

**STUDENTS' VOICES &
EXPERIENCES WITH ACTION
PROJECTS FOR
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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By

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ABSTRACT

The United Nations General Assembly recognized the years from 2005 to 2014 as the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD).

Students' perspectives on education for sustainable development and student perceptions on action projects for sustainable development are almost absent from the literature. This thesis presents an analysis of students' voices and experiences as a result of Youth Forum 2008 (a forum proposed to support high school students as action leaders in sustainability projects) in three different case locations. The study attempts to understand students' challenges with their action projects, examining them in the context of dominant discourses and explores supports that can be put into place to facilitate students' navigation toward their goals of completing successful action projects for sustainable development.

This qualitative study was composed of a series of focus group recorded conversations with ten high school student participants involved in three different school sites who all attempted to complete action projects for sustainable development. Many themes were identified: time, whether projects were extracurricular or curricular, school community, teacher, teacher education, marks/evaluation, community engagement, youth forum and technology. In the examination and interpretation many attractions and distractions for the student participants were identified. By interpreting the students' experiences through the language of the students, a deeper understanding of the dominant discourses of schools and society and how they might limit the students highlights broader ideas about students' struggles and triumphs in education and with teaching. In the conclusion, I suggest recommendations and I also suggest further avenues for research.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my auntie Janice, my grandpa Steve and my grandpa Ted. Even though you are not here with me, I know you will always be with me. Thank you for being there and for always believing in me. You are my guardian angels.

I also dedicate this thesis to my niece, Alyssa Ava and to my nephews, Austin Alex and Ethan August. May your voices always be heard and may you always know the value of education. Best of luck in your future endeavors! I know you will all aspire to do many great things in this world and will all embrace “Be the change”! I hope you will always value our environment and live in harmony with all things and especially with all people! You are all my inspiration for a brighter future! I love you.

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Chapter One

My Research Journey

Personal Background

My personal research journey into sustainable development began in 2007 when I attended a youth forum in Regina with Dr. Janet McVittie. Students from Regina and Moose Jaw met at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum, were welcomed by a keynote speaker and attended sessions throughout the day. I attended sessions alongside the students, conversed with them at nutrition breaks and even participated with them in the ‘break-out’ sessions. I was interested in their thoughts, their group projects, and the reasons why they were attending the forum. But what really drew me was their passion for sustainability. I wanted to know how to pass some of their passion onto other students and transfer or transport it back to Saskatoon. I wanted to inspire teachers to be involved in the half-day sustainability workshops at the University of Saskatchewan that I offered following that youth forum. Since then, I have been reading about sustainability, sustainable development and environmental education and have not seen much research about students’ thoughts, opinions, ideas and passions around the topic.

I believe I was interested in sustainability long before I knew what sustainability even was. I was raised to help my Mom, my Grandma and my Baba in their gardens in the spring, summer and fall. As a family, we walked everywhere in town or we rode our bicycles. At a young age, I helped start the recycling club at my elementary school. I also taught both my Grandma and my Baba the importance of recycling. By grade three, my Grandpa helped my sister and me build a compost bin and we became the town’s youngest composters! I was also involved in 4-H and SRC (Student Representative Council). Growing up, I was taught to appreciate people, respect nature, and take initiative in many projects, which contributed to developing my leadership skills.

I was interested in environmental issues throughout my undergraduate university career. I believed the more I could do for the environment, the better the world would be. I walked, biked and rode public transit to University. I was involved in the Prairie

Habitat Garden at the College of Education. I didn't own a car until I moved away and began my teaching career. As a teacher, I helped my students to be environmentally conscious. They helped their families to recycle, compost, save energy, etc. We, as a class, were involved in the recycling program at our school, we made homemade crafts at Christmas time and we were involved in a city-wide tree planting program. My students often came up with unique ways to be involved in the community and new ideas for saving energy or preserving our natural habitat. My first experience with my students' thinking about the social justice part of sustainability was when they suggested we make our Christmas crafts, walk to a predominantly First Nations senior citizens' home and give them to the people and sing Christmas carols there. I thought it was a great idea; however, I asked the students if they would also like to spend time creating their Christmas crafts with their friends at the seniors' home. The point of my story is that space was made for students to share their thoughts and passions in our safe environment and space was also made to listen and value students' voices.

I believe students should be allowed to speak their minds and I believe teachers should teach students empowerment and enable them to take action. I come from a perspective where I believe that teachers should reciprocate an ethic of care (Noddings, 1992) with their students. I believe that students and teachers must develop relationships with each other and model collaboration within the community as well. Although I live in a world where there is a dominant discourse of constant competition, a hierarchy of relationships and a system of punishment and rewards that I do not believe in. Dominant discourse refers to "more than just language, but to saying(writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations" (Gee as cited in Gruenwald, 2004, p. 102). I teach from a perspective of an ethic of care and I interact with others based on this perspective; this is my filter and I live my life from this point of view. I teach and treat people with an ethic of care and I believe they in turn, for the most part, learn to care. I interact cooperatively and work collectively with people and try to encounter and work with people based on a perspective of collegiality.

I continue to believe students' voices are important and need to be heard. In my role as a graduate student, I was involved in many initiatives and memberships where I could broaden my space, listen to and support more students' voices. I wanted to help

students recognize the importance of sustainability and support students in their quest to live sustainably. Being involved in the Saskatchewan Education for Sustainable Development Network working group, I was able to bring my voice to the table where I believe it could help students. I continue to want students to learn the curriculum while taking meaningful community action on sustainability projects and making the public aware that youth care about sustainable development. My involvement with the Saskatchewan Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) enables connections with members around the world and collaborative sharing on any ESD topics or related discussions. I was also involved with an environmental, ecological, sustainable development group (EES) in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan where we discussed different topics and we did foster, create, and collaborate on research and plans relating to a formal curriculum at a post-secondary education level.

The main catalyst for my study was my realization that students were leaving the youth forum in Regina sufficiently inspired yet insufficiently prepared to take action. I believe students involved with group action projects should communicate effectively within their groups as well as with other groups involved in action projects. By communicating with other groups, I hoped they would develop pride and confidence in their projects. Communication also links groups together by fostering their learning as they verbally support each other's navigation towards their goals.

Purpose of Research Study

The purpose of this study was to hear students' voices in an attempt to understand students' experiences as they completed their action projects for sustainability. The thesis presents an analysis of students' experiences as a result of Youth Forum 2008 in three different case locations. The study explores supports that can be put into place to facilitate students' navigation toward their goals of completing successful action projects for sustainability.

Research Question

My desire was to know more about the thoughts, perspectives and passions of students involved in action projects for sustainable development.

- What are the experiences of selected students as they participate in a youth forum for sustainability?
- What challenges do students' identify or encounter as they develop and work towards completing their action projects?
- What kinds of supports can be provided to facilitate students being successful in their action projects?

Youth Forum and Action Projects

A youth forum is a process that brings students, teachers, and community partners together to identify issues of local concern, then develop and implement action projects to address them. The process involves one or more conference days where teams of teachers and students participate in workshops and presentations in order to learn more about sustainability and action planning.

The 1987 Brundtland Report defined sustainable development as development that “meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (1987, p.43). Sustainable development, to me, is defined as having three dimensions: environment (where the Earth’s resources are able to sustain life and health with the ability to renew themselves), economy (where development decisions, policies and practices do not exhaust the Earth’s resources and also respect the cultural experiences of society), and society (where one lives in harmony with nature and with each other).

Youth Forum 2008 was proposed to support Saskatoon high school students¹ as action leaders in sustainability projects. At the forum, teachers learned to facilitate and support student projects; as well, students and teachers worked with a variety of local

¹ We also invited a northern community to participate. They did participate and they did carry out an action project, but I did not collect any data from them.

experts² and a multitude of government and non-government organizations. Students were encouraged to develop action projects to make a positive difference in their community (be it local or global) for one to three of the pillars of sustainable development: social justice, environmental stewardship, and economic development. Any project targeting one pillar needed also to support the other pillars. In this way, projects would lead to a cleaner environment, a vibrant economy and greater social equity. By inviting youth, and their teachers, as well as community members and NGOs, a cooperative effort towards sharing responsibility for our sustainable society was facilitated. Goals of the forum were developing understanding that students may be stewards of Saskatchewan's future and understanding how action projects may perhaps lead students to become provincial, national or global leaders on issues of sustainability.

The complexity of sustainable development and the education associated with it are acknowledged by Scott and Gough (2003) who noted that "we do not yet know what we shall need to learn in relation to sustainable development ... perhaps what we need to be taught is how to learn and how to be critical in order to build our collective capacity to live both sustainably and well" (p. xiv). Action projects highlighting empowerment and youth engagement in schools while building community partnerships through environmental and sustainability education are rarely incorporated into formal school curricula. The youth forum helped to ensure students learned about action project planning, supported students taking action towards the creation of long-term sustainable communities, and tried to promote their successes.

The main goal of the forum was to help high school students become empowered to take action to create more sustainable communities and to share responsibility with youth in selecting, organizing, planning and implementing action projects. Action suggests a conscious decision on the part of the students; they identify the issue of concern and make a choice as to an appropriate response (Jensen & Schnack, 1997; Jensen, 2004). We, as teachers, have the opportunity to teach critical thinking skills, discuss conflicting world interests, and encourage students to process information and create their own understanding of the world. Ultimately, we have the potential to

² Local experts are defined as people and institutions with specific expertise such as solar heating, water quality analysis, journalism, composting etc. who are willing to share their expertise with students.

empower youth, especially at the youth forum, encouraging them to actively participate in dialogues about sustainability issues (local or global) and to take appropriate action, knowing that they can make a positive difference. Mahatma Ghandi's words are a great inspiration for students: "You must BE the change you want to see in the world".

Potential Contributions of the Study

Students' perspectives on education for sustainable development are almost absent from the literature. Stevenson (1992) emphasized that the only way we can understand adolescents is if we, as teachers, open ourselves to the lessons they can teach us; this involves "an attitude that values children's impressions and points of view about their own circumstances" (p. 53). Thus, the focus of my research is listening to students' voices as they converse about their experiences of engaging in and completing their action projects for sustainable development. Through this sharing, I will identify necessary supports to facilitate student action projects and to promote their stewardship of our environment making a positive difference in our world.

The results of this study have the potential to influence teachers to facilitate action projects with their students. Also, the study may alter the way teachers introduce action projects to their students and even the way students interact and develop relationships with one another. The benefit will be the supports identified to make it more manageable for students completing action projects for sustainable development in the upcoming years.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Definitions: Sustainability, Sustainable Development and Education for Sustainable Development

The goal of sustainability is to develop “a capacity of human beings to continuously adapt to their non-human environments by means of social organization” (Hamm & Muttagi, as cited in Scott & Gough, 2004, p. 1). To develop it further, humanity can only thrive if the capacity of the planet that supports its requirements is not diminished. Scott and Gough (2004) stated “[H]umanity has to act with care” (p. 34). Through sharing and caring, humanity can work together to support the planet, rather than be consumers of the planet and neglect its care. Sustainability aims to promote harmony among humans and between humanity and nature. Stables (2001) stated in regards to the debate over the language of the terms:

whatever our broader philosophical assumptions – whether we see ourselves as scientific realists, critical realists, post-foundationalists, or even relativists – language permeates our lives as environmental educators. ‘Sustainability’ is a word. Like all words, it relates to something outside itself, but, like all words, its precise meaning is always dependent on the context in which it is used. Given the possibility that we might eventually fail to sustain life on this planet, or, at least, diminish its richness, then there seems little of more importance than pursuing the debate about what we mean by this term, what we might mean, and what the adoption of such a meaning might lead us to do. (p. 127)

“Pursuing the debate”, in this sense, would clearly itself be a process of learning.

There seems to be little agreement among researchers as to the goal or even the definition of sustainable development (Jickling, 1994; Huckle, 1991; Hopkins et al., 1996). Analysis of the term has not yet identified sufficient criteria to explain common definitions and understanding. Both terms of “sustainability” and “sustainable development” have been defined in a number of competing ways, at the theoretical level,

for practical purposes by policy makers, and by professionals in everyday usage. The definitions are a set of contested ideas, rather than a settled issue. Dobson (1996), for example, has recorded over 300 definitions of sustainable development. The extent of contestation surrounding these terms is illustrated by, for example, the work of Sachs (1991) who saw the linking of environment and development as a “dangerous liaison”, and Hopkins *et al.* (1996), who saw sustainable development education as the focus of an “international consensus” (p. 2). However, exactly what is of interest in particular cases may vary a great deal. This is sometimes, but not always, reflected in the language used. For example, according to Scott and Gough (2003), “there are those who use the word ‘sustainability’ as a preferred alternative to ‘sustainable development,’ thus perhaps avoiding perceived connotations of the word ‘development’ (for example, Huckle, 1996)” (p. 12). It appears that there are those who are troubled by questions of logical consistency when "sustainable" is juxtaposed against "development" (Padua, 1993).

As mentioned earlier, Gro Brundtland, the woman whom the Brundtland Commission (1987) was named after, described sustainable development as development that “meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), 1987, p. 43). The Brundtland Commission (WCED, 1987) defined sustainable development as a process of change with the future in mind. I chose to use this WCED definition throughout this thesis in reference to sustainable development. In essence, in this thesis, sustainable development involves change where the exploitation of resources, economic development, the direction of investments, technological development and institutional change are harmonious and meet both current and potential future human needs and aspirations for a healthier life. Sustainable development does not occur where learning is not happening. Thus, “sustainable development is inherently a learning process through which we can, if we choose, learn to build capacity to live more sustainably” (Scott & Gough, 2004, p. 1). Sustainable development can be regarded as a constant process of transformation of a society and economy towards acting as caretakers for future generations of a planet that maintains and nurtures life respectfully and holistically.

Currently, we are immersed in the decade on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The United Nations General Assembly recognized the years from 2005 to 2014 as the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). *Agenda 21*, the document resulting from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also called the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992, individually defined goals of ESD and called for education in every chapter. Chapter 36 of *Agenda 21*, ‘Promoting Education, Public Awareness, and Training’, specifically identified four major thrusts: (1) improving the quality of and access to basic education, (2) reorienting existing education to address sustainable development, (3) developing public understanding and awareness, and (4) training. According to Mckeown and Hopkins (2003), “ESD carries with it the caveat that it should always be implemented in a *locally relevant* and *culturally appropriate* fashion. This caveat increases the likelihood of successful ESD programs while it decreases the risk of importing inappropriate programs” (p. 119). The overall goal of the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) is “to integrate the values inherent in sustainable development into all aspects of learning to encourage changes in behavior that allow for a more sustainable and just society for all” (UNESCO, 2005). UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) aims to promote the DESD (Decade of Education for Sustainable Development) as an opportunity for everyone in the world to benefit from education and learn the values, behaviours and lifestyles needed for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation.

Sustainable Development is a process of societal transformation where all learners share and act. Scott and Gough (2004) stated, “Tuning into the rhythms of life support is generally the benchmark of many indigenous peoples and sensitive local cultures” (p. 33). Hence, education for sustainable development means preparing everyone to care for Mother Earth by respecting identity, justice, natural rhythms, social harmony, and a shared future with fundamental requirements and supports for well-being. Education begins to combine both its purpose and its process into a transformative function (Scott & Gough, 2004). Thus, “acting and doing would become elements of assessment and educational development as much as studying and communicating” (p. 34). In a curriculum that emphasizes education for sustainable development, students learn to

create the kinds of communities and style of governing, with shared responsibility and accountability, where action is encouraged and care about and for the communities can be developed.

Relationships and Care

Relationship lies at the heart of Noddings' ethic of care. The power and effectiveness of Noddings' conception of caring, her agenda aimed at restoring care to educational settings, the way teachers demonstrate relational ethics and her behavioural stance can be transmitted to the next generation (Noddings, 1984, 1992). Natural caring, explained Noddings (1984), "establishes the ideal for ethical caring, and ethical caring initiates this ideal in its effort to institute, maintain, or reestablish natural caring" (p. 385). Thus, a primary fidelity to people should guide our thinking during teaching and learning.

Staff at Environmental Middle School in Portland have enacted Noddings' vision of relational ethics in transformative ways and are striving to induct their youth into a culture of care - care for their neighbours, community and region where they live. It seems teachers there care; they "bring what they care about to their classrooms and draw their students into a circle of care predicated on their desire for loving interactions among people, social justice in the broader community, and connectedness to the place where they live" (Smith, 2004, p. 74). They believe, by caring, it will be possible to better prepare children to connect more deeply to their ecological communities which will sustain their long-term health and well-being, and as well children's connections to others, the world and their natural environment. For Noddings (1992), the capacity to care is based on a person's knowledge of what it means to be cared for. For Smith (2004) "care is sustained when those who are cared for in some way acknowledge and value the mutual relationship they share with those who care for them" (p. 81). If children do not have intimate experiences with nature directly, they are unlikely to be concerned about its protection (Smith, 2004). Moving beyond human domination of Mother Earth requires partnerships characterized by the reciprocal relationships that underlie the experience of caring and being cared for. For some youth, "the education they encountered at Portland's Environmental Middle School helped them refine and enact a desire to care, to

question and to be involved in the life of their community and region enabling a more just and sustainable society be brought into being” (p. 77).

Learning for Change

Transformative learning.

Lange (2004) stresses “transformation is not just an epistemological process involving a change in worldview and habits of thinking; it is also an ontological process where participants experience a change in their being in the world including their forms of relatedness” (p. 121). The process of knowing is a process of being and relating, thus integral to the way we live. Teachers at Portland’s Environmental Middle School enacted Noddings’ vision of care in seemingly transformative ways. According to Smith (2004), “high test scores are simply a secondary benefit of an educational process whose primary purposes involve connecting children more deeply to their community and the world and then encouraging them to play a role in bringing about more justice and less environmental destruction” (p. 74). People change their interactions with material, physical, social, emotional realities, and they enact their sense of social and environmental responsibility by getting involved in community. “When your mind, your heart, your whole being becomes totally aware of being all and of the fluidity of all things, then you have broken the program of disillusionment, fragmentation, and alienation” (Krishnamurti, as cited in Lange, 2004, p. 121). Thus, when we acknowledge the fluidity of life, that all things are animate and that we as humans are only one species on this great, vast Earth, we can recognize our bodies, our hearts and our souls as living in community and in harmony.

Snively and Corsiglia (2001) stated, “Traditional ecological knowledge tends to be holistic, viewing the world as an interconnected whole. Humans are not regarded as more important than nature” (p. 12). Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) observes that we are all relations and all life forms are interconnected and are to be respected. We are not superior, but part of “the circle”, which contrasts sharply with Western Modern Science’s (WMS) traditional view of humans dominating nature. Humans are one part of the ecosystem, not a superior part, but a part. Accordingly, “discussions of differences in the ways in which societies view plants and animals and develop resources, and the

reasons why they do so, establishes a suitable base for discussions of environment, appropriate technology, justice, and sustainable societies” (Snively & Corsiglia, 2001, p.29). Thus, science and all subject areas must try to make sense and help all students understand how education relates to action.

Agency.

Instone (2004) talked about a redefinition of nature and culture to relational understanding where it is interactive and productive. Instone (2004) believed that “nature is also inside us and beside us, just as we are inside and beside nature” (p. 132). It would seem that nature and culture cannot be separated; they are mutually constructed. Once human agency is decentred or agency is extended to the non-human world, we can no longer think of human beings as separate entities having individual agency. Instone (2004) expressed a belief that “representation denies the agency of the Other, leaving the representor as the only actor in a one-sided constructivism” (p. 133). Once the move is beyond representation to relational understanding, we will “envision a world that is co-constructed by humans and non-humans. Co-construction blurs the boundary between nature and culture and extends agency to non-humans—natural and artificial” (p. 133). Thus, sustainable development is relational and students engaged in action projects for sustainable development should transform to envision a world co-constructed by humans and non-humans. This is important because it challenges researchers and:

engages us [researchers] in a process of not only unsettling conventional categories but in the reconstructive work of building relations and alliances across difference. It requires us to shift our attention from the discovery of what nature ‘is’ to focusing on the practices through which nature is manifested in social action. (Instone, 2004, p. 134)

Therefore, students should be involved in this reconstructive work of building relationships and partnerships across difference, etc. with humans and non-humans.

I believe that we, as humans have agency. I believe that those who believe they have a voice and have agency are more likely to act to change the world than those who believe they lack agency. I feel I have agency in my life and I choose to use it to better our world. The conversations in which we participate in our daily lives both limit and

focus our views of the world. There are things we would not see if we were not part of these conversations; yet, the conversations also limit where we will focus and how we will see.

Prior to my research, in my grade five classroom, I set up conversations where students were encouraged to speak and to act. This way of teaching came from my values. If my students had, until then, experienced teachers who dominated the conversation, and if and when students spoke, teachers treated them as "precious" rather than as genuine conversational partners, then my values possibly offered a different way of conceptualizing the world to my students. In return, when they talked, they also offered a different way of conceptualizing the world to one another and to me. When a person is a member of the "discourse community" she/he believes she/he has the right to speak and that what she/he says has the potential to alter the conversation. Each conversation will have a distinct focus, thus limiting what can be seen, said and heard. Alternatively, in a classroom where students are members of a shared discourse community, they will expand each other's ability to imagine different ways of conceptualizing the world. I limited my students by focusing their conversation. Also, I believe I expanded their ability to imagine different concepts by valuing them as members of the discourse community. The students in my grade five classroom also limited and focused the conversation, while at the same time they expanded the ability of others to imagine different concepts. "Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes and social identities" (Gee as cited in Gruenwald, 2004, p. 102). Education is set up to promote an economic system where schools are expected to comply with business-like standards of accountability and the needs of students are ignored.

Schooling is an economic system where students are institutionalized to listen to the bells ringing, to be in a certain class in a certain period, to have the day separated into distinct classes with certain teachers teaching specific subject areas, to follow the rules and then to be graded or evaluated based on one's progress does seem to conform with business-like standards of doing school. Student's participation in extracurricular is for enjoyment, recreation, socialization, and learning different skills. The extracurricular activities in schools are similar activities to the ones we have all experienced.

Extracurricular activities have different value in different schools and often students do not get to decide what extracurricular activities are offered at their schools. Usually extracurricular activities are slotted into certain periods like before school starts in the morning or just after school finishes in the afternoon. According to Gruenwald (2004):

Chief among these conflicts is that general education continues to give uncritical support to an individualistic, inequitable, and unsustainable growth economy. “High stakes” testing and “world-class” standards, explicitly promoted to meet the needs of the global economy, neglect knowledge of the truly high-stakes social and ecological gambles inherent in global economic practices. (p. 79)

Standards-based schooling is justified by its intention to create students and nations competitive in the “global economy”. Gruenwald (2004) explained that by examining the language of students, it should be possible to seek a deeper understanding of the dominant discourses and how they might limit students. I believe teachers have the potential to show students various ways to imagine the world other than that of the dominant discourse.

Action and change.

Youth at the youth forum often felt overwhelmed in relation to environmental, health, social or economic problems. Taking action as part of learning is therefore a vital element if students are to be empowered. Empowerment is belief in your own agency. I think taking action provides students an opportunity to be hopeful, and hope presents a sense of power to students that change is possible. Action is actively targeted at solving a student-defined problem and involving students in deciding what to do. “Young Minds 2004” was an Internet-based project where young people from eight countries in Europe communicated and explored the links between culture, health, youth and the environment (Jensen, Simovska, Larsen, & Holm, 2005). One of the principles of the project involved action and change orientation. Thus, the students’ ideas and visions had a crucial role in deciding what actions should be taken, in this case, to improve the environment and health in their schools and communities. According to Jensen et al. (2005), “the health promoting school improves young people’s abilities to take action and generate change.

Young people's empowerment, linked to their visions and ideas enables them to influence their lives and living conditions" (p. 10).

Action differs from activity, habits or routine behaviours. "To be characterized as action, an activity should be intentional, decided upon by the participants and address the root causes of the problem in question" (Jensen et al., 2005, p. 122). Action is an individual's decision; it is a conscious making up of one's mind. Behavioural modification is a change influenced or pressured by others; students are not necessarily acting upon that change or intrinsically deciding to change (Jensen & Schnack, 1997). Action-focused teaching, therefore, emphasizes the importance of close connections and relationships between the school and the local community as well as practical, relevant action as part of the teaching and learning processes. "We believe that education is vital to the development of citizens who are able and willing to take informed action on pressing social and environmental concerns" (Barrett, Hart, Nolan, & Sammel, 2005, p. 507). Thus, taking action as part of teaching and learning processes is to provide meaningful learning experiences for students as active agents in bringing about informed, positive, sustainable changes.

Students' participation as active agents for change does not mean reducing the responsibility of teachers; teachers' responsibilities may increase (Jensen et al, 2005). Teachers have to assume this responsibility for facilitating and supporting dialogue with students. This would both limit and expand their agency to free them to leave the school and engage in meaningful learning with their students. It also sets up a situation where students and teachers are agents together, rather than the teachers being expected to be agents and the students expected to be passive recipients of the curriculum. Jensen et al. (2005) suggest the challenge is "to find a balance in which students are involved as active partners and are taken seriously but teachers have an important role to play as partners in the educational dialogue with students" (p. 13). The teacher's role does not become less important or less exciting; the teacher should fulfill the consultant role and be able to perceive today's problems from an action-oriented viewpoint.

Action competence.

Action-oriented teaching and learning contribute to student ownership and the development of their action competence. Action competence is defined as the “ability to initiate and bring about positive change in health and environment problems” (Jensen et al., 2005, p. 122). Thus, action competence is centered on the student’s ability to plan, develop and implement positive change. Genuine student participation:

is conducive to the empowerment of and development of action competence among children and young people, is conducive to effective learning and contributes to the developing people’s identities of citizens rather than passive consumers of various services, which contributed to the development of democracy and social justice. (Jensen et al., 2005, p. 122)

Teaching and learning increase students’ abilities to create and envision the future they want, reflect on those visions and make choices based on those visions (Barrett et al, 2005). Dominant educational discourses make it difficult for students to engage in action-oriented environmental education. Barrett (2006) believed that in order to discuss what knowledge students should learn and how they might learn it, educators must lead an interrogation of dominant educational discourses. Examining dominant discourses “will require attention to not only what we know, but also to how we have come to know what we know. It will also require interrogation into how this knowing, whether it be linguistic or embodied, serves to produce who we are” (Barrett, 2006, p. 509). Thus, students and teachers can try to understand who we are, how we have come to know what we know and who decides this dominant discourse. Engaging in action-oriented teaching and learning is difficult.

Experiences and actions are closely linked. Without action competence, one cannot become rich in experiences. Experiences “form very deep-lying structures in our understanding of the world and in our practice” (Jensen & Schnack, 1997, p. 166). Experiences are the results of continuous actions and actions are performed on the basis of previous experiences that are the results of other actions, etc. Thus, one acts on the experiences one acquires. “Perhaps common experience is the key notion in connection with the qualitative transition from individual to collective action and in that way to

development of action competence” (Jensen & Schnack, 1997, p. 177). The term “common” is important since there definitely is something common, however, perceptions will vary depending on prior experiences and personality. I do not think that my actions are pre-set or predetermined based on my previous experiences; however, I do think that my previous experiences may or may not influence me to act in a certain domain of sustainable development possibly creating a stronger collective. For example, I grew up in a small town and realized the value of community and have a tendency to favour action in the social justice and environmental domain of sustainable development. However, someone who grew up in a city may value the economic domain more based on his/her prior experiences. Nevertheless, we can both transition to collective action due to common interests in sustainable development. Thus, action competence is closely linked to a person’s structured world of personal and common experiences.

Learning within the Community

Community engagement.

VanWynsberghe and Andruske (2007) argued that community service-learning experiences that contribute to sustainable development can foster community engagement. As an assignment, post-secondary students were to complete a community service-learning experience. Post-secondary students were free to contribute to conversations about sustainability in their class. The professors’ shared a belief that sustainability is emergent and develops through dialogue. The university students chose a wide variety of organizations for their community service-learning experiences, since they did not feel limited by one definition of sustainability (VanWynsberghe & Andruske, 2007). “Community service learning can introduce students to their roles as engaged citizens in ‘affairs and their community’”(Dietz, as cited in VanWynsberghe & Andruske, 2007, p. 350). Learning through community engagement offers a space for interaction with a multiplicity of people and organizations. VanWynsberghe and Andruske (2007) stated, “Students working in areas of environmental sustainability seemed to have had the greatest number of positive experiences. The physical nature of much of the work made it easy for those students to see their personal impact on the environment” (p. 372). Students felt they contributed to their environment and helped the

people. Community service-learning makes a difference; it makes a difference not only to people in those organizations, but it also makes an impact on the student doing the project. Thus, I believe that students involved in Youth Forum 2008 would see that their own action projects involving community would make a positive impact on their schools, on their communities, and on themselves.

Active citizenship.

Active citizenship offers students important and empowering learning opportunities. “If not in schools, where else will students learn that responsible and compassionate action can be both personally rewarding and effective in bringing about change?” (Case, Falk, Smith, & Werner, 2004, p. iv). Social action can be a critically thoughtful, engaging and rewarding dimension for students’ school experience (Case, Falk, et al, 2004). Action projects with the goal of active citizenship will prepare students to identify, plan and carry out solutions to problems within their school, community or beyond. “The goal of active citizenship will be learned through thoughtful, cooperative, and responsible action” (p. v).

Action projects encourage students to analyze social problems, formulate thoughtful strategies, question assumptions and act responsibly on their beliefs as part of active citizenship. Action projects are likely to foster deeper understanding and interest in the curriculum. Action projects can make school “come alive” for students – encouraging them to excel in studies often considered remote from “real-life” concerns (Case, Falk, Smith, & Werner, 2004). Action projects help students see that action can make a difference in the world – that there are responsible ways in which issues of social justice can be addressed at local and global levels (Case, Falk et al., 2004). “Not only do students benefit personally and academically, but also the quality of human life and the environment can be improved” (p. vi). Thus, students’ action projects should contribute to the betterment to society through their thoughtful, responsible, social action.

In school-based action projects, students typically work cooperatively with other students on initiatives they help to identify, plan, and direct. Student action projects range from the school-based community, to the local community, to the global community. Regardless of their geographical focus, student action projects “can be

placed on a continuum – with direct action (directly addressing a problem and effecting change) at one end, and indirect action (influencing or using as intermediaries those who hold power and who are in a position to effect change) at the other end” (Case, Falk et al, 2004, p. 86).

Reflection / collaboration.

The Youth Forum 2008 activities did “raise questions about, for example, the need for students and teachers to engage in reflective and critical inquiry” (Barrett et al., 2005, p. 510). These reflections focused on individual learning, as well as the collective learning and stories of social actions too. The need for reflection and thinking critically traversed cultures and brought new perspectives.

Collaboration is conducive to students’ motivation and commitment. Collaboration according to Jensen et al. (2005) “contributes to developing a sense of the ‘other’: a sense for cultural, sociohistorical, political, geographical differences and similarities regarding health and environmental issues and the ways that deal with them” (p. 124). These interconnections are integral to students’ planning, communicating and creating cross-cultural networks and collaborating to create a better future. Thus, students should explore problems “in a broader perspective, should create joint visions about a better world in the future and if possible, should take joint action together” (Jensen et al, 2005, p. 125). Thus, cross-cultural collaboration and communication allows for differing perspectives to unite for one common purpose and action together, a “joint vision” for a better world.

Learning communities.

Learning communities are a place for innovation and an opportunity to become immersed in deeper learning. The learner needs to be active during the process of learning (Thorpe, 2000, p. 364). Learning communities foster and nourish a variety of skills, including motivation and self-regulation, collaboration and team building that ultimately serve students well when they enter the workforce and seek leadership positions (Dodge & Kendall, 2004, p. 153). Another important dimension is the altered role of knowledge in learning communities: "in learning communities, the development of both diverse individual expertise and collective knowledge is emphasized. In order for

students to develop expertise, they must develop an in-depth understanding about the topics that they investigate” (Bielaczyc & Collins cited in Dede, 2004, p. 20).

Summary

The research on learning for change and learning communities does not address the students’ voices and experiences. My research study will address the gap in the research literature of hearing students’ voices and understanding their experiences as they complete their action projects for sustainable development. It is important to read literature about the ethics of care of individuals as I believe students need to experience being cared for before they can care about the people, communities and environments involved within their action projects. So, when I talk about sustainable development I am also speaking of a culture and community of care. It is also equally important, then, for me to investigate literature about relationships, collaboration, community engagement and service learning with the goal that most students will develop a sense of being a part of their communities as they carry out action projects in their community. Interaction, dialogue and learning in community with others may have a profound impact on communities and learners. The literature on action competence, change and transformative learning has contributed to my understanding of action projects for sustainable development. These projects have the potential to alter both teachers’ and students’ ontology.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Research Rationale

As a teacher, I had attempted to value students' voice in the classroom and ensure they felt that what they had to say was important to me. In my classroom, students had a space where they felt they belonged and mattered, also creating a greater degree of student choice and autonomy. The necessity of listening to the voices of my students in determining my classroom learning environment and its scope also became increasingly apparent to me in my graduate coursework.

The value of students' voice is something I continue to appreciate and believe in. Hence, in this research, I was interested in the views of students and what they brought to the table. I wanted to establish a relationship with students through which I would come to understand their experiences as participants in action projects for sustainable development. Any research that explores the perceptions, views, opinions and voice of students can best be addressed through qualitative research. Kirk and Miller (1986) define qualitative research as an approach to social science research that involves observing people in their own space and communicating with them in their own language, on their own conditions. The students' action projects created by the students were definitely locally relevant and culturally appropriate meeting the requirements of ESD (McKeown & Hopkins, 2003).

This research study was conducted as a multiple site case study with a qualitative approach to inquiry in order to explore the views of high school students in completing their action projects for sustainable development. It was multiple site case study, since there were three different school sites, three different focus groups and three different student designed action projects for sustainable development involved. The high school students at each individual school site worked on a collective action project for sustainable development. By using multiple sites, I was able to observe if the themes and patterns from one site existed in another site. While the themes that arose in this research

are not generalizable, a teacher reading the research might see how the results resonate for his or her own students.

Case study involves fieldwork where the researcher learns about the phenomenon through interactions with the research participants in their own environment. Yin (1994) further emphasized studying the phenomenon in its own setting. Yin observed that typically case study “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). In this multiple site case study, the phenomenon, the students’ views of their supports and barriers, was intricately bound in the context of their own action projects for sustainable development.

A case study design facilitates “an in-depth understanding of the situation and its meaning for those involved” (Merriam, 1988, p. xii). A case study provides an opportunity to observe the everyday situations of particular groups of students as “complex social units” resulting in “a holistic account of a phenomenon” (Merriam, 1988, p. 31). The researcher attempts to depict a phenomenon and conceptualize it and provides what is called “thick description” of the phenomenon; that is, statements that recreate a situation and as much of its context as possible accompanied by the meanings and intentions inherent in that situation (Geertz, as cited in Gall, Gall & Borg, 1996, p. 549).

There are several features of this research that reveal it as case study. “Case study is the empirical investigation of a specified or bounded phenomenon” (Smith, as cited in Mabry, 2007, p. 1). The research participants were part of a bounded phenomenon. The research was bound in place. The groups belonged to a school division in Saskatoon and they participated in the Youth Forum that was held at the University of Saskatchewan. The research was bound by time, a five month period from February until June 2008 and it was bound by the number of participants, three groups of high school students in three different locations. Merriam identified four additional properties of case study as describing process more than outcomes: they are “particularistic, descriptive, heuristic and inductive” (Merriam, 1988, p. 11). The study was particularistic in that it focused on three groups of students at three different locations as they participated in their own action projects for sustainable development. The study was descriptive. The inclusion of

rich description of setting and participants, meanings and intentions inherent in each situation was documented. My study was heuristic in that it created new understandings of students' views about necessary supports that may need to be put into place or into practice when completing their student action projects for sustainable development. The emergence of themes about these students' views and perceptions was inductive as data were analyzed through the "constant comparative method whereby data gradually evolve into a core of emerging theory" (Glaser & Strauss, as cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 144).

The exploration of my research question included gathering information through participant observation and focus group recorded conversations to gain understanding of their particular experiences. The students' experiences were presented through a description of group experiences by the researcher and through the students' own words as contained in the transcripts of conversations.

Research Design and Data Collection

Participants.

All participants in this study had attended Youth Forum 2008 in Saskatoon. All participants in the Youth Forum attended high schools in Saskatoon or Île à la Crosse. All were actively engaged in action projects for sustainable development. Each school sent five to ten students to the forum, and the students in grades 9 to 12 from each school formed one group with a common action project. At the youth forum, the students listened to different speakers who were invited to spark interest in the students with their choice of projects. Hence, I invited different kinds of speakers to the youth forum so that, I believe, a greater range of ideas and options were opened in students' discourses to consider what was possible.

Upon registering for the Youth Forum, students were informed about the purpose of my study through a letter of introduction where I asked for volunteers to participate in the study. Purposeful sampling was used, since all the students who returned their permission forms participated. Originally four case sites were chosen; however, early on the participants in the fourth site were unable to commit to attending the youth forum and were unable to commit to completing an action project for sustainable development. Thus, three sites were chosen and were visited weekly for in-depth study and recorded

conversations. Information letters were sent home to ask parents' permission for their child's participation in the study. The selected students were invited to sign letters of assent and parents were invited to sign letters of consent (See Appendix A & B).

Observations of the groups of high school students occurred over the five month period from February until June 2008. I observed the high school students at the first Youth Forum on February 8th, 2008, and the last Youth Forum where students presented their progress on May 14th, 2008. Also, I arranged to observe the students throughout various group-work sessions that occurred during their extra-curricular hours, on their own time at noon or after school as they met for their action projects and, in some instances, observations were made during curricular hours. I established a schedule with the students and their supervising teacher before beginning my observations. I tried to observe by alternating noon hour and after school time in order to sample widely to obtain as clear a picture of each site as possible.

Observations.

Observation gathering focused on obtaining descriptions of participants, activities, interactions and the physical setting, in addition to more subtle factors such as nonverbal communication, body language and unplanned activities (Merriam, 1988). Glesne (1999) commented, the researcher must "note what you see, hear, feel and think and begin to look for patterns to abstract similarities and differences across individuals and events" (p. 48). The need for the researcher to work on "making the familiar strange" (Glesne, 1999, p. 44) was to constantly ask what a certain gesture, action or event meant. I attempted to make the familiar strange by starting with broad observations and recording everything possible, then observing the unusual, and moving finally to probe deeply into the interactions with the groups, while I searched for contradictions and complexities.

Participant-Observations.

My role as a participant-observer assisted my involvement with these students in order to establish a rapport with them. I met the students at the Youth Forum and had previous, though limited, contact with them by virtual means (online registration and emails). I assisted students throughout the Youth Forum and attempted to facilitate their online discussion in the discussion board KIDS (Kids Involved in Discussion for

Sustainability). The students did not often choose to use the online discussion board. I was available through face to face interactions during my school visits to answer their questions and to connect them with various experts to help them complete their action projects for sustainable development. Also, I was available by email to the student participants and some of them did email me to ask for help. By developing these relationships with students, I had an opportunity to work directly with the students in their groups. This helped me to gain an understanding of the challenges and barriers students needed to overcome and the future supports students might require to complete student action projects for sustainable development in the coming years. I needed to remember to use my sophisticated instruments. “In situations where motives, attitudes, beliefs, and values direct much, if not most of human activity, the most sophisticated instrumentation we possess is still the careful observer – the human being who can watch, see, listen...question, probe, and finally analyze and organize his direct experience” (Guba & Lincoln, as cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 103).

Field notes.

Glesne (1999) reports the significance of field notes as the primary recording tool for the qualitative researcher. She stated that field notes may take numerous forms; “that you keep a field notebook, however, is vital” (Glesne, 1999, p. 49). Gall, Gall and Borg (1996) point out the need for field notes that are detailed, concrete, include visual details when appropriate, and are descriptive and reflective. A double-entry log was used to support descriptive note taking of dialogue, settings, participants and their interactions, as well as for recording researcher impressions for use in preliminary analysis. The reflective process included the researcher’s personal journal and included information such as “reflections on the methods of data collection and analysis, reflections on ethical dilemmas and conflict, reflections on the observer’s frame of mind and emerging interpretations” (Gall, Gall & Borg, 1996, p. 350). Field notes were taken during the observations of the students as they met with their groups and worked on their action projects in order for me to reflect on the details of students’ interactions.

Focus group interviews.

Interviewing more than one person at a time can provide constructive information and children, in particular, often need the encouragement and collaboration of others in order to speak openly and honestly (Glesne, 1999). The advantages of group interviews were that they stimulated respondents to state feelings and beliefs they would not have expressed if not in a collaborative environment. On the other hand, what one person says can turn the conversation in that person's direction. Hence, group interviews enabled me as interviewer to initiate and facilitate discussion while participants drew out the perspectives of others in the group (Gall, Gall & Borg, 1996). I initiated the discussion by asking students to share their experiences of completing their action projects.

Students who were participants in the in-depth study and recorded conversations were selected based on my observations from the Youth Forum in February 2008. I tried to interact with most of the students early that morning and then throughout the day during the nutrition and lunch breaks. I talked briefly with some of the students about what they wanted to do for their action projects. After the forum, I kept in contact with teachers via email.

Each candidate selected needed to be a student in high school and to have attended the youth forum. The selected group needed to be involved in an action project for sustainable development at their school and I wanted both the male and female population to be represented so that a wide variety of voices were included in the study. The final requirement was that the potential participants needed to express interest in the research study.

I conducted recorded conversations with three groups. In one focus group there were two students and the other two groups had four students involved. It was on the basis of these group interviews that I was able to determine the range or amount of experience students had with action projects, their abilities and knowledge surrounding sustainable development, their availability to meet in person with their group and online for discussion, and their experiences in completing their action projects.

Recorded conversations were used in these focus groups as I wanted to hear as much student voice as possible. I wanted students to feel they had a space where their voices were heard and where one person's thoughts, ideas and opinions were able to

spark conversation amongst the whole group. I facilitated the discussion in these recorded conversations so that all students' voices were heard. I was interested to find out what students thought and knew. I felt the best way with this age group of students (ages 16-22) to find out what they were thinking was to engage in relationships with them and make them feel as comfortable as possible by providing the space necessary for them to open up and share their thoughts. The recorded conversations occurred with three focus groups of two to four students per group and they occurred after consultation with the involved students regarding their schedules. The times of the interviews and the dates were all set ahead of time once participation in the focus group was granted. All of the focus group interviews were audio and digitally recorded in order to provide a complete and authentic record of the interview. Both methods of recording were used to ensure back-up of the data in the event that technical difficulties ensued and data was lost.

The first conversation took place at the beginning of April 2008 and was an opportunity for me to get to know my participants personally as individuals. It was a great opportunity for me to sense how the groups were working together. The questions I asked varied depending on the conversation. The second conversation was held in May 2008 and enabled me to check in with individual students to see how their action projects were progressing and what they needed to support them in completing it. This gave me time before the next Youth Forum to put necessary supports into place for the students. These supports were items like inviting different experts students found interesting and relevant, searching and locating funding opportunities for students, or providing students with the necessary technological tools or equipment for their presentations. The final conversation occurred sometime at the end of May or early June and focused on students' summarizing their experiences with their action projects that led us to converse about implications for future action projects as well.

By utilizing recorded conversations, the students' voices were heard and valued, thus the conversation progressed naturally with questions asked from both parties as they became relevant to the conversation. The need for a researcher to be an active listener was stressed by Glesne (1999): "[I]n the process of listening to your respondents, you learn what questions to ask" (p. 69). Thus, by listening to students' conversations within the focus groups, I became informed with what they were learning, what they knew and

were struggling with, as well as challenging them to voice their concerns and experiences during our focus group conversations.

The three focus groups involved eleven students at three school locations. On two different occasions, I interviewed Paula³, Suzy, Barb, and Wilma at Rocky View Campus. Two different dates, I interviewed Bob, Caesar and Paul at Badlands Drive School. Then, Bob and Caesar were interviewed at Badlands Drive School on three different occasions. At Flower Power High, Aster, Lily, Daisy and Buttercup were all interviewed two times.

Eleven was the final number of participants who agreed to participate and met all the study's requirements. Two male participants and nine female participants agreed to participate. However, halfway through the study, one of the male participants quit the study and his course that had got him involved in the study. He signed off on his comments and allowed his recorded discussions from his focus group to still be used in this study. Thus, ten participants were involved in the final interviews.

Document collection.

The documents collected in this study were artifacts including a student written proposal for their action project for sustainable development, presentation outlines, posters and letters of appreciation from the students. I could see what the students were attempting from their proposals, presentation outlines and posters. Students' emails were also saved and documented. The students volunteered to share their work with me. While I never asked them for their outlines, they felt I should know what their group was doing, so they emailed me their progress or they printed a copy of their work.

Research Trustworthiness

Given the range of data collected, triangulation of data was possible to increase the degree of confidence in the trustworthiness of research findings. "Methodological triangulation involves checking data collected using one method with data collected using

³ All of the names of the students and the names of the schools are pseudonyms. I created and assigned most of the pseudonyms for the students, however the students in Badlands Drive School chose their own pseudonyms. Also, I created and assigned all the names of the schools.

another method” (Mabry, 2007, p. 10). For instance, I checked whether observations confirmed information gathered from focus group interview transcripts. To ensure additional confidence in the data and “comprehensive validation” (Mabry, 2007, p. 11), participants reviewed the data collected from their own observations or interviews prior to further dissemination. Thus, all participants were asked to read and edit interview transcripts in order to ensure accuracy and completeness. My research supervisor had the opportunity to read any data and offer input and perception, allowing for a comparison of viewpoints, thus increasing the trustworthiness of my own interpretations. In addition to triangulation and trustworthiness, a review by peers and colleagues with experience in case study methodology provided a check on clarity and reason, logic of arguments and adequacy of evidence (Mabry, 2007).

Data Analysis / Interpretation

Analysis of case study research commenced with the provision of thick description of setting and participants. According to Gall, Gall and Borg (1996) by creating thick description, the researcher:

looks for constructs that bring order to the descriptive data and that relate these data to other research findings reported in the literature. A construct is a concept that is inferred from observed phenomena and that can be used to explain those phenomena. Researchers can also add depth to their descriptions by searching for themes present in the phenomena. (p. 549)

Thick description enabled the recording and analyzing of meaning-making and experiences in detail. Category construction occurred through the constant comparative method of data analysis as segments of data (participants’ remarks, observations, challenges, group conflict and events) were sorted into categories and through interpretational analysis were linked by theory, patterns and themes (Gall, Gall & Borg, 1996). Categories were established in response to the research question and were mutually exclusive and exhaustive (Merriam, 1988). The final categories were representative of the participants’ experiences and the ‘thick description’ of the setting and participants led to the development of “naturalistic generalizations” for the reader (Stake, 1995). The generalizability of constructs and themes was also checked in this

multiple case study design. It involved noting if a particular theme occurring in one case also was present in other cases. If something was found at one site, I would go back and check if that particular theme was also found at the other sites and when and if it showed up then it was a common theme. However, the distinctions between sites become more apparent, since if something was found at one site and it did not show up at the other two sites, then it was a difference between the two sites.

During the interviews and especially after the interviews, I made notes about the topics and big ideas that seemed important to the group. On occasion, I would drive to my next focus group interview after I had just finished one, so I ended up making my notes on a tape recorder that was sitting on my passenger seat. It was a different way of making field notes; I had to pretend that I was talking with someone and then I listened to it and wrote it out when I got home.

Once the focus group recorded conversations were conducted, I analyzed the students' ideas in relation to my original research questions. Using constant comparison analysis, I transcribed the conversations, classified the statements by tabbing my binder with different coloured tabs and compared them to the other student conversations I conducted. I was then able to determine whether the focus group conversations were similar or different in order to develop themes of the possible relationships among the data collected. The three dots located in the transcripts meant the students paused when they were conversing. An example of the constant comparison analysis being used was when students were asked about the positive influences of their action projects. I colour coordinated my binder that contained all of the transcripts from all three of the focus groups and two out of my three groups replied that their teacher was a source of positive influence on their action projects, so I tabbed those particular statements with orange tabs. I used orange tabs since orange tabs signified when students talked about their schooling, green tabs when they talked about the youth forum, yellow tabs when they talked about their action projects and pink tabs when they spoke about their group work. As I worked through and analyzed the conversations of the focus group interviews, the big ideas or themes were written on the tabs and the relationships among the data emerged. Thus, the theme of teacher as a positive influence with students' action projects occurred in one case and was also present in one of the other two cases. As part of the

interpretation, I attempted to find my and my students' limitations. I attempted to locate the dominant discourse and how the conversations we lived in our daily lives limited our views of the world. Also, I tried to show how my discourse limited me in how I viewed the students and how I interpret what they said. Thus, I attempted to interpret how the discourse that I and they were part of affected what we both believed was achievable and worth achieving.

Researcher Subjectivity

I am a young, Caucasian, privileged woman. Acknowledging my age, race and socio-economic status is vital to my role as researcher because each of these factors influences my worldview and determines my access to the world. I am a graduate student, a teacher, a researcher, an environmentalist, a daughter, a sister, and friend. These characteristics are central to defining me as a person and these same characteristics also immensely influence my decisions and choices as a researcher and determined directions I took. Knowing my positioning helps the reader to understand how I perceived the dominant discourses that bounded me as I worked with the students.

My roles as student and teacher are central to this study. These two roles are intricately intertwined, each role influencing and being influenced by the other. I believe teachers should be involved in students' lives and I believe students should be allowed to speak their minds. I believe teachers should teach students empowerment and action and I also think students should be allowed to act as the brilliant young people they are and not wait until they are adults to let their voices be heard. I believe young people will convince others to take action and together we will live sustainably. In a world of constant competition, it is my personal belief teachers can support students and provide space at school to allow this to happen. These beliefs affect the discourses that I participate in – what I am likely to interpret, the problems I am likely to see, and the solutions I am likely to suggest.

“The researcher's perspective has been described as more virtue than limitation, and it is researcher interest that compels the determined efforts resulting in deep understanding” (Mabry, 2007, p. 10). Thus, who I am and what I believe will highly influence my perceptions, the focus of my discussions, my analysis and interpretation of

students' experiences and emotions. By acknowledging the occurrence of this subjectivity and the discourse that is dominant in my life, both I as writer and you as reader will be aware of its presence.

Ethical Considerations

The risks to participants in this study were minimal and were further minimized by using procedures consistent with sound research methodology. Written permission to conduct this study was obtained from the participating school boards and administrators of the schools involved. Written permission was also obtained from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board. Assent forms were given to student participants and were signed before any interviews took place (see Appendix B). Parents and guardians were given an information letter describing the study and letters of consent for their children to participate (see Appendix A).

Participants in the study were assured their privacy and the privacy of the school would be protected. The researcher ensured anonymity and confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and by masking the school locations and some characteristics of the schools. I took my interim research text to some students to talk about it with them, discuss their opinions and further shape the text as early as possible. Participants viewed their transcripts after data collection and had ample opportunity to add, delete, or change anything that was recorded, without penalty or coercion of any kind. Participants were also asked to sign a statement of consent for the release of transcripts (see Appendix C). Participants were informed they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any kind of penalty or loss of services from their school or the University of Saskatchewan.

I ensured all participants understood the purpose of the study and informed them that this thesis, reports and possibly journal articles would be written and published from the results of the study. All interview transcripts, audio tapes, digital recordings, and field notes have been stored in a locked office at the University of Saskatchewan and will be retained for a minimum of five years with my supervisor, in accordance with the University of Saskatchewan guidelines.

Summary

This project employed qualitative research through a series of focus group conversations and observations in a natural setting. Data were collected, organized into categories of themes, analyzed, and then interpreted. As part of the interpretation, I attempted to find my own and my students' limitations. Trustworthiness was established through the triangulation of data. Ethical considerations were taken into account and followed.

My research purpose was to listen to selected students' voices as they participated in Youth Forum 2008 and to understand their experiences with action projects for sustainable development. The contribution of my research study in the field of education is bringing student voice to the determination and identification of the supports necessary for educators to put in place as they work with students to successfully complete action projects for sustainable development.

Chapter 4

The Students' Experiences

There were three different school sites, three different focus groups and three different action projects for sustainable development involved in my research study. The students at each individual school site involved in the study worked on a collective action project for sustainable development together. I will now describe each unique site.

Rocky View Campus

Description and Interpretation of School Site

I chose the pseudonym Rocky View because it is a small school on the brink of closing its elective programs due to low enrolment. Hence, the school has had to focus on higher enrolment courses such as required courses; thus I felt the school had a “rocky view”, since elective courses were likely to be closed due to enrolment issues. Also, I felt that the school had a “rocky view” or outlook of its future because of the unpredictability of student enrollment due to the school’s location. At Rocky View, the teacher whose students were involved in the Youth Forum and this study had created and initiated an innovative, locally designed course, had it approved, and the students were carrying out their sustainability projects as a requirement of the course.

The first time I visited Rocky View Campus, I thought it was an architecturally pleasing school. Its creative design of “*huge cascading windows allowing the sunlight to pour into the grand interior*” (field notes, May 8, 2008) warmed the foyer. I instantly felt warmth from the sunlight in the foyer as I entered the school. Once I moved past the foyer, the first item I noticed was the attractive display of all the sports trophies student teams had won locked away inside a glass case.

I found my way easily, walking straight into the classroom where I was supposed to be visiting with my participants. I noticed that the room was arranged comfortably with plants, stuffed chairs and modern literature spread around the room. Students’ work was carefully displayed on the bulletin board. The students politely greeted me, but

remained focused on the class discussion. This helped me feel welcome, since I could slip into the classroom without disrupting what was happening. Student chairs and tables were oriented towards one another for maximum eye contact, if they wanted to look at who was speaking. It seemed as though the atmosphere was created so the students would feel they contributed to the conversation.

While in the classroom, I observed that the students interacted candidly with one another. All students were encouraged to express their opinions and the teacher was open with the students, providing the class as a safe area for the students to be heard. The students seemed comfortable enough with one another to voice their concerns. It was great to observe the level of trust that the students had with each other and for each others' opinions.

Description of Students

A short description of each student is given to set the scene for the reader and to help explain each person's role. To protect each student's anonymity, this description will be quite brief. I assigned pseudonyms for Rocky View students. Other students selected their own pseudonyms.

Paula.

Paula was a seventeen year old, grade twelve female student during the time of the study.

Suzy.

During the study, Suzy was a seventeen year old, grade twelve female student.

Barb.

Barb was an eighteen year old, female student in grade twelve during the time of the study.

Wilma.

At the time of the study, Wilma was a seventeen year old, grade twelve female student.

Description of Project

While the students at Rocky View Campus worked on several action projects together as a group, the sustainability challenge eco-workout week was the action project discussed throughout the focus group recorded conversations. The students designed many challenges for their whole school for one full week in early June. Some of the challenges included a school wide, school yard and surrounding neighbourhood clean up, a reduce your eco-footprint homeroom challenge that involved walking and biking to school, a garbage free lunch day, a compost challenge where compost bins were put in each classroom and the students would empty the compost into one large bin, and a reduce, reuse, recycling bee. Also, the students had challenges of a garbage free lunch day, petitions about greenhouse gas emissions to sign, speakers from Saskatchewan Waste Reduction Council, SaskEnergy and SaskPower to talk about energy consumption and several humanitarian organizations like SCIC were invited by the students to talk with students at noon or in the morning on designated days. The students were responsible for coordinating the events and working with teachers, staff and students at their school and within their community to encourage participation.

Badlands Drive School

Description and Interpretation of School Site

Badlands Drive is an alternative school located in a core neighbourhood. The students had dropped out of other schools and were now returning as mature students to earn their high school credits. The teacher, having chosen to work with this group of students, planned and prepared individualized programming. I named it Badlands Drive School, since students were in some type of trouble at their previous schools. I also named the school after the Big Muddy Badlands located in southern Saskatchewan where American outlaws hid out. It was fitting to the students, since they were “outlaws” from mainstream schools, and yet had found a welcoming home in this one. I added “drive” to the school’s name since the students upon returning to school were offered a chance to “drive” their success in their program and “drive” down a different path into their future.

I was running a little late and felt a little frazzled my first time to Badlands Drive. The little school was tucked away in the midst of a park cascading with trees and wide open grassy spaces. When I opened the front doors, I felt quite comfortable, so much so that my nervous choppy breathing calmed down to a shallow-paced lull. I met the janitor and the secretary as I entered the school, as both their offices were near the entrance. Since the administrator was expecting me, he popped his head out of his office and made me feel welcome. It was just after lunch on a sunny April day and the school had such a calm, serene feeling as I was escorted to the classroom. The ceilings seemed low for a high school and the new paint was a nice, bright colour. *“It felt like I was walking down the hall in my old elementary school. The hallways looked renovated and the old staff room was a converted student lounge with comfy couches, a microwave and a stereo”* (field notes, April 11, 2008). The halls were full of the students’ accomplishments – student awards, professional-looking student-created artwork, slogans and inspirational quotes, staff pictures and profiles all made for a very proud, personal, collaborative school journey. I entered the small class and was greeted by students working collaboratively at round tables with their laptop fans humming, intent on showing me their progress. The students eagerly talked about their projects. The class had such a casual, calm feel that might have come from the “work at your own pace in a style that suits you” attitude of the teacher and staff.

After multiple email and phone conversations with their teacher, it had been decided I could come and meet the students on a day when their classroom teacher would be absent. The students shared their ideas with each other about their sustainability projects and I shared my purpose of my research with them. I felt as though we were making progress together by talking about the focus of their project and narrowing a timeline of events relating to their project. The substitute teacher sat back at the desk. With such a small group, it was evident that their own personal experiences and school journey affected their projects and enabled them to bounce their ideas off each other. That day, they shared many life stories as they worked with one another talking about their experiences with gangs, talking about their families and why they wanted to create awareness about gangs in their neighbourhood. I think this atmosphere and the students’

ability to talk to each other created a unique working experience and group dynamic at Badlands Drive School.

Description of Students

Most students were assigned a pseudonym, however in this focus group, I gave students the opportunity to choose their pseudonyms. When faced with the choice to choose their pseudonym, one young woman in the group stated that she refused to have a girl name. Hence, I think, she also influenced the other young woman in the group to choose a boy's name since her pseudonym was chosen directly following this young woman.

Caesar.

During this study, Caesar was a mature female student (more than twenty years old). Caesar was the student who chose the boy's name first.

Bob.

Bob was a mature female student (more than twenty years old) during the period of the research study.

Paul.

During the time of the study, Paul was an eighteen year old male student. Part way through the study, Paul withdrew from the class that had involved him with the research study, and thus also withdrew from this study. Nonetheless, although not continuing in the study, he wanted his already collected data to remain in the study.

Description of Project

The students at Badlands Drive School decided that they wanted to plan a community workshop designed to educate and develop awareness of issues of sustainable development. Specifically, the two students created their own community workshop promoting gang awareness within a specific urban community. The students designed the entire gang awareness workshop to target the social justice domain of sustainable development and they reflected the other aspects of sustainable development too. They created advertisements such as posters, flyers and brochures promoting it and canvassed

neighbourhood homes with the brochures. They posted the flyers and the posters at various schools and businesses to advertise the workshop. They emailed and called many community volunteers requesting their time to speak at the workshop. They attracted speakers on behalf of the city of Saskatoon, community associations, SCIC, CHEP, Station 20 West, gang awareness unit, Agriculture and garden planners. The two students solicited numerous businesses and organizations for donations of food and prizes for the workshop. The students wanted their neighbourhood citizens to get to know their neighbours in a safe setting and to present an array of resources for people to become aware existed within their city. During our focus group taped conversations, we discussed the community workshop action project.

Flower Power High

Description and Interpretation of School Site

I named the school Flower Power High since it was a large school with a high student enrollment located in an upper middle class neighbourhood where, to me, there seemed to be a hierarchy of power relationships. The administration were hidden from me “*not visible from the front door*” (field notes, April 21, 2008), where the secretary answered all questions and when I asked, it seemed she could not “*make an appointment for me with the principal*” (field notes, April 28, 2008).

Flower Power High was a rather substantial high school with a considerable student population that I found tough to maneuver my first day. As I walked up to the school, I noticed “*the front door seemed hidden from the road*” (field notes, April, 21, 2008). Walking into the school I did not know which direction to turn as there were three different ways to go. In one direction there was a corridor leading to classrooms and a staircase, the other way led to offices and what looked like the library and the third way offered a view of neatly labeled classroom doors. With the help of a student I found Room 12, a classroom with computers and a white board. It had an adjoining room with a lounge area complete with a couch, microwave, comfy chairs, a sink, cupboards and a lot of big blue recycling bins on wheels. Despite the fact that it was a difficult place for

me to find, I thought it was a perfect meeting space for a group of students because the arrangement of furniture in the space had the potential to create conversations.

The teacher informed me that he had been assigned to work with the students. He had a conflicting schedule and needed to fulfill his supervision duties, so I was going to be 'on my own' with the students for their meetings. The students and I met together, chatted openly about some issues in a round-table discussion format, and then we talked about what project(s) the students were interested in completing. Because they were meeting on their own time, we also talked about timelines. The meeting was very business-like, much as the school was very formal and business-like; the students, however, were committed to work collaboratively on an extra-curricular project. They were very interested in working together to create a school group that cared and was committed to taking action on environmental issues.

Description of Students

I also assigned Flower Power High students their pseudonyms.

Aster.

At the time of the research study, Aster was a sixteen year old, grade ten male student.

Lily.

Lily was a grade twelve female student who was eighteen at the time of the study.

Daisy.

At the time of the study, Daisy was a seventeen year old, grade eleven female student.

Buttercup.

Buttercup was seventeen years old at the time of the study. She was a grade twelve female student.

Description of Project

As their action project, students at Flower Power High formed an extracurricular eco-awareness club. They focused on promoting the group, sustaining membership of the group and creating an awareness of sustainable development issues in their school. They advertised for membership, held meetings, defined their role in the school and began a system of recycling paper, cardboard, bottles and cans at their school. Students created posters advertising their eco-club's meeting time, location and their group's purpose. They were also allowed to advertise their group for two minutes at their school assembly. The students wanted to change other aspects of their school such as hand-dryers in the washrooms, recycling milk cartons, recycling batteries, composting and creating environmentally friendly packaging or biodegradable products for their school cafeteria to reduce waste. The group at Flower Power High talked about their extracurricular eco-action group during our focus group recorded conversations.

Data Description

When interviewing participants about their experiences with action projects for sustainable development, open-ended questions were asked so that the questions did not create the themes. Using constant comparative analysis, I went through each of the transcripts checking for ideas that were repeated forming themes of that transcript. Then, the themes of each transcript were taken to other groups and conversations occurred and questions were asked based on the themes. The main identifiers about their experiences with action projects for sustainable development and the supports and challenges to which participants referred included: resources, curricular and extracurricular groups, marks and evaluation, school community, teacher, project schedule, teacher training, the education system, the youth forum and technology. The following sections describe these aspects and supports students identified as being important in regards to their action projects and education for sustainable development.

Time

Most participants agreed that they struggled to assemble necessary resources when completing their action projects for sustainable development. The students felt they lacked sufficient time to complete their projects.

At Flower Power High, Lily reflected that completing their action project on their own time was about each student's priorities. She stated, "*as long as you have your priorities set, everything can come into place*" (transcripts, May 23, 2008, p. 10).

Buttercup brought out the personal side, stating that students want to do their own thing if they have any spare time. Her friends "*would rather go out at lunch*" (transcripts, May 23, 2009, p.10). Lily liked to plan ahead, utilizing her time wisely. Lily commented, "*when you are more busy, you do things, like you can plan things ahead of time*" (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p. 8).

Meanwhile, at Badlands Drive, Caesar felt the pressure of school and the time constraints of their action project. Caesar commented about feeling stressed, "*I have an hour in school [to work on the action project] and I work weekends from 6:30 a.m. until 3 p.m., then when I get home, I got to sleep and then the week days I have school crap that I have to do. I have a lot of chemistry and math coming up, I have a chem test tomorrow and a math test next week and it is just too much in too little of a time*" (transcripts, May 1, 2008, p. 5). Caesar thought that other things in her life were compromised because of school and her commitment to completing her action project. Caesar stated, "*I know, I have come to say goodbye to my social life totally*" (transcripts, May 1, 2008, p. 6).

At Rocky View, Wilma commented about her school not providing any time. She stated, "*there wasn't even a period...if there was a period we could have, like that would have really rocked*" (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 21). The course, although a credit course, was brand new and was run at noon hour.

In Flower Power High, the teacher assigned to this role to be in charge of the club had volunteered to do paid supervision at noon hour and had stopped attending the meetings. The students wanted the support of an adult. Lily reflected, "*I think that the administration wanted someone who was in science and that is why they picked Mr. B, but I don't know, he kind of disappeared out of the picture*" (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p. 4). There is competition for people's time. Lily noted, "*there is also competition*

because there are also other clubs too that are in the school so people might be convinced to join those groups instead of this one” (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p. 6). Suzy related this all to time and involvement, *“it is so hard to get people into things outside of the classroom”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 12).

At all sites, students felt pressured for time. They believed they did not have sufficient time for doing what they wanted to do with their sustainability projects.

Extracurricular and Curricular

Students in Flower Power High worked on their action project during their extracurricular time and did not receive credit in any courses for their action project for sustainable development. The students in Badlands Drive were allotted class time to work on their action project for sustainable development and received credit for their project in their course. Rocky View Campus had approved the teacher’s innovative course where students received credit for their action project(s) completed during the course. As well, the course did not have a regular time period assigned to it, but rather was available as an extra elective at noon hours.

Most students thought that there were a lot of factors in competition for people’s time, but there was also competition between extracurricular groups for people’s attendance. Aster thought it was a miracle that the tiny group at Flower Power High was still going. He commented, *“I think it is an accomplishment that we could actually get the group started with a few people and that it is still going and it hasn’t already crashed, especially since it is an extracurricular activity”* (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p. 6). Daisy commented, *“I had a history essay that was due and I was kind of spending all my time on that”* (transcripts, May 23, 2008, p. 12). Lily said, *“there are so many things that you want to do, but too many things that you have to do”* (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p. 1). Daisy seemed to believe that curricular work was more important than her extracurricular action project. There was a tendency for curricular assignments to take priority over extracurricular events.

Meanwhile, at Rocky View, the action projects were curricular, an assignment in a locally developed course. In a conversation about carrying out projects in the community, Suzy noted that when an assignment is curricular, *“it really helps you get*

into that kind of mindset and be able to do those things, but with a kind of framework when it is based out of the school” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 13). She talked also about the interactive aspect of the class, *“we would be taking learning outside of the classroom and applying what we learned”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 12). Paula reiterated, *“it also gives you a little more respect when you are going to places to support your thing, it is better to have it based out of a class rather than a club, it opens up a lot more opportunities having it backed by the school too”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 13). The participants thought that the learning opportunities were present more often when it was curricular. The students at Rocky View Campus felt that curricular projects were more respected in the community.

Marks/Evaluation

Students at Flower Power High did not receive credit or marks for their extracurricular action project for sustainable development. In contrast, students at Badlands Drive and Rocky View did get credit and were evaluated on their action projects for sustainable development in their curricular courses.

Some of the participants felt marks would increase people’s priorities to action projects, extra-curricular clubs, community involvement, and so on. Aster explained that some marks attached to core classes for work completed in their extra-curricular group would be seen as positive by the students. He believed, *“bonus, like bonus marks for science, like the sciences would be a good thing”* (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p. 2). Lily suggested, *“maybe they [teachers] can talk with administration about getting a credit for this or if that is too extreme or something, maybe you could get some bonus marks in a certain class”* (transcripts, May 23, 2008, p.19). Lily wanted to see some credit obtained for her hard work and the hard work of others that follow in the near future.

Participants at Rocky View felt that some people viewed their work as valuable since credit had been allocated for their work. Paula stated, *“like having this as an accredited class is a really big motivator to want to learn how to apply the things we are learning and get acknowledgement for the work that we are doing”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 13). When considering community work for credit, Paula commented that, *“it just gives community work [significance], it gives it ownership and value and those kinds*

of things” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 13). Paula was the only student at Rocky View who mentioned earning credit was important. The other students might or might not have agreed. Nonetheless, not one student at Rocky View, even Paula, expressed the slightest interest in the numerical grades they might get for their project.

Regarding evaluation, Caesar stated, “[the teacher] *will probably give us a self evaluation because that is kind of how she does it. We are doing stuff and she knows that, so I am not very concerned with it*” (transcripts, May 22, 2008, p. 16). Bob believed, “*we tried, we still involved ourselves in doing it [the community workshop]*” (transcripts, May 22, 2008, p. 17). Caesar stated, when commenting on others’ reactions, such as their teacher’s reaction to their project, “*you can’t control other people’s [their teacher’s] actions [evaluation]*” (transcripts, May 22, 2008, p. 17). Marks did not seem to be important to Bob and Caesar. Caesar and Bob at Badlands Drive were familiar with their teacher’s evaluation style and were confident with their work. Bob thought, “*it is the effort that you are putting into it and what you are doing to change*” (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 18). They believed that completing their action project was about changing one’s own behaviour. Bob reflected that it also was “*what impact your project has*” (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 18). The personal journey and the experience of completing their action projects were more important to the students than the marks. Students who were receiving credit for their work were not overly concerned with marks or evaluation. It is an interesting aside that the two students who were getting evaluated on their action projects responded that it was not about the marks.

School Community

When talking about the school community, most participants spoke about breaking out of the monotonous, typical aspects of their school. Paula who attended Rocky View reflected on school, “*I think that the school was grounded in its tradition and so that is why this year especially, I think that it was really good because the people in this class getting out of the school, helped people open their minds to non-traditional ideas and non-traditional events*” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 11). Wilma agreed, “*and I think that it is a really positive thing in an environment where we do the same things every year*” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 11). Thus, completing their action

project of their sustainability challenge in their school, Rocky View, was a positive change towards introducing different ideas into their school community.

Teacher

Most participants agreed that their teacher and their administration also helped introduce different ideas into their school community and were supportive. Bob, attending Badlands Drive, stated, “*she [the teacher] always helps us and will find information for us, so that we can carry on in the project*” (transcripts, April 17, 2008, p. 22). This also showed the commitment of the teacher to the completion of their students’ action projects for sustainable development.

Suzy agreed with Paula about how important it is to “*surround yourself with positive influences*” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 4). The group at Rocky View commented that their teacher really was their main positive influence. Suzy believed teachers needed to clearly make the link of how concepts benefit students’ lives and explicitly show them those links. She questioned, “*if you don’t have an interest in something and you don’t see how it can benefit you in real life, why would you want to do it?*” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 15). Those teachers viewed as a positive influence were perceived to be able to bridge content and context while incorporating students’ varied interests into their teaching.

The students at Badlands Drive knew that their teacher was transferring to a different school that autumn. They saw their teacher’s move to be a positive influence, since she would be passing on their community workshop action project to other students in a new school and a new community. Bob stated, “*if she passes what we did onto them [the new students], they will keep doing it [the community workshop] in their communities or tell their friends at different schools and maybe everyone will just start getting involved more*” (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 9). For Bob, recognition from other students was important. The fact that their teacher would be able to tell students in another school about their student action project was significant. She wanted people to get involved and get their communities involved. Caesar explained, “*you have to have the teacher for it. You just can’t pick anyone, like if they are by the books they will never be able to do it*” (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 21). Most of the participants agreed that it

takes a special teacher to teach and lead students working on action projects for sustainable development. Bob added, “*you want someone with a creative mind who can go with the flow*” (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 21).

In contrast, the group of students at Flower Power High who believed their teacher was assigned to them and was too busy to show up to their meetings were looking for adult support. Lily reflected, “*I think that the administration wanted someone who was in science and that is why they picked Mr. B, but I don’t know, he kind of disappeared out of the picture*” (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p. 4). They did not succeed in completing their action project.

The teacher seems to make a difference. The students at Rocky View and Badlands Drive believed that their teachers supported them, yet, they “owned” their projects. Their teachers reciprocated an ethic of care. Thus, it would seem the qualities of a teacher and the teacher’s influence on the students also help contribute to the students’ successful completion of their action projects for sustainable development.

At Rocky View, Suzy commented, “*I really thought that I knew what I was learning, but now that I have learned in a different way, I realize now how archaic the entire school system really is and how really so many teachers don’t, can’t do, what our teacher does*” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p.18). Teaching in a different way is difficult. Suzy believed that only some teachers are able to teach in a way that uses discussion, collaborative groups and applied community work that will facilitate students carrying out action projects. Wilma commented, “*sometimes I feel like teachers don’t even know what they are teaching, they are just kind of doing the motions of teaching*” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 19). Some participants felt that teachers get used to teaching a certain way and cannot break out of that routine, one way of teaching that seems to suit them. Suzy defended her teachers, “*and that is not to say that our teachers aren’t great people, and they are smart, but that is just the way they learned I suppose*” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 19). Students also felt that teachers were a product of the system; they were only teaching how they were taught.

Discussion helps some people think about what they are really learning. Students commented about teachers they have had in the past and how and why they would not be able to effectively teach in this action-oriented way, since all they seemed to show that

they knew was their ability to be the front of the classroom, “preaching” to the students. It seemed some of the students’ teachers could not facilitate discussion in their classroom nor let go of the reins so that students could possibly create their own projects, assignments, debates or discussion topics. Some students had positive examples of teachers who supported them and saw them through their action projects for sustainable development. Wilma realized, “*there are so many class discussions and sometimes I totally don’t agree with some people’s opinions here, but I can think about it afterwards and it does, it gets me thinking and it gets me questioning where do my opinions come from*” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 18). The nature of inquiry and discussion were important elements of learning in a different way for these participants.

Schedule

Students at Rocky View felt they had a lot of voice in the classroom and in their curricular action projects. The teacher gave them space and allowed them to make decisions and figure it out together with their group. Barb, attending Rocky View, stated that they had “*so much voice*” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 21).

Part of the attraction also was setting one’s own schedule. Caesar talked about doing things at “*your own pace ... your own speed*” (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 17). At Badlands Drive, class was very self-directed and students were allowed a huge amount of choice and their voices were included in the decision making process. Caesar related a story, “*I had to drive my Dad and pick him up from the doctor’s today and I asked her [the teacher] what we were doing in class and she said ‘it is up to you, I should be asking you what I am doing this class’*” (transcripts, May 1, 2008, p. 12). Thus, students enjoyed the freedom to decide their own schedule when it came time to working on their action projects and preferred the individualized “work-in-your-own-style” environment.

Teacher Education

At Rocky View, Wilma commented about the education system and teacher education, “*even in education, there is not a subject, you can’t major in global education*” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 17). She felt that the College of Education was not progressive enough to change the way it segregated its students into courses and a

grade levels approach to teaching. Wilma suggested, *“have a bigger kind of academic and theoretical base to make curriculum and practical classes on those kinds of subjects is exactly the direction that I think the university needs to go”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 17). Suzy commented, *“yeah, so the merit in that is that you should be able to do whatever you want to do, whether it is biology or geography or anything in the whole world and be able to apply it to everything”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 19). Thus, the participants in this study felt as though they could study any subject or theory and be able to apply it in a practical way when going into the community to do the work.

Community Engagement

Suzy’s comment about *“how archaic the entire school system really is”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p.18), was a realization shared between participants at Rocky View and similar statements were heard within many discussions between two groups. There was, however, a positive side to the education system. In response to a comment about getting involved in the community, Wilma stated, *“you are actually given an opportunity through the education program, I thought, that was really, really important for people that haven’t had the opportunity to do it before”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 13). Paula agreed, *“I definitely think that every student should have that opportunity”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 14). These participants valued working within the community and were pleased with the opportunity their project offered them for promoting that teaching. Also, they realized they were fortunate to have those opportunities to take their learning into the community and believed that all students everywhere would benefit from similar, positive experiences.

Youth Forum

Attending the youth forum, participants realized their personal actions affected their communities and that students could be a source of positive change. Aster started doing things like recycling paper, cardboard, and batteries at home. The extracurricular action project group at Flower Power High and the youth forum helped him because he *“was never really doing that much ’cause [he] didn’t see it as making very much of a difference”* but, he *“realized it was doing something”* (transcripts, May 23, 2008, p. 9).

Suzy appreciated that the youth forum organizers kept connected with the students and she viewed that as a positive. She stated, *“I think, especially, my favorite part about the whole thing was the continuity of it, the way that the organizers kept in touch with people a lot and kept the contact going because it was really motivating to see how so many groups actually followed through with their plans”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 2). The youth forum provided an avenue for students to present their action projects for sustainable development and celebrate with each other their individual level of completion.

Completing their action projects, students were hoping to learn many things. Bob stated, *“I could get something done”* (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 7). Bob focused on not procrastinating and actually achieving a finished project at the end. Caesar hoped to learn many things from the youth forum. Caesar wanted to learn, *“how to use time wisely. Preparing is the big thing ... I have to learn how not to be so aggressive when I talk”* (transcripts, May 1, 2008, p. 13). Bob felt they learned *“what route to turn to look for help and how to go about doing it”* (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 9). Caesar learned other skills. Caesar boasted, *“I learned how to write a letter of invitation, a letter of request and a thank you letter and public speaking skills, there was a lot that I learned”* (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 9). Bob did not realize the scope of their project and when it was completed, Bob commented *“...to get sponsors and stuff, I never knew what people would do to get a sponsor from a store”* (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 9). Caesar also learned *“responsibility ... taking it in, not waiting for someone else to do the work, but actually having to do the work yourself”* (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 9). The participants learned many skills that they will take with them from the youth forum and the community experts who helped them believe they could make a positive difference in their community. The students believed they learned life skills. Most importantly, they believed they learned to take responsibility for their work.

Technology

I believed students would respond well to an online discussion board where they could enter into discussion online with other students from different schools. I created this discussion board using a secure site where only students involved with the project

would be granted access by logging in with a user name and password. Once logged into the website, students would then be able to communicate with each other using multiple methods, like discussion boards or blogs. There were direct email links to community experts and teachers in the event that students wanted advice or had questions or concerns I may not have been able to answer. Hence, they would have a multitude of people offering feedback and would be involved in a supportive network of companions who could also share their stories and challenges. I thought, and continue to think, that students benefit from communicating with other students, sharing their ideas and voicing their opinions.

The student participants involved in the focus group taped conversations did not form an online learning community as they did not use the discussion board. In regards to the discussion board Caesar stated, *“honestly, I haven’t gone online, I don’t have a computer at my house, the only chance that I get to go on a computer is here”* (transcripts, April 17, 2008, p. 14). The students did not have much access to the discussion board and some of them only had access to computers for a brief amount of time at school.

Four of the participants explicitly stated that they would rather talk in person than online. Participants did not say anything about their comfort with online meetings after having met others face to face.

The issue most often identified by students was time. Daisy complained, *“yah, it is a time thing”* (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p. 1). Caesar stated, *“it is just too much in too little of a time”* (transcripts, May 1, 2008, p. 5). Participants felt pressure to do their school work, be involved in their family’s lives, care for their own children or younger siblings, and also they wanted time for socializing.

There were also personal reasons the students could not log into the discussion board. Aster admitted, *“I have been grounded from the computer for the last two weeks”* (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p. 1). Thus, students needed full access to a computer and they needed time to comment on the discussion board. The participants felt that the discussion board was not something they could manage; in some cases, it was viewed as just another thing to do.

Summary

As the study reflected, most of the participants agreed there were both positives and negatives to completing their action projects for sustainable development. The participants definitely felt that they lacked sufficient time to complete their action projects but, when they had the support of their teacher and their school community, they felt they could get involved, change their own behaviour and make a positive impact with their project within their home community. The teachers' commitment and positive influence also helped the students complete their action projects for sustainable development. The youth forum allowed students an opportunity to present and celebrate their action projects for sustainable development. Although students noted that having the project as a course assignment was valuable, they seemed more interested in the skills they were learning. The students believed they learned life skills from the youth forum and the community experts at the youth forum also assisted students to complete their action projects for sustainable development. Students believed that they could take responsibility for their work and they felt that teacher education needed to progressively change their programs so that they was not separated into subject areas. Thus, teacher candidates could study any subject or theory and learn to apply it in a practical way when going into the community.

Chapter 5

Data Discussion

This thesis reflects the local and contextualized experiences of ten participants. These experiences are specific for individuals, groups and the time in which the action projects were completed. The information I have written exemplifying precise traits of students' experiences with action projects is dependant on time, place, and mood. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated, "What we may be able to say now about a person or school or some other is given meaning in terms of the larger context, and this meaning will change as time passes" (p. 19).

The participants' experiences have been shared. What broad themes and issues are intertwined with the data? What do the data tell us about the life of a student and action projects for sustainable development in schools? By examining the students' experiences and the language of the students, a deeper understanding of the dominant discourses and how they might affect the students should be possible. This chapter answers these questions broadly, in terms of attractions and distractions, and specifically, in terms of students' reactions and actions. These struggles and triumphs will be shared and reflected on in the theoretical conclusions of this study. Discourse is defined as "ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities....Discourse is a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize" (Gee as cited in Gruenwald, 2004, p. 102).

In the discussion of the data through the topics of collaboration, group work, community engagement, time, peer pressure, grades, and technology, I have come to understand there were many attractions and distractions for the student participants rooted in their experiences during their work on their action projects for sustainable development. Initially, I thought the student participants did not care about my research. But after much time spent contemplating the results and their comments in the focus group conversations, I realized that the students really did care because they showed up to the interviews. They always seemed eager to talk to me. I believe that most people

want some external affirmation of the importance of what they are doing. In some cases, they wanted someone to hear in what ways they were frustrated or in what ways they were accomplishing and exceeding their goals. After time, I came to realize there were many external issues to their action projects so that students often lost focus on their projects.

Challenges and Triumphs

Group work and collaboration.

All the participants mentioned the benefits and challenges of collaborating with their action projects for sustainable development.

Most participants talked about the positive, collaborative effort of their group and commented about supporting each other. Eight out of ten students said they found working as part of a group to be a positive experience. Two voices were not heard when the discussion of collaboration and group work occurred. This raised questions in my mind why those two students did not comment. I wondered if, perhaps, they didn't speak because others had said what they believed. On the other hand, perhaps they chose to say nothing because their experiences of working in a group was negative and they did not want to say something while their group members were present during the discussion. I also wondered if they had negative experiences and they did not want to hurt my feelings or perhaps they did not feel they could say anything, since I was part of the group also. Buttercup stated, *"I really find the group as more, like it is more of a stress reliever for me because like you have school and then you have got lunch and you have something at least to look forward to"* (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p. 8). Paula spoke to the positive collaborative effort of their group with their action project and how well they worked together towards a common goal. Paula reflected, *"I think that it was good of us at least to try and it had been a goal throughout the whole year and we weren't just going to give up on that goal and I think that everybody kind of kept each other motivated throughout the whole thing. I think everybody was really motivated and kept each other encouraged throughout the whole planning process and stuff"* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 3).

Group work was about the mutual encouragement that they had with each other. Suzy agreed with Paula to *"surround yourself with positive influences"* (transcripts, June

12, 2008, p. 4). The group commented that was really what each other was there for was to positively influence and support one another. Suzy stated, *“as the class went on, everyone became like an information source and we would talk about stuff”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 9). Barb stated, *“just to know that we are able to do something like this ... just to know that we are going to help someone out”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 10). Wilma thought that the commitment to the project(s) took dedicated leadership from the teachers and the students and also leadership in the way of supporting one another. Wilma remembered, *“we were there to support each other and we were each there to back each other up at each individual’s event”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 17).

The students were talking about reciprocal care (Noddings, 1992). They were not only reciprocating care with the teacher, but also with one another. They showed reciprocal care through their interactions by encouraging one another, keeping each other motivated, supporting each other and being leaders committed to working together on their action project(s). The students seemed drawn into the “circle of care predicated on their desire for loving interactions among people, social justice in the broader community, and connectedness to the place where they live” (Smith, 2004, p. 74). The students and their teachers, through interactions and deeper connections, showed they cared about and for social justice in their neighbourhoods and their larger community. At Rocky View, students cared about the school and their local community through their action project. In the Badlands Drive action project the students cared about their community and at Flower Power High, the students cared about their school community by creating a club and trying to promote it within the school, but they also cared about the planet. Thus, the caring interactions that students develop with one another, lead to better preparing children to maintain deeper connections within their homes, schools, communities and their world.

Collaboration also was about bringing awareness to the group. Paula commented, *“you can see the concrete changes, the concrete influences that human beings, that people around you have and it is awesome”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 16). Part of the fascination of the group was observing people thinking differently and sharing feelings within the group. Wilma felt that they effected change in *“communities, agencies and tendencies”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 16). Buttercup stated, *“don’t*

get discouraged, just keep going and always welcome new ideas because that is how you will grow too, I mean like, if someone has a new idea, it might not be perfect at the start, but if other people bring their ideas into it, then sometimes it snowballs into something really great” (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p. 17). The group members worked well with each other and brought different ideas to the group. Caesar commented, *“we all had a board to fill up about the gang project, but some of the questions were kind of hard to find answers, but I felt if I didn’t write something down on that piece of paper, then I wasn’t doing my part”* (transcripts, April 17, 2008, p. 12). Thus, the students in all three sites felt that they had something to offer their groups and, in return, the people in the groups offered something back.

For participants, collaboration was about contribution and partnership. Sometimes it was about attendance. Aster agreed with Lily, *“showing up is ninety percent of succeeding”* (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p. 16). One of the positives about doing an action project according to Bob was *“having a partner”* (transcripts, May 22, 2008, p. 13). Caesar stated, *“a partner makes a huge difference; it makes it a lot easier”* (transcripts, May 22, 2008, p. 13). Bob realized, *“you don’t have to do it all by yourself, you have someone to do it with”* (transcripts, May 22, 2008, p. 13). Participants realized they could talk with one another, share the work and help each other. Caesar commented, *“someone to give their opinion and you get two people’s opinions other than yourself and if you don’t know how to do something then you can talk about it and work it out”* (transcripts, May 22, 2008, p. 13). Buttercup reflected, *“someone may have an idea and it is like hmm how is that going to work, but then if you put your heads together, it will all come together”* (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p. 17). Thus, the positives such as forming partnerships, communication, supporting each other, bringing awareness and mutual encouragement identified by participants regarding collaboration was dependant on each individual’s group and how they each negotiated what each individual brought and did not bring to the group.

The students’ projects facilitated their ability to move beyond the dominant discourse by valuing group work in a society that values individuality. The students were able to resolve conflicts in their group in a society that I believe, tends to value quick, easy solutions by creating a new technology that is supposed to solve a complex problem

rather than negotiating a way through the complexity. They were able to share and work together collaboratively as a group, rather than compete in a society that I think favors competition. The students taught each other to care and they learned about what it meant to be cared for. They learned to compromise and take each other's ideas and points of view into account. The projects did not move the students beyond the dominant discourse (Barrett, 2006; Gruenwald, 2004) because they may not have been 'pushed' to their own individual limits. They relied on the group and all of its members to get the work completed. Perhaps the work of those who valued cooperation and caring has affected schools. Such people as Johnson and Johnson (from the 1980s), Kohn (from the 1980s) and Noddings (1984; 1992) have affected schools so that students are encouraged to work together and are beginning to value collaboration and cooperation.

Technology.

The issue most often identified by the students was time when talking about the online discussion board. At Flower Power High, Daisy complained, "*yah, it is a time thing*" (transcripts, May 30, p. 1). Caesar, at Badlands Drive, stated, "*it is just too much in too little of a time*" (transcripts, April 17, 2008, p. 5). Lily also commented, "*when you are more busy, you do things, like you can plan things ahead of time*" (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p. 8). This speaks to the dominant discourse that we value being busy. I believe there are too many demands and at school we perpetuate the busyness of society; this particular school values busyness. The dominant discourse, at Flower Power High, seemed to be that you have to be busy to succeed. What can be seen is that education is set up to prepare students for "successful participation in economic life" (Gruenwald, 2004, p. 77), rather than to examine relationships between culture, social realities and environmental issues. There are a lot of assignments given to students and they have to finish them on time. There is little time given to deep understanding. The dominant discourse focuses on an "individualistic, inequitable, and unsustainable growth economy" (Gruenwald, 2004, p. 79). The online discussion board is a worthy task and the students believe they haven't time to do it. The online discussion board is a worthy task since it would enable a connection of different students from different schools to support one

another in succeeding to complete their action projects for sustainable development. Also, students would be able to establish a connection online with experts, their community, teachers and various governmental and nongovernmental organizations. I believe that students learning to use technology in such positive ways would greatly enhance their connections to one another and their broader community of supports that would lead to deeper understanding.

Also at Flower Power High, Aster admitted, "*I have been grounded from the computer for the last two weeks*" (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p. 1). This plays into the dominant discourse of punishment and rewards, similar to a business model of compliance and quantitative measures for holding schools, teachers and students accountable (Gruenwald, 2004). Also, though, I believe it plays into the discourse about computers being toys, and not being important to learning. Parents can revoke computer privileges, since the computer is a toy, not a learning tool. But, I see a lack of trust and a lack of valuing of toys and play. I do not think that work tools would be taken away. Also, part of the busyness of society is that Aster should be doing something he doesn't enjoy – that would be work.

Teacher.

The teacher was important to set the tone of the group. Students in Badlands Drive and students in Rocky View had teachers who collaborated with the students, supported them, and were dedicated leaders who really worked on teamwork. The students at Flower Power High had a teacher who was too busy and had too many things to do, to spend time with the club. He volunteered to supervise and he had been assigned to this club, and they conflicted. Lily reflected, "*I think that the administration wanted someone who was in science and that is why they picked Mr. B, but I don't know, he kind of disappeared out of the picture*" (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p.4). I question, why does Lily think that administration assigned a science teacher to their group? I wonder, perhaps part of the discourse is that sustainable development belongs in the science curriculum. It is definitely a part of the conversation with the group at Flower Power High that their teacher was assigned, rather than chose to participate. The teachers at Rocky View and Badlands Drive had chosen to work in their locations and to teach the

courses the action projects were part of. They participated and brought passion to the work the students were doing. Teachers' lives are complex with supervision, extracurricular assignments and teaching and it is important to acknowledge the complexity of teachers' lives.

At Rocky View, Suzy commented, "*I really thought that I knew what I was learning, but now that I have learned in a different way, I realize now how archaic the entire school system really is and how really so many teachers don't, can't do, what our teacher does*" (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 13). Teaching in a different way can be difficult. Wilma commented, "*sometimes I feel like teachers don't even know what they are teaching, they are just kind of doing the motions of teaching*" (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 19). Here the students seem to talk about how some of their teachers have been incorporated into the dominant discourse. They have seen, from their teacher, a different approach. They are now able to imagine a way of being and learning that they believe is better. Perhaps their teacher was teaching from a traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) perspective (Snively & Corsiglia, 2000) and perhaps she influenced her students at Rocky View through her support and working in collaboration to begin changing their ontology to value relatedness (Lange, 2004). At Rocky View, it is my belief that their teacher was teaching for transformation and realized it as "an ontological process where participants experience a change in their being in the world including their forms of relatedness" (Lange, 2004, p. 121). Thus, I believe, the students were changing their habits of thinking and transforming their understanding and way of being to value relatedness.

Transformative learning.

When a person transforms, his or her whole orientation changes. Suddenly, he or she notices the injustices all around and challenges the purpose of certain practices. Gruenwald (2004) summarized his paper with:

The difference between an educational discourse that has been coopted and one that remains potentially transformative is this: a coopted discourse can be claimed to be already sufficiently recognized, understood and integrated into existing policies, programs, standards. ... A transformative discourse, on the other hand, constantly challenges the assumptions and purposes behind existing practices and articulates a fundamentally different vision. (p. 100)

The system for punishing and rewarding, which groups get the teacher's time and which groups don't, which subject areas and which extracurricular clubs get preferred time slots, all become part of what is noticed and become part of the dominant discourse. The students involved in my research study can be examined through the lens of transformation away from the dominant discourse. The students were all at different stages of transformation. The three case study sites were at different stages of transformation away from the dominant discourse – Badlands Drive School students were the most transformed, Rocky View Campus students were changing, and Flower Power High students struggled to recognize how their school's structures limited them. The assigned teacher was not able to support the students at Flower Power High, since he remained absent throughout the groups' meetings and discussions. The students were looking for adult support and the school and the administration, in its choice for teacher, limited the students in their action projects. These students could not see past their extracurricular club or the school community to go beyond the walls of the school to the wider community for support. Badlands Drive had students who have been at odds with the dominant discourse, and Rocky View's students elected to take a course that would challenge the predominant worldview, but Flower Power High students were members of an extra-curricular club with little teacher and school support.

Extracurricular.

It seemed that an extracurricular club allowed for more choice of scheduling for the students involved, yet curricular work seemed to get their attention. Daisy commented, "*I had a history essay that was due and I was kind of spending all my time on that*" (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p. 12). Lily stated, "*there are so many things that you want to do, but too many things that you have to do*" (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p.1). I felt that these students believed that curricular work was more important and valued rather than their extracurricular action project for sustainable development. Perhaps, the extracurricular allowed for more choice in their schedule, but the choice seemed to have been – do it or not. If there were "have to" demands, as Lily stated, the choice would be not.

My experience with high schools is that students who participate in extracurricular elite sports are expected to make time for the sports. This reveals a hierarchy of what is valued in high schools. Despite my impression that sports were more valued at Rocky View Campus than other activities, the students themselves believed the administration was demonstrating the value placed on extracurricular activities. Students noticed that sports were valued by the school since the school organized tournaments for teams and all the athletes on the teams received uniforms.

I do not believe that students working on their extracurricular eco-club felt supported by their school, Flower Power High. I believe that students do not need a teacher supervised extracurricular club. Parents and the neighbourhood community should be involved. The existing structure in place at the school is one of business-like standards to create students competitive in the global economy where the needs of students and communities are ignored (Gruenwald, 2004), so it was not part of the conversation for parents that they should get involved. Yet, if the community had been involved in Flower Power High's eco-club, community engagement, shared responsibility and authentic partnerships between students, citizens, school and community likely would have ensued.

Community engagement.

Participants realized their individual benefits of learning together within the group. Aster thought the group had been a positive influence on his life. He stated, "*I have always been conscious of the things that have been going on around [me], but I have never known what I could personally do about it ... and I guess it is just doing my part*" (transcripts, May 23, 2008, p. 9). Lily wanted "*to get more people thinking about this, like people just like us [peers/youth of the same age] are aware of the fact, but they don't realize what they can do*" (transcripts, May 23, 2008, p. 10). For Lily, community work was getting her peers in her school community to see the action they too can take and changing their attitude towards the positive that something can be done. Lily wanted to get more students from Flower Power High involved. Growing and building the group was one of the goals the group wanted to accomplish. Caesar stated, "*it just kind of*

makes me feel good that I am trying to do something” (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 7). Daisy was more ambitious and emotional when it came to reflecting about working on their action project in their community. She felt she wanted to make a difference “*so, we can help save the environment for when our children’s children grow up*” (transcripts, May 23, 2008, p. 9). I believe these students are beginning to learn responsible action and they are observing how personally rewarding it can be. Case, Falk, Smith, and Werner (2004, p. iv) question, “if not in schools, where else will students learn that responsible and compassionate action can be both personally rewarding and effective in bringing about change?” The community the students created for working together is one kind of community.

Some participants reflected on the vital and essential connection of school and the broader community, in which the school is located. Participants spoke about the feeling of disconnect in schools between their lives and their community. Caesar stated, “*I think it is just trying to connect the community and your life with school. Instead of it being research this and write down notes, like I don’t want to do that*” (transcripts, April 17, 2008, p. 11). They felt they could have a positive effect on themselves and their community; it did not matter how small an effect it may be. Caesar reflected, “*I think that we are both having an effect because we are actually trying to do something. We are putting together this workshop and we have no idea how it is going to turn out, we have never done it before*” (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 7). Action projects with the goal of active citizenship will prepare students to identify, plan and carry out solutions to problems within their school, community or beyond (Case, Falk, Smith, & Werner, 2004). Talking to the community can be difficult and challenging. Bob stated, “*they choose to listen, or they choose not to*” (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 7). Caesar wanted to “*get a response*” and “*just want[ed] to be heard*” (transcripts, May 1, 2008, p. 17). Thus, taking action and getting a personal response to their message was what this group wanted to get from their community. Caesar said by “*trying to better the community*” (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 7), there would not be such disconnection between school and their community. She thought that more interaction would yield a tighter bond between school and community. Dryfoos (2000), a strong advocate for community schools, stated “the community ‘owns’ the school” (p. 16). Creating change and making

a difference in the community is about whether people care. Bob felt, *“if people come out and then they leave right away then obviously they don’t care, but if people come and stay and listen to what we have to say, and listen to what is going on, then obviously they care and they want to help make a change too”* (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 8). Again, Noddings’ (1992) vision of relational ethics is fundamental to our community’s well-being and is enacted through a culture of care – care for our neighbours, community and region where we live.

Other participants talked about the interactive aspect of learning within their community and how it is a valued opportunity for students. Suzy reflected, *“we would be taking learning outside of the classroom and applying what we learned”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 12). According to Claus and Ogden (1999), *“the process is as important as the product, and the focus is on engaging in thoughtful community action that will empower young people to care, question and act in their lives”* (p. 4). Wilma commented on the benefits of community organizations being involved in the schools, *“those organizations could not have reached out to the people in the schools in that same way, as the class kind of provided that opportunity for them to”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 13). By valuing community work and embracing their opportunity of learning in community, their class provided the organizations with the opportunity to contact people in the schools. *“The goal of active citizenship will be learned through thoughtful, cooperative, and responsible action”* (Case, Falk, Smith & Werner, 2004, p. v). Some participants also commented on the value of teamwork while learning in community. Bob reflected, *“I don’t think I could have done this by myself”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 10). Thus, learning in community has positive individual benefits especially when interacting with others within the community and linking one’s personal life, school and community altogether.

Their action project helped the students move beyond the dominant discourse, since Badlands Drive and Rocky View wanted to carry out the action projects within their community trying to interact and change their respective communities. These students were empowered to make a difference and their teachers encouraged relations between people and their communities so they felt connected to one another and to where they lived. Their teachers cared about the students and their action projects and challenged the

dominant discourse of hierarchical power relationships. The counter example was the students at Flower Power High seemed only to want to get in touch with their school community. They talked a lot about trying to make change in their school with their eco-group. The fact that these children did not get out of their school, located in an upper middle class neighbourhood, was intriguing. The principal and teachers possibly did not believe in moving beyond their school's walls. Gruenwald (2004) also noted that schools are expected to adhere to business-like standards of accountability and the needs of children and communities are ignored. The dominant discourse at Flower Power High was power within the school; it was not developing deep connections within their community. In this school, the students were stymied and this was perhaps because they didn't think to move beyond the school. Perhaps they did not have the adult support to help empower the students to make a difference.

Peer pressure.

Part of the challenge of working on their action projects for sustainable development was from outside factors. Sometimes the outside factors were other people, these students' peers and the things that they said or did not say. Buttercup believed "*they are too scared to speak*" (transcripts, May 23, 2008, p.10). Lily agreed with Buttercup, "*they are too scared to speak up and also there is peer pressure, like if my friend knows I am in this club, then they are not going to hang out with me anymore*" (transcripts, May 23, 2008, p. 10). Peer pressure was still a considerable concern for these students even though they did not let people's comments affect them negatively. They always had their group to communicate with and as Caesar stated, "*you can't control other people's actions*" (transcripts, May 22, 2008, p. 17). This is part of the dominant discourse in Flower Power High. Their peers do not believe that eco-club was "cool". The other two sites had supports. At Rocky View, students who valued action projects, environmental and social justice applied to be in the one class. At Badlands Drive, the students were not children, but adults and they had broken away from peers twice – once when they dropped out of school and then again when they dropped back in. Schools contributed to the development of peer pressure by modeling the societal dominant discourse of hierarchical power relationships. Schools also valued the societal

need for efficiency, since they easily bypassed those who were “out of tune” or “different” compared to the mainstream. Schools also placed importance on numbers and hard data where product was valued over process and one was evaluated based on what they produced. Administration and teachers also contributed to the creation of peer pressure by making students aware of the significance of certain extracurricular activities compared to others. Peer pressure did not encourage relations between people and it was important to learn what it meant to be cared for and feel connected to one another. Peer pressure was a concern for the students at Flower Power High, at this school located in an upper middle class neighbourhood, since they were “different” because they cared about the environment. They were not “producing” anything and they did not have adult support. Peer pressure was not a concern at the other two schools, since the teachers cared about the students, valued that they were all different and encouraged them to be different and make a positive difference in their school and community.

Students’ Actions and Reactions

Actions.

Participants thought that by taking action, they could create a ripple effect and change some people’s perspectives in their communities. They felt good about trying different projects and were inspired by each other hoping they could change another’s perspective. Paula commented, “*you are thinking about how you were before and what you tried before and stuff, so it might create small little changes in a few people’s lives as much as changing someone’s perspective*” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 5). Caesar claimed, “*I wanted to try something new too, I just wanted to see how it would go*” (transcripts, May 22, 2008, p. 14). Suzy talked about taking action as motivation saying, “*I think that actually going out and doing something with the things that you learn is really important*” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 15).

Taking action and completing their projects allowed students to have their voices heard, to encounter unique experiences and to grow in all ways. Paula commented, “*I think that sometimes with events, even a small thing is successful, just to learn about it and how to handle those kinds of things and stuff*” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 9). Barb reflected, “*I don’t think that I would be who I am today or think half of what I think about*

today because of this class, like it really made me into, I think a much better person, in order to have this experience” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 15). Their decision to work on a community workshop as a project, according to Caesar, *“maybe not necessarily to learn a bunch of stuff, but just to go and inform people and be heard”* (transcripts, April 17, 2008, p. 30). Bob wanted to learn from others. Bob stated, *“get some ideas from others and see what their matters are and what they think of it”* (transcripts, April 17, 2008, p. 31). Bob had a positive attitude about the outcome of their action project. Bob shared, *“as long as one person goes home with some kind of knowledge that they didn’t know when they got there, then I will be happy”* (transcripts, May 22, 2008, p. 15).

This section really does challenge the dominant discourse. These students at Rocky View and Badlands Drive, in taking action, were moving into the community. They were young students (who are supposed to be obedient and protected) from the lower and working class neighbourhood schools and they were activists for social and environmental justice. The students from the upper middle class neighbourhood school were young and did not consider working in the community as something possible for their action projects for sustainable development. The students at Flower Power High stayed protected and dependent in their school. Despite having high aspirations about saving the environment for future generations, they did not go beyond the walls of the school.

Reactions.

Upon completion of their action projects for sustainable development, participants shared reactions about their journey. One of the action projects was to host an eco-workout during sustainability week at one of the schools. Wilma commented, *“I am so happy, because it was one of my goals as a grade twelve student to leave something like that behind that you know could grow the school”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 11). Another project was hosting a community workshop. Caesar stated, *“after the workshop, we have nothing to worry about ... you know really if it turns out badly, she can’t really dock us marks, there is nothing she can really do”* (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 17). Caesar was in the dominant discourse here as marks and numbers count. She saw marks as motivators but more, marks as power and the teacher had the power. It was as if, in

this statement, she saw herself in a power struggle with the teacher and she, Caesar, had won. Bob replied, *“because we have done everything that we could do ... we tried”* (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 17). Bob challenged the dominant discourse here. She stated that it was about trying, attempting and putting forth the effort. It was about the process and learning from that process. The dominant discourse really was the numbers, the hard data, and the product. The dominant discourse, for Caesar, was that we do not get “paid” for effort, but for product. By “trying” their best and countering the dominant discourse, Bob and Caesar felt that putting forth the effort and learning from the process was all they could do and it took great courage to grow from that realization. Wilma also reflected while getting personal, *“this has been the most growing that I have done as a grade twelve student this whole year and it has been, it seems, like the most important work and the most important thing that I have learned in terms of concepts”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 14). Through their reactions, the students came to realize the scope of change that occurred in their personal lives and the significance of their action projects. They realized that their action projects, the messages, and lessons from their projects, will live on in their own lives, in the lives of other students in their schools, and in their communities.

The Community Workshop

Challenges and triumphs specific to the community workshop.

There were many struggles and achievements specific to the group who worked on the action project of planning a community workshop. The greatest accomplishment according to Caesar was deciding on what to do for a project and *“getting it going”* (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 1). At times, Caesar *“never thought it would get started”* (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p.1). Bob also remembered the struggles, *“I didn’t think it would actually be happening until we had a date picked and stuff”*(transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 1). The most stressful, time-consuming job was creating and delivering the flyers. Caesar stated, *“I don’t think I will do the flyers again”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 9). Another large stress according to Bob was getting *“people working at the workshop”* (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 2). However, through all the stress and struggles, there was delight and determination. They felt very proud of planning their

workshop and took ownership of the project. Caesar beamed, “*it was all us too, we planned it all*” (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 2). Hence, when students were working on their action projects for sustainable development, there definitely were positives and negatives, however, that was how they learned together and it also was how they each succeeded by conquering their struggles and overcoming their challenges.

The teacher was present enough that the students at Badlands Drive School felt their work was valued by her, but she was absent enough so they knew the work was theirs. They developed their sense of accomplishment and pride. In contrast, the students at Flower Power High did not have a teacher to value or support their work or to prompt them when they stalled. The students were not able to accomplish all of their goals of their eco-club. Within the educational discourse – teachers tend to see their roles as telling, controlling, etc. The teacher for the students at Badlands Drive backed off and students learned through this. Thus, it is important that teachers get to know their students so that a primary fidelity to all people (Noddings, 1992) guides their thinking during teaching and learning.

Actions and reactions specific to the community workshop.

The students who completed the community workshop as their action project for sustainable development shared many lessons that they learned after the workshop concluded. Planning needed to be completed more in advance and it needed to be more precise and specific. The students thought the month of May was a better time to host a community workshop. Caesar commented, “*there is a lot of people who don’t seem to have any time in June. They already have a lot of stuff that they are working on and I think if we would have been able to work on getting a hold of them before, it would have paid off*” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 4). The group thought that making the community workshop an annual event would increase attendance. Also, Caesar stated that more advertising in “*the school newsletter*” or according to Bob, advertising in “*the community newsletter*” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 5), would help attendance too. The students were disappointed in the weather, but as Caesar realized, “*there is nothing that you can do about it*” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 6). Bob was upset about the fact that the speakers from various organizations were talking to each other. Bob stated, “*I wish*

they [the citizens] would have moved around and kept talking to them [the presenters], like we have these people speaking for us and presenting for us and there is nobody talking to them because they have already gone through it all” (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 3). Possibly, there could have been a formal presentation schedule arranged, so the public would have listened to each speaker’s message together, rather than informally visiting each booth and talking with each person individually.

The students’ ultimate goal of other youth hosting a community workshop in their own community after attending their workshop was not realized. Caesar commented, *“there wasn’t enough high school students or youth there”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 7) however, the students who organized the community workshop remained optimistic about other youth still hosting a workshop one day. Bob thought *“that teachers moving around and teaching Global Citizenship, I think, it will be that way where someone else will do a community workshop, but I don’t think that it will be from our workshop like that night from people being there”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p.7). Another realization was that one more person would have helped to relieve the pressure somewhat and would have greatly helped them to do some of the running around in preparation for the workshop. Caesar stated, *“we don’t even need a [large] group, just one more person would be helpful”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 11).

The students who planned and completed the community workshop as their action project for sustainable development valued teamwork. Bob reflected, *“I don’t think I could have done this by myself”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 10). Claus and Ogden (1999), in a book on service learning for youth empowerment, wrote *“reflection helped them [the students] to understand their experience”* (p.172). The students learned accountability too. Caesar also learned *“responsibility - taking it in, not waiting for someone else to do the work, but actually having to do the work yourself”* (transcripts, May 29, 2008 p. 9). The students concluded that they learned many lessons about collaboration, accountability, responsibility and reality while understanding their experiences too. They started something, followed through with their plans and above all, they tried. Bob concluded, *“it was an awesome experience for me to do something like that”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 14). Caesar summarized, *“I have never done anything like that, it was good”* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 14). They were very proud

of their work and for the first time planning a community workshop, they learned various valuable lessons from their experience that will continually benefit their lives.

Students' Advice on Action Projects for Sustainable Development

The participants involved in this study all agreed that other students should definitely have the opportunity of the challenges and triumphs of completing action projects for sustainable development in their future school careers. Wilma stated, *"I not only think that it should be in all the high schools, but I think that it should be in every class like learning how to apply what you learn in the classroom and using it in your community, not only the [methodology] behind the class of going back to the community to do the work, but applying it in a practical way"* (transcripts, June 12, 2008, p. 14). However, teachers must allow students to be leaders and must take initiative to empower students to change and encounter or create these action projects for sustainable development. This is about breaking down the dominant discourse. Our society acts as if students (especially adolescents) need to be protected from themselves and that they are too immature to carry out worthy projects and make a difference. If they take on an action project, we think they are "cute". Teachers must also change how they conceive of their students. They must trust their students to leave the classroom and make a positive difference in their community.

"The school's curriculum and activities arise from the individual qualities of specific communities and the creative impulses of particular teachers and students" (Smith, as cited in Hiatt-Michael, 2003, p.2). It is so much about the teacher seeing the students as functioning members of the community. It takes a special teacher to teach students working on action projects for sustainable development; it takes a teacher to lead by example and to be willing to give the reins over to the students to be leaders. Caesar stated, *"you have to have the teacher for it"* (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 21). The teacher needs to care and to be creative, compassionate and flexible.

It is so important to have a positive attitude. Lily stated, *"don't underestimate the little things that you do, like the things that we talked about, they count"* (transcripts, May 30, 2008, p. 16). Caesar added, *"just believe in what you are doing"* (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 19). Caesar also said not to concentrate or dwell on what other people

think. Caesar responded, “*even if people laugh at you or think it is a bad idea or stupid or something, we think we are cool and as long as we think we are cool, that is all that matters*” (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 19). Again, peer pressure or ridicule from other students should not stop students from achieving their goals and taking action for what they believe in. Community involvement was integral to the successful completion of their action projects for sustainable development. Bob shared “*get involved.*” Bob also stated, “*it is not going to turn out well if you are negative. If you are positive, you will have positive outlooks*” (transcripts, May 29, 2008, p. 19).

In this study, there were many barriers described and discussed originating in the dominant discourses of society and of schools. Society seems to value individuality and busyness. Our society’s dominant discourse favours efficiency where the “different” students were passed by, since they do not fit into the system. Society seems to value a hierarchy of power relationships and places importance on hard data where product was valued over process and where people were evaluated based on what they produced. Schools, administration and teachers contribute to the development of peer pressure by making students aware of the significance of certain extracurricular activities compared to others and by modeling the societal dominant discourse of hierarchical power relationships. Schools value numbers and grades by evaluating the products and by not valuing the process. Schools place many demands on students, thus perpetuating the busyness of society.

The dominant discourse of society and schools limited what the students could do. The students’ projects facilitated their ability to move beyond the dominant discourse by valuing group work in a society that values individuality. Especially at Flower Power High, their group was the only support they had as their teacher “disappeared out of the picture”(transcripts, May 30, 2008, p. 8). The group had to collaborate and try to break down the walls together. They had difficulty overcoming the barriers and did not complete their action project for sustainable development. At Badlands Drive School, the students moved past the dominant discourse of valuing hard data and products, to one where the teacher valued the process students’ were going through from a distance. She was present enough for the students to feel that their work was valued, but she was away enough so they knew they ‘owned’ their work. They were empowered and acted within

their community because the teacher broke down a wall of ‘traditional’ teaching styles and allowed the students to take the reins and own their action projects. At Rocky View Campus, the teacher had the students question why schools were structured the way they were. They acted in their lives, but saw that they were empowered because their teacher had broken down some walls. One of the walls of the dominant discourse in schools is the traditional subject areas. Their teacher had created a locally developed subject area that was outside of the traditional subject areas, thus they were able to complete their action projects for sustainable development.

There were many elements at play here within the groups involved in my study. There was only one male student involved in the conversations that may have added to the dynamic of the groups. Also, the students varied in age and maturity. Students were attending school for different reasons. The maturity of the students and the choice of action projects also contributed to the complexity of our conversations and of course, contributed to their skills of working together within a group. The number of students involved was manageable. Gathering more voices to be part of the focus group recorded conversations would have greatly increased the complexity of their projects and perhaps would have added to the dynamic of the conversations, the distractions and attractions, the interruption and disruptions. The systemic influences were also at play since there were different schools involved, different sizes of schools, different administrators, different ways of doing things, different values and views of the school administrators.

My Reflection: My Experience with Action Projects for Sustainable Development

We are who we are because of the experiences we have had.

James P. Gee (2000/2001)

Just like the participants of this study, I, too, have been trying to complete an action project for sustainable development. My action project for sustainable development involved a great group of academics and a terrific group of high school students. I was trying, in collaboration with others, to promote education for sustainable development through planning and hosting the youth forums at the College of Education. Collaboration, group work and learning in community were valued and it was necessary

for me to try to involve the whole community if I wanted to achieve success with the youth forums. Success to me was defined by the response from the students who attended the forums and the response from the experts invited from the community to speak to the students. Success was also defined by my reflection on the youth forums, as well as by my colleagues' reflections on how they thought the entire project was carried out. My experience with action projects for sustainable development both as a graduate student having completed a project and as a researcher observing students completing their action projects will reflect the many external attractions and distractions causing one to lose focus and will also touch on the many roles and responsibilities of students and teachers that are an integral part of life.

The students who were involved with action projects for sustainable development had many different facets in their lives. Some were caregivers and parents to either their own children or to their younger siblings. They had extra responsibilities of not only taking care of themselves, but also taking care of the little ones relying on them to meet their basic needs, to be there for them, to help them with their school work and above all else to love them. Some participants lived on their own, thus, household chores were solely their own responsibility. Most participants had part time jobs working odd hours in order to make some money to pay for car loans, gas, etc. The two participants at Badlands Drive School had jobs to support themselves, pay rent, food, bills and other living expenses. Some participants participated in extracurricular groups such as SRC or sports teams that required a lot of their time and discipline. Others were highly competitive students who focused their attention on studying and maintaining good grades to compete for scholarships and entrance into local, national and international universities and colleges. A lot of participants belonged to many different peer groups that allowed them to flourish and hone their social skills when working in the collaborative group setting for their action projects. Many students were also concentrating their energy and effort into planning and preparing for grade twelve graduation. The participants chose to be involved in completing an action project for sustainable development because they believed it would make a difference in their lives and in the lives of their peers. They wanted their children and their children's children to

grow up in a tolerant, innovative, environmentally friendly world where their voices were heard.

Two of the teachers made time for their students, and then stepped aside to let their students lead. The two teachers trusted their students and seemed to have intuition about how much support to give. They were flexible and patient people. These teachers were also passionate about issues of sustainable development and wanted to help and encourage these students to take action. They dove into projects taking a chance and learned alongside their passionate students. They learned from their experiences. These teachers were role models to their students and embraced the concept of lifelong learning.

My experience with action projects for sustainable development in planning the youth forum was that it was crazy, exhausting, and truly rewarding. I am a genuine, 'what you see is what you get' type of person and I am sure some of the time I looked completely drained. However, it was energizing to meet and see the students with the speakers and to chat with them after about their inspirations and preparations for their projects. Even after having completed five graduate courses in one term, the youth forums refreshed me. I felt exhilarated and I could not wait to get into the schools and meet with students to see how their projects were progressing so that I could plan for the final, celebratory youth forum. As exciting as planning and preparing were, I had to meet deadlines and get approval from the school board to even set foot in their schools. As time passed, I too was involved in other facets of my life. I was involved with meetings, presentations, looking for work, becoming an aunt for the second and third time, planning to marry my fiancé and packing my personal things for the unknown time to move out of my parent's house. As I realized that I encountered all of these attractions and distractions, it made me profoundly ponder all of the attractions and distractions that the students encountered along the way to planning, preparing and presenting their completed action projects for sustainable development. Through all of the times that I lost focus, yet returned to what remained important to me, I thought about all of the barriers, struggles and challenges that the students working on their action projects met and conquered. They truly were my inspiration and will continue to be my strength and inspiration as I meet, endure and triumph over all sorts of life challenges.

Summary

This study reveals the experiences of students who completed action projects for sustainable development in either a curricular or extracurricular fashion. Not only did analyzing the data reveal specifics about students' reactions and actions during their action projects for sustainable development, analyzing the data highlighted broader ideas about students' struggles and triumphs in education and with teaching. These ideas describe the importance of collaboration, group work, community engagement, transformative learning, they explain how experience affects our lives, reflect the many roles and responsibilities of a teacher and emphasize the various relationships and expectations a student may maintain. My personal experience exemplifies these conclusions.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

Where do we go from here?

What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

In this final chapter, the research question is answered, implications and future research based on this study are described. A personal reflection regarding the overall success of this study concludes this thesis.

Answering the Research Question

The following research question guided this study: “What are the experiences of selected students as they participate in a youth forum for sustainability?”

Participants talked about their experiences and I noted the differences and similarities. Each participant attended the youth forum for sustainability and completed an action project during either their curricular or extracurricular time. Students from both Badlands Drive and Rocky View thought that learning opportunities were present and they seemed to realize that their action project for sustainable development was a priority for their course. They also seemed to find that the community supported their projects when they were curricular. Flower Power High students worked on their action project as an extracurricular project and they wanted bonus marks or credit for their action projects to get some type of recognition within their school for their eco-club.

Participants who completed their action projects for sustainable development during in-class, curricular hours talked about being valued and that their projects were respected by their teachers, other staff members, administration and most importantly students and their wider community. Participants felt supported by their teachers and administration where they could introduce non-traditional ideas into their schools. Students thought it was important to surround themselves with positive people and their teachers were one such positive influence in their class. The teachers at Badlands Drive and Rocky View

certainly did not limit the students in their projects; they supported them, encouraged them, and made space for the students to make their own choices. These students learned responsibility and they owned their projects. Students who completed their action projects for sustainability during curricular hours also participated during in-class discussions and shared their comments about the education system. These students felt they had more influence and involvement. One of the challenges associated with completing their action projects within the school was the realization that the school system was typical and slow to change.

The experiences of students who completed their action projects during their own time or extracurricular hours tended to talk about time, priorities and commitment. Students who did their projects as extracurricular were able to choose their own projects, their own time frame and students liked to have control of their arrangements and plans. Students found it challenging to commit themselves to larger projects, since there were many extracurricular groups in competition for their time. Their perspectives were also related to their school community and collaboration. Participants who completed their action project outside of class time thought their administration could recognize the work that they were doing within their school. Recruiting new students was one of the challenges associated with completing their action projects as an extracurricular club. However, students talked about how they appreciated each other and the new and different ideas that each person brought to the group. Participants commented that the group had been a positive influence on their lives.

In conclusion, the students in the alternative school, Badlands Drive, were adults and were used to having to make their own changes in life; indeed, by returning to school, they were making a path for themselves. The students in the small school, Rocky View, had elected to take an innovative course where the teacher believed they could do amazing things and encouraged them to do so. There seemed to be no doubt - all the students, regardless of their background, group, site or environment wanted to make a difference. But the students in two schools were able to make progress and were empowered to make a difference, whereas those in the third school, Flower Power High, were not able to accomplish their goals. Those students who were more open to challenging the dominant discourse or who were more supported in challenging it were

able to do more with their action projects than those students with the will but without the support. The students at Flower Power High noted some issues they had, but did not see other issues that interfered with them completing their projects.

Recommendations

The primary finding in this qualitative study, I think, is that student action projects for sustainable development are worthwhile, if appropriately supported. The students at two schools felt empowered, and had learned how to participate in democratic processes, and wanted to make the world a healthier place. Thus, action projects for sustainable development are important enough for teachers to spend the time. So, my recommendations focus on how teachers, schools and teacher preparation programs can support these projects. They are described below.

1. It is essential for teachers to commence and facilitate action projects for sustainable development with students. Teachers must understand that their identity and experiences will influence their teaching. Teacher preparation programs need to connect and involve teacher candidates' life experiences into their courses. "Students not only develop civic participation skills, values and attitudes; they also develop firsthand knowledge of the topics they are studying in the curriculum" (Wade, 2000, p. 10).
2. Although pre-service education cannot completely prepare teachers specifically to teach students about action projects, in it lies opportunities for teacher candidates to experience teachers and classrooms who are encouraging students to complete action projects for sustainable development. This would alter the way teachers introduce action projects to their students. "The three R's – Recognition, Relevance and Respect are critical components of creating an organizational culture that supports continued youth engagement. Work and efforts that feel meaningful and relevant to participants are more likely to be embraced and show results" (Hoffman & Staniforth, 2007, p. 41). Students would have more

influence and involvement and would own their meaningful and relevant action projects for sustainable development.

3. Relationship is at the heart of teaching and learning. Encourage both teachers and students to develop relationships with each other and model collaboration in faculties of education, during internship, and as a staff and faculty.
4. A primary fidelity to all people should guide our thinking during teaching and learning. It is important to teach people to care and to learn what it means to be cared for. Also, in teacher education reciprocate an ethic of care and encourage relations between people and their communities so they feel connected to one another and where they live (Noddings, 1992). Allow students off site experiences to engage in the community with opportunities for shared responsibility to build authentic partnerships.
5. In teacher education, exemplify that students have a voice and include them in their learning. “To be democratic implies orienting subject matter to student culture – their interests, needs, speech and perceptions – while creating a negotiable openness in class where the students’ input jointly creates the learning process” (Shor, as cited in Claus & Ogden, 1999, p. 71). Thus, in the program provide a safe space for teacher candidates to have a voice and allow them to be heard.
6. Accentuate an affinity for acting, doing and respect for all. Teach teacher candidates to interact with their community by being involved and moving to action in their homes, neighbourhoods and communities, and of course schools.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study describes the experiences of students who attended the youth forum and completed action projects for sustainability in either a curricular or an extracurricular manner. These findings suggest further avenues for research.

1. This study reflected some high school student's experiences with action projects for sustainable development in Saskatoon. It would be interesting to do this same study with participants from elementary schools in Saskatoon and compare the results. What are the experiences of elementary students in carrying out action projects for sustainable development? What are their challenges? What supports are available for these different age groups?
2. It would be interesting to do the same study with participants from other national and international rural and urban settings to tease out the dominant discourses in rural settings that are different from those dominant discourses in urban settings. Further research could be done asking such questions as: How are the experiences of rural students similar or different to those students who live in an urban setting? Do the participants in other areas of the world have similar or different challenges than the Canadian students? How do their experiences with their action projects for sustainable development compare?
3. The relationship between the youth forum organizers and the students who attended the youth forum was integral to supporting the students as they worked on their action projects for sustainable development. It would be interesting to listen to students' voices should this support change or should the organizers be the students themselves. More specifically, what experiences would students have if they organized and orchestrated the youth forum at their own schools? How would community support compare? What would the school system do to ensure that students would be offered such wonderful opportunities like the youth forum for sustainability and how would they sustain these opportunities?
4. The relationship between school and community and the students and their community was integral to the students' successful completion of their action projects for sustainable development. Participants talked about the community 'experts' at the youth forum and the many

community organizations, businesses and social groups that helped them with their projects. It would be interesting to do such research that deals with what are the expectations of the community and these 'experts' from the students' perspective and what are the expectations of the students from the community's perspective? Furthermore, a study within the community investigating the supports for students to explore, learn and volunteer in their community and the school's role in community learning.

5. The participants in this study described completing their action projects for sustainable development during both curricular and extracurricular hours. A closer examination of the dominant discourse of schools to determine what might affect how teachers and students can imagine other ways of being would be an interesting study. For example, why do some teachers and schools value action projects for sustainable development to devote class time to them, but some schools do not provide any support for students working on their action projects as an extracurricular?
6. Students in this study were able to choose their own action projects and provide their own direction for their action projects for sustainable development. It would be an interesting study to compare student created, student led action projects and teacher created, teacher led action projects for sustainable development. Why do the students complete the action project? How do teachers get students to 'buy into' the project? Where is the motivation for successful completion? How do we measure success?
7. A minor point raised in the study was the positive change that doing these action projects had created in the students' classrooms and why they could not have had this opportunity earlier in their schooling. Further research could be done within this area asking the question: Why do some students get the opportunity of working on action projects for sustainable development and others do not? Specifically, why are

teachers in the school system not teaching their students to take action?

What are the expectations of teachers from a teacher's perspective?

From an administrative perspective? From a parental perspective?

8. This study exemplified some of the frustrations students found with teacher education practices and further research could be done in this area. Why are teacher candidates not being taught to teach students to take action? Are teacher candidates developing these skills in their teacher education program to teach students about action projects for sustainable development? If not, why not? What do people do if they want to teach about sustainable development? What supports do teachers have regarding teaching action projects for sustainable development?
9. The participants of this research who were being graded on their action projects described how they were not concerned about evaluation during the completion of their action projects for sustainable development. How does marking/grading/evaluating their action projects affect students? Specifically, how does it affect the effort they put forth on their action projects and how does it affect motivation? Do they feel a loss of ownership for their projects since it is being judged? When it comes to evaluation of action projects for sustainable development, would authentic assessment be superior? How does students' maturity, age and alternative programming affect assessment?
10. This study touched on the school system and the students' realization that it is not flexible. How does school system change relate to changing the curriculum and how teachers are teaching students? Why are some teachers stagnant in their growth? Why are some teachers so willing to change? Why are action projects for sustainable development not found in the curriculum? Why is sustainability not explicitly threaded throughout the curriculum?
11. This research study reflected students' experiences with action projects for sustainable development as a result of attending a youth forum for

sustainability. It would be interesting to research a community forum for all ages of people, not just youth. What experiences would they have? How would they support each other? If students worked together with all people in a community atmosphere, how would their challenges differ? By working in collaboration, how would it be reflective of our workforce today? What skills or supports would people learn from one another?

Reflection

Perhaps one of the most important elements of this thesis lies in this final reflection. From the writing of this thesis, I have come to recognize and realize some of the personal prejudices I have had. Although I identified my personal biases in the beginning of the study, I did not realize until the end of the study the extent of these biases. By encouraging students “to be the change they wanted to see in the world” (Ghandi), I realized I also needed to personally make changes in my life.

Upon entering the College of Education as a graduate student, I did not go to the bookstore and invest in the books my professors set out in the course syllabus as I once did as a bachelor’s student. Instead, I signed the ‘Sustainability Pledge’ on the campus’s Facilities Management Division sustainability online site. It reads, “I pledge to explore and take into account the social and ecological consequences of my decisions. Furthermore, I pledge to use the knowledge that I gain while at the U of S to improve sustainability of the communities in which I live, learn and work.” Taking this pledge profoundly changed not only my thoughts, but my actions. I came to the realization that I needed to always be conscious of the decisions I make and the profound consequences of those decisions. I believe this was the beginning of my ontology changing to be more aware of the dominant discourse in my life, in grad school, in schools that I am a part of and in our society. I also think that my worldview and my views towards thinking about schools and teaching has changed. Throughout my time as a graduate student and as a result of this research study, I believe my ontology has changed to be more aware of the ways to implement action projects in schools, in classrooms and in the curriculum. I believe I am more aware of the value of action projects for sustainable development and I

am more aware of the students' being able to own those projects, create them and see them through. Also, as a result of this research study, I highly value teachers' positive influence and the enormous and influential role they play in supporting students' as they allow students to create, manage and complete their action projects in their classrooms.

I began emailing people who were going to be in my classes, meeting them and discussing personal experiences with them. I vowed to help my friends, my peers and my colleagues through their classes, their difficulties and talk with them about life and various teaching experiences. Since I already walked and cycled many places, I promised myself that as I was walking and biking, I would smile and greet every person when I would see them. It was my goal to turn a 'keep to yourself' neighbourhood into a respectful one where people would at least acknowledge the presence of others. I tried to turn my at times impatient neighbours who drove by in their big Escalades, Explorers, and Equinoxes nearly hitting me, into people who felt something about their street. I went canvassing door to door for many different organizations, shoveled the sidewalks and street, raked leaves and continually waved to the shadows in their gas-guzzling vehicles as my 'small town' efforts were ignored. I still have not lost hope and it is still my vow to greet people on my walks and bike rides.

While I have been composting for a very long time, 20 years at least and counting, I promised myself that I would commit to cleaning up my neighbourhood. I pick bottles and garbage as my Mom and I go for walks and everyone probably points and looks and perhaps calls me the 'garbage lady', but deep down I know that we are only one species of this great Earth, Mother Earth, and I care. I have now influenced others to do the same and I am proud. I feel that by donating my time, talent and treasure to others, to school, to students and to my community, I can recognize and hope that we will all, with our body, heart and soul live in harmony with all things and with all people.

Also, from this study I have recognized the importance of sharing my thoughts and opinions with someone; I have learned how important it was for these students, my research participants, to be heard. Claus and Ogden, in a book on service learning for youth empowerment, wrote "reflection helped them [the students] to understand their experience" (Claus & Ogden, 1999, p.172). In conclusion, students came to a richer understanding of their experiences due to the research – according to Claus and Ogden.

What I now see more clearly is: The complexity of sustainable development and the education associated with it are acknowledged by Scott and Gough (2003) who note that “we do not yet know what we shall need to learn in relation to sustainable development ... perhaps what we need to be taught is how to learn and how to be critical in order to build our collective capacity to live both sustainably and well” (p. xiv).

In this, my final paragraph, I want to thank the participants in my study for teaching me these lessons. Through their words, conversations, and perspectives of their experiences, I was allowed to informally witness their challenges and feel their emotions through their descriptive struggles. Observing them and allowing their voices to resound within my research study, my thoughts, and my life was a profound place for me to progress. My final words are “thank you” to the students and to my fiancè, my parents, my family, friends, peers, colleagues, and my supervisor for being there to listen to my voice and allowing it to have meaning. I am forever grateful to what lies within me!

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Appendices

Appendix A: Parent Consent Form



CONSENT FORM

Your child is invited to participate in a research project entitled “**Students’ Voices’ and Experiences with Action Projects for Sustainable Development.**” Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

Researchers:

Dr. Janet McVittie
Department of Curriculum Studies
Ph. 966-7582
Email: janet.mcvittie@usask.ca

Sharla Scyrup
Department of Curriculum Studies
Ph. 955-5758
Email: sscyrup@hotmail.com

Purpose and Procedure:

The purpose of this research project is to provide student’s voice, experiences and perspectives to the research field that involves student action projects for sustainable development. Your child is being invited to participate in this research project because s/he has been involved in the Youth Forum 2008 and is part of the classroom or extra curricular group where action projects for sustainable development are taking place.

As part of students’ action projects, Ms. Sharla Scyrup will be facilitating students in a private online discussion board where they will discuss their progress on their projects. This discussion board is not part of the research study. All students who participated in Youth Forum 2008 are invited to participate in the online discussion board. Ms. Scyrup’s role will be to monitor online “netiquette” and to suggest supports

when students seem unable to overcome a barrier. Online discussion board will help shape focus group conversations.

Students will receive secure guest user accounts through the ITS (Information Technology Services) division at the University of Saskatchewan that will be password protected and will be responsible to adhere to appropriate online behaviour and conduct. Such appropriate behaviours include, but are not limited to:

- Students will treat each other with care and respect at all times.
- All users shall use language appropriate for school situations.
- Conversation is to focus on action projects for sustainability.
- Only students who attended Youth Forum 2008, and were given access to the discussion board, and Ms. Scyrup will be able to read the discussion.

No one else is permitted access.

As part of the research project, Ms. Sharla Scyrup will conduct focus group interviews. Each focus group consists of approximately four to six students and will last for up to one hour. Participants will be asked about their opinions, perspectives and experiences towards the Youth Forum 2008 and their action projects for sustainability. The focus group interviews will take place over lunch or at a mutually agreed upon time at your student's school; interviews are not part of classroom activities. The interviews will be audio taped to help track the conversation.

Potential Benefits:

Being asked about their beliefs, attitudes and experiences with action projects for sustainability will give participants an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences and their possible interest. In addition, listening to other participants' opinion may develop a sense of awareness of the similarities and differences within their school community. However, there is no guarantee that your child will benefit from her or his involvement in this research project.

Knowing the students' beliefs and experiences about the Youth Forum and about the action projects for sustainability, will allow the researchers to provide student's voice to the field of education and make improvements to the Youth Forum and the way that action projects are introduced and completed.

Potential Risks:

Should your child, for some reason, feel uncomfortable, s/he can discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

One possible risk of the focus group interviews is that your child may feel uncomfortable in sharing his or her opinions in front of others. Your child may feel uncomfortable expressing her or his beliefs if another participant has expressed a different opinion. The interviewer will tell the students that what is said in the group is to remain confidential, and will encourage students both to hold what others say in confidence, but also to remember that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Your child does not need to respond to any question s/he does not want to respond to.

Storage of Data:

All research data including the audio tapes and transcripts will be securely stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Saskatchewan. Only the researchers will have access to the data. All computer files associated with the data will be password protected for confidentiality. The audiotapes will be kept for five years, and will be destroyed afterwards.

Confidentiality:

Although **direct quotations from the focus groups will be used** in the research reports and any publication about the research projects, participants will choose their own pseudonyms, and all identifying information, such as the name of the school, the teachers, and the principal will be altered into pseudonyms. *If at some later point (up to June 2008), your child has any second thoughts about her or his responses, s/he can contact the researcher, who will remove them from the data base.*

The researchers will undertake measures to safeguard the confidentiality of the focus group interviews, but cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so.

Right to Withdraw:

Your child’s participation in the study is entirely voluntary. Even though you and your child agree that s/he will participate, both of you can still change your minds later. *Your child is free to answer only those questions with which she or he feels comfortable. Your child can withdraw* from participating from the research project at any time without any penalty. Your child's decision to withdraw from the research project will not affect anything, including his or her grade at school. If your child withdraws from the research project at any time (up until June 2008), any data that s/he has contributed will be destroyed.

Questions:

If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided above. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on February 14, 2008. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (306-966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect.

Consent to Participate:

I have read and understood the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my/our questions have been answered. I give my consent for my child to participate in the research project, understanding that I or my child may withdraw consent at any time. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

_____	_____
(Name of Child)	(Date)
_____	_____
(Signature of Parent or Guardian)	(Signature of Researcher)



You are being invited to be part of a research project entitled “**Students’ Voices and Experiences with Action Projects for Sustainable Development.**” Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

Researchers:

Dr. Janet McVittie

Department of Curriculum Studies

Ph. 966-7582

Email: janet.mcvittie@usask.ca

Sharla Scyrup

Department of Curriculum Studies

Ph. 955-5758

Email: sscyrup@hotmail.com

Why we are doing the research project?

This research project tries to understand how students like you think about action projects for sustainability. We want to know students’ opinions about the Youth Forum 2008, such as what interests you, what kinds of activities you do, and how the Youth Forum can further help you in your projects and empower you and other students as action leaders. This research project will help us understand your opinions and perspectives about action projects for sustainability, and how adults can help and support students as they plan, develop and especially complete their action projects. It will help us develop and design more interesting ways to support students as action leaders.

Do I have to participate?

This research project is not part of your classroom activities. It is up to you whether you want to be part of the project. No one will force you to participate in the project. Even if you agree to be part of the project, you can still change your mind later. No one will be upset or punish you if you choose not to be part of the project now or withdraw later.

What will happen to me in this research project?

If you agree to participate in this research project, you will be asked to take part in a group discussion. This group will consist of one interviewer, Ms. Sharla Scyrup, and approximately four or six other students. The group discussion is not part of any classroom activities, and will take place out of class time. It will take up to one hour and it will be audio taped. ***You are free to answer only those questions with which you are comfortable.*** What you say during the discussion will not be shared with your parents, your teachers or classmates outside the focus group. It is courteous to your peers not to share comments made during the discussion to others outside the focus group.

You have been invited to participate in an online discussion board as part of your action project. Although Ms. Sharla Scyrup is involved in this discussion board, this is not part of the research. Themes for focus group conversations might arise from the online discussion board, but nothing that is written there will be reported as part of the study.

The data from this research project will be published and presented at conferences, ***and direct quotations from the focus groups will be reported.*** However, your identity will be kept anonymous. Although we will report what you will say during the discussion, your real name will not be used in the report. ***If at some later point, you have any second thoughts about your responses, you can contact the researcher, who will remove them from the data base. This will only be possible up to June 2008.***

Is there any potential for harm?

Nothing in the research project itself should cause harm to you. However, you might be worried that other students in the group might share your opinion outside the group. You might feel uncomfortable sharing your opinion if it is different than other student's opinions. You need only answer any question you feel comfortable answering. If after the group discussion, you change your mind about something you said, you can let Ms. Scyrup know. No one will be upset and you will not get any penalty for changing your mind. You may change what you said in the transcripts, or you may withdraw from the study.

Will I like participating in the research project?

We hope that you will like the focus group conversations, but we cannot tell you whether you will like it or not. You might believe it is important to let teachers know about your own opinion towards action projects for sustainability. You may also enjoy learning that others have had similar experiences to you or you may like to hear other student’s conversations that may help you with your project. You might also like to know other students’ opinions during the group discussion.

Who will know that I take part in the research project?

Other members of the focus group, your parents, and Ms. Scyrup will know that you have participated in the research project. You will choose a pseudonym for yourself for when the results are published.

Signature:

If I sign my name at the end of this document, it means that I agree to participate. I also agree that I will not share any content of the focus group discussions with other people. I understand that I may withdraw consent at a later date if I choose to.

(Name of Student) (Date)

(Signature of Researcher)



TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM

You have participated in the research project entitled “**Students’ Voices and Experiences with Action Projects for Sustainable Development.**” Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

Researchers:

Dr. Janet McVittie
Department of Curriculum Studies
Ph. 966-7582
Email: janet.mcvittie@usask.ca

Sharla Scyrup
Department of Curriculum Studies
Ph. 955-5758
Email: sscyrup@hotmail.com

I appreciate your participation in my research study on your experiences with action projects for sustainability. I am returning the transcripts of your audio taped focus group interviews so you can read them. I will adhere to the following guidelines that are designed to protect your confidentiality and interests in the study.

Would you please read and recheck the transcripts for accuracy of information. You may add or clarify the transcripts to say what you intended to mean or to include additional comments that will be your words. You may also delete any information that you may not want to be quoted in the study.

All research data including the audio tapes and transcripts will be securely stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Saskatchewan. Only the researchers will have access to the data. All computer files associated with the data will be password protected

for confidentiality. After completion of the study, the audiotapes will be kept for five years, and will then be destroyed.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. If this happens, the tape recordings and interview data will be destroyed.

I, _____, have reviewed the complete transcript of my individual portion of the focus group taped conversation in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my focus group interview with Ms. Sharla Scyrup. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Ms. Sharla Scyrup to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher

Appendix D: Sample letter to the School Boards

Letter of intent – School Board

January 2008

Dear _____:

Please accept this as my official request to use _____
School Division as the site for my thesis research.

My thesis topic is “Students’ voice and experiences with action projects for sustainable development”. I am specifically interested in the experiences and perspectives of students involved with action projects for sustainability and how they can be supported to facilitate the navigation to their goals.

Being involved in the Youth Forum 2008 encourages students to develop action projects which will make a positive difference in their community (be it local or global) for one to four of the pillars of sustainable development: social justice, environmental stewardship, economic development, and culture. The main goal of the forum is to help students become empowered to take action to create more sustainable communities and to share responsibility with youth in selecting, organizing, planning and implementing action projects. The youth forum will ensure that students learn about action project planning, will support students taking action in creating long-term sustainable communities, and will promote their successes. Ultimately, we have the potential to empower youth, especially at the youth forum encouraging them to actively participate in dialogues about sustainability issues (local or global) and to take appropriate action, knowing that they can make a positive difference.

In this way, projects will lead to a cleaner environment, a vibrant economy and greater social equity. By inviting youth, and their teachers, as well as community members and NGO's, there will be a cooperative effort towards sharing responsibility for our sustainable society. Students should understand they are the stewards of Saskatchewan's future. These projects should lead students to become provincial, national or global leaders on issues of sustainability.

My thesis topic is students' voices and experiences with action projects for sustainable development. I am involved with the Youth Forum 2008 and will observe the students during their time at the U of S participating in the Forum's workshops. Students will also be involved in an online learning community with other students who will participate in the Youth Forum 2008. The online discussion community is not part of this research study. Rather it is a process set in place for students within and across schools to support one another towards completing their action projects. The online learning discussion board will be secure, with only Youth Forum 2008 participants and myself having access to the site. Youth Forum 2008 students will receive secure guest user accounts through the ITS (Information Technology Services) division at the University of Saskatchewan that will be password protected and students will be responsible to adhere to appropriate online behaviour and conduct.

Teachers will be involved in their own online learning community discussion board in order to support and encourage one another as they facilitate their students in completing their action projects for sustainable development. Teachers will receive secure guest user accounts through the ITS (Information Technology Services) division at the University of Saskatchewan that will be password protected and teachers will also be responsible to adhere to appropriate online behaviour and conduct.

I will be informing teachers with a weekly email as to the highlights of student discussion boards, excluding names and all other identifying information. Teachers will then be invited to post or send the weekly highlights to parents keeping them informed.

I also would like the opportunity to observe students working on their action projects. Also, I will be conducting audio taped focus group conversations with approximately four to six students in focus groups at noon hour or after school

approximately four times through the semester. Conversations will be about their experiences with the action projects for sustainability.

I would also like to observe student action groups once or twice a week from February until June, 2008. Students will choose their pseudonyms so that their own confidentiality and all other identifying information, such as the name of the school, the teachers, and the principal will also be altered using pseudonyms so their interests will be protected.

The research will consist of observations, field notes and focus group interviews. I feel the knowledge that I acquire will be of future value to students, teachers and administration in the _____ School Division.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns, please feel free to contact me at home by calling 955-5758 or email me at sscyrup@hotmail.com. You can also contact my supervisor Dr. Janet McVittie at 966-7582 or email her at janet.mcvittie@usask.ca.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Yours sincerely,

Sharla Scyrup

Appendix E: Sample Focus Group Questions

Focus Group No. 1 Questions:

Questions arose as themes emerged and from group observations. However, the following questions were addressed in the first conversation:

1. Why did you get involved?
2. What prompted you to choose the project you did?
3. What projects have you been involved with in the past and how have they helped to contribute to this project that you are currently working on?
4. In what ways do you see your group coming together as a team? What more might you do to support yourselves as a team?
5. Have you participated in the online discussion board? In what ways has the discussion board facilitated your work? In what ways has it hindered your work?
6. What are you hoping to learn?
7. In what ways have your teachers and your community supported you as you progress in your project? How can we (as in the Youth Forum folks, or your teachers, or your community) better support you and your group as you work on your project?

Focus Group No. 2 Questions:

Questions will arise as themes emerge from the first focus group that will lead to various questions to be asked for the next focus groups' questions. (Questions will always be phrased in the positive, and will always be focused on the action projects.)

Focus Group No. 3 Questions:

Questions will arise as themes emerge from the second focus group that will lead to various questions to be asked for the next focus groups' questions. (Questions will always be phrased in the positive, and will always be focused on the action projects.)