher getting what they need, and leaves the community partner at a loss; however, this approach can often result in minimal learning taking place for the practitioner or researcher. This has been especially true when service-learning projects have involved students. Past studies have revealed when projects were student-centered,

they often resulted in students reporting a sense of charity to those with whom they interacted, rather than a sense of learning about the larger social inequities and power dynamics at play. Bennett et al. (2016) argued for the need of transcendence, for students to experience a sense of dissonance and discomfort in their learning, and then through reflection and dialogue confront questions about power distribution and inequities exposed throughout the process. Additionally, it has been noted when projects have been approached in this way, students have not only had their ideas challenged, but they have been pushed to seek out explanations to better understand their thinking and resolve the dissonance they have experienced (Akhurst, 2016). For this type of process to occur, projects must use a critical, community-based framework including elements of a critical, bicultural pedagogy. Programs can shift to empower both students and community members when this type of reflective dialogue occurs throughout project monitoring and evaluation. Chambers (2005) posited when program agendas were set by school sites it could further diminish community empowerment, and in fact reinforced colonial systems of invasion, intervention, and dominance. Simply put, practitioners need to not only be aware of the perception and historical context the term service brings to a learning space, but also need to critique this framework to shift to a more decolonizing approach. Porter and Monard (2001) worded this shift in approach nicely, suggesting instead of looking at reciprocity as a hand-up or hand-out, to reframe it as a hand to. This stance removed the charity model approach and replaced it with one built out of mutual respect and collaboration with community partners.

The Role of Self-Reflection

Adding to Bennett et al.'s (2016) call for transcendence as a crucial element to service-learning projects, Crump (2002) argued for a more process-oriented approach, believing this

would create space for stereotypes carried by students to be surfaced and reevaluated after having spent time in community spaces. Although accurate, this work continued to center the experiences and learning of students, framing the project around student benefits and neglecting to center the experiences of community members or acknowledge the impact on community partners.

To confront this, those leading the service-learning project must be critically aware of their own positions and must take a stance to move beyond the needs of the campus and school environment and begin by listening to the needs of the community. Schneider (2019) stated, "We must enter their institutional spaces and listen to their perspectives. What are their needs? How do they want to structure the volunteer experiences? Are there ways that course content could be altered to address their concerns?" (p. 11). Approaching service-learning reflecting on questions such as these honors the lived reality of the community members with whom the students will interact. Practitioners need to have a sense of critical and cultural consciousness and recognize the impact of hegemonic power over the local community context at play. Myers (2016) directly stated it was the role of the teacher or coordinator to bring this critical consciousness to the learning environment, assessing the assumptions and biases existing prior to entering a partnership. This intentional stage of the planning process creates space for the project leader to learn of mindsets that could be destructive for the community and address any form of savior mentality or patriarchal attitude that exists among the students. Embedding these reflective spaces into one's approach to service-learning can positively impact participants' cultural competences and attitudes toward diversity and build toward a more reciprocal relationship between school sites and communities from the onset (Collopy et al., 2020).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I shared and reviewed the existing literature around service-learning, focusing on the community-based approach. A discussion around the impacts these programs can have for participants recognized these impacts have existed only for those who have had the opportunity to experience these programs and even then, the impacts for certain groups can be quite diverse. The next section discussed the diverse experiences of marginalized students, community members, and those leading the programs. From here, this review explored the role access plays in service-learning programs, touching on the different barriers that can exist for students in participating in such programs. A brief critique of the metrics used to evaluate and measure success in service-learning followed, reinforcing the need for a decolonizing lens to be considered. Finally, this chapter revisited the theoretical frameworks presented in Chapter 1, building on the need for a decolonizing and critical, community-based framework in the service-learning field. In the next chapter, I present my methodology and how I included autoethnographic data collection in a case study on the service-learning program at ACA.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

To best explore and examine the service-learning program from a decolonizing lens, I conducted a case study on the Austin Charter Academy (ACA) campus using documents and artifacts from the service-learning program; interviews with staff, alumni, and community partners; and autoethnographic data focused on my role as an administrator at the school. The purpose of this chapter was twofold. First, I described the method used in this study along with rationale. Second, I explained how I used a case study methodology, including autoethnographic data, to shape this study. Defined as "the approach in which researchers focus on unit of study known as a bounded system (e.g., individual teachers, a classroom, or a school)" (Mills & Gay, 2019, p. 403), case studies offer a narrative account with new insights about a topic or relationship. Case studies are tangible and concrete because they are rooted in context; and therefore, they present an opportunity for readers to compare knowledge, experiences, and understandings in the study to their own experiences (Mills & Gay, 2019). The choice to include elements of autoethnography, a method "us[ing] the researcher's personal experience as a method for connecting the personal to a larger cultural context or phenomenon" (Leavy, 2017, p. 144), provided space for reflective self-examination by the researcher and added beneficial context to the case study.

Research Questions

This case study responded to a problem of practice I identified on the ACA campus. A holistic examination of the service-learning program needed to be conducted so one could

understand fully the different program components and experiences of stakeholders at ACA and in the community. This included an examination of the logics at play, such as structural design, decision-making processes, and power dynamics. Because I am uniquely positioned as a former administrator at ACA and current humanities specialist for the network, including a critique of my personal account and relationship to the service-learning program provided a more accurate depiction of the service-learning program. A decolonizing lens was used to use the new knowledge gained from participants to shift current practices on the ACA campus to better meet the needs of marginalized and disenfranchised stakeholders at the school site and in the community. As I explained in Chapter 1, the decolonizing lens counters the traditional hierarchical process to move service-learning programs toward more reciprocity and solidarity with the communities served by educators. The research questions guiding this study responded to the specific problem of practice on the ACA campus and to an identified need in the literature on service-learning for studies using a decolonizing lens. This study focused on the following two research questions:

- How does one high school charter community describe their experiences in service-learning programs?
- Who is being centered and what logics are being reinforced in service-learning projects?

The first research question guided the descriptive elements of the case study, as I gathered and analyzed data to present a 360-degree view of the service-learning program at ACA. The second question uplifted the decolonizing lens, enabling a critical assessment of equity issues related to the program.

Why Use a Qualitative Approach?

Why a Case Study?

The case study approach satisfies a researcher's desire to examine program implementation and effectiveness and can be especially beneficial when looking at phenomena not easily or appropriately studied by other designs (Mills & Gay, 2019). For this current study, the service-learning program at ACA was complex as different components were entangled, there were a variety of stakeholders involved at different levels of implementation, and there were discrepancies among documented plans and current practice. Additionally, Mills and Gay (2019) shared a case study is an appropriate choice when one is studying process and the extent to which a particular program has been implemented. Because of these reasons, conducting a case study was the best way to answer my research questions.

There are a variety of approaches one can take in conducting a case study. To best answer my research questions, I used a descriptive and heuristic approach. Mills and Gay (2019) stated in a descriptive approach "the end result of the case study, the narrative, includes 'thick description' of the phenomenon that was the focus of the case study research, inclusion of many variables and analysis of their interactions" and a heuristic approach "refers to the fact that case studies illuminate the readers understanding of the phenomenon under study beyond the readers' original knowledge" (p. 406). Considering the two research questions I explored, it made sense this case study was both descriptive and heuristic in nature.

Why Include Autoethnographic Data?

First and foremost, an autoethnography promotes a reflective cycle essential in praxis (Camangian, 2010). An autoethnography is beneficial when the researcher not only has

experience with the topic being studied, but is willing to critically examine their experience. A case study requires looking at a problem from the outside; however, in this case, I was uniquely positioned to share my experience in as the researcher regard to the program being examined as well. As Adams et al. (2015) stated, autoethnographic data allows for a study to use "insider accounts" to address "outside forces" (p. 27). Because I was one of the administrators on the ACA campus, including autoethnographic data provided a more accurate and holistic view of the program. This contextualized the narrative of service-learning programs on ACA's campus and offered an effective platform for knowledge construction as the start of inquiry beginning with the researcher's own experiences in the topic being studied. Holman Jones et al. (2013) presented four characteristics of autoethnographies to build into study design and better evaluate your work as a researcher: "(1) purposefully commenting on and/or critiquing of culture and cultural practices, (2) making contributions to existing research, (3) embracing vulnerability with purpose, and (4) creating a reciprocal relationship with audiences in order to compel a response" (p. 22). Including these elements in the design of this study was beneficial for answering the research questions and adding to the field of service-learning, further supporting the addition of autoethnographic data in this case study.

Autoethnographies combine elements of autobiography and ethnography. In line with the theoretical framework used in this study, I employed elements of critical ethnography, beginning with "an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain" (Madison, 2005, p. 5). Bringing in my own lived experience as an administrator implementing the service-learning programs on ACA's campus, I explored the interplay between reflective self and self-positioned in society. My role and positionality have been entangled in

the historical context and social structure of the service-learning program and ACA community, so to provide the most accurate depiction of service-learning at ACA, this case study needed to include autoethnographic data.

Because a goal of the study was to shift practices, it was important the vehicle in which the study and findings were shared was friendly, approachable, illuminative, and inspiring to fellow researchers and readers. Chang (2008) claimed autoethnographies are well suited for this as they lean into storytelling to emotionally engage audiences and are all inclusive due to the deep level of familiarity the researcher brings to the experiences under investigation. Not only can autoethnographies engage readers and researchers, but they are often a vehicle to build alliances for social change (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). Spry (2001) noted because of their use of critical self-reflection an autoethnographer's account can often inspire others "to reflect on their own life experiences, their construction of self, and their interactions with others within sociohistorical contexts" (p. 711). This study offered an example of how one administrator used a critical, decolonizing lens on a community-based service-learning program; by sharing their own experience in the study, other administrators and practitioners can see a model for how to implement a shift in their own practices. To address problems in the service-learning program at ACA and implement change, school leaders like me need to recognize the changes needed and act on them. Through an intimate process of examining and reflecting on my relationship with service-learning, I provided readers with a better understanding of the role administrators, specifically White, female administrators, can have in relation to service-learning programs, benefitting not only the ACA community, but also responding to the need highlighted in the literature.

Method

To answer my research questions, I used a variety of procedures to provide context into the service-learning program at ACA. These were the four elements of the study: (a) document analysis, (b) individual interviews, (c) focus group interviews, and (d) autoethnographic artifacts. Historical documents provided background knowledge on the site and the program. Individual and focus group interviews, along with documents shared by participants, provided detailed accounts of how stakeholders experience the current program. This included dialogue with the ACA founder, administrators, teachers, alumni, community partners, and me. Including autoethnographic data throughout was intended to address my positionality as the researcher and administrator at ACA. In the following sections, details are provided about the participants, setting, data collection, and analysis plan for the study I conducted.

Participants

This case study included perspectives and experiences of several key stakeholders involved in ACA's service-learning program. One of the goals of the study was to gain insight into the existing programs. Therefore, I used purposeful sampling to select participants whose unique experiences helped illuminate various aspects of the program. As Patton (2015) posited, the better the participants are positioned, the richer the data will be. I selected key stakeholders to interview because of their specific role related to ACA's service-learning program. Certain participants provided the most accurate portrayal of the current program implementation and experiences had by different stakeholders. Including them allowed me to notice where the program aligned with documented program objectives and where gaps existed.

ACA Staff

Table 4 lists the ACA staff, past and present, interviewed in this study and includes an additional note about their role related to the service-learning program. The staff interviewed served at ACA for a variety of years, ranging from 6 years back to the founding team. In addition to selecting staff because their role at the time of the study and that relationship with the service-learning program, I also chose a few specific staff members because they held positions of power making them best situated to implement changes to future programming based on findings revealed in this study.

Table 4

ACA Staff Participants

Participant	Role at ACA	Role in service-learning program
Lee	Leadership	Participated in writing original charter petition; provides oversight of ACA; supports with reporting and cultivating community partnerships
Silas	Leadership / Teacher	Providing student opportunities and professional development for staff; cultivating community partnerships
Natalia	Leadership	Oversees graduation requirements; oversees community service tracker
Carmen	Teacher	Implements community service requirement with students
Shirley	Teacher	Maintains partnership with community organizations; implements community service requirement with students; implements civic action project with students
Q	Teacher	Maintains partnership with community organizations; implements community service requirement with students
Kayla	Teacher	Providing student opportunities and professional development for staff; supports with reporting and cultivating community partnerships; experience implementing community service requirement with students

ACA Alumni

The alumni focus groups were split into two groups to provide more equity of voice during the interview. Recent alumni were identified as those who graduated in the past 2 years and older alumni were identified as those who graduated in the past 3–7 years. Alumni were

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recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. Snowball sampling allowed space for

students to suggest additional participants they believed would provide important information for

the study. The decision to include ACA alumni instead of current students was because alumni

could provide the most retrospective view of the program, having completed all 4 years at ACA.

Additionally, although recent alumni were able to recall their program experience, older alumni

were also able to share how their experiences with service-learning at ACA did or did not impact

future educational and career choices. Specific alumni were recruited if they participated in a

variety of ACA service-learning programs and had continued their work in these fields after

leaving ACA, making their perspective and input to the study unique. The alumni participant

group included diverse experiences and included students with exceptionalities and students who

received academic honors and awards for service-learning (see Table 5).

Table 5

ACA Alumni Participants

Participant	Ethnicity	Notes
Cassie	Latina	Completed community service and civic action requirements
Rosa	Filipina	Received award for most service-learning hours; Completed community service and civic action requirements
Kristina	Latina	Received valedictorian honors; Completed community service and civic action requirements
Kevin	Latina	Qualified for a 504 plan; Completed community service and civic action requirements
Charlotte	Latina	Received award for environmental work; Completed community service and civic action requirements; Participated in service-learning internship
Randall	African American	Received valedictorian honors; Completed community service and civic action requirements
Jesus	Latino	Qualified for an IEP for autism; Completed community service and modified civic action requirements
Jocelyn	African American	Completed modified community service; civic action requirement waived
Alfredo	Latino	Qualified for an IEP for specific learning disability and specific learning impairment; Community service and civic action requirements waived

ACA partnered with a variety of community organizations. These organizations ranged in distance to ACA, with some being down the street and others being in the greater Southern California area. Because ACA had a strong environmental focus, they have partnered with a handful of organizations specific to that field. After reviewing an exhaustive list of ACA's community partners, I selected three based on the following criteria: (a) length of time the partnership has been in place, (b) mission alignment/misalignment, and (c) strength of relationship. Table 6 shares an overview of the partners and their work with ACA's service-learning program.

Table 6

ACA Community Partner Participants

Participant	Mission	Primary role with ACA
Partner A	Protection and promotion of outdoor spaces	Provides student opportunities for service-learning and community service
Partner B	Providing space for intergenerational learning in community with the environment	Acts as thought partner for leadership and teachers; Shares partnership opportunities
Partner C	Mentoring youth in innovation and entrepreneurship	Provides student opportunities for civic action; Shares partnership opportunities

Setting

This case study took place at ACA, a public-charter high school, located in Southern California. ACA is 1 of 4 schools in its charter network, and it is the flagship campus. In the network, there were two high schools and two middle schools. The campus served approximately 520 students, Grades 9–12. Students have been selected through a lottery process, and the majority have resided in the surrounding neighborhoods of the campus. ACA was a Title 1 school with 87% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The teaching staff consisted of

roughly 32 adults, and there were roughly 20 classified or part-time staff. Each grade level had one teacher per content area and teachers collaborated on grade level teams and in departments on a weekly basis. ACA also had instructional roles outside of the classroom, such as two instructional coaches, an environmental coach, and an equity coach. A counselor has been assigned to each grade level. Classified staff included office personnel, security guards, a horticulturist, and a variety of other part-time roles. The special education department has been made up of a coordinator, two specialized academic instruction teachers, and five paraeducators. Roughly 10% of the student population at ACA received special education services. The English learner development department consisted of a coordinator, who also acted as a teacher, and one paraeducator. Roughly 8% of student population were considered English learners, and about half the student population were previously enrolled in an English learner development program. The racial demographic breakdown of the student body during the 2019–2020 school year was the following: 81% Latino, 10% African American, 5% Caucasian, and 4% Asian. For the past 5 years, ACA has had a graduation rate of 96% or higher, and a 4-year college/university acceptance rate of 95% or higher.

Because ACA was an environmental school, the campus itself has been situated as a learning lab, with a stream and dry bed running through the middle of it. Chickens have often been seen roaming across the grounds and there was a greenhouse and cistern located outside one of the classrooms. The grounds were covered in gardens, known as free vending machines, growing fruits, vegetables, and herbs based on what was in season. Students could receive community service hours for assisting in watering the plants, composting materials, building, and restoring garden beds, and any other campus projects needing support.

Data Collection

Qualitative research aims to understand the world from the participant's point of view. Emerson et al. (2011) encouraged researchers to frame questions to determine how participants see and experience events. By centering the data collection process around the importance and significance the participants bring to the study, I was able to focus on how participants described, classified, analyzed, and evaluated their experiences on their own and in relation to others. Data were collected in the following procedures: (a) document analysis, (b) individual interviews, (c) focus group interviews, and (d) autoethnographic artifacts. Each of these procedures provided context into the service-learning program at ACA. The order in which I conducted each procedure was intentional. I began with document analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the historical background of the program and to better understand its evolution to the current program. Next, I conducted individual interviews with the ACA staff members and community partners. Then, I conducted focus groups to interview recent and older alumni participants. In both individual and focus group interviews, I revisited document analysis based on any artifacts shared by participants, and at times, I placed specific documents in front of staff and community partners to gain their perspectives on policies and program descriptions. Throughout the entire research process, I conducted autoethnographic data collection, setting aside intentional journal and reflection time at different points.

Vygotsky (1987) explained "every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness" (pp. 236–237). In this vein, interviewing was heavily used in this study as it provided a clearer understanding to the context of people's behavior, thus leading me to a richer understanding of the meaning behind their behavior. In-depth semistructured

interviews were conducted with individuals and the focus groups. Semistructured interviews rely on open-ended questions, providing space for participants "to use their own language, provide long and detailed responses if they choose, and go in any direction they want in response to the question" (Leavy, 2017, p. 139). Additionally, this type of interviewing allows conversations to flow naturally with flexibility in the questioning route based on the participant's lead (Polkinghorne, 2005). The goal of interviewing in this study was not to get answers to predetermined questions, but rather to find out the different perspectives and experiences of participants.

The decision to use the semistructured approach stemmed from my desire for these interviews to be dialogues between the participants and me. Researchers often arrive with an agenda with interviewing, leaving little room for the conversation to be shaped by those being interviewed. With a dialogue, researchers enter with general questions and follow up with probing questions to illicit further conversation. This approach provided space for participants to decide what was important and what to share in their lived experience, in alignment with the decolonizing lens I brought to the study. Additionally, framing the interviews as dialogues addressed my positionality, as there was a power differential with my relationship to staff on the site. I continued dialogue between researcher and participants into the analytics by taking the themes from our conversations back to participants for member checks. Based on their responses, I shifted my analysis of the data, ensuring participants' voices were accurately represented.

This nature of this interview technique, along with other characteristics of qualitative research called for emergent design, allowing the research space to adapt to new ideas and

findings that present themselves throughout the process. Siedman (2013) shared the goal in interviewing was to shift the relationship with participants to an I-thou approach, allowing one to gain more rapport and build trust with participants. Keeping this idea in mind throughout interviewing assisted me in ensuring there was authentic voice and comfortability among participants (Mills & Gay, 2019). Additionally, probing and enabling techniques such as sentence completion, word association, and storytelling were used to modify questions and make it easier for participants to express themselves when necessary (Leavy, 2017).

By weaving autoethnographic data collection throughout the research process, I continued to recognize the different power structures at play and the influence they had on the research. Booth et al. (2008) encouraged researchers to remember they were joining a conversation to assist community members in dismantling and freeing themselves from the ignorance and prejudice often imposed on people groups. At the same time, it is important to recognize interviewing can also be exploitive, serving the interest of the researcher's personal advancement (Siedman, 2013). Having a designated space for internal reflection of my role and experience in service-learning provided space for me to be able to separate my experience from the participants', and better center the participants in the process, exemplifying my belief the participants' experiences need to be heard to dismantle and change current practices.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with the ACA staff and community partners in the following order: ACA staff (i.e., founder and former executive director, former service-learning coordinator, administrator, and teachers) and community partners. Interview questions for the individual interviews conducted with staff and community partners are in Appendix A. These

were stand-alone interviews, lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes, and I did a follow up meeting with participants only if clarification was needed. All participants were asked a set of general questions with additional questions specific to each participant based on their relationship with the service-learning program. The individual interviews took place via the online Zoom platform, with participants deciding what time of day worked best for their schedule. Interviews were recorded on my computer.

Older and Recent Alumni Focus Groups

A focus group is like a group interview and provides a space for researchers to collect a shared understanding from multiple individuals as well as specific viewpoints from individuals (Mills & Gay, 2019). The older alumni group consisted of six graduates and the recent alumni focus group consisted of three graduates. I included a diverse representation of students in these conversations, including students who qualified for special education services and students who received valedictorian honors. Interview questions for the alumni focus groups conducted are in Appendix B. These conversations took place via video conference on the Zoom platform. Due to protocols because of the COVID-19 global pandemic, alumni were not permitted to meet on ACA's campus during the data collection timeline for this study. I recorded our dialogue on my computer. I chose to interview alumni as a group rather than individually so they were more comfortable sharing their experiences and together were able to build on one another's responses. In line with the decolonizing framework, including the voice of the youth as authority ensured their opinions and perspectives were guiding much of the process and providing insight for new structures needing to be created in ACA's service-learning program.

Document Analysis

Participants were asked to share any artifacts they believed would provide additional insight into their experience with ACA's service-learning program. These artifacts were shared before, during, and after interviews. Artifacts included historical documents such as charter petitions, parent/student handbooks, accountability tools such as Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation reports, grant requests, job descriptions for specific roles, and journal reflections, articles, and pictures from events, etc. Visual elicitation, a technique using visuals such as graphs to facilitate dialogue focused on the phenomenon under inquiry (Wang et al., 1998), was used at times and was contextualized through storytelling about the meaning behind each visual.

Autoethnographic Data Collection

Autoethnographies involve a rigorous writing practice, including journals, memo writing, interviewing, and content analysis (Leavy, 2017). In this study, I included a chronological narrative, sharing excerpts of my life experience with service-learning from three distinct time periods: (a) before I became an educator, (b) during the years I was a teacher, and (c) during the years I was an administrator. As Adams et al. (2015) suggested beginning this study by finding myself in the story and reflecting on my experience with the topic, I was able to better build collaborative conversations with others into my methodology alongside my writing practice. I used artifacts from these three time periods to base my reflections. Additionally, I leaned into prompts from the 28-day journal exercise in Saad's (2020) *Me and White Supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor*. I dialogued about these journal reflections, among others, with a cohort of other White educators at ongoing Alliance of White

Anti-Racists Everywhere meetings in Los Angeles and with colleagues in my daily practice. An example of the different journal prompts utilized can be found in Appendix C. Collecting autoethnographic data throughout the research process, spiraling back to my experiences and reflections, helped to uncover any disconnect between my experiences and the decolonizing framework. Custer (2014) posited, "autoethnography can radically alter an individual's perception of the past, inform their present, and reshape their future if they are aware and open to the transformative effects" (p. 2). My intention to reflect and write about past and current occurrences and experiences was a way to provide space to connect my positionality and understanding of antiracism to the service-learning program on ACA's campus. These reflections were woven throughout the study to address my positionality in relation to the program under examination. In addition, reflections from the autoethnographic data framed this study in the prologue and epilogue.

Analysis Plan

The nature of this study required me to immerse myself in the data so meaning and relationships between data sources could emerge. Grounded theory analysis has referred to an approach where the researcher "collects and analyzes data, develops new insights, and then uses those insights to inform the next round of data collection and analysis" (Leavy, 2017, p. 148). The analysis in this study was ongoing and iterative. I intentionally did not wait until all the data were collected so I could build moments to pause in the data collection process consciously, providing space to reflect on what I was attending to and what I was leaving out. Triangulation is a common strategy for addressing a question with multiple sources of data (Leavy, 2017), and making sense of multiple data sources is a process requiring patience and flexibility (Mills &

Gay, 2019). I integrated the different types of data I identified to provide the most holistic

description and critique of the case under study. To conduct this type of inductive analysis, I

followed the process Mills and Gay (2019) set forth: "(1) becoming familiar with the data and

identifying potential themes, (2) examining the data in depth to provide detailed descriptions of

the setting, participants, and activity, (3) categorizing and coding pieces of data and grouping

them into themes" (p. 569). Identification of emergent patterns and themes in this process

assisted me in constructing meaning among the data sets.

First, I followed this process with the autoethnographic data I compiled at the onset of the

research process. This helped me in looking at the entire case study from a decolonizing lens.

Any emergent themes that arose were then carried into the document and interview analysis.

Second, I conducted a document analysis, immersing myself in the historical and current artifacts

of the service-learning program at ACA. This initial immersion in content was intended to give

me a sense of the big picture, before I moved into specific pieces of the program (Saldaña, 2016).

I was able to bolster my description of the school and the context needed to better understand the

case at hand. After this document analysis, I revisited the autoethnographic data to connect

trends and identify existing gaps. Third, I synthesized interviews with each participant or focus

group individually, and then located trends across all groups. I read over notes from the

interviews, including additional context gained from reviewing any shared artifacts. With the

interview transcripts, I read through their entirety and I looked for emergent themes when

rereading. I coded by summarizing, using in vivo coding where applicable. Choosing in vivo

coding allowed me to lean into the categories and terms used by the participants themselves, in

both the interviews and shared documents. All this coding was completed through Dedoose

(Dedoose software tool version 9.0.46 [2021], www.dedoose.com), in conjunction with Word documents. On an additional read, I turned the summary phrases into categories, so I could connect the interview categories to those from the document analysis, surfacing any new themes from both data sources. In vivo coding, along with sensitizing concepts, was used to lift up and center the categories those being interviewed brought to the data (Patton, 2015). One of my aims is for this approach was to give priority to deriving the analytic categories directly from the data, rather than from any preconceived hypothesis I might have brought to the study (Emerson et al., 2011). As I analyzed the documents and interview data, I continued to gather autoethnographic data, connecting my own reflections and practice to the case being studied. Next, I moved each theme onto a separate word document and began to pull quote excerpts that highlighted the trends from each theme. Afterward, I read through the data again with the decolonizing lens at the forefront of my mind, searching for connections between themes. Finally, I looked back at the existing literature presented in Chapter 2 and used the deductive approach to align the emergent themes to those previously noted, if applicable.

Validity/Trustworthiness

To maintain trustworthiness and reliability, I completed member checks throughout the process. When applicable, in vivo coding was used, framing the trends and analysis out of the participants' words. Upon completion of the interviews, I shared analysis with the participants, checking to see if I accurately captured their experiences and gathered any additional context needed. Specifically, I conducted readability and coherence checks so any gaps or ambiguities that needed further attention were identified and addressed. Additionally, I asked a key stakeholder to review the case for an accuracy check.

Limitations

  Data in this study were self-reported, relying on the participants' willingness to share their experiences. In both the interviews and document analysis, participants' chose what they wished to share in regard to their experiences with ACA's service-learning program. This study also relied on participants' memories about their experiences with the program. Additionally, my positionality was a limitation, as I was the researcher and a former administrator and current employee at the site under study. I aimed to balance this by approaching the interviews in an informal semistructured manner, which provided space for open dialogue with participants. The timing of the study itself was a limitation. The data collection took place over 1 year into the 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic. Students and staff had not been on the ACA site, and most service-learning programs had not been running. Because of this, observations were not included as a source of data collection. ACA had also made changes to the program, such as removing community service as a graduation requirement and limiting the criteria needed to complete the civic action project. Students and staff have struggled from this traumatic time; and therefore, the feelings and reflections presented might be different than those prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Delimitations

  A delimitation was the choice to focus on just one school, and to focus on the service-learning program of the school. Centering the study on a case around a specific program will hopefully guide ACA to conduct a redesign of the program, but this study itself did not actually complete the redesign. Another delimitation was the participants I chose to include. Selecting recent and older alumni as the student participants provided a retrospective view of the program.

Additionally, it removed any discomfort they might have had in speaking openly with an administrator as they were no longer students of ACA. Recognizing my role as researcher and study participant by including autoethnographic data further addressed my positionality and served as a delimitation in the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Background

The case study performed at Austin Charter Academy (ACA) aimed to meet two objectives. First, it described and explored the service-learning experiences at ACA by providing the lived experiences of ACA older and recent alumni, ACA staff, and community partners. Second, through autoethnographic data collection, the study examined the role of a White, female administrator in these programs. By including a variety of stakeholders and highlighting their voices, it provided a holistic and authentic understanding of their experiences in service-learning. Trends in access and barriers to these programs, and the disparate outcomes occurring were spotlighted in the analysis. Using a decolonizing framework, I examined my positionality in the programs and was able to question the different power dynamics and logics at play. This firsthand experience offered a different approach to examining service-learning programs than what has been represented in the literature. Additionally, by centering the voices of participants, this study aimed to confirm the need for the student and community voice to be present in this work, to not perpetuate existing inequalities. On a larger scale, this study aimed to impact current practices and assist administrators in making decisions about service-learning programs, or lack thereof, at their school sites.

Organization of Chapter

This chapter responds to the two research questions. In each section of the chapter, data were presented thematically. First, I responded to the research question: How does one high school charter community describe their experiences in service-learning programs? Beginning

with an exploration of the service-learning program at ACA, I have described the lived experiences of ACA staff, older and recent alumni, and community partners. I have discussed the different ways in which various members of the community interpreted the definition and purpose of the service-learning program at ACA. From there, I have presented the barriers to access experienced at ACA and how these barriers have led to disparate outcomes for marginalized student populations. And yet, there are still benefits of these programs and so after sharing these, I have provided a discussion on the supported needed to harness these benefits so all students and community partners can find success in these programs. Next, I have presented the data related to the second research question: Who is being centered and what logics are being reinforced in service-learning projects? This section focused on how the needs of the school and students have been centered over those of the community, highlighting the ways ACA's program has upheld traditional, Eurocentric approaches to service-learning. The culture of ACA has been one of learning, innovation, and always trying to move student learning and teacher practice forward. This continual moving forward has not allowed for the space to stop and deeply reflect on systems and structures in place. There has been a mentality of structures needing to be upheld; and therefore, there has not been space to break down the structures needing to make programs more equitable. This culture has permeated the service-learning program and has been exemplified by the way requirements have been presented and implemented on campus and in how partnerships have been cultivated and included in the work. Because of this culture, the service-learning programs have ended up being performative, rather than authentic learning experiences.

Diverse Interpretations Are Problematic

Different stakeholders had different definitions and different understandings of the concepts this study presented. Although this study aimed to examine the service-learning program at ACA, participants referred to many other concepts when discussing the service-learning program. These concepts were: environmental learning, project-based learning, community service, civic action, stewards of community, and youth participatory action research. For some, these concepts were interchangeable; for some they were combined, and for others each of these concepts were very distinct and different.

All the different definitions and interpretations were significant to how the program has operated and the ways it has and has not been successful. These interpretations have carried value as they have been embedded in the culture of the school. In most cases, participants struggled to define the terms service-learning and community service, and instead proceeded to provide examples of what they believed to be the different concepts. The following are some of the words and phrases named by ACA staff as components of service-learning: "giving back to community," "teaching them," "environmental learning," "structured community service," "integration into content," "facilitated by an expert," "measurable," "disconnected from curriculum," and "reflection."

Diverse interpretations for a program required of all students showed a structural problem at ACA. Different interpretations lead to different messaging and implementation practices, resulting in different outcomes for students. This was troublesome because it linked an unjust structure to activities students were required to complete. Additionally, it was problematic because these different interpretations ranged from a traditional approach to service-learning to a

more critical approach. As seen in some of the components named by participants, there was an application of Eurocentric concepts seen in some of the interpretations throughout the planning and implementation of these programs.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, families and students first heard of the service-learning requirements through the ACA handbook, with language deeply rooted in colonizing notions. A specific issue arising from unclear messaging and language across ACA's campus has been a lack of clarity among students and families in programming. Older alum reflected on their 4 years at ACA and now see how what they did in ninth grade for community service and the different experiences they participated in over the years could actually build toward what they did in grade 12 for their civic action. However, it was repeatedly stated this was not clear to students while attending ACA and the different programs felt very disconnected. ACA staff agreed, as Q commented:

> Another barrier is how we frame it and how we share it with them, and who's doing the sharing and who's telling them they have to do it. What's the message they're receiving about community and how are we defining it and laying out the projects for them? We are barriers to their service.

In addition to programs feeling disconnected, Q's comments reminded me of the importance and impact of messaging for students. Chapter 1 shared the way disciplinary action has been tied to community service in the handbook. Linking community service with disciplinary action is troublesome because it creates confusion for students about the purpose, value, and underlying beliefs of service are. Leadership (Natalia) reflected:

> I feel like in the way that our students have learned to understand community service, especially when it's tied to like restorative practices in the judicial world and the criminal justice world where instead of going to prison or instead of paying this fine the judge will say I need you to do 300 hours of community service, and then the way that it's portrayed on TV, like they go to the side of the highway and they pick up trash. I think our students

think that's a way that we've seen community service and community and then, when we look into like the ways that our students have historically completed a community service it's very similar to that.

Connecting these two ideas exemplified how the entanglement of the terms service-learning and community service and the way community service was explained in the handbook and tied to disciplinary actions could lead to students having certain interpretations of the concepts. Structuring the program in this manner not only reinforced problematic notions of service, it also impacted students' attitudes toward the programs.

Lack of Vision

Another impact stemming from diverse interpretations of terms was a lack of clarity for students about the purpose and value of the programs they were required to complete. An alum who won an award for service-learning shared, "No one ever really specified what their definition of community service was." Not having a clear vision among ACA staff has led to confusion among the student body. Moreover, there was confusion about whether community service hours from grade 9 through grade 11 were meant to be used to build up toward a civic action project in grade 12. This was exemplified in Kevin's reflection; he said:

> When I was doing community service, I was thinking "Oh, what can I do to service my community?" and then I get to my service-learning project and I was like "Okay, what can I do to support myself?" It was more up to me to figure out and then they told us "Oh, this is going to be part of your community service hours so make sure you get your supervisor's signature." Then I realized, I could have probably done this since freshman year instead of doing all the other things.

Both older and recent alumni agreed, sharing students were allowed to do a variety of different things for community service over the years to fulfill the requirement; however, when they needed to complete hours as a senior for their civic action project they realized the hours needed to be connected to a specific topic they had been studying. As described in Chapter 1, the civic

action project centered service around policy, law, advocacy, and organizing community outreach. This was a different approach than students were used to in prior community service work at ACA. These different approaches to community service confused and complicated the purpose and value of service for not just for students, but for staff as well. Leadership (Silas) commented:

> There was a challenge of does every service-learning project have to be environmental and, obviously, in the senior civic action, the answer is no, but then, how are we supporting it? It was a weird dichotomy, but we were primarily going to environmental spaces, which are predominately older White spaces.

This reflection spoke to the tension between the civic action program and other service-learning programs taking place. When ACA staff were asked about the different terms on the teacher development tool, it became clear there was confusion around what it looked like to implement the different concepts of service-learning and civic action. One staff member felt service-learning and project-based learning were the same thing, and civic action was very different; and another staff member felt civic action was an example of service-learning, but not the same as project-based learning. It was also clear ACA staff were not sure whether they were being asked to implement environmentally based service-learning and civic action projects even though it was in the name of the category these sections fell under. It is important to note one of the ACA staff members was able to share how the teacher development tool was created, and specifically how service-learning and civic action ended up combined in a section. Carmen reflected:

> There was a hot conversation about what this was going to be called because at the high school it was civic action and in the middle schools it was service learning. And the two never met. They couldn't come up with a definition that encompassed both and service learning didn't want to become civic action, civic action didn't want to become service learning so they put them both on there and they were just like "Fine, we'll call it everything."

Her reflection hinted at the performative undertone of these programs, for rather than clarifying language, purpose, and vision at the time, the easier route was taken by simply keeping both terms on the document without an explanation about how they were similar and perhaps in tension with one another.

<p style="text-align:center">Access to Programs Is Not Equitable</p>

Favoritism

As I described in Chapter 1, the way opportunities have been advertised and the process for student selection has been inequitable and problematic at times. Students from both the older and recent alumni groups perceived barriers to access were based on favoritism by ACA staff. For example, Cassie clearly stated, "If you knew the right teacher, then you definitely got the opportunity and things like that." She continued on to share she was often left thinking "Oh, I didn't even know that was a thing" when her peers would share about different events and activities in which they had participated. In the group, her peers nodded in agreement, shared similar sentiments. In the recent alumni group, Jocelyn added to this feeling when she stated, "Certain opportunities are not really accessible to the whole school if the teachers are picking the students they know or like or want to have go." One of the alumni who received valedictorian honors recalled, "With certain programs there just wasn't a lot of access. You kind of have to know someone and you needed to have a good relationship with the teacher leading the trip." Students commented often the students in the college match program or who the school wanted to highlight in certain ways were offered these opportunities; however, students who fell into those buckets also shared they too felt in the dark when it came to many opportunities. However, they did agree they had to seek out many of the opportunities they ended up having. Students

also believed depending on who their advisor was, there was a different level access to programs, and they would hear about the programs with a different level of frequency. Charlotte shared the following experience:

> With my advisor I would rarely hear about these things. I remember so many times I would want to join certain service-learning opportunities they would have and I wasn't able to because there weren't enough spots anymore because I didn't sign up in time since I didn't hear about it soon enough.

Although students in the older alumni focus group nodded in agreement with this experience, one student shared the issue of access has spanned wider than community service and service-learning opportunities at ACA. An alum who received valedictorian honors, shared:

> In terms of resources, more generally, that was definitely a conversation at ACA, like what students had access to various programs. I don't think it was always rooted in community service but I think our (the students) conversations were about overall access.

Connected to his statement, although students perceived favoritism as a main barrier to access for these programs, data showed more systemic reasons for the disproportionate outcomes seen across student experiences at ACA, specifically for students with exceptionalities, English language learners, students with 504 plans, and Black/African American students.

Timing and Location

Students and staff highlighted the restrictions both timing and location had on students' ability to participate in different opportunities. For example, one staff member (Carmen) believed this presented a barrier specifically for those trying to make up academic credits and those required to attend tutoring after school. She continued, "There is an assumption that the kids are just going to be able to go and do this on the weekend, and this has always disproportionately affected our students in marginalized groups." The alum who had a 504 plan spoke of the difficulty this presented for her, saying:

There were certain medical things I had to do by a certain time when I got home so I couldn't be outside after 4:30pm. I did most of my hours at hospitals and I did it at every hospital visit I had for myself. It wasn't like I could do it on my own because I didn't drive at that time and taking the bus was very scary. It affected my civic action, community service, and joining any other events or activities.

Her experience touched on the barriers she faced personally in regard to having to complete hours outside of the school day, but she also mentioned the impacts of barriers like transportation and a lack of support could have on students. Additionally, older alumni spoke about the barrier transportation could present specifically in communities of color. They shared stories of their mothers trying to figure out how to drive them and their siblings to the different events and how it was difficult to find a ride when their one car was used by their dad for work during the day and their mom for work at night. Charlotte spoke about the experience she and most of her classmates felt as first generation, students of color. She mentioned not having certain resources, such as parents' friends to be introduced to in the field, "you just don't have access to anybody like that" and so students were trying to figure out what to do based on what was available to them in their own community, often different types of connections than the ones ACA required students to have to be successful in terms of civic action and community service. Cassie's experience was one leadership have wondered about. Natalia pondered:

Can my mom and my dad and my family take me to this location so that I can I can participate? Do I have the time to do that because, am I expected to come home after school and take care of my siblings and prepare dinner because my mom doesn't get home until seven and my dad is working the night shift?

These questions spoke to the additional barriers students might have faced. Students who were able to speak about successful community service, civic action projects, and service-learning experiences were those when transportation was supported by the school. Older alumni shared examples of ACA staff driving them to events as one of the most valuable supports they

received, and those who received this support spoke of a variety of successful experiences. Older and recent alum who were not participants in the after-school programs offering transportation shared, unless their parents were able to drive them, they often received their hours by helping a teacher in their classroom, cleaning up campus at lunch, or even by purchasing items such as Kleenex and whiteboard markers for a teacher. Although the barrier of transportation was removed for these students, their experiences with service-learning, community service, and civic action were vastly different from their peers and their exposure to opportunities to work with partners off campus was extremely limited.

The Need for Soft Skills

Even for students who jumped the hurdles of timing and location, another barrier many students have faced were what ACA staff referred to as "soft skills." When asked why some students were able to meet these graduation requirements, participants repeatedly shared the sentiment offered by Rosa, "I took matters into my own hands." The level of self-advocacy and initiative these requirements asked of ACA students was high and without proper supports in place it was one of the barriers preventing certain students from accessing these opportunities. As one ACA teacher (Kayla) shared:

> I think there's an assumption that all kids can advocate for themselves equally in terms of seeking out opportunities, and so I see why different subgroups get left out and it could even be kids that aren't in even in that group but just don't have the social skills to pursue something like that. It requires a level of social and emotional confidence that we assume young people have to go out and ask someone if they can help.

A specific example of this was shown when Jesus, an alum who qualified for an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for autism, shared, "The problem I had was being more assertive at the time, because I was so anti-social." Multiple staff also commented on the "social confidence"

students needed to be successful in finding a partner to work with for these requirements, acknowledging the lack of supports in place for students to actively build up that confidence. Additionally, students commented on the difficulties they had finding partners willing to work with them. Cassie touched on the impact not having these supports in place had on her, saying:

> Without resources or being connected I struggled. It's not my fault that an organization does not want me to be in their space. And we were going to get penalized for not doing it, but we couldn't do it. For example, for me going into classrooms of students with special needs to assist I needed to have clearance and all my vaccines and all this other preparation. And I had to do it all within the deadline I was given.

Her experience highlights the unrealistic and unfair expectations placed on students with the limited supports they are receiving.

The Way Concepts Are Presented to Families

Another barrier students faced that is important to note was the overall sharing of the different concepts tied to the requirements: service-learning, community service, and civic action. Older and recent alum shared "community service was a completely new term" for them and their families. A recent alum shared she and many of her peers did not come from a community where they could go out and do things because of safety concerns, so being required to do so felt uncomfortable for her. Another alum from the older group shared because the term was new to her family, her parents were not sure how to support her; and therefore, getting transportation was tricky.

Because there were diverse interpretations of the concepts presented to students, students and families received different messages. As Alfredo, an alum who qualified for an IEP for a specific learning disability and specific learning impairment, shared, "Students do what the teachers say because we want to graduate" and so, even though there was confusion around the

concepts, students did their best to meet the requirements being asked of them. A teacher (Carmen) shared these concepts were "Always just presented as this requirement. This is what you got to do. Okay. It's done. Let's move on to the next requirement." These two sentiments exemplified a lack of thoughtfulness on ACA's part around this requirement. It presented a performative aspect to the requirements, where staff were simply moving them forward with reflecting on whether they were meaningful experiences for students. This hinted at a larger cultural structure at ACA, where slowing down was not an option, perpetuating a lack of reflection and impeding the campus from doing the actual work needed to dismantle the inequitable structures in place for programs such as service-learning, community service, and civic action. Additionally, there was confusion among ACA staff as to why this was a requirement. One teacher (Q) stated:

> Maybe for some job exposure or like just to broaden where they go and what they do so it's just like, I actually don't know at all. I don't really beyond like we're supposed to be contributing in our communities and like using our gifts, but I don't know, like the school's point of it.

This lack of clarity among staff trickled down to families and students, and impacted the experiences and outcomes coming out of the programs.

Disproportionate Outcomes Are Taking Place

A Variety of Student Experiences

Hearing from ACA staff and alum affirmed the variety of student experiences presented in Chapter 1, resulting in inequitable outcomes for students. This wide spectrum of experiences was problematic as not all students had the same, or even remotely similar, experience when it came to the service-learning requirement. A handful of ACA staff mentioned the inequity in ways students were meeting their hours and the different value they might have placed on the

requirement. Rosa, an alum who received a service-learning award and scholarship for completing the most service hours while at ACA, shared despite being recognized for her work, she was still not a fan of this requirement. She stated:

> Some people use the opportunity to go out and do things, but some are just buying supplies for school or doing random things. I think it's pointless then because it loses it's meaning. What is community service? Now people think it's just buying tissue boxes. That's not really what it is. It's not as meaningful.

Rosa's reflection speaks to the wide range in experiences students have participated in to complete the community service requirement, highlighting how this could result in varying degrees of understanding of true service. During participant interviews I shared an analysis of the graduation data presented in Chapter 1. This analysis highlighted the disparate outcomes seen with students with exceptionalities, English learners, students receiving 504 support, and students identifying as Black or African American in relation to the service-learning graduation requirements. ACA leadership and teachers responded to this data without surprise, one staff member even shared she has seen this happen year after year. Another teacher connected these outcomes to the barrier of program timing for students. Q shared:

> All the people at the top, are the students that have to work way harder just to find success in school. So, having an extra requirement on top of them already having to work way harder, I'm not surprised at all that there's less space for it. I don't think that they can't do service learning at all; I think that they definitely can do service learning. There's just less time and space for them to be able to do it.

Older and recent alumni agreed with this notion, reiterating the extra requirements were often a struggle, specifically for their peers who were already struggling academically. Going further, an alum (Cassie) reflected:

> I just remember hearing teachers saying it's normal for somebody with an IEP or a 504 plan to not graduate within the 4 years, like it was almost already defined for them, and like there was kind of just no hope at that point, and they made it seem like it was okay.

An ACA teacher (Kayla) responded similarly, stating:

> For our students with 504's it was often like, "Oh you can volunteer with a program here after school." I don't know what other more mainstream avenues we have for kids who maybe don't even have parents support to get them their things like that.

Although ACA staff recognized there were some students who would go above and beyond the requirements, for the most part the requirements were not equitable for all students and additional supports needed to be put in place. In particular, an ACA teacher (Shirley) noted "for our Black and African-American students if they don't see a purpose as to why they should be doing it they're not going to be motivated to do it." This response exemplified how important clarity of purpose was as a support for students so experiences were meaningful for all students. Without this support, the experiences become performative and lack authenticity.

Just Another Checklist

ACA staff recognized although intention behind the programs was positive, the impact might not have been what they originally hoped for. Leadership (Natalia) shared:

> I think it obviously started with a good intention, like we want our students to serve, and be part of their community, and we want them to gain the soft skills that this requirement can bring about. And it's actually done really good for certain students or students have racked up hundreds and hundreds of hours and they committed themselves and dedicated themselves to an organization or a project and they've learned a lot and they feel really proud about that and it's also helped them with their college applications, so it's about certain students. But I don't think it has that same effect on most students.

Despite the good intentions that might have been present at the creation of these programs, the way they have evolved over time has not been intentional or in an equitable manner for all students. Student and staff experiences highlighted how both they have created their own version to meet these requirements, exemplifying a lack of vision campus wide. This performative and

inauthentic approach has led to disproportionate outcomes for some of the most vulnerable

students. Leadership (Natalia) continued to comment on this, stating:

> It's harder for certain students to meet this community service requirement, so we know that it affects students in a disproportionate manner, and then on top of that, as an institution if we're not focusing resources to really support this community service requirement then we're not setting up our students for success.

A variety of participants referenced these requirements as something students and staff were just

trying to check off and move on. Alfredo, an alum who qualified for an IEP for specific learning

disability and specific learning impairment, shared he felt his peers and he operated in the

following manner, saying:

> Like people just had to do it because it is a graduate graduation requirement to walk the stage. So, we did, we just listen to the teachers, and do the thing we have to do to graduate because who doesn't want to graduate?

ACA staff added to this by sharing for most students, the requirement was just another box to

check, and many staff, administration included, would sign off on anything so students could

meet the requirement, even if it did not follow the criteria presented in the handbook. When

asked how it has felt implementing these requirements, ACA teachers repeatedly shared it has

not felt good, has been inauthentic and unsustainable, and has been unempowering for students.

For example, a teacher (Kayla) said:

> If I if I had one word [to describe the programs] it would be scramble. It is like that, and is acquiring rather than empowering. The mandatory piece made kids scramble to do it but not necessarily come out of it empowered or I don't know because we didn't document it.

As students scrambled to just get it done to check off the requirement, it has become

performative, which has not been meaningful for those involved. Further, a lack of reflection can

perpetuate traditional Eurocentric notions of community service.

Benefits Do Not Apply to All Students

Despite disproportionate outcomes, research has shown and participants agreed benefits have come from service-learning, community service, and civic action programs. When discussing benefits of these programs with staff and alumni, the need for ACA to find a way to harness the benefits and leverage them for all students and community partners was discussed repeatedly.

Outside the Classroom Walls

Some of the specific benefits older and recent alum mentioned were: time management, exposure to the outside world, being more open-minded, and making their curriculum more relevant. This last piece was expanded on when an alum who qualified for a 504 plan (Kevin) shared, "you learn new things that you don't in a classroom, it's more hands on, and you can literally take it with you through life." Community partners also shared they saw the experiences as ways to get students out of their comfort zones, to try something new, and to give them opportunities to extend their learning outside of the classroom. ACA staff mentioned a variety of benefits, but the one that seemed to resonate most heavily was getting students outside of the classroom, exposed to real-world issues, and to make curriculum more relevant. For example, Leadership (Natalia) shared:

> We're able to break down these four walls and get them out collaborating with other humans outside of their school community. And by doing that they're learning or they're enhancing, they're improving like their soft skills like communication skills. It gets them to work with their community and by doing that I think it helps them understand the community a little bit better, like where they live and hopefully humanize the people that live in that community and humanize themselves because they're part of a community as well. So they're learning about themselves, and when we do that our students feel committed to their communities a lot more, and I think as part of our mission we're hoping to create lifelong learners and part of that is, yes you're going to college, yes you're getting a degree, and also yes you're going to come back to the spaces where

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you're needed not perpetuate the problems that have been going on, but be part of the solution in the spaces where you're needed. It's opportunity to like grow and to practice our soft skills that we want our students to have when they leave our spaces.

This approach and process spoke to the importance of humanizing both students and communities in programs pertaining to service.

Soft Skill Development

One of the barriers mentioned earlier was also seen as a benefit of these programs. Although social skills and confidence were needed for students to participate in these programs, ACA staff also saw the development and growth of these soft skills as a benefit for students upon participating in these experiences. For example, leadership (Lee) shared:

> When I've talked to kids that I've had over the years and the most important thing they've learned that they've told me they learned is how to work with someone else I think that has to happen in service learning. You have to learn those, what I used to call soft skills, which are workplace skills, and that happens in the process of participating in in service-learning projects.

Older alum recalled having to make phone calls, send emails, and perform tasks out of their comfort zone for these projects, but they recognized these skills helped them in college by understanding how to use their voice and advocate for themselves. Overall, ACA staff were hopeful these experiences were empowering for students as they learned their voice mattered. ACA staff were also able to share a handful of alum who have continued in the field of interest due to their community service, service-learning, or civic action project at ACA.

College Acceptance

College acceptance is an important benefit to note because it was rooted in the historical decision to include these requirements in the charter. ACA staff members recalled a desire for a

community service component as a requirement for students because it would benefit students when applying to college. One teacher (Carmen) clearly stated:

> There was always a desire to have a community service component because of its rounding for the student in terms of applying to college. It wasn't until much later on, that it became less about unique community service, because it looks good on your application for college and more about like you need to give back to the community. In the early years there was a lot of that give back to the community built into the curriculum and in the classes.

Other ACA staff (Natalia) recognized students were using these experiences on their transcripts to "beef up their college application." These comments reinforced the notion that ACA's program was set up to serve students, with minimal consideration for the community partners.

What About the Benefits for Community Partners?

When asked about the benefits of participating in service-learning, community service, and civic action programs, both older and recent alum spoke to the ways students and ACA benefited from the experiences; however, there was minimal mention, if any, of how the community benefited. This was in line with what was previously described in Chapter 1, as there was minimal mention of the benefits for community partners in documents describing the approach and implementation of service-learning on ACA's campus. One alum (Alfredo) went so far as to share the following: "It [performing community service] feels good, like you're doing something. But, do I think it helps the community? I honestly don't." Many of the responses were similar, with alum reporting they liked "giving back" to the community, reinforcing the "White do-gooder mentality."

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Supports Need to Be in Place

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To leverage the benefits previously described by stakeholders, ACA needs to consider including more support. Stakeholders most frequently brought up inequity in access to these

different programs, and this was connected to a lack of or need for more support. Although this lack of support was seen as the main barrier to access, this perspective is problematic because it continues to not address the root of the systemic issues in these programs on the ACA campus. The supports offered up were worth considering; however, many were band-aid, quick-fix solutions, void of deep reflection necessary for getting to the root of these programs and enacting change from there.

ACA staff agreed the support students have received has been minimal, normally offered in the form of reminders to complete hours, and every now and again offering ideas for where to complete hours. Leadership (Natalia) shared, "the way that we've done community service in the past, and with the lack of focus and my capacity to attend to that program we just left it to students to just collect these hours." Both older and recent alum shared the level of support received depended on their advisory teacher. Across the board, alums voiced a desire to have community service, civic action, and service-learning talked about more often, earlier on in their ACA experience, and with more clarity and intentionality. When asked what supports they received, many could not recall more than being given reminders to complete the requirements.

Teacher Support

A need for clarity about the role of ACA staff was mentioned several times. ACA teachers shared a variety of ways for how they supported students in completing their community service hours through advisory, finishing their civic action projects, and learning about service-learning opportunities. One teacher (Shirley) clearly stated:

> What's the teacher's role in supporting or who is supporting students on this
> requirement? What does that look like? Historically there's an advisory teacher that
> supports the students in this and at least you know tracking the hours and making sure
> that students are meeting it but I can't remember a time where there was ever a pd or

anything else that said hey do you talk to your students about where they're doing community service and why they're doing it there and talk about opportunities as a whole group like where you could do community service together or things like that. There's never been a focus placed on it.

When asked how it felt to be a teacher implementing these requirements, the consensus was not good. Additionally, a few staff shared the process was confusing for them because they felt they needed to define community service based on the list of bullet points they were provided; however, their understanding of what community was and how service could look was quite different. Both of these reflections touched on the need for clarity of concepts, but also lead into another support seeming to be missing, teacher development. Staff commented without a "solid service-learning curriculum" or "person to support service-learning projects" teachers struggled to implement the practice.

One of the main vehicles for supporting teachers is through the development tool. ACA staff saw the teacher development tools described in Chapter 1 as a way for administration to evaluate teachers; however, all ACA teachers interviewed voiced a concern with this practice, specifically when it came to the service-learning element on the rubric. One teacher (Q) voiced a concern around the amount of time administration spent in room, questioning if one could really see service-learning in 5- to 10-minute classroom visits. Another teacher (Carmen) voiced she always scored herself lowest in this section on the self-reflection portion of the evaluation process, and another teacher (Shirley) continued to refer to the evaluation system as something that motivated her to implement civic action into her classroom, out of a need to "hit that part of the rubric." These responses beg the question: Is the tool supporting the development of teachers?

Integration With Curriculum

One support mentioned by many stakeholders was looking for opportunities to integrate service-learning into the curriculum. Examples of successful service-learning partnerships included a strong element of integration into curriculum. Additionally, when shown a list of components that could lead to effective service-learning programs, ACA teachers and leadership and community partners continually identified integration into curriculum as the lever to move this work forward. For example, one teacher (Shirley) expanded on this saying:

> If it's integrated into the curriculum then all of a sudden it matters and they see the impact . . . if students are doing work within the community as part of their intercession projects and they see their presentation day as "this is my opportunity to teach the community something because this is something my community needs to know or it's valuable for my community."

Some ideas that came from alumni and ACA staff and community partners were to integrate these programs into the college prep curriculum or the history curriculum. For example, Partner A shared:

> I think it'd be great to do some more something more, I'm trying to get my work together to integrate the work that we do in DC in that week to bring it full circle for them and integrate it more into their lesson, into their government history lesson, or you know, try to figure out a way to broaden it to make it more real to more students, not just for the kids who attend the DC trip.

Although integration into curriculum was mentioned most by participants, leadership (Lee) recognized this type of work could require a large amount of effort on the core content area teacher, and so she recommended having a specific person devoted to this work. Finally, both older and recent alumni continually mentioned having these concepts woven throughout their 4 years at ACA would be supportive, so the skills needed to be successful in these types of

programs could be built over time. Specific skills included communication with partners, public

speaking skills, time management, and confidence in predominately adult settings.

Cultivating Partnerships

Finding and cultivating relationships with community partners was another support both

ACA staff and alum saw as a barrier to access. Leadership (Silas) shared:

> The way it was designed we're kind of expecting students to recreate those partnerships every senior year, like go find a partner, and the teachers can't even find a partner. It's a lot to ask, and so I guess there was always this idea of having like preselected partners that students can kind of plug into but then you're building like a full internship program.

Expanding on this, and perhaps one of the supports spoken about the most by ACA staff, was the

need for a designated person to support students and teachers in this work.

The partners interviewed both shared this was the first time they were asked for feedback

formally. One partner mentioned there was "loose feedback" shared each year but to reflect and

shift the program, it would require more formal debriefs together. The other partner mentioned

not only was this the first time they were asked for feedback, but they felt unseen, unsupported,

and at times resentful due to the lack of interaction with ACA administration. The lack of

reciprocity seen in ACA's partnerships ACA with these organizations aligned with mainstream

approaches to service-learning, where the dominate narrative has been centered on students' and

schools' perspectives, often void of the community perspective, needs, and input. Having a

person devoted to cultivating partnerships would support ACA in moving toward a more

reciprocal relationship with community partners and would support teachers and students in their

programming.

Support Role

Regardless of the role's title, ACA staff agreed this role would be essential if ACA is going to require service-learning to take place. For example, one teacher (Q) shared, "This is like a whole other job. It's a huge thing that isn't in the realm of a general education teacher" and when asked why they would say that their response was that "it seems like way more than anyone would have the capacity to do if they're trying to run a class because this requires a specific style of education." This sentiment hinted at the issue of teacher burnout and also touched on the support a teacher would need to implement service-learning in their classroom. Leadership (Lee) even spoke to the levels of support needed – not just by teachers, but by administrators, and even board support and funding. Other leaders such as Natalia agreed, sharing:

> I think we need to have an internship coordinator or service-learning program coordinator on our campus- somebody that's going to support with that because I know that it doesn't have to be a requirement for students to be interested in. Students would want to use their free period to collaborate with an organization and provide a service. But there isn't a person on campus who is strictly responsible and in charge of supporting our students with these endeavors or supporting a teacher with a service-learning project in their classroom so we don't have the infrastructure to support our own teachers with it.

Overall, Lee said it best: "Community service should not be a requirement for graduation unless there is someone that is supporting them." Although the addition and hiring for this role would be a strong support, it has continued to be a quick-fix solution and has not pushed ACA to stop and think about a more authentic and equitable approach to service-learning. This support comes from a mindset of continuing to uphold existing structures, impeding their ability to break down and dismantle the structures needing to be shifted.

Additional Supports

Additional areas of support ACA staff and alumni mentioned were: (a) a need for revamping the civic action project to provide more clarity and structure on the assignment, (b) examples and models of what proficient civic action projects looks like, (c) common language around what 'steward of community' means to ACA staff, (d) clarity on what community service means for the campus and how students are being supported in this work, and (e) public speaking practice to support students in talking with partners.

Decolonizing Critical Community Service-Learning

According to a traditional community service-learning framework (Neururer & Rhoads, 1998), programs serve as a way for students to be connected to their communities, leading to a greater feeling of social responsibility and valuing of the community on the students end. Santiago-Ortiz (2018) and many others have pushed for critical community service-learning and even more so the addition of an anticolonial stance being added to this framework. The main tenets of a decolonizing critical community service-learning framework are to acknowledge settler colonialism in academic spaces, counter dominant narratives, change the way partnerships are envisioned (with a goal of reciprocity), and acknowledge the imbalance of power and redistribute it.

This chapter has presented the experiences of participants in response to the first research question, a response to mainstream, or traditional, service-learning programs. From here, this chapter aims to respond specifically to the second research question: Who is being centered and what logics are being reinforced in these projects? Because this project was built with the decolonizing critical community service-learning framework in mind, it is important to present

data supporting this perspective and providing a critical eye to the service-learning program involved in the case study. Specifically, it will present data showing a lack of reciprocity with community partners leading to an imbalance of power, colonial and Eurocentric notions being upheld reinforcing a pedagogy of Whiteness, and a perpetuating of dominant narratives through performative approaches.

Deficit Mindset

At times, responses from ACA staff were worded in a way that was deficit-minded toward the community. The feeling of the students and the school projects were an opportunity to "give back" to the community, teaching them about topics or skills they would benefit from was at the forefront of many responses. For example, one teacher (Shirley) shared, "This is my opportunity to teach the community something." This belief was also found in the language about project descriptions and in the handbook. For example, the civic action project had the following objective: "Students will create awareness." This exemplified the belief students were bringing awareness to the community, and it assumed the community needed the skills and knowledge the students would bring. This led to the lingering question: If ACA staff carry a deficit mindset of the community, do they also carry a deficit mindset of their students into their practice?

Lack of Reciprocity

ACA's student-centered approach has made it difficult for there to be any sort of reciprocity with community partners. As leadership (Natalia) shared:

> It's been something that has felt disconnected to the community like it's a one-time thing, like I'm going to go in there, I'm going to get my hours and then I'm going to come out with no real commitment and dedication to that organization or understanding the problem that were they were trying to support.

ACA staff mentioned a person facilitating partnerships, ensuring the community partner was included in the planning, and providing space for reflection and feedback, could perhaps reach some sort of reciprocity. The only mentions of possible benefits received by partners from ACA having a community service requirement was the free labor some organizations might have received. However, one staff member felt even though organizations received free labor, they were taking on a big responsibility by having teenagers come in and support their work. Again, ACA assumed organizations wanted and needed the support of high school students. ACA teachers also shared experiences they have had with service-learning projects where "everything has felt pretty one way, with a lot of organizations being very giving to us" (Kayla). One specific example was shared where an organization came to classes to share with students and support the curriculum by making it more relevant for students, but because there was no follow up with the organization afterward or effort to attend their community events moving forward, it felt like "we're taking more than we should" (Kayla). Both older and recent alumni wondered whether their service helped the community. One alum (Cassie) even stated, "I don't even think we were impacting the community. What does the city of Lawndale actually feel they are getting served by ACA students?"

Without reciprocity, ACA runs the risk of creating harmful relationships with community organizations. One partner used the term "resentment" when discussing their relationship with the site because of the lack of support they received from the site. Conversely, another partner shared "I've always felt like we were getting more out of it than they were."

Hearing the different experiences of staff and alumni with partners revealed there were different types of partnerships on the ACA campus. There were community-based partners,

where students went to learn through volunteerism or an internship. There were teacher-created partners, where teachers worked directly with a partner on a specific area related to their course or interests. There were development-based partners, where ACA was part of the larger environmental and service-learning discourse taking place in education, collaborating with other sites and organizations as thought partners. Because of the diversity of partnerships at ACA they were scattered, loose, and not sustained over time, for the most part.

Students First, Community After

Examining the historical documents at ACA made it clear the focus of their service-learning programs was the students. This school and student-centered perspective lined up with the traditional and mainstream approach to service-learning programs taken by most campuses. Reviewing the handbook highlighted this, as there was no mention of the community's needs or how one might cultivate partnerships with community organizations with reciprocity. The job descriptions of those supporting this work listed requirements and responsibilities beneficial to the campus and the student population. Community partners were spoken of as "resources for students."

Even throughout the process of completing community service hours, the handbook noted the activities "must be approved by advisory teacher or administrator," exemplifying one of the ways the school was the decision maker in what constituted service. Additionally, teachers shared the main resource for students to refer to when searching for a community partner, the list posted in the office, was not up to date and did not include "stuff the kids even care about or potentially that the community cares about." Besides this list, the handbook clearly stated community service activities to consider were activities benefitting the school. The language

repeatedly stated phrases such as "to help students practice these skills," highlighting how the foundational pieces of the programs were created with the school and students in mind, and the community was an afterthought. At the start of ACA's charter petition there was mention of an ancient African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," sharing its vision for partnership with the community, calling for a "united effort." Overall, the historical documents and policies revealed ACA's belief students came first, and the community's role was to support them in their learning.

ACA staff corroborated this by sharing their perceptions. The way ACA staff entered the planning and creation of service-learning projects was student-centered, as the community partners' needs were an afterthought. For example, one teacher (Shirley) shared her approach where she "Gets into the mindset of what do students care about and what are they interested in, and then create their service-learning opportunities around that." A staff member whose role was supporting teachers with professional development in how to implement service-learning responded with a similar process. Their reflection was:

> First, what does the teacher want, then what partner could help make that happen, but it's hard to institutionalize that . . . But, in a way that was cool because it wasn't the partners agenda, it was the teacher's agenda. I want the students to understand this or get this experience and then it was, okay, what partner could help make that happen?"

There was also comment on how the programs were used to benefit not just the students, but the school to make it look better to the public, using the community as a means to this end. One teacher (Carmen) shared:

> I definitely see the goal of the partnerships to be for the school, whether that is for the students or for the financial gains. I don't believe that the community at large has ever really been at the center of the planning of partnerships. It's often been for the benefit of a specific reason that is school related.

When specifically asked to respond to the language in the ACA handbook, one teacher (Kayla) reflected:

> To me the way it reads is a school that is trying to make kids look good to get into college, not actually a school that is really that interested in the surrounding community and building the kids up. So, I think I think it would be cool if the organization got that straight first, like, are you just doing this, so that the kids because I know for a fact I got a scholarship and I got into the colleges I did because of all the community service, I did like you know circa 1990 whatever like this was the thing to do right. So, the school started 2001 or whatever whenever they started, so yeah this was a big thing I think to make you look fancy on college applications, and I think I would like to know if it's actually for that or if it's actually to make a positive impact on the community as it states. I think to make a positive impact of the community the school needs to be tied to work being done in the community and help facilitate that work. So I think the tweaking that first needs to be what, why are we doing this.

She continued to share there was a strong belief among staff and students most likely as well, these requirements were in place for marketing purposes and to attract families to the school.

School First, Environment After

A review of ACA's foundational documents revealed language promoting the school and the academics over the environment. For an organization claiming to consider the environmental setting and landscape to be a member of the community, exploring the language ACA used to talk about the relationship between their work and the land on which they do the work was important. Specifically, in the charter petition ACA stated one of the tenets of the curriculum was "using the environment to improve learning" and, even more specifically, it shared:

> An example of using the environment to improve learning follows: Students have conducted an investigation into the environmental impact of waste disposal policies. To adequately investigate, analyze and understand this issue, students must apply their knowledge of resource depletion, consumption, decomposition, chemical interactions, public health risks, laws and policy, cultural awareness.

The verbiage "using" is problematic because it centers the academic setting and students and sees the environment as a resource to be used to benefit the students and school site. The document continued to share strategies to support students in achieving ACA's mission.

Furthermore, the petition explained the hope as students participate in service-learning over their 4 years at the site, they not only increase content knowledge in their classes, but they learn skills needed to improve their local community and gain a love for the outdoors. Through this process, ACA hopes "students become wise and thoughtful stewards of the earth and their own community."

Reinforcing a Pedagogy of Whiteness

A handful of ACA staff responses touched on the ways service-learning and community service programs could reinforce White pedagogy, specifically a "do-gooder" mentality. For example, Leadership (Natalia) shared, "I think they do the hours and work because they feel good about it, about the work they're doing so they continue contributing because it feels good to help." This belief was not mentioned by alumni focus groups, but resonated with ACA staff, and so it is important to consider the ways these programs reinforced this mentality among students, without them recognizing it. Leadership (Silas) reflected on the way students' topics for their civic action project were vetted by staff as a potential area of concern. They shared how at times students would pick a topic they were passionate about, only to have an adult tell them it was not good enough. They questioned how those assumptions were formed and if they were formed from White ideals of service-learning. In their role specifically, Silas shared they tried to teach students, saying:

> The tools of Whiteness that they would need in dominant society and how to navigate
> society. I got that they were playing apart, so I mean it wasn't like brainwashing, but it

was sort of like it would be really cool to explore like how could students make an impact without replicating the way things are supposed to be that are white dominated and I think it goes back to the question of assumptions of adults and teachers, I think, regardless of race, if you're not politicized to kind of question that dominant narrative than we're going to keep perpetuating the idea that the work of some students is more valuable than the work of other students.

This exemplifies one way ACA staff's intentions were to disrupt the dominant narrative, but the approach could end up having harmful impacts for students of color, in this case centering "tools of Whiteness" in the curriculum and "brainwashing." Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 1 the handbook advised students to "seek non-profit, governmental or religious organizations." This is problematic as many organizations in this category are perpetuating mainstream and traditional approaches to service-learning and reinforcing colonizing notions. One of ACA's partners prided themselves on the way they offered students access to job opportunities through mentorship and internships. However, the mindset and approach in this space centers White capitalistic values. Leadership (Silas) shared a reflection aligning with this. They recognized having reciprocal partnerships was complicated because the school worked primarily with nongovernmental organizations, which tended to be White. When thinking about the different partnerships worked with over the years, Silas commented there were many spaces where students were working with predominately older White men, and although there was opportunity to discuss power dynamics, discussion never took place. They commented:

It was so much about bringing these kick ass students into really normative spaces and blowing up the space, like the U.S. green building conference. There were so many situations where like we were just blowing up the normative White environmental spaces.

Through reflection, they shared if they were to do it again "there would be a lot more focus on nonprofits from Lawndale, or just on the residents of where the school is." These reflections highlighted there were missed opportunities in these programs for deep reflection and

questioning the dominant narrative, in this case around the field of environmentalism presented as a place of privilege not action. One teacher (Q) offered an example of what this could look like in their sharing about a weekend service-learning trip, where they shared how important it was for there to be a debrief at the end of each day, saying:

> The service-learning part isn't necessarily the digging on the trail . . . we're having dialogue, and we're working and using different skills when we're out on the trail, and then, when we come back and we do our debrief at lunchtime, we talk about stuff like, why did we move over for the white people that were walking on the trail, and who was on the trail and what kind of things did people say to you when you were on the trail.

Although this was a strong example of how to embed reflection into these programs and questioning the dominant narrative, it was also not a practice common across the ACA campus.

Measuring Impacts and Performative Projects

In my experience at ACA, there was a deep desire to streamline, evaluate, and measure the impact of programs. However, when reviewing documents and interviewing staff, there did not appear to be any form of metrics or method for how the service-learning programs or partnerships were evaluated, measured, or reflected. In the actual projects, such as the civic action project, students were asked to measure the impact their actions had on the community. Questions such as "How did your actions impact your community?" and "What future actions should be taken to help your cause be sustainable?" seemed appropriate; however, on further reflection, the way students were asked to complete the project made this measure seem performative and not authentic.

When veteran staff were asked about the creation of these programs and documents describing the programs, there was a lack of clarity on the process, and no one was able to remember when or how certain things came to be. Leadership (Lee) even stated:

> Maybe it was something that you know in the beginning when ACA first started I thought was a good idea and it was embedded in there somehow . . . and then there was a time when we standardized parts of us that were too loosey-goosey, but now as you're looking at it and as I look at it, it doesn't work to support ECS's current mission and the goals of our organization and where we've come to as a learning organization.

This language makes it feel performative. Furthermore, when questions of this nature were asked ACA staff tended to go on a tangent into another topic. Additionally, ACA staff tended to want to jump to solutions, offering up the idea of hiring someone to organize the programs, or shifting the requirements to be more equitable for students. A stark example of this was seen at the onset of my data collection. When I shared my research interest with ACA staff many responded with sentiments such as "Oh, if our programs aren't serving all students equitably then let's stop them or hire someone to fix it." This nonchalant response and lack of desire to conduct an analysis of the programs was problematic because those creating the policies and doing the work were not reflecting on some of the root causes as to why these programs were inequitable. A recent alum touched on this notion, sharing that when she and a group of students protested the current civic action project the response from administration was "Oh you just want to get rid of it. Okay, let's talk about that." She continued to share the students were not aiming to remove the project, and they believed the idea of the project was powerful, but they were protesting for a more equitable project that considered where each student was individually. She reflected it was troublesome for her that the response by administration was to jump to stop the project, sharing:

> I think that's a really negative mindset to have especially when you're handling a school filled with predominantly Hispanic and Latino kids and a small percentage of Black students on campus because it's kind of how society tells us we can't succeed so if we find the issue and we want to correct it and want to do better, because we know we can do better, and Admin is thinking "Oh we just want to give it away," it's kind of defeating and it's like "Well, we've already been told we can't do this and you're saying well let's just cancel it, since you guys can't do it, I think it's a really toxic mindset to implant.

By not directly wanting to reflect on the historical creation of these policies and discuss the disparate outcomes now occurring, the site will continue to perpetuate the colonizing notions of traditional programs, and these beliefs can also continue to show up in other facets of their campus. ACA staff commented on the opportunity in these programs, specifically in civic action, for students to reflect on and interrogate their privilege and responsibility in relation to their community; however, this was not intentionally molded into the programs. Leadership (Natalia) felt strongly about reflection being a missing piece to ACA's practice, and without it the programs are:

> not authentic and disconnected to the student experience. It's more of a "Go do it. Here's the product. Here's an output. Now, go show the rest of the world what you did." But to be truly authentic there'd be a reflection piece to allow students to grow as individuals.

The lack of deep reflecting on a systems-level seeps into the classroom and individual teacher practices that impact students.

Not only do the documents describing the vision for these requirements come off as performative language, but the programs themselves also appear to be performative for many ACA staff and students. When specifically looking at the community service requirement, students from the recent alumni group shared they did not see the point of community service and a handful admitted to lying on the forms to get their hours done. The sentiment of "This is a requirement, so I need to get it done, not because I care and want to be a change" resonated with many alumni. Continuing with this notion, one alum (Jocelyn) shared she felt it was confusing because although ACA was promoting community service, the campus itself did not always practice valuing community and unity. Leadership (Natalia) noted without an intentional space for discussion and reflection, the community service component and the service-learning

requirement at large has often felt performative and individualistic. In a nutshell she said, "the community aspect of service-learning is missing."

Conclusion

The findings presented here exemplified the complex, and at times, messy approach to service-learning in place at ACA. With a multifaceted approach to service-learning, these findings highlighted a need for clarity across stakeholder group when it comes to vision and implementation plan. Across all these findings, there were indications of a need for deep reflection to ensure future programming supports student and community partner needs. By further examining these findings, Chapter 5 explores the ways the service-learning program is upholding colonial notions, countering, or reinforcing dominant narratives, and it will highlight the need for a reimagining of partnerships.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this case study was to provide a holistic understanding of the service-learning program at one public charter high school. In this purpose, it sought to meet two objectives. First, the case study explored and shared the lived experiences of staff, alumni, and community partners. In addition, it used autoethnographic data to support my investigation of my role as a White, female administrator in these programs. Using a decolonizing framework allowed for an examination of the researcher's positionality in the programs and led to questioning of power dynamics, decision making processes, and the different logics at play. This approach sought to add a different perspective than what has often been seen in the literature, centered on the traditional and mainstream approach to service-learning. Additionally, the voices of participants were centered in the study, specifically the voices of low-income students of color, a group seldom present in the existing literature. By sharing the experiences of stakeholders, including my own, this study aimed to provide other administrators with a roadmap for how to reflect on and improve their service-learning programs to better serve communities and be more aligned with a decolonizing framework. The case study addressed the following two research questions:

- How does one high school charter community describe their experiences in service-learning programs?

- Who is being centered and what logics are being reinforced in service-learning projects?

Employing a Decolonizing Critical Community Service-Learning Framework

This current study ended up centering the experiences of students and staff, and the analysis was conducted with a decolonizing framework. Santiago-Ortiz (2018) recommended the field of critical community service-learning include an acknowledgement of settler colonialism in academic spaces, inclusion of decolonizing methodologies to counter dominant narratives, and a change in how partnerships between institutions and communities are envisioned. Using this framework means the analysis and interpretation of findings in this current study will explicitly acknowledge when settler colonialism is present and address when power dynamics and decision-making processes perpetuate existing inequities. Specifically, keeping a decolonizing methodology in mind, the interpretations presented call out when the dominant narrative is uplifted and when dismantling of systems and structures should be considered for a more equitable approach to service-learning.

This current study explicitly acknowledged colonial notions and their impacts on the program through an examination of historical documents and policies and by centering the lived experiences of a diverse group of staff, alumni, and partners. Coupled with my autoethnographic reflections as a White administrator, the study problematized traditional understandings of service-learning and highlights the role and impact of power dynamics and decision-making processes on programming. Kahn (2011) surfaced the need for an intentional process of decolonization in the service-learning field because of the deeply embedded imperialist attitudes existing in the work. This current study further extended the importance of using a decolonizing framework in service-learning programs, and specifically the findings presented called for an explicit focus on reflection as an essential piece to put this framework into practice. Overall,

leveraging the decolonizing lens created space for the "voices of the marginalized to be heard and the inequities of the system to be exposed" (Furman, 2004, p. 215).

Discussion of Findings

The following sections discuss the findings, organized by Santiago-Ortiz's (2018) main points of colonial notions, dominant narratives, and reimagining partnerships. Following the discussion, I present the limitations of the study and considerations for future research. This leads into a thorough list of recommendations and implications, starting with a broad look at policy and then zooming into districts, school sites, and then specifically Austin Charter Academy (ACA).

Upholding Colonial Notions

Upon hearing from a variety of ACA stakeholders, findings were clear–the diverse interpretations of service-learning were problematic. Using the decolonizing lens made it possible to identify the ways in which the different narratives about service-learning were in competition with one another, thus surfacing different power struggles. York et al. (2019) shared how several approaches to service-learning have emerged on campuses over time, such as discipline-based, problem-based, capstone courses, internships, and community-based programs. ACA has pulled pieces from each of these approaches. Because each approach has called for a different set of intended outcomes, the programs at ACA have become entangled—and at times in competition—with one another. Additionally, a lack of clarity in terms across the ACA campus has strained relationships among staff. For example, one ACA staff member reported feeling "on an island" at times because not everyone saw the value in service-learning or had the same understanding about what it entailed.

Findings from the current study revealed a student-centered and school-centered approach to service-learning programming. ACA staff and alumni frequently used phrases such as "giving back" and "teaching the community" when discussing their experiences and takeaways from the programs. This finding coincided with past studies (Henry & Breyfogle, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2012; Santiago-Ortiz, 2018) warning when programs are student centered they result in outcomes being tied to a sense of charity for those interacted with instead of learning about the larger power dynamics and inequities at play. This recurring notion of "giving back" ACA staff and alumni referred to coincides with Hammersley's (2012) research. In their work, the term service was examined, pointing out programs using this term often end up with a relationship where there is a giver–receiver stance, and the one doing the giving often feels a level of superiority. In this light, the assumption being made is communities lac resources, skills, or knowledge and without the assistance of a school and students, they are without solutions. Hammersley (2012) explained how this stance is problematic as service-learning programs can end up perpetuating existing power dynamics. Findings in the current study resonated with this notion, as the language ACA staff used and the way programs were written in documents used to train and guide staff, and communicate with families, have continued to center the academic space and presents a deficit mindset of the communities being served. If there is a deficit mindset toward the community, and most ACA students are from neighboring communities, it begs the question: What is the connection to educators having a deficit mindset about the students with whom they work? This will be an important question for ACA to reflect on moving forward.

The specific language in the ACA handbook has recommended students seek out religious organizations and nongovernmental organizations for volunteer opportunities, advice

very much in line with a growing concern around how service-learning programs "promote paternalistic, charitable, or even missionary orientations" (Sulentic Dowell, 2008, p. 14) among students. Again, this notion of focusing on the server and the served rather than working toward a reciprocal partnership can perpetuate existing power dynamics. Research has been clear to confront assumptions such as these, those leading the programs must be critically aware of their positions and move beyond the needs of their students and campus to listen to the community. Although a few ACA staff members spoke to this, there was inconsistency in approach, planning, and mindset to community involvement. As shared previously, Kayla used the term "scramble" to describe the planning process for these programs, and Silas shared how they often began with what the teacher and students needed first, trying to then find a partner who could fill that need for them. Their planning process began with the teacher and school needs, which is in direct opposition to a decolonizing approach. An approach confronting colonial notions would be one with the following mindset:

> We must enter their institutional spaces and listen to their perspectives. What are their needs? How do they want to structure the volunteer experiences? Are there ways that course content could be altered to address their concerns? (Schneider, 2019, p. 11)

The continual centering of student and school needs present in ACA's approach and implementation of service-learning programs exemplifies the value is placed on the students' learning over the community partners' needs, with the assumption that because student learning is taking place there is also a benefit to the community (Adarlo et al., 2019; Blouin & Perry, 2009; Clayton et al., 2010; Derreth, 2019; Enos & Morton, 2003). More specifically, the findings in this current study point to a "pedagogy of Whiteness" being present throughout ACA's approach to service-learning. Statements previously shared by staff, such as the importance of

teaching "the tools of Whiteness," exemplified this notion. As Mitchell et al. (2012) pointed out, many programs can be well-intentioned but end up marginalizing the experiences of students of color, and ACA's programs falls into this trap.

Decolonizing Methodologies That Counter the Dominant Narrative

The findings presented in this study clearly showed disproportionate outcomes for students are taking place on the ACA campus in the service-learning programs. Specifically, findings revealed barriers to access and a lack of support continue to place marginalized groups at a disadvantage when it comes to service-learning opportunities. It was clear, ACA has provided limited, if any, additional support to students with exceptionalities and those with 504 plans for service-learning requirements.

Both older and recent alumni revealed the barriers of program timing and location had for them. Specific examples shared by a student with a 504 plan and students with exceptionalities spoke to the challenge of transportation and having to spend time in the evenings or on the weekends finding service opportunities, when their families had different needs during those times. Such findings are consistent with Dymond et al.'s (2008) research, underscoring the need for schools to offer transportation and financial resources to students with exceptionalities to ensure participation in service-learning programs. Additionally, the literature presented by Bennett (2009) and Crump (2002) about how student participation can be limited based on the time requirement and scheduling of programs for students needing to attend tutoring or other academic commitments was highlighted in this current study. The experience shared by Kevin, who struggled to find a ride to different opportunities after school while juggling the need to attend academic tutoring and help at home, resonated with many of their peers. Following this

further, this study found when transportation and timing of programming was a barrier, students not only ended up with fewer opportunities than their peers, but with different opportunities. ACA offers a limited number of on-campus service-learning experiences, which take place during the school day, for students unable to access off-campus opportunities. Although these on-campus experiences allow students to complete the required hours for their service-learning requirements, they do not offer rich learning experiences or opportunities for collaboration with community partners. This was especially noted in how common it was for students with exceptionalities to complete their service-learning on ACA's campus during lunchtime, and many of their peers completed their hours after school or on the weekend and with community partners. This discrepancy led to many students not seeing the point in the programs and to staff not knowing how to best support students, resulting in programs becoming just another thing on the checklist and being performative in nature.

Both older and recent alumni spoke to the benefits they experienced from their involvement in different forms of service-learning. The main topics mentioned were the real-world application that can come from learning outside of the classroom walls and the soft skills one can learn from exposure to these types of programs. For students with exceptionalities, it is important to note both students shared it was because of their lack of confidence and antisocial behavior that they struggled to participate in programs. This finding coincides directly with Dymond et al.'s (2008) research on the barrier social skills and traits like nervousness can have for students with exceptionalities and service-learning. Dymond et al. posited inclusive service-learning programs can lead to students with exceptionalities gaining career awareness, receiving more support in their transitions from high school to adulthood, and seeing themselves as

contributing members of society. This study included two students with exceptionalities, and neither of them spoke to these benefits resonating with them.

According to the literature, for service-learning programs to be successful, not just for students with exceptionalities but for students in general, sites need to invest in having a coordinator or support role for students and staff in this work (Bennett, 2009; Bennett et al., 2016; Dymond et al., 2008). These studies emphasized how a coordinator could support both students and teachers in successfully navigating service-learning partnerships. A specific example of this was heard in the suggestion provided by an alum who qualified for a 504 plan (Kevin), saying:

> There should be more reaching out to those people who need help and saying we are here for you, we support you, what kind of help do you need so we can accommodate for that. "Let me reach out to this student and see what ways I can help." I never got that.

Findings also made it clear first generation, low-income students of color have faced different challenges than their White counterparts, such as when one alum (Cassie) shared a struggle in having access to people in different fields of work. This adds to Bennett et al.'s (2016) research on the need for schools to consider the additional barriers this demographic may have when it comes to service-learning so the structures in and of themselves do not become barriers for students to engage in the service. His study presented a family's social economic status can impact student experience in service-learning programs because of a variety of factors, including limited access to news information and fewer household conversations around civics. Findings in this current study add to this, as older and recent alumni shared it was not until enrolling at ACA that they or their families had heard about service-learning and the additional terms used on the ACA campus. Yeh's (2010) study centered the experiences of low-income, first-generation

college students, and even though this current study focused this group in their high school years, the experiences shared were similar. Yeh's (2010) work highlighted the ways low-income, first-generation college students experience service-learning was different than their White, high-income counterparts, focusing on the resiliency and critical consciousness necessary for programs to be successful. This current study affirmed these findings. Therefore, it is important for ACA and other schools with a demographic similar to ACA to move away from traditional forms of service-learning and use a decolonizing critical community-based approach.

Kackar-Cam and Schmidt (2014) spoke of the importance in separating the experiences of students, school sites, and community partners because each group has a different perception of service-learning experiences. This current study explored each of these groups separately, and findings revealed although each group had a different perception of the programs, there was a similarity worth noting. All stakeholder groups recognized there were benefits to service-learning programs; however, ACA needs to reflect on what has and has not worked to find a way to ensure all students have access to experiencing those benefits. It was clear by speaking with each group because this reflection has not taken place, the programs continue to push forward, feeling performative in nature rather than authentic learning experiences for those involved.

Reimagining of Partnerships

Numerous authors have highlighted the lack of community partners' voices in service-learning research (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Carlisle et al., 2017; Crabtree, 2013; Nickols et al., 2013). Hernandez (2016) expressed how this was problematic, calling for a need for decolonizing of service-learning curriculum, pointing out the limited input, if any, from communities often seen in traditional programs. This current study affirmed this need. Although

this study aimed to present a holistic understanding of ACA's service-learning program, one

stakeholder group was not fully represented. Community partners were difficult to track down,

contact, and schedule time. It became clear partnerships between ACA and the community are

scattered and loose, and without systems in place for cultivating and sustaining the partnerships

they end up being lost over time. Most partnerships seemed to exist because of a specific

relationship between a person and an entity; and therefore, when that person leaves ACA, the

partnership ends. The research is clear: the field of service-learning is student centered and rarely

does one hear the perspective of community partners. This current study falls in that arena as

well, with limited partners' perspectives being presented. Consistent with this student-centered

perspective, when speaking with ACA staff and alumni no one mentioned the benefits these

programs have for the community partners, and even when probed it was difficult to name the

ways they saw the programs supporting the work being done by the partner. During interviews

with ACA staff and community partners, the following excerpt pulled from Chapter 2 was shared

with participants:

> Research states that there is "an implicit assumption that service-learning courses
> enhance student learning and provide service to the wider community" (p. 121).
> However, in reality the process is transactional, task-oriented, and often exploitive,
> valuing the students' learning above the needs of the community partners'. (Adarlo et al.,
> 2019; Clayton et al., 2010; Derreth, 2019; Enos & Morton, 2003)

Both ACA staff and community partners commented these sentiments resonated with them, and

ACA staff provided several examples of this showing up in their work. Most explicitly this was

noted when one teacher (Kayla) stated "we're taking more than we should" when discussing her

grade level team's work with community partners.

For the different partnerships that were interviewed, one finding was clear—here is no clear process for reflection. Each partner mentioned the interview being the first time they had been asked formally for feedback on the partnership, and all expressed a desire for more intentional, ongoing debriefs and reflections to take place to continue strengthening the work and being able to meaningfully address topics such a privilege and stereotypes that come up in the work. This finding coincides with Akhurst's (2016) findings that when ongoing reflection between community partners and school sites is in place, attention to social justice issues at hand such as power, privilege, and cultural awareness can be addressed, resulting in better outcomes for all. Holsapple (2012) presented many of the benefits service-learning programs can have for students: confronting stereotypes, gaining knowledge about the population students worked with, an increased belief in the value of diversity, a heightened tolerance toward differences, interest in future engagement with different cultures, and recognizing commonalities with different cultures. The findings of this current study did not reveal these benefits being experienced by the older and recent alumni. Therefore, by building in space for reflection, ACA may move toward strengthening these outcomes for all students, while also attending to the needs of community partners.

Although ACA does not have a formal way of gathering feedback from partners, they do have different structures in place for teachers to measure impact and reflect on their service-learning practices. Due to the different interpretations of terms the process for teacher reflection around service-learning needs to be reexamined at ACA; however, in looking specifically at the reflection tool being used it is important to note that this tool, along with many others being used to support the service-learning program, have all been created by the school. This finding is

consistent with the literature and a decolonizing framework calls for schools to create tools in collaboration with community partners, to ensure reciprocity throughout the planning, implementation, and reflection process. Bennett (2009) spoke to the lack of clarity there is around what should constitute measurement of service-learning programs and he, along with other researchers, have surfaced the ways tying measurement and evaluation to service-learning programs can be problematic and in tension with a decolonizing framework. This current study exemplifies that without tools and structures cocreated by community partners and schools, it is difficult to have an authentic and meaningful evaluation system and reflection process for measuring impacts of service-learning programs, and without a reflection process in place programs become performative in what service entails.

Limitations

As with all empirical research using qualitative interviews, findings are limited by the study's design. The methodology included interviews and focus groups, and this self-reporting approach relied heavily on the participants' willingness to be open and honest in their responses. An interesting limitation connected to the case study design is that it allowed for research to only be gathered from one site. In that, participants were recruited through purposeful and snowball sampling and through email contact, with interviews taking place on Zoom. This presented a limitation for alumni, often students with exceptionalities, who rarely check their email and struggle with the Zoom platform. I noted this challenge for several alumni throughout the process. Additionally, the ACA campus is small and with teachers sharing classroom space, staff participants found it difficult at times to find a place for the interview, leading to a potential limitation on what was shared due to who else was in the same area as the individual being

interviewed. Also related to the case study design, a potential limitation was the relationship between participants and me as the researcher, which could have influenced what and how participants chose to share information pertaining to the study. This specific limitation was revealed when one participant asked about anonymity several times during the interview, and when a handful of participants appeared to want to offer up additional feedback on other programs at ACA through the space being offered them in the interview, which was meant to solely focus on the service-learning program. The timing of the study was another limitation in that the 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic has impacted individuals and school sites tremendously, and in ways we are still learning about daily. Recent alumni responses reminded the researcher that because of the pandemic they were not exposed to the same type of service-learning programs as they normally would have been. Finally, a limitation was the difficulty in including the voices of partners in this study. Due to a pause in partnership collaboration because of the COVID-19 global pandemic it was a challenge to track down former partners for inclusion in the study.

Future Research

Considering these limitations, future studies should be explored. Although this case study provides a holistic understanding of ACA's service-learning program, future studies should explore focusing on different aspects of the program, potentially through different approaches to qualitative and quantitative studies. This would build on the current study but allow for a more targeted understanding of each participant group, with research questions aligned to a decolonizing framework. This current study recognized that in each participant group, there were additional voices that, if added, would lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the

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program and provide more targeted next steps for ACA. First, the alumni groups contained students who for the most part found academic success at ACA, receiving a grade point average of 3.5 and higher. The group also included a few students with exceptionalities. However, this group could be more diverse, including students who had an average grade point average. It would also be beneficial to hold a focus group specifically for students with exceptionalities because I noticed in this process and in general that they shared more openly when it was a smaller group, mirroring their specialized academic instruction class experience. Second, the staff group could be expanded to include more voices. Future studies could consider a mixed-methods design, including a survey instrument to gather more general trends across the site, and that could be used to follow up with more specific interview questions. Third, conducting a narrative case study specifically focused on community partners would allow for adequate time and care to be given to this group. Centering the experiences of partners would allow for ACA to gain a better understanding of how partnerships can be better cultivated and sustained to ensure reciprocity is taking place. Finally, future studies at the site should consider the role of the researcher. Although a more holistic and unique perspective was had with the researcher also acting as a participant, future studies should consider a researcher who is not as directly involved in the case at hand so participants might feel more inclined to share openly and without additional feedback on programs unrelated to the topic at hand.

From what I have learned in this study, the role of reflection is key in shifting practice, and therefore, another consideration for future studies would be to conduct a case study of the program applying a critical bicultural pedagogy. This pedagogy recognizes it is important for one to intentionally build reflection around existing colonizing practices into the framework being

used. Biculturalism speaks to the process wherein individuals learn to function in two distinct sociocultural environments: their primary culture, and that of the dominant mainstream culture of the society in which they live. It represents the process by which bicultural human beings mediate between the dominant discourse of educational institutions and the realities that they must face as members of subordinate cultures. More specifically, the process of biculturation incorporates the daily struggle with racism and other forms of cultural invasion (Darder, 2012). Darder's (2012) summary of biculturalism speaks to the power relations that exist in service-learning. To truly include an anticolonial stance into critical community-based service learning, one might need to add a bicultural pedagogy lens to support the existing framework. By applying this pedagogy to a follow-up study at ACA, one would be able to better examine the link between culture and power that exists in service-learning (Hernandez, 2016). By further examining the relationship of students participating in service learning and the communities they serve one can look at how the traditional, Eurocentric service-learning approach and discourse is privileged. Adding the critical bicultural pedagogy alongside a decolonizing and critical community service-learning framework will highlight the voices of the marginalized communities and better place their voices at the forefront of future studies.

Implications and Recommendations

In addition to future research, there are several implications and recommendations that came out of this current study. Although this current study focused on ACA's service-learning program, its use of a decolonizing lens to examine different program components surfaced the dialectical tensions that exist on the campus and highlighted the ways this program can better disrupt and dismantle existing power dynamics that currently uphold colonial notions.

Additionally, this study explored the role of an administrator through autoethnographic data. Being able to see the ways policies and structures that were created or upheld by someone in a position of decision-making power led to disenfranchising certain groups of students is a practice that should be applied to other programs at ACA moving forward. Although the findings are specific to ACA's service-learning program, using this decolonizing framework, heavily embedding reflection into the process, would continue to surface programs and spaces where ACA should shift their practice. This would lead to more authentic and meaningful experiences for ACA staff, students, and community partners, rather than falling into the performative nature seen in the current service-learning program. Overall, this study was significant because it revealed the ways a lack of deep reflection on both the individual and collective school level can impact a program. It surfaced the need for reflection to be explicitly stated in the theory and framework being used because without a reflective practice in place at school sites, there is no intentional and thoughtful space to enact change.

Given the case study design of this study, the findings point most heavily to recommendations for ACA. However, other administrators, school sites, and policymakers should also consider the implications and implications these findings have for their work. The following section will start with broad implications, focused on policy and school level implications, and then narrow in on the network of schools ACA is affiliated with before focusing in on specific recommendations for the ACA campus.

Recommendations for Policymakers

Assembly Bill 1689 (AB 1689), introduced in 2016 by California Assembly Member Low and coauthored by Assembly Member McCarty, called for the addition of service learning

as a high school graduation requirement, beginning with the class of 2021–2022. Specifically,

this bill points to the superintendent of public instruction (SPI) to develop curriculum standards

for service-learning. The bill speaks to the benefits of service learning for students by developing

character, building civic responsibility, and increasing knowledge of local community issues. It

is important to note the bill defines service-learning as a

> method through which pupils or participants learn and develop through active
> participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in, and meets the needs
> of, a community, is coordinated with a secondary school and with the community; and
> helps foster civic responsibility. (Assembly Bill 1689 [AB 1689], 2016, Section I)

I recommend there is an examination of the discourse of this bill from a decolonizing critical

community service-learning framework, paying specific attention to its role in reinforcing the

dominant culture. This would note the gaps that exist in the policy and name the changes that

need to be included before moving forward with this work.

In my initial analysis of the bill the following was noticed. AB 1689 continues to focus

on the role of the SPI in developing service-learning curriculum, and although there is mention

of consulting with stakeholders, they alone have decision making power in who they "deem

appropriate" for this task (AB 1689, 2016, Summary). This makes one wonder how communities

are or are not being partnered with in the initial planning stages of this work. Additionally, AB

1689's wording raised alarm considering the critical community service-learning framework.

Words and phrases such as "imposing," "infusing," "powerful," "well-planned," "quality,"

"promote" make one pause and consider the meaning behind these terms (AB 1689, 2016,

Sections I-II). The ambiguity of the terms used to describe the process leave one wondering how

the authors of the bill would define such terms. What does a well-planned program look like?

What does it mean to have a quality program in place? The term reflection is only used once in

the bill, and there is no clarity on what this process looks like for students or staff. All signs point to the SPI being the one to answer these questions, leaving one to wonder if this bill addresses power relations or reinforces the existing dynamics at play.

AB 1689, and the creation of it, does not appear to take a decolonizing lens into consideration. At one point, it stated the "the persons the Superintendent consults with . . . shall represent, as much as feasible, the diverse regions and socioeconomic communities of this state" (AB 1689, 2016, Section I). The clause "as much as feasible" allows the SPI to move forward without intentional collaboration with marginalized communities. Much of the wording in the bill comes with many assumptions as well. For one, the definition of service learning provided includes the statement that service-learning will be "conducted in, and meets the needs of, a community" (AB 1689, 2016, Section III). This assumes the school leader or coordinator has a strong understanding of the community and their needs; however, nowhere in the bill or in existing policies in place does the state offer funding or guidance for professional development related to service-learning. If AB 1689 is going to require service-learning be implemented in schools, the state needs to ensure teachers and students implementing service-learning programs receive training to understand the context in which they serve, question their knowledge base and assumptions, and continue to build their critical consciousness to model for others what it looks like to challenge the status quo of the social order and address inequities in the larger society (Johnson, 2006). York et al.'s (2019) work around how service-learning can confront issues of power, privilege, oppression, and inequality needs to be acknowledged and addressed in the creation of this bill because in examining this bill as it stands, one can see how the traditional, Eurocentric service-learning approach and discourse is privileged. This bill fails to acknowledge

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how different subgroups of students experience service learning differently, resulting in different outcomes for themselves and the communities they serve. To respond to this in the bill, data must be collected from the parties most affected: students and community stakeholders (Pearson & Peterson, 2019).

Finally, and more specifically, I recommend this bill be slowed down. Due to the potential budget cuts of up to 20% California is facing in education and because of the impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic on education, it does not seem feasible for school districts to be ready to implement service learning in an equitable manner during the 2021–2022 school year. By slowing the timeline down, bill authors will be able to gather additional data, and districts or school sites will begin to build authentic relationships with communities prior to implementation. This will be especially important as schools and communities continue to rebuild in a postpandemic world. Schools and districts would have time to conduct equity audits focused on service-learning on their campus, determining what funds, coordination roles, and teacher trainings are needed, etc. Equity audits are "a systematic way for school leaders to assess the degree of equity or inequity in three key areas of their schools or districts: programs, teacher quality, and achievement" (Skrla et al., 2009, p. 3).

The original bill included much more specificity around how the components of service learning could be implemented via the career and technical framework, but this was removed in the final iteration of the bill. Although I agree with removal of implementing service-learning through this framework because not all schools are required to implement a career and technical program, I do believe the bill should provide more clarity in how sites are expected to implement the service-learning component. Additionally, the bill takes into consideration the rise in

community service and the decline in service-learning; however, it does not explicitly address the difference between the two and provide more clarity around a common language of these terms and what is asked of school districts and sites needs to be embedded in the bill (AB 1689 Bill Analysis, 2016). D'Arlach et al. (2009) posited how service-learning programs have often been responsible for creating or perpetuating the very problems they are seeking to alleviate, and if AB 1689 hopes to put into reality what it actually says, then more time is needed for planning and guidance prior to implementation at sites.

Recommendations for Administrators

Although this case study focused on one public charter high school, the findings are beneficial for other sites as well. This study revealed the importance of clarity in programming goals, roles, and responsibilities, but more specifically, alignment and common understanding in language used by staff and students. For schools looking to implement service-learning, I recommend having a clear vision, including an intentional and sustainable way for centering community voices from the onset of program planning. Another recommendation for schools is to consider the supports in place for programs. As highlighted in this study and seen in the existing literature, supporting service-learning through funding, timing, and location of opportunities, and hiring of a support role can all greatly impact program outcomes.

As previously mentioned, slowing down state policies tied to service-learning would provide time for sites to conduct equity audits. This is a recommended step for sites with an existing service-learning program. Administrators should be aware of the implications historical documents, policies, and foundational knowledge has on their current site's practice. This is especially important if a school or organization was founded with deeply embedded Eurocentric

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and colonizing notions in their practices. There should be a system or structure in place for how historical policies are revisited, revised, and reflected on in regard to how the theory has been implemented in practice, and whether the impacts are harmful. Leaning into the autoethnographic data presented in this current study, I recommend other White administrators reflect on their role and impact related to their campus' service-learning program. These recommendations for sites can be carried into other programs on their campuses outside of the service-learning field as well.

Recommendations for ACA

This study revealed service-learning at ACA is complex, messy, and has many moving pieces. This section attempts to provide a roadmap for ACA beginning with thinking through the larger ideas and notions guiding service-learning thinking at the network level and then focus on more immediate, short-term recommendations for the site. In this section, I refer to the network leadership when discussing those who make decisions impacting all four schools, and I refer to ACA leadership when discussing those who make decisions at the site level.

Reflection as Step 1

First and foremost, the network leadership team should build in time and space for deep reflection on practice to take place. It would benefit the organization to follow Saad's (2020) advice when she wrote:

> Rushing ahead to solutions-especially when we have barely begun to think critically about the problem bypasses the necessary personal work and reflection and distances us from understanding out own complicity. (p. xii)

To elevate the service-learning program successfully to produce meaningful outcomes, it must become a priority to the organization in alignment with the strategic plan. If the network

leadership team decides implementing a service-learning program is aligned with their strategic plan and they want to move forward with service-learning as an integral piece of their programming, this time for reflection would provide space for both network and site leadership to grapple with the entanglement of terms and diverse interpretations present among the school community and decide on the approach and terms to be used moving forward. This time would also support the sites in potential shifts that might take place in their programming, as considerations of charter petition revisions, WASC reports, and board approval processes and timelines will be impacted. Additionally, committing to an ongoing reflective practice will support ACA in offering service-learning experiences that are authentic and meaningful for students and community partners alike. Figure 1 portrays the current service-learning program at ACA. The wavering pillars, represent the different findings, and can be summarized to say the intended outcomes are not being met. Without a solid foundation in reflection for each of the pillars, they will continue to waver and not hold up the program ACA seeks to implement. What you see below the foundation are the findings when a decolonizing framework was used. This section represents the problematic outcomes that can become deeply rooted in programs with the absence of a decolonizing lens centered in your reflective practice.

Figure 1

ACA's Service-Learning Program Representation
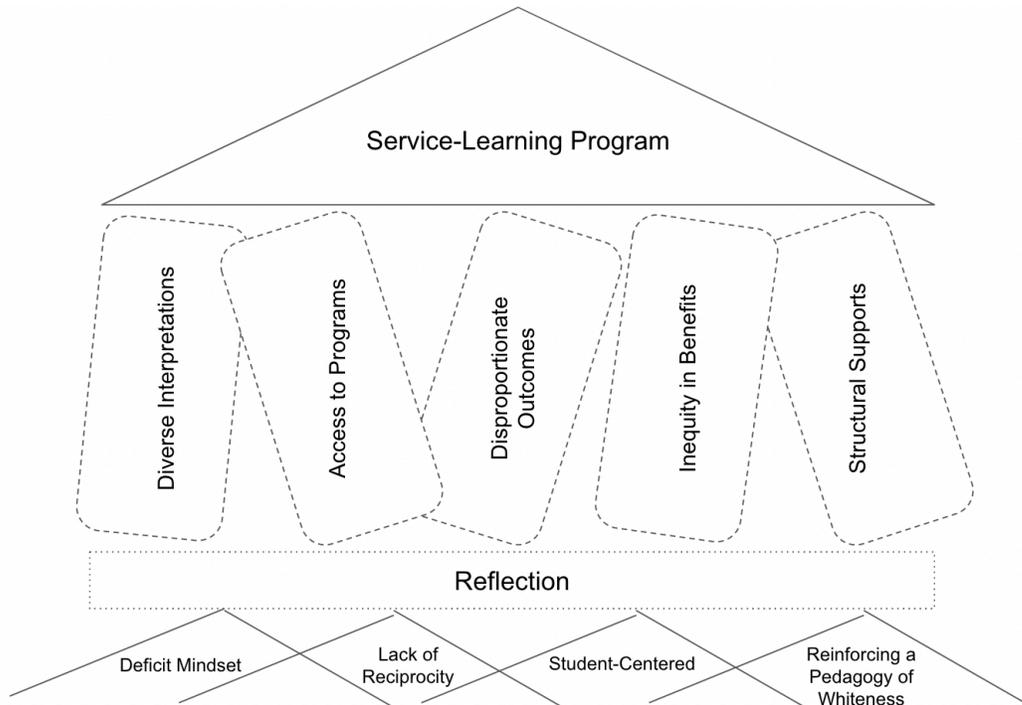
Long-Term Recommendations

I recommend the network and ACA leadership revisit their relationship with service-learning and redesign their programming to be more in line with a decolonizing framework. This would be a multistep process and would begin by continuing to examine the historical documents tied to service-learning with the goal of clarifying what programs they are continuing with, what programs they are shifting, and what programs they are removing. They would also need to consider additional research and best practices from the field to support their restructuring and implementation plans moving forward. This would include researching and deciding on a framework for their approach to different disciplines housing the service-learning work on the

site. It is critical at this beginning stage that network and ACA leadership bring in voices of students, alumni, staff, and community partners.

Centering the voices of community partners, students, and staff in this process would shift decision-making processes in place. I recommend ACA leadership, at both the network and site level, not lead this work, but create an advisory team of different stakeholders to do so. In this vein, the leadership would become catalysts for the changes needed to take place, providing the space and structures to support the work, but they would be putting the trust and decision-making power in the stakeholders impacted by this work. This approach would be in line with a decolonizing framework and would ensure the voices of those historically marginalized to be at the table for planning and decision-making processes. This advisory group should consider conducting more research and learning about different approaches to service-learning. In line with the recommendation to perform an equity audit, the network and ACA leadership should explore equity-based service-learning as a potential framework to follow in their programming moving forward. Much of this framework responds to the findings in this study and is built out of the work Mitchell (2008) did with the critical community-based service-learning framework, with a heightened focus on equity. Additionally, Collopy's (2020) reciprocal service-learning framework offers a structure for reimagining the program in a way that begins with the historically unheard voices of community partners. Finally, the place-based justice network, a learning community committed to transforming higher education and our communities, offers guidance for deconstructing systems of oppression through place-based community engagement (Campus Compact, 2017). Although geared toward college and university campuses, many tenets guiding this network are built out of Yamamura and Koth's (2018) work, which heavily

involves an equity lens in line with the decolonizing framework presented in this study. It is important to note the importance of approaching each resource with a decolonizing lens, recognizing what supports are aligned with their mission and which are not. In this research phase, I would recommend network leadership consider their relationship and understanding of environmentalism as well. Certain comments hinted that ACA's approach to this work has been presented as a place of privilege and not of action. The environmental movement is rooted in the protection and conservation of nature, which has a history of exclusion and racism (Taylor, 2014). Therefore, more work on how the campus understands environmentalism in an urban context should be considered, especially because of the network's focus on environmental service-learning. Finally, I recommend network and ACA leadership and continue to learn into the resources provided by sites offering policies, best practices, and exemplars for schools looking to implement service-learning programs (youth.gov, n.d.).

A consideration of how the framework ACA and the network choose to follow is aligned or misaligned with existing frameworks and policies is important to note. Something I learned when talking with veteran staff was the history of service at ACA. When the school was founded a hot topic in education was community service and so the organization inserted it as a requirement for their students. Years later, there was funding available for a service-learning coordinator, and so they hired one. Years later, as the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) were bubbling up in English language acquisition and math, people began to wonder about a framework or standards for history, and the school looked into the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013) leading to the creation of

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the civic action project. The parallel I am drawing leads to a question around what role does funding and decisions in the greater educational landscape have on these programs at ACA? Leadership (Silas) shared something that supports this wonder when they reflected:

> I always wondered if what we were doing was service-learning or just like real world education with a focus on social and environmental justice. But since my role was service-learning coordinator because that's what was funded, we called it service-learning. We even had to use service-learning in the best practices rubric because that was the acceptable school methodology.

Currently, the state is calling for schools to implement civic responsibility, and there are teachers at ACA approaching history and service-learning in a variety of ways . A discussion around the different frameworks for implementing history standards should be on the table, and how they complement one another or live in tension with one another will be an important next step for the network to consider. This would help the network in separating the service-learning approach and history (i.e., civic action) approach that are currently entangled and leading to much confusion. It will be important that the network provides clarity on the framework and approach to both history and service-learning moving forward. Because the prospect of shifting to a youth participatory action research project was listed on the document and referenced by staff, I recommend ACA leadership consider this as an option as well. Specific to the entanglement of terms these different approaches have created for the site, I propose the network remove all the terms currently used and decide on one term intentionally built to address the things outlined previously, such as access and reciprocal partnerships to guide their work in this field. Along with this, I propose the ACA staff and community partners collectively define what this work should look like to ensure all parties' voices are included, and all are working from the same understanding.

Wherever network and ACA leadership lands on an approach, I recommend they consider having staff practice themselves the assignment they are asking students to complete. Practitioners need to experience what they are asking students to complete, so they can reflect and refine the process prior to putting it in front of students. Having clarity on this will support ACA staff in their investment and engagement with the programs, and in their communication with students and families. Being able to provide ACA staff clarity on their role in supporting service-learning programs is an important next step for the site to move this work forward.

Once there is clarity from ACA leadership and the advisory team on what the approach to service-learning will be, a position to support the work will most likely need to be hired. This can be a director for the network or a coordinator for the site depending on how ACA leadership decides to move forward. This requirements for this role should be specifically related to the findings in this study, as this role will provide support for partnerships, teacher development and student support.

Next, an examination of the role of partnerships at ACA, and in the network, would provide the campus and network with a better understanding of how different partnerships are created, sustained, and operated throughout the year. ACA has a variety of partnerships, and they need to approach partnerships on multiple levels. To sustain the service-learning work, they need to be in conversation with other educators, other school sites, and the larger service-learning movement. Being a part of the larger environmental and service-learning conversation taking place nationally would benefit the site by gathering professional development support and ideas on how to best implement programs. Joining think-tanks such as educators consortium for

service-learning and green schools conference would provide a space for continued reflection and refinement of programming.

Short-Term Recommendations

The process of redesigning the service-learning program would be a tedious process, and therefore I recommend a few immediate actions to take place in the short term. Specifically, this would mean pausing certain graduation requirements and programs until a more thorough examination and reflection, like the process listed, has taken place. First, I recommend removing the civic action from any graduation requirement until a more thorough examination of the project outcomes takes place. There is not agreement among staff and students on the purpose of this project. This lack of clarity stems from the confusion the teacher development rubric presents to staff, and therefore I believe it is ACA leadership's role to revisit this specific historical document to clarify the approach they endorse for service-learning, including civic action. Second, remove the community service requirement. I recommend the site build out ways the concepts of community and service, in alignment with ACA's mission, can be integrated into the curriculum and student experience in a more authentic and holistic manner. Having a mandatory service requirement and placing a grade on it, even if just a participation grade in advisory, is harmful. As one teacher said:

> Let's celebrate the ones that do the work, uplift the work they do, and continue to build opportunities for them. And at the same time, stop penalizing those who aren't able to serve in the specific way we've said is good enough, stop pressuring young people to perform community service, and causing harm on them. (Q)

I recommend ACA not continue to push forward these requirements solely because they are part of the handbook, but rather to reimagine how service-learning can be better aligned to the mission and vision of ACA and the network. In this conversation, network and site leadership

should include a discussion around roles and responsibilities and decision-making processes. For example, who makes the decisions around what is included in graduation requirements? This clarity on roles and responsibilities will allow the site to name who will continue to lead this work moving forward and will support the long-term process described previously.

I am not recommending ACA remove the service-learning requirements, as the benefits noted in the research and in this case study are valuable. However, as the network and site leadership work on the overall future programming, there are some shifts the site can take in the short term to move to a more decolonizing approach. One concrete step I recommend ACA take in the meantime is to review their current partnerships with the decolonizing framework in mind. Specifically, reflecting on when there is mission alignment (or misalignment) between the site and partners would provide ACA with next steps specific for each partnership.

I also believe ACA leadership should consider some of the recommendations directly from research participants. In thinking about the structure of service-learning experiences, a handful of alumni shared a desire for programs, specifically community service and civic action, to be redesigned not as an individual requirement but a group requirement. Alumni believed if ACA devoted a day where service-learning was housed, or specific grade level events, it would be more intentional, allow for more academic connections, and push students to think more critically about activism and organizing action. I recommend ACA leadership reflect on how historical campus events touched on this concept, but for many alumni and staff these were still seen as performative projects, lacking the meaningful learning experience they aimed to accomplish. One student mentioned even if the current structure remained, but there was support and an expectation for advisories or classes to attend events together, the outcomes would be

richer as students would recognize how the service made more of an impact than if they had completed it individually. This notion of impact resonated with many alumni, as both older and recent alum shared a desire to do more. For example, one alum (Kristina) said, "I would have liked more support. I wish I would have gotten more out of it and been able to do more." It appeared staff and alumni had ideas for how to reimagine service-learning as a day of action, focused more on integration into the curriculum and intentional collaboration with community partners, and I would push ACA leadership to create space to hear those ideas and create a short-term plan in collaboration with staff, students, and community partners.

Conclusion

ACA has created a service-learning program that has propelled a group of students to become true changemakers for today's society. At the same time, it has created a service-learning program where the experiences and outcomes are not equitable for all students and where the voice of community partners is void for the most part. This study constructed a holistic understanding of ACA's service-learning program, presented recommendations for the site, and other administrators as well, that will push service-learning programs beyond the traditional approach to service-learning to one that is built out of a decolonizing and critical community-based approach. This study highlighted how important it is to consider both intentionality and impact when implementing service-learning programs. Freire's (2018) concept of praxis rings true in this work, ensuring educators are not only focused on theory and practice, but are building in space for deep reflection so they are able to enact change in action.

EPILOGUE

The date is May 20, 2021. I am sitting with my morning coffee and breakfast burrito
outside my favorite coffee shop in town. Next to me is my copy of Saad's (2020), *Me and White*
Supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor, and the
notebook where I house my daily reflections. I am on Day 6. I have been on Day 6 for several
days now, which means I have also been on Days 1–5 several times. I have read and reread this
statement from Day 6 over a dozen times:

> White exceptionalism is the little voice that convinces you that you can read this book but
> you do not have to do the work. That because you have an intellectual understanding of
> the concepts being presented here, you do not have to diligently write out your responses
> to questions. That you can just think about it in your mind, and that is enough. (Saad,
> 2020, p. 69)

The Day 6 topic is "You and White Exceptionalism." The first time I hit this statement, I thought
"Damn. That's exactly what I just did for the past week. I need to start back on Day 1." So back
to Day 1 I went, again and again. I could not understand why it was so hard to acknowledge and
confront that little voice in my head. Why was the Day 6 reflection so hard? The answer to this
roadblock I was experiencing was so simple. It was around my fourth interaction with this
statement that I began to hear Illich's (1968) words yet again: "To hell with good intentions . . .
You will not help anybody by your good intentions" (p. 2). My continual assumption because my
intentions are in the right place, it is enough, is wildly inaccurate and problematic, to say the
least. It is often easier to tell yourself your positive intentions are enough, even if your actions
prove harmful to a few.

When I set out to conduct this study, I knew I would need to uncover, confront, and
address the problematic pieces of my practice. Specifically, I would need to look at how my

positionality and approach to service-learning impacted the staff, students, and community at ACA. This mindset I was battling on Day 6 was the same mindset I saw reflected in my work with ACA's service-learning program. For years, I had continued to tell myself because our intentions behind implementing a service-learning program were in the right place—it was enough. It was easier for me, and the ACA community, to believe in the performative façade we presented to our audiences than to critically reflect on how our practices were perpetuating harm for some.

I eventually made it past Day 6 and completed Saad's (2020) 28-day challenge and have revisited it several times since then. Her text, and supplemental journal, served as a personal antiracism tool. Through daily reflection and structured dialogues with peers, I continued to understand what it means to take ownership of my participation in the oppressive system of White supremacy. Specifically for this case study, I focused on how my beliefs and actions moved toward dismantling, or reinforced, the way this system manifests in ACA's service-learning program. As Saad (2020) so eloquently said, "If you are willing to date to look white supremacy right in the eye and see yourself reflected back, you are going to become better equipped to dismantle it within yourself and within your communities" (p. 14). I continued this work throughout the data collection process, reflecting after each document analyzed and each interview conducted. This process allowed me to directly see the ways I was upholding a problematic approach to service-learning, and how I was causing harm to different stakeholder groups in my role as an administrator by doing so. Additionally, it allowed me to better understand how racial identity and power show up in running service-learning programs.

A specific example of this was when during the older alumni focus group, a student shared their experience on a service-learning trip to Washington, DC. They shared feelings of discomfort and inadequacy during their experience, unsure of how to navigate so many predominately White spaces. In an interview with one of the trip leaders, they shared although they recognized this, they responded by trying to teach the students "tools of Whiteness" as a way of feeling more at ease in those spaces. This account reminded me of an experience I had as a middle school teacher, where I had taken students to Washington, DC. After one of the activities, a student asked me if we could go back to the hotel and skip the next tour. After probing a bit, she shared she felt uncomfortable on the different tours because when every time our group entered a room it felt as though all eyes were on us. I cannot remember how I responded, but it was most likely similar to the approach taken by the ACA staff member. This is one of many examples where I can point to how my White privilege not only impacted my teaching practice but became rooted in my understanding of service-learning as an administrator as well.

Using the critical, decolonizing lens to reflect on the policies and programs I was implementing, as a teacher and then as an administrator, allowed me to see where I was blinded by my White privilege, exceptionalism, and saviorism. Uncovering this, layered with listening to the experiences of staff, students, and community partners, I was able to pinpoint some foundational practices in ACA's approach to service-learning that need to shift. ACA's service-learning programs have evolved over time without the benefit of intentional reflection and the consistent application of a decolonizing lens. Rather than being aligned with the mission, they

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have developed in response to pragmatic and logistical concerns, leading to a less effective, performative version of service-learning that is misaligned with the true goals of the program.

Maya Angelou (2003) is often attributed to have said the following, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better" (as cited in Saad, 2020, p. 170). As I approach year 15 working in education and continue to evolve as both educator and human, this research project exemplifies my attempt to "do better" for our communities.

APPENDIX A

SEMISTRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ORGANIZED BY

PARTICIPANT

The following is the complete set of interview questions for the staff and community partner participant groups. The intention is for the interviews to be a dialogue between researcher and participant; therefore, some of the questions may not be used during the interviews. Additional questions will be asked if the responses to the initial questions requires supplemental information. Participants will be asked to bring or share any artifacts that exemplify their experience with ACA's service-learning program.

Staff Questions

Introductory
- Tell me about ACA's service-learning program.
- How do students get involved with the different programs?
- What prerequisites are needed for students to participate in these programs?

Involvement and Support
- What service-learning programs are you involved with?

- What is your role in the program?

- Talk with me about your process for working with this partner. How did you get involved with the community partner?

- When and where do the programs take place?

- What is your role in supporting students in the program? What other supports do students receive?

Impacts
- How do you measure success for the service-learning programs?

- What are the benefits of the programs?

- Tell me about the process for teacher evaluation and service-learning.

- ACA seniors are required to complete a civic action project. Tell me about your experience with that process.
- As you know, ACA requires students complete 80 hours of community service to

  graduate. Tell me about this process. What are your thoughts on this?

- Have you developed any sense of how mandatory community service hours affect students' attitudes toward the work?
- What should I know about this? Tell me how this was created. (Researcher will show documents from the document analysis. Examples include charter petition, WASC report, community service tracker, graduation rates, etc.)

Closing
- What opportunities did you have to provide feedback to ACA administration about your

  program experience?

- What feedback do you have?

- Are there other things about the SL program you think I should know that I have not asked?

Community Partners

Introductory
- Tell me about your partnership with ACA. How did it start? How long has it been in

  existence?

- What was your involvement in the planning process for the program?

- What prerequisites are needed for students to participate in this program?

Involvement and Support
- How did you get involved with ACA?

- When and where does the program take place?

- What is your role in supporting students in the program? What other supports do students

  receive?

-

Impacts
- What were some of the benefits from the partnership?

- What feedback opportunities exist between you and ACA?

- What should I know about this? Tell me how this was created. (Researcher will show documents from the document analysis. Examples include student work, MOU agreement, etc.)

Closing
- What opportunities did you have to provide feedback to ACA staff and administration about your program experience?

- What feedback do you have?

- Are there other things about the SL program you think I should know that I have not asked?

APPENDIX B

SEMISTRUCTURED FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following is the complete set of interview questions for the recent and older alumni participant groups. The intention is for the focus group interviews to be a dialogue between researcher and participants; therefore, some of the questions may not be used during the focus groups. Additional questions will be asked if the responses to the initial questions requires supplemental information. Participants will be asked to bring or share any artifacts that exemplify their experience with ACA's service-learning program.

Recent and Older Alumni

Introductory

- Who was involved with… (Researcher will ask for show of hands)

  - PCT

  - Hike the Hill

  - Green Ambassadors

  - Off campus community service

  - On campus community service

  - Summer Bridge

  - Any other service learning programs I didn't mention?

- Tell me about your one of your experiences with ACA's service-learning program.

- When and where did the programs take place?

- How did you learn about the programs?
- What was the application process? How were students selected?

Involvement and Support
- What was your experience like working with the community partners?
- How did you get involved with the community partner?
- What kind of support did you receive from ACA?

- What barriers made it hard to work with more community partners?
- What could I and administration have done differently to make this experience better for you?

Impacts
- What were your favorite parts of the program?

- How did it make you feel to work with the community partners?

- What were some of the benefits from the program for you and your peers? What did you

  get out of it? How has your participation in the program impacted you?

- ACA seniors are required to complete a civic action project. Tell me about your experience with that process.
- As you know, ACA requires students complete 80 hours of community service to

  graduate. Tell me about this process. What are your thoughts on this?

- What should I know about this? Tell me how this was created. (Researcher will show documents from the document analysis. Examples include student work, community service tracker, graduation rates, project descriptions, etc.)
- What should I know about this? Tell me how this was created. (Researcher will show documents from the document analysis. Examples include charter petition, WASC report, community service tracker, graduation rates, etc.)

Closing
- What opportunities did you have to provide feedback to ACA staff and administration about your program experience?
- What feedback do you have?
- Are there other things about the SL program you think I should know that I have not asked?

APPENDIX C

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY DATA COLLECTION

The following are examples of what will be reflected on for each of the time periods in the autoethnographic data collection.

1) Before becoming an educator:

- Experiences with community service via educational setting and church setting

- Experiences with International Service Learning: Mexico, Uganda

2) Teaching years:

- Experiences with student travel & partnerships: San Francisco, Washington DC

- Experiences implementing ACA's programs

3) Administrative years:

- Experiences with overseeing ACA's programs

The following are examples of prompts from Saad's (2020) *Me and White Supremacy* that will be used for journaling and dialoguing throughout the autoethnographic data collection.

- In what ways have you wielded your white privilege over BIPOC that have done harm (whether or not you intended to do so)?

- What white savior narratives have you noticed yourself buying into (whether consciously or unconsciously)?

- In what ways have you believed that BIPOC are helpless and require intervention and help from people with white privilege?

- In what ways have you spoken over BIPOC or for them because you felt that you could explain their needs and experiences better than they could? In what ways have you put BIPOC words through a white filter?

- Think back across your life, from childhood to where you are in your life now. In what ways have you consciously or subconsciously believed that you are better than BIPOC?

- How have you tokenized or fetishized "cute Black kids" or "cute mixed kids"? How have you wanted to "save" Black children?

The following are examples of prompts that will be used to link these past reflections to future change on ACA's campus and in my practice.

- Given the context of this program, how do I see change taking place on our site?

- Where has my positionality impacted the program?

- In what ways has my understanding and approach to service-learning been in line with a traditional, mainstream approach? What opportunities to shift to a decolonizing lens exist in the current model?

- Where do I need to reflect on intent versus impact in the program?

- In what ways is my approach to service-learning and support of program implementation perpetuating harm for students, staff, and community partners?

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