Studying the Struggle

Contexts for Learning and Identity Development for Urban Youth

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Activism and organizing can be a fertile subject matter for young people to study. This article presents a case study of a summer seminar in which urban high school students examined the historical struggle for educational justice in their communities. Adopting a "communities of practice" approach to learning, the article documents the changing participation of seminar participants and the changing identities and skills that this entailed. During the seminar, students took on identities as "critical researchers"— skilled investigators who produce and share knowledge relevant to social change. In the process, seminar participants developed and deployed high-level academic skills in language arts, social studies, and mathematics.

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Education activism and organizing has emerged in the past few years as a significant new field of study. Scholars from the disciplines of sociology, political science, law, and education have studied struggles for educational justice as a strategy for equity, educational reform, and civic engagement (Anyon, 2005; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006; Oakes & Rogers, 2006; Stone, 2001; Warren, 2001). These scholars draw on an array of theoretical lenses and methodological tools to rigorously document organized struggles and analyze their effect on participants, schools, and communities.

Less attention has been paid to how education organizing and activism might serve as a subject of serious study by young people. Yet this fertile intellectual field seems an ideal context to engage young people in rigorous academic work, particularly urban youth of color who have been marginalized by inequitable educational conditions. Organized struggles to create educational justice address deeply felt concerns of urban youth. Such struggles highlight how people similar to themselves and members of their communities have taken action to effect change. In this sense, narratives of education organizing provide urban youth with new ways to think about agency and power. For all of these reasons, education organizing offers an engaging and compelling subject matter.

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Educators can use this organic interest to motivate students to develop and deploy academic tools, such as expository writing, textual analysis, and statistical manipulation, to answer meaningful questions. Furthermore, because studies of education organizing can inform ongoing struggles for justice, students engaged in this subject matter can forge a new appreciation for knowledge work. They can come to see the work of the academy not as something alien and alienating but rather as purposeful and consequential for them and their communities.

Throughout the past several years, we have created a summer seminar for high school students as a context for testing the possibilities of engaging urban youth in studying educational activism. The seminar brings together students from underresourced urban schools across Los Angeles as a community of researchers focused on educational activism. An example from the seminar's opening day in 2003 points to the quality of engagement that this subject matter produces and hints toward a model of learning that draws on this engagement to forge links between activism and knowledge work and build students' academic knowledge.

In the second hour of the seminar, students watched an episode of the documentary *Chicano!* depicting the 1968 student walkouts from high schools in East Los Angeles due to the troubled conditions of the schools (National Latino Communications Center, 1996). Following the documentary, we asked the seminar students to talk about whether the school conditions highlighted by the 1968 student protest had changed in the intervening 35 years. Many of the students recognized their own educational problems in the concerns of 1968 activists. Raul pointed out that not only did his school lack the basics but he and other students were blamed for the system's failure.[1] "When standardized tests come in, you have the politicians say this school is bad, the neighborhood is bad. But they don't give us the right materials we need, so how can we succeed?" Raul's incisive commentary speaks to a point that Michelle Fine and her colleagues have made elsewhere: Consigning low-income students of color to substandard schools undermines learning and teaches students that the broader public does not care about them (Fine, Burns, Payne, & Torre, 2004). One of the most striking things that students saw in the documentary was that young people experiencing conditions similar to themselves had not become complacent. "Back then, at least, they were protesting," Mary commented. Her classmate Chandra added that at her school, "Students would rather argue and debate over their white ts [t-shirts] and cell phones and pagers than their education."

The conversation about *Chicano!* created an opportunity for more experienced peers to point seminar students toward the power of studying educational activism. The discussion closed with comments from five undergraduates who had participated as high school students in previous summer seminars and now were joining the community as teachers. Javier told the students,

> I listened to some of the struggles you guys were talking about . . . and those were
> obstacles that we [also] faced. . . . Even though those obstacles seem hard to overcome,

they can be overcome. You are in the right spot to *learn those tools* [italics added] and those ways to overcome those obstacles.

His colleague Arturo agreed.

During high school I didn't know if I was going to end up 6 feet under or if I was going to end up not graduating or just working or whatever. But through this research and through doing research and educating myself about what goes on in high schools . . . that research opened my eyes and presented me with *tools to create change* [italics added] and now I am dedicating my life to creating change.

Javier and Arturo hint at both a particular model of learning and a distinctive enterprise. Their comments suggest that young people can learn skills as they participate in research (alongside more experienced peers and adults). Furthermore, they point to a form of academic engagement that bears social power. That is, it offers young people a meaningful social role that can affect their daily lives. In the remaining sections of this article we elaborate this approach to learning through participation in what we term "critical research." Section two reviews the literature on learning in the context of communities of practice. Section three introduces the seminar in greater detail, describing how it promoted the enterprise of critical research. Section four reports our findings: we describe how students underwent a series of changing forms of participation through the course of the seminar and how these new forms of participation entailed the acquisition of important academic skills. In section five we conclude the article with a discussion of educational design principles based on our findings.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, we adopt a Community of Practice (CoP) perspective to guide both our design and our analysis. A community of practice is a site of learning and action in which people come together around a joint enterprise and in the process develop a common, historically constituted repertoire of activities, set of stories, and way of speaking and acting (Lave, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Joint activity around a shared endeavor, such as a campaign for educational justice, is a hallmark of a community of practice. Furthermore, joint activity, like any system of human activity, is organized around and by shared tools, divisions of labor, and rules and roles for participation (Engeström, 1987).

Becoming a member of a CoP, however, is not an instantaneous feat but requires sustained participation in the activities of the community as one moves from a peripheral role toward full membership over time (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This movement represents learning as novices gradually take on more skilled roles. To educators, the authentic and natural way that learning occurs as people engage in the ongoing work

of the community is a large part of the appeal of this perspective. When the practice is connected to academic study or research, then this movement toward the core of a practice includes, but is not limited to, learning disciplinary knowledge.

In communities of practice, learning occurs constantly as people participate in activities that are more and more central to the core practice. By working with and observing old-timers of the community in action, newcomers become certain "kinds of persons" who hold new knowledge, articulate new and specialized language, and appropriate new identities. By this we mean that changing one's role in relation to the community leads participants to take on new identities that are necessarily bound up with new knowledge and skills. In Jean Lave's (1996) words, "crafting identities is a *social* process, and becoming more knowledgeably skilled is an aspect of participation in social practice. By such reasoning, who you are becoming shapes crucially and fundamentally what you 'know'" (p. 53).

It has been argued that learning in traditional classrooms differs from learning within a CoP framework (Riel & Polin, 2005; Roth, McGinn, Woszczyna, & Boutonne, 1999). Classroom communities are distinct from other CoPs because in most classrooms "there is a self-conscious effort by adults to produce and manage learning" (Rogoff, 1994, p. 213) and less attention to making progress toward a shared endeavor and the reproduction of the community. Too often the institutional structure of schooling prevents students from being engaged in an authentic joint endeavor with a variety of people at different levels of expertise and experience. Riel and Polin (2005) propose that, at best, classrooms should be considered task-based communities—short-lived communities organized around specific tasks that work together only until the task is completed. They contrast task-based communities with CoPs, claiming that the latter are organized around a broader set of shared goals and are characterized by voluntary, sustained participation in the activity system.

Classrooms often neglect a central insight from the CoP literature about the importance of attending to issues of power and agency in student learning. The CoP framework holds that movement toward full membership is closely related to the transition from participation to responsibility (Diamondstone, 2002; Litowitz, 1997). Said another way, part of the motivation for learning in a community of practice is the desire to shift from a dependent role to a position of control over one's own activity and influence over the broader enterprise. For this very reason, developmentalists and educators have argued that the practices of traditional schooling are mismatched with adolescence because at a time when students desire to exert more agency, the adults around them are exerting increasing control over their behavior and interactions (Eccles, Lord, & Midgley, 1991; Moje, 2002).

The differences between classrooms and communities of practice can be consequential for student learning and identity development. Wenger (1998) argues that when schools fail to create opportunities for students to participate in meaningful practice, they present students with "a choice between a meaningful identity and [school] learning." He suggests that this choice

creates a conflict between their social and personal lives and their intellectual engagement in school. What appears to be lack of interest in learning may therefore not reflect a resistance to learning or an inability to learn. On the contrary, it may reflect a genuine thirst for learning of a kind that engages one's identity on a meaningful trajectory and affords some ownership of meaning. (p. 270)

This stark choice between academic learning and identity development is a particularly common experience for low-income students of color in urban schools. Many urban schools foreground mechanisms of discipline and control, providing students with few opportunities to assert agency in learning (Noguera, 2003). When these structures of control sit atop overcrowded and poorly resourced schools, many students become alienated (Fine et al., 2004), that is, they become disengaged from dependent roles that offer little promise of power or future reward.

Although such outcomes are common, they are not inevitable. Several studies have shown that when conditions supportive of learning and identity development are set in place, low-income students of color do not reject schooling but instead orient themselves toward academic success (Martin, 2000; Mehan, Hubbard, & Villanueva, 1994; Morrell, 2004a; Oakes & Rogers, 2006). The students in these studies do not adopt a naïve "achievement ideology" (Mehan et al., 1994, p. 94) but rather orient themselves toward maintaining their cultural heritage and making challenges to access visible to others. These positive cases have been shown to be associated with long-term academic success and inform the design and analysis of our study.

A central lesson from these cases is the importance of designing learning contexts with explicit attention to issues of power. Cornelius and Herrenkohl (2004) identify three ways to conceptualize power relations that are consequential for student learning. First, learners develop a relationship of power with a concept or body of knowledge. This ownership of ideas emerges through relationships with knowledge and relationships with other people in the community. Second, novices acquire social power through interactions with other students. These relationships of partisanship forge solidarity and alliances among students. Third, students assert power by using authoritative and persuasive discourse that places them in power over, or on equal footing with, others.

This study explores each of these forms of power in the context of our seminar. Ultimately, we are interested in the degree to which students appropriate and appropriately display an academic discourse identity and use it to control their behaviors, interactions, and expectations. For our purpose of tracing shifts in participation and the corresponding shifts in identity, an important consideration will be the roles that students play in joint activity and how these roles shift over time.

We believe that the IDEA seminar is a hybrid space that includes classroom-based activities and opportunities for students to leave the classroom to collect and produce new knowledge firsthand. In many ways it fits what Wells (1999) has called a knowledge-building community characterized by the joint construction of a shared body of knowledge. In this case, students build a critical history of racial segregation and the struggle for educational justice in their own communities.

Seminar Overview

In the summer of 2003, the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access (IDEA) convened 25 high school students from across Los Angeles for a 5-week research seminar titled "Equal Terms: The Struggle for Educational Justice in Greater Los Angeles, 1954-2004." The seminar's title came from the United States' Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) that education must be "provided to all on equal terms." As this landmark case approached its 50th anniversary, public officials and community members increasingly asked whether *Brown*'s promise had been realized and what actions today might lead to educational justice. These questions held special significance in Los Angeles because a lawsuit filed in 2000 (*Williams v. State of California*) charged that more than one million low-income students of color in California were confined to separate, unequal, and substandard schools. The IDEA seminar aimed to inform the resolution of *Williams* through a youth-led public history project exploring historical shifts in educational opportunities across Los Angeles. It also sought to open up a broader public conversation about the role that activist youth and communities can play in creating change.

The "Equal Terms" public history project was the fifth in a series of annual summer seminars that IDEA has offered to Los Angeles urban youth. The IDEA seminars have aimed to create a distinctive community of practice around what we term "critical research." Critical research refers to the practice of young people using social theory and the tools of social science investigation to document, make sense of, report on, and take action to change the conditions in their schools and communities. We call this research critical because it highlights inequality and social activism and foregrounds the role of young people who are negatively affected by inequality as key agents in enacting more just and democratic policies (Morrell, 2004a; Oakes & Rogers, 2006).

The effort to forge a community of practice around critical research has shaped three goals for the IDEA seminars. First, the seminars try to develop young people who have the tools, understandings, and commitments necessary to conduct rigorous investigations and play powerful civic roles. That is, the seminars seek to enable urban youth to take on identities as critical researchers. Acquiring these identities is bound up with developing an array of academic literacies that urban youth need to be successful in schools and the academy (Morrell, 2004b). Second, the seminars aim to produce quality research that can inform equity reform and the practice of social activists. In this context, quality research means research that is both rigorous and accessible to the broader public. Third, the IDEA seminars attempt to document and elaborate the emerging practice of critical research in the hopes of influencing both our own praxis and that of other educators and activists.

The 2003 IDEA seminar set out to study the history of struggle for educational justice in Los Angeles. The seminar sought to position present conditions (such as school segregation) as the result of policies, legal decisions, and the actions of individuals and groups rather than natural, inevitable, or forgivable "histories." This required that students see themselves as critical historians whose understanding of the past could compete with elite perspectives for public policy influence if the students' positions were backed up by rigorous, evidence-based explanations for the historical roots of contemporary inequality. Toward this end, the seminar tried to equip students with the tools to track historical shifts in community demographics and school opportunities and document the perspectives of individuals who experienced and fought against injustice.

A wide array of individuals participated in the 2003 seminar. Ernest Morrell and John Rogers directed the project and served as the primary instructors for the large seminar meetings. Noel Enyedy and a group of his graduate students led an instructional unit focused on statistical understanding and mapping. The seminar instructors were joined by five kindergarten through 12th-grade teachers who each cofacilitated a student research team along with an undergraduate who had participated in the IDEA seminar as a high school student. The teachers came from five distinct geographic communities across greater Los Angeles and were selected on the basis of their interest in critical research. The teachers in turn each recruited five 11th-grade students from their schools or communities to participate in the seminar. The teachers selected students from a wide range of academic backgrounds: roughly a third of the seminar students arrived with a cumulative grade point average of C or lower; 16 of the students were Latino, 8 African American, and 1 Southeast Asian; and all came from poor or working-class homes. These participants came together as researchers for roughly 5 hours a day throughout 5 weeks.

Data Sources and Methods

Data collection on the seminar included extensive videotaping, instructors' field notes, and systematic gathering of ongoing student work, including daily student journals. We used grounded theory to guide our analysis (Charmaz, 1983; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). We began with theoretically grounded conjectures about the significance of shifts in participation that would be consequential for student identity. We focused on ways that the roles and relationships that students took up shifted over time and the degree to which we could link these new roles to learning history, language arts, and mathematics. We examined our field notes, videotapes of the seminar, and student journals to generate initial cases and categories. After examining these examples, we compared them to other data sources and cases to confirm and/or challenge our interpretation of the data.

Findings

What did the students learn? More appropriately, how did they participate in the seminar throughout the course of the 5 weeks? How did this participation change as students embraced their roles as critical researchers? We identified three major shifts in the activities and roles of the students throughout the 5 weeks of the seminar. First, there was a shift in the type of traditional academic work that they undertook—from high school–level work to college-level work. This was not just a shift in the level of the content but in how the students engaged in the academic enterprise. Most notably, it entailed a new relationship with text. The second shift in student roles occurred when they engaged in data collection for their own research projects. The third shift emerged when students turned their efforts toward producing new knowledge and communicating their new understandings to a wide audience.

Phase 1

During the first 2 weeks of the seminar, students attended the large group seminars, participated in small group discussions, read academic texts, talked about these texts in meaningful ways with their peers and instructors, and related these texts to their own experiences as students attending urban schools in greater Los Angeles. Of particular significance was the way they engaged with the texts. For many students, this was the first time they had a textbook that they could write in and annotate. The seminar leaders also pushed the students to follow Freire's (1997) admonition and "demand meaning from the text." The students took up this challenge by highlighting, jotting down notes, and developing questions to take back to their groups. As noted earlier, this new relationship to the text represented a shift in power. The students were now taking ownership of these ideas (Cornelius & Herrenkohl, 2004), not only consuming them but questioning them, synthesizing them, and making them their own. During these initial weeks, students also became textual producers. Each day they responded to journal prompts that asked them questions about their own schooling experiences and about the process of learning to conduct critical research. Other early texts included summations of academic literature as well as notes on lectures and discussions.

In all of these practices, the seminar resembled a highly functioning, although traditional, learning space (see Figure 1). This engagement in traditional academic practices is important because becoming a critical researcher entails gaining proficiency with the tools and language of academic research. Put succinctly, students need to be able to read and write at a high academic level if they are to effectively participate in academic discourse.

Even in this early stage of the seminar, students experienced opportunities to assume different roles than they might in a traditional college-level academic seminar. The first day of the seminar, students began designing a research study in their

Figure 1
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small groups. Assisted by group leaders and the seminar directors, they asked about the nature and quality of schooling in greater Los Angeles. They began to turn hunches or concerns into researchable questions by formulating hypotheses that empirical data could answer. Students created lists of data they might like to collect and brainstormed the logistics of a month-long research project. They decided who they would like to interview or survey and where in the city they might collect interesting data. Students even began to create instruments of research such as interview protocols and surveys. Through these initial practices, students' relationship to the subject matter changed. They went from learning about a topic of interest to developing original research questions and research plans. Students essentially designed the remainder of their curriculum, which called on them to collect and analyze data and come to their own original conclusions about these data.

The students' anticipation of their research was important because it gave a long-range frame to the more traditional academic exercises of reading, writing, and discussion. They engaged with the texts knowing that they were going to have to put these ideas into action not years from now but in days. The curricular timeline reinforced the instructors' charge to "demand meaning" and helped encourage students to take up new academic roles.

Phase 2

During the second phase of the seminar (roughly weeks 2-4) the students took on the roles of investigators. They spent far less time in the large seminars and more time in the field collecting data or in small groups analyzing data or refining the tools of data collection. Their primary tools became Mead notebooks, tape recorders, digital video cameras, and surveys. The location of their work shifted from the classrooms of UCLA to the neighborhoods, public schools, and historical archives across Los Angeles. Student research groups developed lists of participants to interview. Each team took responsibility for unpacking the schooling experiences of students of color during a particular post-*Brown* decade. Their primary informants were graduates of Los Angeles–area schools from that period. Students identified family members and neighbors who fit their research needs, spoke with community leaders, and traveled to neighborhood locations (community colleges, shopping malls, restaurants, and parks) where interviewees might be found.

While in the field students took on multiple roles with implications for their development as researchers and activists. For instance, when approaching well-known activists and respected community members, the students took on the formal roles of oral historians. They became young scholars armed with notebooks and cameras to record for posterity these seemingly forgotten stories of educational activism amid changing schools and changing communities (see Figure 2). Initially timid, they gained confidence in their research capabilities when others treated them with respect. Nothing we might have fabricated in the formal seminar space could match the reaction to the students by other members of their own communities. As a consequence, the students took themselves and their work very seriously.

In one such visit the student research team responsible for the first post-*Brown* decade (1954-1963) interviewed a group of men who had attended Garfield High School in the early 1960s. Known as the Maravilla Veteranos (MV), these gentlemen met regularly at a local restaurant to socialize and maintain connections to their early life in East Los Angeles. When our student research team showed up, the entire restaurant buzzed. The members of the MV opened their hearts to these young researchers, frequently talking over one another to share stories of their experiences from Garfield. For more than an hour students peppered a dozen or so men with questions. Students asked questions, took notes, and videotaped. At the culmination of the interview, one of the MV members pointedly asked, "How can we learn more about your research? When are you presenting your findings?" The MV clearly saw

Figure 2
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these students as legitimate researchers and, even more, as the guardians of their community's historical narrative, with the ability to carry their stories to places the MV were unlikely to travel.

In another field episode, a student research team from the second post-*Brown* decade (1964-1973) visited a local historical archive to collect data. This group wanted newspaper clippings and other media artifacts to document community organizing and significant happenings in schools during this era. The director treated the students as she would any "sanctioned" researchers who visited the archives. Students were told how to handle the artifacts, that they could only take notes with pencils, and that they could photograph but not remove any of the artifacts they examined. The students took this task very seriously and remained at the archives for a couple of hours. Prior to leaving they shared with the director some of their project research. When she learned that the students were collecting digitized video oral histories from community members she became very excited and asked if the research groups would be willing to donate their data to the archives' community history project.

Both of these experiences from the field research portion of the project legitimated the student researchers as data collectors, as public intellectuals, and as scholar-activists working toward social change. History was no longer an authoritative text to be memorized; history became something they were entrusted to create. As it became referred to in the seminar, their role was to "give voice to the voiceless." Thus, the students asserted themselves as authors in the discipline of public history (Cornelius & Herrenkohl, 2004).

Phase 3

During the third and final phase of the seminar the students returned to the university where they analyzed the data they had amassed and prepared research reports, short documentaries, and PowerPoint presentations. Loaded with mounds of data and the responsibility of representing the stories of the people they encountered, student teams worked relentlessly to create high-quality research products to share with audiences ranging from university faculty to community members to administrators and policy makers. During this phase, student roles shifted again as research teams pored through field notes, interview transcriptions, and video data. Now, instead of studying published works, the students' texts were the data that they had collected.

They soon were putting the finishing touches on projects that they had envisioned on white boards only a few weeks prior. In preparing projects that would be presented to a live audience and shared with others via an Internet site, the students became knowledge producers. Groups also focused on innovative ways to share their data. The adults continued to serve as guides, as readers of drafts, and providers of feedback. The students worked around the clock to have all of their projects ready; the work was theirs and they cared deeply about its quality.

Students presented themselves as research experts and communicated their findings to fellow researchers and stakeholders in the community. Before 150 guests at the university faculty center, each research team presented their findings in PowerPoint slides and a short documentary film (see Figure 3). Dressed in conference attire and delivering academic talks within an academic environment, the students were credible academic presenters. After the presentations, invited panelists responded as they would at a professional research conference. Students answered questions about their methods and findings and pointed to future directions in historical and social science research as well as implications for contemporary educational organizing and activism.

Identity Development and Academic Development

The summer seminar focused heavily on the development of academic content knowledge. In particular, we sought to use the context of the seminar to develop the students' abilities across English language arts, social studies, and mathematics. Indeed, when we instituted the seminar in 1999, one of our initial goals was to develop a set of activities whereby urban youth attending underperforming schools would be able to develop academic and critical literacies and demonstrate their college readiness (Oakes, Rogers, Morrell, & Lipton, 2002). We wanted to collect, analyze, and present data that countered the widely held expectation that students attending these schools were not academically capable. We hoped to situate this

Figure 3
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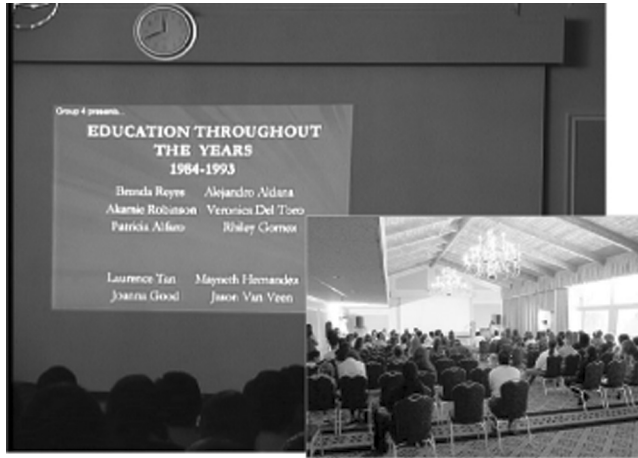
academic learning in a context where the students' experiences with the inequitable educational system would motivate them to engage content that, in the past, may have intimidated or alienated them. In this next section, we discuss the relationship between students' developing identities as critical researchers and their mastering content in secondary language arts, social studies, and mathematics.

Language Arts

The jointly sponsored National Council of Teachers of English and International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA, 1996) *Standards for the English Language Arts* are explicit in demanding that students read and write across a variety of genres and texts and that they draw on the experiences of their everyday world to develop their academic literacy skills. In adhering to these demands for an English curriculum, we intentionally created opportunities for students to engage in supported college-level reading and writing as they developed the sociological tools to interrogate their own educational experiences. Students read complicated texts across many genres, including poetry, essays, social science scholarship, interview transcripts, and other sociological data.[2] In group "read arounds" students explored the meaning of "critical reading" as different from, and superior to, traditional reading. For example, during the 2nd week of the seminar, students read Paulo Freire's (1997) *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach*. In small groups, students dissected passages of this graduate-level text as Freire articulated his theory of critical

reading as a revolutionary act in which intellectuals demand meaning from the text and in which they engage in a dialectical process of using their readings of "the world" to inform their readings of "the word." In her journal, Alicia discusses the importance of this new approach to reading:

> Alicia: Not only did UCLA's Summer Seminar teach me new theories, topics, and to demand meaning, but it has also taught me to use my knowledge to help my educational life. By this I mean, I can use my knowledge of being a critical researcher to help me better understand the subjects I embark on in school. I can use my knowledge every time I have a project in one of my classes, such as my History class or my Science class. I can use my knowledge to demand meaning from the text. Take my science class for example; when we read text about new topics or theories, I can take my role of being a critical researcher and start demanding meaning from the text. I can start to question what I don't understand, or I can start to read and take deeper meaning of the text, to help me realize what it's trying to tell me. I didn't realize it until now, but being a critical researcher and having a critical identity has helped me, and will help me in my studies beginning now, and continuing on to the future.

In addition to teaching basic skills of comprehension, summary, and analysis, we defined reading as active engagement with the text and the social world. Furthermore, we encouraged students to read their world onto and into the academic texts that we assigned. Together and individually, students navigated our 700-page course reader. Students demonstrated their ability to read at a high level via their use of texts in conversations and in their research products.

The seminar also provided ample opportunities for students to develop their identities as writers. Students wrote in their journals for 45 min daily on topics ranging from their personal experiences to their feelings on contemporary social issues to their reactions to experiences in the field. Drawing from these journal entries, students produced 2,000-word critical memoirs that they took through several drafts with the assistance of a writing instructor. Collectively, students also produced PowerPoint presentations and research reports that they disseminated to an audience of academics, policy makers, and community-based organizations. This next passage from a students' critical memoir serves as evidence both of the impact of academic reading and the power of the written texts that the students were able to create after only a short tenure with the program.

> Rafael: The education structure is also set up to keep minorities at a low achievement level and not allow them to rise up to the occasion. Being exposed to the writings of such great writers such as Bourdieu, Bowles, Gintis, and Bernstein allowed me to gain insight on the real theories of public education and many of them proved to be true. The writings of Bowles and Gintis gave me insight on the "correspondence principle," which highlights the similarity between the social relations of production and personal interest. This shows the relationship between the students, teachers, and administrators

in the workplace. This theory shows that capitalism reflects the production on things, and different "tracks" emphasize different values, such as the "top flight" kids are given the better and more rigorous courses while kids of lower income families generally have a mediocre education.

This is an example of an incredibly fertile reading of a complex sociological text that has been drawn on to analyze contemporary problems in schools in urban Los Angeles. Rafael not only refers to sociological theorists but he incorporates their work into his analysis. In following Freire's challenge, Rafael demands meaning from these sociological texts as he attempts to make sense of the relationships between wealth, power, and access to quality schooling in his city. The spaces for writing and revision enabled Rafael to create a well-written essay with a cohesive and theoretically rich argument.

Social Studies

With respect to the social studies content, students learned not only about *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) but also about the legal and social history of school segregation in California from the 1860s to the present. Students read commentaries on cases leading up to *Brown* and they even were able to interview a surviving litigant from a landmark case from the 1940s. In addition, they learned about the changing demographics of the city and country in the half-century since *Brown* and the policies that were enacted that created de facto segregation. In the process, students learned a great deal about their schools and communities and about the American educational system as a whole. Moreover, students acquired the skills necessary to complete their own original historical research. They learned how to access historical archives, they developed protocols and learned how to conduct oral history interviews, and they collected and analyzed other historical artifacts such as letters, old yearbooks, and newspapers. These skills are generative and will help them succeed academically and in their professional lives.

Furthermore, students grappled with the standards of good inquiry and sought to create a form of practice that was neither traditional (objective) research nor narrow activism. They thought about evidence and how to balance their interpretive role with their desire to "give voice to the voiceless." Consider this lengthy excerpt from the research report written by the group studying Los Angeles schools during the decade from 1954-1963:

The study of public education is complicated since it involves racism, injustice, and the lack of opportunities for many students to succeed in life. For example, the opportunity for students to obtain a higher education is often denied, because they are minorities. As students attending high schools in greater Los Angeles, we are participating in this UCLA seminar in order to research the conditions of schools prior to 1963, to record

people's accounts at these schools, and to inform others in order to empower them to change. We used various methods and tools to achieve our purposes. To capture our subjects' appearances and surroundings, we used digital video cameras, digital photo cameras, voice recorders, and notebooks. . . . Our methods were different from traditional research methods and traditional school projects. . . . Usually we would look at history books, which are secondary sources, and more likely to be less accurate. We spoke directly with people who were students attending schools in Los Angeles during that time instead of just reading about these people. Instead of reading about the way conditions in schools were supposed to be, or the way the schools looked according to official reports or laws, we asked people how they actually were.

This research group report offers a complex and well-conceived original research design. It also reveals a growing understanding of the limitations and possibilities that the research process affords. As we have argued elsewhere (Morrell & Rogers, 2006), in the process of becoming public historians, these students not only read historical materials differently but they become history-making agents by contributing new and socially significant historical narratives of their schools and communities. Their research allowed them to draw connections between local experiences and larger trends across the country.

Mathematics

The mathematical goals of our project were designed to be consistent with the recommendations of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics' *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics* (2000) and the California Department of Education (1999). These documents recommend that students learn how to formulate questions that can be addressed with data; design experiments, collect data, and/or use premade data sets to answer questions; use appropriate methods to analyze the data; and generate statistical inferences and predictions based on data.

Furthermore, research in statistics education helped us target two statistical concepts where students typically struggle. First, students often have difficulty reasoning from a distribution when making inferences from data. (By distribution, we mean the distribution of data points, such as a normal bell curve, often characterized by mean, median, mode, and standard deviation.) Instead, students are much more inclined to reason from individual, meaningful data points, such as something they have personally experienced (Konold & Higgins, 2002). Second, when reasoning about the covariation of two variables in a data set, students often fail to draw a valid conclusion. This is because students tend to focus exclusively on one aspect of the data and ignore others.

Analyses of the pretest and posttest demonstrate modest advances in the ways that seminar students were making inferences based on data. There was a statistically

significant gain of 3.6 points on a scale of 0 to 16, with the mean score rising from 7 to 10.6 from pretest to posttest ($t = 5.364$, $p < .005$). Much of this gain was due to the increased value that students saw in drawing conclusions from quantitative data as opposed to individual qualitative cases. In addition, in their final presentations and written reports, students produced many well-articulated, sophisticated claims about inequitable educational opportunities in Los Angeles schools. Forty-six of the 105 claims (34%) made in the final presentations were drawn from a distribution rather than individual data points.[3] Taken together, we can see that their experiences investigating the history of struggle for educational justice increased the perceived value of quantitative data and, in certain circumstances, led them to begin to reason from a distribution (for an expanded analysis, see Enyedy & Mukhopadhyay, in press).

In considering how the activities and the identities offered by the seminar contributed to the students' statistics learning, we have identified two leading possibilities. First, mathematics was seen as being in the service of their larger joint enterprise. Second, their own firsthand experience was valued as a resource to make sense of the statistical abstractions and as a way to develop conjectures that could be tested against the data. For example, Figure 4a shows the students looking at a GIS map they produced (Figure 4b) and discussing what inferences they can make about the relationship between de facto segregation of African American and Latino students to the income levels of the different neighborhoods. The irregular shapes of Figure 4b represent individual census tracts shaded by the average income of the people who live there (darker areas represent a higher income level). The dots correspond to Los Angeles high schools, with the dark-colored dots representing schools with high concentrations of Black and Latino students (i.e., segregated schools with more than 80% African American and/or Latino students).

Through the discussion grounded by the map the students began to grasp the relationship between income levels and segregated schools. Although the teacher began by pointing out to the students the concentration of heavily segregated schools in low-income areas (i.e., dark dots on a light background), the students noticed that some schools did not fit the trend. They pointed out to the teacher that there were a number of predominately White schools in low-income areas (i.e., light dots on a light background). This was important because, as stated previously, one of the common statistical mistakes students make when reasoning about the relationship between two variables is to only examine part of the information, usually the positive cases. In this instance, the teacher made this mistake by only pointing out the pattern that fit their conjecture about segregation. It was the students who began to point out and explore the counterevidence. Through a subsequent discussion of what counted as adequate evidence they began to understand the mathematics at a conceptual level.

Figure 4
PLEASE PROVIDE A FIGURE TITLE

Discussion

IDEA's summer seminar is a distinctive community of practice that aims to promote the development of critical researchers, socially important research, and insights about the design of powerful learning contexts. Above, we have described how seminar students gradually took on the identity of critical researchers. Throughout the course of the seminar, they participated in more knowledgeable and skillful ways and increasingly integrated the knowledge work of critical investigation with a commitment to improving their schools and communities. We also have hinted at the significance of their research to ongoing activism for educational justice. In the article's final section, we focus on the last of the seminar's goals—the lessons it produced about designing powerful sites for learning.

Design often is associated with planning what instructors should teach to pass on a body of knowledge or skills. This approach to design assumes, in the words of Jean Lave (1996), "that there is no learning without teaching, and that what is taught is what will be learned (if it gets learned)" (p. 18). By way of contrast, a community of practice approach assumes that novices learn when they have opportunities to engage in practice as legitimate peripheral participants. As Etienne Wenger (1998) argues, this approach means that an instructional plan should look "more like an itinerary of transformative experiences of participation than a list of subject matter" (p. 270).

What was it about the design of the IDEA seminar that made participation in historical research transformative? Urban students often participate in seemingly similar work—learning about historical events and writing papers—that is not transformative in the same way. The difference between the IDEA seminar and most other urban school contexts lies in its distinctive approach to knowledge work. IDEA's seminar frames distinctive answers to the following questions: Why does this knowledgeability (related to critical research) matter? Who holds and enacts this knowledge and skills? How can new knowledge and skills be accessed, developed, and interrogated? Where should new knowledge be disseminated? Taken together, the answers to these questions point to a set of five design principles that emerged from the seminar.

Principle 1: Frame a Compelling Enterprise

The seminar's core investigation—of the history of struggle for educational justice in Los Angeles—was designed to make knowledge work matter to urban high school students. Students were drawn to stories that represented their own community's past and spoke to the struggles that continued in today's school system. The belief that they too could present stories that mattered was confirmed when students conducted interviews and heard community members ask when they could see the products of the students' research.

Of importance, the IDEA seminar not only welcomed students into a compelling enterprise but invited them to shape this enterprise. In their research teams, students determined whose voices to document, how to draw on other evidence, and (ultimately) what story to tell about their decade. The seminar also prompted students to reflect on the enterprise of critical public history and report on what it means and why it matters. In this way, students gradually were drawn into and then became core participants in the enterprise.

Furthermore, the compelling enterprise provided a motivational context through which all of the subsequent academic work was situated. Once students became engaged in the historical research, it was not difficult for the adult educators to create a set of meaningful academic activities that developed important skills related to existing content-area demands. Rather than start with these demands, however, the educators started with issues that mattered to the students and then developed contexts where students learned as they became active participants in studying these issues. We argue that educators can more effectively reach urban youth if they begin their curriculum design with a compelling enterprise (drawn from student interests) and spaces for active participation instead of starting from content demands and applying them to generic learners who are theorized as passive recipients of fixed and discrete subject matter.

Principle 2: Distribute Knowledge Across Participants

A central premise of critical research is that engaging young people who are affected by inequality in investigations into that inequality will yield important and distinctive knowledge. This claim is based on the view that because of their interest and "insider" stance, young people can infuse new questions and understandings into the research process. To play this role, youth need to work with peers and adults with more experience in research methods. One of the strategies of the seminar thus is to create sites where young people can share knowledge as they simultaneously acquire new expertise.

The IDEA seminar consciously developed contexts where knowledge was evenly distributed across the group. In part, this task was rhetorical. Seminar leaders spoke of the various participants in the seminar—from students to undergraduates to teachers to faculty—as "critical researchers" engaged in a joint enterprise. This shared title was used on the identification badges that all seminar participants wore when the teams traveled into the field. Distributed expertise also was structured into the student research groups. Each group included five students from five different neighborhoods. As the teams traveled across greater Los Angeles, the role of community expert shifted. Significantly, students (rather than teachers or adult researchers) held knowledge that facilitated the research. At the same time, adults shared insights about research methods gained through their own experience.

Although the focus of the seminar and this article are on empowering youth as academicians and activists, we do not want to leave the impression that adults do not have an important role to play in student learning. Indeed, the more youth become involved in intellectual and activist work, the more they need to collaborate with and learn from those who have experience and expertise. Our argument is that knowledge should be more equitably distributed between adults and teens, not that teens would be better served without the explicit guidance of adult mentors and expert peers. A pedagogy of critical research is not laissez-faire. Rather than abdicate their responsibility, teachers should reconceptualize how they teach when the project is collaborative critical research for social change. Each of these design principles constitutes an element of this reconceptualization.

Principle 3: Facilitate Access to Necessary Knowledge and Skills

While calling into question the belief that knowledge expertise lies exclusively within the academy, the IDEA seminar drew on the resources of the academy to provide students with the knowledge and skills they needed for their investigations. This knowledgeability was developed in the context of meaningful participation in a research community of practice and it also became immediately applicable to the practice of critical research. That is, the knowledge and skills were necessary to the work that the students needed and wanted to do. The students had to develop their conceptual, methodological, and analytical skills to become better researchers and to enhance their own research projects. The nature of the research enterprise created a more authentic environment for the expert researchers to introduce the novice researchers to important information and for the expert researchers to impart relevant research tools.

Toward these ends, the seminar's faculty collected a wide array of secondary and primary sources on Los Angeles educational history into a reader for the students. They pointed students to useful reports and data sets that could answer the students' questions and directed them to sites where students could find relevant artifacts. The faculty also drew on their social networks to connect students to former superintendents, reporters, and civil rights attorneys who could shed light on the key decisions that shaped particular decades. In turn, the students accessed the knowledge resources according to their own schedules and interests. In this way, the faculty enhanced the knowledgeability of the students as the students remained the primary agents in knowledge acquisition.

In a similar way, seminar faculty enabled students to develop skills necessary for critical research. Students learned core skills of research through "just in time" workshops or tutorials. Efforts were made to time the workshops so that the lessons responded to skills students needed immediately to advance their research. Students learned to use audio and video recorders before they went out on their field interviews. Similarly, workshops on video editing and PowerPoint were presented in the

final week as the students were preparing their final presentations. The students then used these new skills to answer their questions and to tell their story.

Principle 4: Create Contexts for Meaning Making

As the IDEA seminar connected students with new sources of knowledge, it created pedagogic sites for students to grapple with the meanings of this knowledge. Early in the seminar, students read Freire (1997) and talked at length about how critical researchers must interrogate the meaning of what they read and what they observe. This principle carried over into all aspects of the seminar. Students wrote daily journal entries that explored what they were learning through their research. In research team meetings, students considered and reconsidered the main messages of oral history interviews. Recurring issues became topics for discussion in the whole group seminars. For example, students initiated a dialogue about how to make sense of conflicts between informants' stories and the accounts found in official sources such as newspapers. Two points are important to note. First, throughout the course of the seminar, students gradually appropriated existing structures of meaning making for their own use. Second, reflection was purposeful. Students used these contexts to address knowledge problems posed by their ongoing investigations.

Principle 5: Create Structures for Sharing Knowledge Work

The IDEA seminar aimed to create a body of research that would influence social policy and community activism. This required attention to both the quality of the research and to its distribution. The IDEA seminar took up this subject directly, in part as a strategy to highlight the importance of the enterprise to the students and their community. In whole group discussions, seminar participants talked about who has the power to make decisions or engage in activism about educational justice. Based on this dialogue, students generated lists of individuals or groups who should learn about their research—either through the final presentations or via a Web site. When students personally knew individuals on the lists, they invited them to the final presentation. In other cases, seminar faculty used their social networks to reach out to elected officials or civil rights attorneys. Ultimately, they shared the students' research with a much wider audience through an online journal.

Creating structures for sharing knowledge work is important to validating the student research projects. Informing an attentive audience is a far more valuable and validating activity, for instance, than merely handing a teacher a report to evaluate. More important, when students emerge as legitimate researchers with important findings to share, educators are compelled to find appropriate forums through which various constituencies can benefit from this knowledge work. Their work demands attention because it bears value. That is, whereas the presence of an audience grants students a sense of legitimacy as researchers, the usefulness of the knowledge legitimizes the students as coparticipants in the struggle for social and educational justice.

Critical research as a community of practice thus effects change on several levels. First, as urban youth engage in critical research, they take on new and more powerful identities. These identities embody skills and knowledge and ways of being that young people need as they navigate future academic and social settings. They also provide youth with a set of knowledge-based civic capacities that they can use to foster social change. Second, the products of critical research can directly inform the work of contemporary educational activists and organizers. Third, the practice of critical research produces new insights about powerful learning contexts that can be used to shape school experiences for urban youth. Critical research also represents a potential new stream of work within the emerging field of scholarship about education organizing and activism. It is time that this field, which examines and draws inspiration from the political energy of youth, incorporate the intellectual contributions of youth researchers as well.

Notes

1. The names of high school students are pseudonyms.

2. The level of academic rigor of these texts can be judged by the fact that a slightly revised version of the course reader was later used in a doctoral seminar at the University of California, Los Angeles.

3. At first glance this percentage (34%) may seem low but the total number of claims included claims that were self-evident to the intended audience (i.e., claims that needed no data) and claims based on the firsthand reports of the community members interviewed by the students.

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