Diversity in Solidarity:  
Student Action with Farmworkers’ Archive of Intern Writing  
(1995-2005)

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Abstract

Each summer, Student Action with Farmworkers (SAF) interns, half of whom come from farmworking families, spend ten weeks in North and South Carolina communities interning with agencies such as health clinics and legal aid offices whose clients include migrant and seasonal farmworkers. SAF uses a participatory, praxis-based pedagogy to teach these students to act in solidarity with farmworkers and to continually reflect upon their action. Starting in 1995, as part of their reflection, these students have written weekly guided reports, and since 1999, two-thirds of the students have completed folklife documentary projects with farmworker participants. In this community-based research study, I have worked in collaboration with SAF staff to analyze their archive of student work. This study discusses the generative themes that students have dealt with in this work, including themes of identification with farmworkers, awareness of injustice and the burden of deciding to do with that awareness, frustration with racism and exploitation in the rural south, questions about one’s own ability to make a difference, and through the documentary projects deepening knowledge gained from farmworkers themselves. This study also compares the broader practices that SAF seeks to instill in students with the written work they assign. Departing from dominant literacy practices in U.S. schools, SAF encourages non-textual expression, bilingualism or even monolingual Spanish, and collective expression. Writing is one among the tools that SAF gives students to reflect and witness, not itself an essential tool for all interns. SAF interns reflect in other ways, and staff translate interns’ reflections and
writing of witness into their public work of advocacy. Drawing upon focus groups with staff and former interns, this study suggests that in the future, SAF will preserve both reflection and witnessing and also continue to experiment with their writing practices to reach more interns. SAF’s work can serve as a model for other educators working in campus-community collaborations, non-profit associations doing activist work, and classrooms that invite students to look beyond scholarly work for knowledge. In particular, SAF teaches its interns to value diversity in solidarity, which leads to uses of writing that promote individual reflection and collective expression.
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Introduction

June 3, 2006. Swannanoa, North Carolina. I had accompanied Lupe Huitron to Warren Wilson College to help her set up for orientation of the 2006 class of Into the Fields interns that would begin the next day. Thirty college students were arriving in Durham from around the country to caravan up to the mountains for six days of intensive activities designed to orient them to the farm labor movement, to the jobs they would hold for ten weeks over the summer working on behalf of farmworkers, and most of all to the staff of Student Action with Farmworkers and to each other.

Lupe and I had come a day early to post signs directing the students to the dorm and classroom building where they would spend the week; to set out flip charts, resource books, binders, and other materials; and to make food arrangements for their first day on campus. The campus was virtually empty. A staff person had driven in to turn over the dorm and classroom keys to us. A white student with dreadlocks gave us directions as we passed her on the pedestrian bridge over Warren Wilson Road. The buildings snuggled into the green hills of the campus were buttoned up. Later in the week we’d notice the inhabitants who were indeed summering over, tending crops in the garden of the dorm adjacent to ours, manning the circulation desk in the small library, walking out of the cafeteria with ice cream cones after their lunch dishwashing shifts. For now, the cool summer temperature and intense quiet prevailed.
Lupe and I had dinner at a Mexican restaurant five miles down Tunnel Road from campus. The small restaurant was festooned with color and nearly empty of customers at the five o’clock hour. The manager sat with us to talk over our dinner needs for the following night. Lupe told him about SAF’s work and the role the interns would play in local communities this summer. She explained that they were volunteers who came from around the country to work with campesinos in North and South Carolina, not to work in Hispanic Centers, but to work with campesinos specifically. She explained that she had come here last summer from Washington State and stayed, that her own parents were farmworkers. The manager shared that he had once worked in the fields himself, otherwise said little, and offered Lupe fifty percent off the group’s large order. We commented on his generosity as we ate our supper and welcomed a mariachi band. Lupe requested a ballad popularized by a particular singer, and we dropped dollar bills in their guitars as they played for us.

The next day around noon, the interns began arriving. Mostly between eighteen and twenty-four years of age, they were lively despite the six a.m. wake-up call that had started their day. They chatted cautiously over submarine sandwiches, thumbed through their orientation binders, and stuffed their new SAF T-shirts, the slogan “Si se puede” emblazoned across the back under an image of a raised fist, into the bags that they lugged down the halls to their rooms for the week. They began to know one another.

During the sessions over the days that followed, the interns had ample opportunity to grow their relationships. Each day held several team-building activities, such as the SNAPS game that they began with. They were told to sit on the floor with their eyes closed. A facilitator read a list of statements that they were to respond to if the statement was true for them: “I am proud of myself”; “My parents are proud of me”; “I want to change parts of
myself”; “I believe in God”; “I want others to believe what I believe.” Most statements, not the last of these, evoked many snaps. During other activities, differences were noted. When a facilitator formed groups to prepare presentations on key events in farm labor history, she chose one group leader with a family member who’d been in the bracero program, one group leader who’d participated in the United Farmworkers, one group leader who’d had a family member legalize under the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, and one group leader who’d recently participated in an immigrants’ rights march.

Sessions covered the history and conditions of farm labor, team-building, and also skills interns would need for their summer placements. Following orientation, they were headed to communities around North and South Carolina, where in most cases they would live with one to several other interns and work in agencies that served farmworkers. Most would work as advocates, educators, translators and organizers in agencies such as health clinics, migrant education programs, legal aid units, and labor organizing groups. So, sessions covered such topics as health outreach and interpreting strategies. Also, all interns were required to either participate in a theater group or complete a documentary project over the course of the summer; a number of sessions were devoted to these activities. SAF had commissioned a new play for this particular summer, and its playwright directed rehearsals throughout the week. The documentary projects had a new look too; after seven years recording farmworker folklife traditions, this summer’s interns were going to do projects about farmworkers’ educational aspirations. In their sessions, documentary interns worked with me and other documentary consultants to practice such skills as putting participants at their ease, taking portraits, telling a story with photographs, writing field notes, and using digital recorders to record interviews and ambient sound. In this last session, we practiced in
pairs asking questions about educational aspirations, such as what’s your earliest memory of school? Back in the whole group, participants were eager to share with everyone their snatches of interviews. The group listened to their audio tapes, noticing when questions were nervous or halting, when voices were too soft, when the mic was held too close.

By the time I headed out on Day Three, back to the Triangle with two of the other documentary consultants, I knew all of the interns’ names and a little about their personalities and backgrounds. I certainly knew the reticent ones and the talkative ones, who would likely ask a question when there was space for it, who would crack a joke, who might disappear when there was a break. I didn’t know as much as they’d have learned about each other; I’d crashed when it turned dark and been aware of music and voices well into the night. One night, Lupe and an intern had succumbed to the pressure to show off their dancing skills and been joined by others, experienced dancers like themselves, novices, observers. On the afternoon I left, the interns were playing a game of Red Light Green Light facilitated by a union organizer who later that afternoon would take them to Kroger to protest the shelving of Smithfield pork products. They all wore their SAF T-shirts in anticipation, half red, half black, the fists also alternating in color.

Thirteen summers prior to this one, I had participated in SAF’s orientation as an intern. That year, we’d met at the Short Journey Center in Smithfield, flat, hot, in the middle of tobacco country where the majority of the interns work. I’d slept in a bunk bed in a room of many bunk beds, helped cook spaghetti suppers, participated in get to know you games, laughingly watched some dancing, and learned a lot about a subject I’d known virtually nothing about: farmworkers. That year, about half of the interns came from Duke or UNC-
Chapel Hill and many of these had taken a course during the previous semester about farmworkers. By contrast, in 2006, the twenty-five interns came from eighteen different universities and were assumed to bring no classroom knowledge about farmworkers to the orientation. Knowledge about farmworkers was another matter. In 1993, one intern came from a farmworking family; in 2006, more than half of the interns did.

Participating with me that summer as a fellow intern was Melinda Wiggins, the organization’s current executive director. Melinda joined SAF’s staff when she finished a divinity degree from Duke in 1994 and has been with the organization ever since. When I interviewed Melinda for this project, she noted how the intern groups have shifted over the years:

The thing I notice that’s pretty vivid is the way the group interacts or what its culture is as a group is different from year to year. I don’t know exactly why that is. Sometimes it depends on the make-up of the group, who’s in the group, how many farmworker versus non-farmworker students, or how many local people. Some of it depends on what’s going on in the larger political context.... There’s a group identity that’s different that’s formed from year to year. How that impacts what they’re interested in, it does somewhat. Some groups are much more interested in the boycott, marches, activism piece of the work. Some groups are much more keen on having small group reflections. And some groups are partiers....

This inspired a laugh, and I imagined her remembering particular stories and particular people.

I asked Melinda if she noticed other differences aside from the group experience. Were there changes in what students brought to the internship, things such as their intellectual interests or their disposition toward activism? This question led her to expand her earlier point about what’s going on in the larger political context.

Well I think, certainly in the last couple of years, the groups have been very attuned to the immigration issues going on and they have brought an understanding and concern, and most all the interns have heard about the Dream Act. I’ve noticed a real awareness of what’s going on politically.... I feel like that’s changed in the overall
climate here. More people are certainly talking about immigration issues and even farmworker issues than even 10 years ago. For good and for bad, you know.... More people are aware of it, talking about it, which we want, but folks who are opposed are more vocal also now. I think it’s a reflection of what’s going on in the larger context, in the larger community.

There are always some geographic differences in knowledge of the issues. West coast folks, California folks, and all those students are from farmworker families, or most of them are, are always so much more aware of farmworker issues, who Cesar Chavez is, have maybe participated in a boycott before, in a march before, have family members if they work in the fields who are part of the union. I mean, there’s just such a difference in their understanding and experience with farmworker issues. Also folks who come from Texas and some from the border states are just much more connected to immigration and Latino issues too. The Latino community in the southwest is just so much older. And for the students who come from the east coast or students not from a farmworker family, especially for those not from a farmworker family, this is their first anything with farmworkers. Some of them don’t know who Cesar Chavez is, for instance.

I asked Melinda whether students from the south bring relevant knowledge as Southerners, such as knowledge of slavery. She replied,

Some of the folks have had my experience of growing up on a farm and will bring that perspective. We certainly have students from farm families that bring a very different experience, from white farm families. We also have some African-American students from sharecropping families, too. So they have an understanding of rural south and farming and agriculture and the importance of it in the south and some understanding of its connections to slavery, but it seems so disconnected to the Chicano movement or the farmworker movement or Cesar Chavez. They are just two almost parallel experiences or ways of coming to this issue.

That was my experience too. I did not know who Cesar Chavez was, and he died the year I got involved. I learned about him when he died.... I grew up in a rural agricultural community; that’s all I knew was rural farmwork. My dad and grandparents were sharecroppers, but... it wasn’t connected at all to the farmworker movement. I think partly because of race and ethnicity.... The farmworker movement historically has been so connected to the Chicano movement and to California and to Chavez, it has just had that cultural identity. And so with white or black sharecroppers, it just wasn’t a part of that. So yeah, I do think some people from the south come with a particular southern perspective on the issues but not so much the movement.

Melinda’s co-workers also frequently mention the “movement,” and during orientation I’d notice an ongoing, seemingly intentional focus on the farm labor movement
that I hadn’t remembered from when I was an intern. When they spoke of the unjust living conditions of farmworkers, staff and some presenters emphasized that farmworkers did not have a history of giving in. The session on the history of farm labor had two parallel strands. On the one hand, interns looked at key pieces of policy and legislation that have determined the conditions under which farmworkers live and work, in particular ongoing exemptions for some agricultural workers from key federal labor laws, including minimum wage, overtime, unemployment compensation, even child labor law (Thompson & Wiggins, 2002, pp. 145-149). On the other hand, presenters guided students to focus on times when farmworkers and their advocates have fought for better conditions. The group presenting on the current status of farmworkers spoke of the three-way union contract signed in 2004 between the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, the Mt. Olive Pickle Company, and cucumber growers, the first union contract for farmworkers in the state’s history.

Melinda confirmed that a sense of a farmworker movement has grown within SAF.

I don’t think we used that language in the beginning.... When SAF was started, it was very much a part of a larger service-learning movement, if you can use that word with that.... In the early years, just our founding and the history, it was much more connected to a more campus-based academic understanding of connecting to the community, or serving the community.... I think with those movements there is a lot of paternalism. Because there’s this understanding that people who are well-off can afford to serve people who need help, essentially. The more and more farmworker students that got involved with our work, that model did not work. It didn’t speak to what we were doing. And we didn’t want it to. We didn’t want even the wealthier white students to be serving or providing help. We tried to look at it differently. The students are going to get more... than anyone out of the experience. They’re certainly going to address a specific need, help increase access for farmworkers, to services, to a solidarity community, to folks that can support their work and support their change, but that’s very different language than the service-learning movement uses....

We’ve made a conscious effort as an organization to diversify. That was one of the biggest things we did. And it took almost ten years to move from a majority white to a majority Latino organization. But it was conscious, and I think who we are changes how we define and talk about our work. Because more and more farmworker students have had those experiences that I mentioned. They have had some
experiences with the farmworker movement and they have brought that to bear on... how we talk about our work.

To hear Melinda tell it, students, particularly those from farmworking backgrounds, have shaped SAF. It took staff initiative to diversify the organization, to change it from majority white to majority Latino; the resulting majority Latino membership has carried SAF into the farmworker movement. There are concurrent shifts in the larger south, with growing numbers of Latinos settling here, with Latino advocacy groups and increasing bilingualism, with a union for farmworkers, visible shifts that bear a relationship to the cognitive and linguistic switch Melinda discussed: from well-to-do white students as doers to farmworkers as doers, from farmworkers as left out of the law to farmworkers as challengers to the law. There are more Latino voices in North Carolina than there have been, and SAF is interested in honoring how that happened and being part of that trend continuing. SAF used to be a majority white organization that taught its members to act on behalf of farmworkers; now it’s a majority Latino organization that teaches its members to act in solidarity with farmworkers, who are represented among its members. Solidarity for SAF is signalled in the preposition “with”; SAF asks students and other activists to act alongside farmworkers toward the goals that they identify with farmworkers.

Ideologically, SAF has relocated from the service-learning movement to the farmworking movement and from acting on behalf of workers to acting in solidarity with workers. Practically, vestiges of old notions remain in everyday realities. Many workers don’t have access to public conversations, so interns continue to speak on their behalf. Many SAF placement sites, such as health clinics and migrant education programs, are sites that see themselves as serving farmworkers. So, SAF’s activities haven’t exactly shifted from service to activism. They include both. It is true that the organization’s goal is to get rid of the
hierarchy that positions students as actors and farmworkers as clients and to have them work toward justice together.

This goal of uniting students and farmworkers complicates my understanding of how SAF uses writing in the summer internship program, asking me to look for ways that farmworkers speak, or might speak, through interns’ writing and for ways that students write about themselves in relation to farmworkers. In SAF’s early years, Melinda suggests, it would have been harder to hear farmworkers speaking in the students’ writing. The service paradigm would have kept that from happening. But Melinda suggests that even now SAF’s writing assignments may not have caught up with the rest of SAF. They may still retain elements of the service paradigm. In fact, in our interview, Melinda commented that written assignments as a part of the internship are in some ways a vestige of SAF’s years as primarily a service-learning organization. Written assignments, like textbook readings, were originally based on an assumption that students learned and then served. As I mentioned, in the early years, most interns came to the summer fresh from a course on farmworker issues. Now, the organization operates on what Melinda calls “a praxis model.... Separating [activism and reflection] doesn’t make sense to me, and the idea that you can prepare, prepare, prepare, prepare, and then go out and just do it doesn’t make sense. I think you have to prepare, do it, prepare.” For Melinda, praxis means acting and reflecting simultaneously in social justice work; one doesn’t precede or supersede the other. Melinda introduced some doubts about the written assignments as they currently exist in the SAF curriculum. Essentially, interns write nine guided reports, one a week, in response to a variety of prompts. This overall structure has been the same since 1995; some prompts have changed,
and some have stayed the same. Melinda pointed out several changes that have taken place over this period of time: the organization has shifted from a majority white to a majority Latino organization; an allegiance with the service-learning movement has shifted to an allegiance with the farmworker movement; a praxis model has intermingled preparation and action. Given these changes, should the structure and content of the written assignments also have changed significantly, more than they have? Might there be “a praxis model” of writing more appropriate to the internship?

SAF’s newsletter is entitled “From the Ground Up.” Finding meaningful writing assignments has to start this way: from the ground up. What will students latch on to? What will sustain the movement that’s now at the core of SAF’s curriculum? One way to answer these questions is to delve into SAF’s archive of student writing, which is what my project entails. This archive holds all guided reports turned in since 1995 and all documentary project narratives and field notes since 1999. In these papers surely exist what Paulo Freire (1970/1990) calls “generative themes,” the core issues that people in a particular community grapple with, issues that will yield meaningful conversation and deeper understanding if explored (pp. 86-101). Before attempting to teach, educators need to discern a group’s generative themes. Freire wrote of “concentric circles” of themes, from the most local to the most global (p. 93). While local themes may be apparent to a community, more global themes may be elusive, masked. In his time and place, Freire wrote that “domination” and “liberation” were the most important global themes and that they were masked (p. 93). Through education, people could begin to see. Generative themes were the first step, the building blocks of a meaningful curriculum through which people would begin to know their reality more fully and eventually be able to act more purposefully. Following Freire, I
believe that curriculum needs to begin with a people’s generative themes, both the reality of their everyday lives and also the larger conditions, perhaps hidden from them, that create suffering in their lives and provide hope of something better. For Freire, these conditions were domination and liberation. For young activists in the farmworking movement, what are they?

This project is an attempt to discern local and global themes in the archive of SAF student writing. But whose themes? Well, the themes of young student activists in the farmworker movement. But, this is not a homogeneous community. It’s diverse in race, gender, class, geographic background, educational background. What unites its members is a college student identity and a concern for farmworker justice, but even there, some people come in with broad knowledge of what that means, and others come in with no such knowledge. Some people identify as farmworkers, and some do not. “Community” is an elusive term in this context, neither wholly identity-based nor geographically-based, except in the sense that for ten weeks, a common geography is shared, except in the sense that “student activist” is an identity. The community under discussion are for the most part temporary inhabitants of communities in the Carolinas, burgeoning activists at different stages in their acceptance of the necessity for activism and in their acceptance of the reality of injustice. They come from a range of backgrounds and they are headed to a range of places. The summer isn’t long enough to solidify a new group identity, though it is a beginning. Previous and future identities will influence how the interns construct meaning during the ten weeks in which they are writing. So, as I read interns’ work, I get not only the generative themes of young activists in the farmworker movement, but also hints of the generative themes of farmworkers, for example, and the generative themes of upper and
middle class white Southerners. Other groups are present, but these feel the most prominent to me – farmworkers because they are the subjects of the internship and the writing, and white Southerners because they are “my people” and we are the people most responsible for the exploitation of farmworkers in the rural south. All interns’ themes are shaped by their temporary involvement in the farmworker movement, an involvement which may last beyond the summer but may not. Beyond that temporary affiliation that unites them are the deeper affiliations that could divide them.

Since some of the student writers come from farmworking backgrounds, readers can begin to hear the voices of farmworkers through students’ work. Perhaps not currently migrant farmworkers, but some people who identify with farmworkers based on past work experiences of selves and families. Also, we begin to hear farmworkers’ voices when we read excerpted quotes of farmworkers in the documentary projects, though here we must recognize that student writers chose what to excerpt and transcribed the tapes. Farmworkers did not have control over what was said. In looking for a praxis model of writing, we need to look at the possibilities of farmworkers writing as well as the opportunity for student voices in the movement. Students need to be able speak and act in the communities of their placements. If writing is to further that ability, the assignments must intentionally respond to the possibilities and barriers that students encounter in their placement sites. It is for these that we read their guided reports, in search of the generative themes they have faced that can be used to design more intentional writing assignments for future interns. Beyond SAF’s curriculum, I hope this study can be used to generate curriculum for other young activists and for service-learning programs whose facilitators are interested in moving past a service paradigm. In particular, I hope it can be used for other such programs in the southeast, to
help Southerners understand and respond to our legacy and contemporary realities of racism and exploitation.

SAF’s archive of student writing has the potential to describe and reveal generative themes of activist students and of initiates in the farmworker movement. To know what would sustain them in the movement requires another study, an exploration of the generative themes for lifelong activists. This study does not promise that exploration, just the exploration of beginnings: the generative themes of young people in an intense learning experience, for some the first with activism, for others, not. Well-to-do white students, students from farmworking families, students from sharecropping families – these are a few of a range of backgrounds – SAF their albeit diverse, albeit temporary, nonetheless communal experience, potential source material for a praxis model.
Chapter 1

Background and Description of Study

About two years, I was sitting at a book club discussion describing my area of focus in graduate school: non-formal, participatory education; adult education; social justice. Melinda, one of the book club members, said, “I have a project for you!” This dissertation was born that night.

At that time, Melinda’s project involved someone reading through six years worth of SAF interns’ documentary projects. No one had read them all the way through to see what was there, how SAF could use what was there, or what gaps in folklife traditions remained for students to explore. Tony Macias, SAF’s assistant director, collaborated with me on this project, meeting with me about guiding questions, methods, and analysis. I read six years worth of documentary projects, wrote a report about these projects, and presented my report to the Documentary Advisory Committee. My findings largely focused on the documentary experience (what enabled the students to be successful, what they struggled with) and also on overall trends in farmworker folklife traditions (who they learned from, who they passed their traditions onto, who they shared their traditions with, how being in the US influenced their tradition, what interfered with their ability to practice their tradition). SAF staff used some of my observations as they planned their 2005 summer orientation and documentary training sessions and invited me to participate as a trainer.

This project was meaningful for me because it gave me an opportunity to reconnect
with my prior experiences working with farmworkers and yet to revisit that world in a different way. After I’d completed the SAF internship in 1993, I’d worked with farmworkers and other rural Latino immigrants through a two year AmeriCorps placement in a Hispanic Ministry in Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina. Principally, I’d interacted with women who worked in their homes, often isolated without transportation or many acquaintances. With them, I’d coordinated a women’s group, driving the church van on a ninety minute circuit to pick up the women and the children, listening to their ideas of how they wanted to spend their time together, responding with driver’s ed classes, English classes, and social time, trying to be empowering, not merely benevolent. In addition, I’d gotten to know many male farmworkers who were in the US on temporary work visas through ESL classes and health clinics, and I’d learned about Latinos teens’ struggles in schools through an after-school program. Because of the complex relationships established, because of the persistence of poverty and injustice in the lives of the immigrants I knew, because of my inevitable mistakes and failures as a novice to this work, my AmeriCorps placement was an intense, educational, troubling, and rewarding experience, one that I’ve never been able to make sense of entirely. I did make partial sense of it through writing fiction based on the experience. By basing stories around farmworkers and farmworker service providers such as myself and others I had known, I was able to grapple with some of the issues and questions that had most troubled me doing that work.

In reading the documentary projects, I learned among other things that the troubled feelings I had felt as a service provider were not unique, that some SAF interns had documented similar feelings during their placements generally and their documentary work specifically. In particular, a few of the white students revealed a heightened awareness and
also a shame about the ease of their lives, both of which were familiar to me. Many interns wrote about the process of establishing trust with farmworkers, and that felt familiar too: more visits led to greater trust; interest and support needed to be reciprocated for relationships to feel non-hierarchal; non-hierarchy was sought after. Field notes also revealed differences from my experience. For some interns, farmworker homes were familiar spaces culturally, where they could eat the kind of food their mothers cooked or speak in the language that felt most comfortable to them; they struggled to feel at ease in other places within the Southern communities of their placements. Most strikingly, I read in some pieces about the experience of doing documentary work with a partner. I read that partnership furthered trust, productivity, understanding. I’d sometimes felt isolated as an intern and AmeriCorps member, and the idea that this kind of work might be done in partnership made me feel more hopeful for myself in the future and for others coming to the work.

Reading the documentary projects not only helped me remember and flesh out my experiences; they also helped me realize that I had changed since my internship and grown out of some of the emotional turmoil that had accompanied me during those years and just after. I was at a different place with regard to the issues that had most troubled me, namely, the ease of my life and my relationships with people who have less power and privilege than me. In words I have since learned from SAF interns’ writing, Angelita Morado’s and others, I have learned to “appreciate [rather than apologize for] all that I have,” the opportunities afforded me because of my family’s and my own economic well-being, racial privilege, good health, and more. I still had questions, worries, and implications for my life in response to the work, but they didn’t take over. Perhaps I read more dispassionately than I once would
have; mainly, my increased self-awareness helped me to view myself in relation to the texts, rather than viewing myself confusedly mixed into the texts.

Tony’s guidance and support during my study of the SAF documentary projects taught me what I’d sensed reading documentary field notes: the rewards of collaboration. Bouncing around ideas together led me to conclusions I could not have reached on my own. Though Tony coordinated SAF’s documentary work as part of his responsibilities and had thought through the work deeply and extensively, he always listened to me and invited my observations and suggestions. He let me undertake a learning process beginning at my own starting point and valued the steps I made in that process.

After I completed my study of the documentary projects, Tony, Melinda and I began discussing possible dissertations that I could write about SAF’s work. I was eager to have another collaborative research experience and liked the idea of continuing to work with familiar subject matter from a new perspective. By that point, I’d developed as a writing teacher, primarily through my work tutoring in UNC’s Writing Center, and begun to interact with SAF from that area of specialization. I was becoming increasingly interested in exploring the role of writing in social justice and in developing curriculum for campus-community collaborations around literacy. I had read in this area and begun to implement some ideas in my work; I felt I had something to offer SAF and much to gain. When it came time to settle on a dissertation topic, Melinda and Tony helped me choose the writing-related topic I’ve pursued. Once again, Melinda found a “project” that needed someone’s attention. Now that the documentary projects had been read, they would love for someone to read their archive of student guided reports, weekly reflections by interns over eleven summers. We decided that I could analyze both sets of materials in light of my initial research question, In
a campus-community collaboration, how can writing honor the relationships participants establish and also promote participation in public life? I was looking for ways that people use writing to bridge private and public lives – my own uses in SAF and AmeriCorps had been too private, after the fact, separated from action and from the reactions of readers – and SAF seemed to have such a model. With their support, I embarked on this study.

Literature Review

To this study, I brought particular views about the limitations and possibilities for literacy practices in social justice work. I was interested in how writing might promote, and also might inhibit, more equitable participation in public life. An out-of-school site seemed most relevant for a study geared toward lifelong learning and activism. More specifically, I wondered about the role of writing in campus-community collaborations, where participants with diverse educational, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds interact and try to find common ground. I wondered whether a possible key to successful interaction might lie in a writing practice grounded in personal narratives.

Public and private life

This study is based on a concern with participation in public life. At times in this dissertation, I call such participation “activism”; at other times I write about political or civic engagement or social justice work. My understanding of these concepts is informed by Hannah Arendt’s definition of “action” and by Dorothy Holland and her colleagues’ discussion of activism. Arendt (1958) defines action as the human ability of “starting processes of our own” (p. 232). For Arendt, action is public and political: we act in relation to others; our actions affect others. She acknowledges that in the past “action” has been used to mean both initiation and follow-through, and that such a separation has led to a split
between leaders and followers, between those with knowledge to initiate a plan and those who simply act to execute it (p. 189). Instead, she implies that knowledge and action are linked and that all human beings have the capacity to initiate activity. Holland et al. (2007) help me see that activism, political engagement and social justice work all imply action with some degree of plurality in mind; activists act with an awareness of the needs and wants of others as well as for the environment, for a “public good” rather than for their own self-interest. To be truly democratic, this public good must include the needs and wants of everyone, including the poorest and most marginalized members of our communities (pp. 202-204). Holland et al. write that American government is closer to a plutocracy than a democracy, run by the wealthy, and that activists, harnessing humans’ capacity for action, have interceded where government has fallen short (p. 188). Activists confront government with unmet wants and needs, human and environmental, and Holland et al. see in their confrontations the possibility of a truer democracy. Following Holland and using Arendt’s definition of action, I define activism as action for the common good where people perceive that the common good is not being addressed through existing channels.

Arendt (1958) argues for the active preservation of public and private life. She decries the decline of public, political life in favor of what she calls the “social” realm, where people “behave” rather than “act” (p. 40). Where action is starting new processes, behavior is following set guidelines; through behavior, people conform to social expectations. Arendt writes that the social realm threatens both private and public life, and that people must act to preserve the private and the public. Privacy is necessary for “intimacy” (p. 38), and public life is necessary for true political participation. Arendt suggests a reciprocal relationship between public and private life; people need some degree of separation in order to engage in
contemplation, and they need to reconnect with others to make that contemplation “real.”

She writes,

> Each time we talk about things that can be experienced only in privacy or intimacy, we bring them out into a sphere where they will assume a kind of reality which, their intensity notwithstanding, they never could have had before. The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves, and while the intimacy of a fully developed private life... will always greatly intensify and enrich the whole scale of subjective emotions and private feelings, this intensification will always come to pass at the expense of the assurance of the reality of the world of men. (p. 50)

In private, people can experience a range of feelings and thoughts, but it’s only by making them comprehensible to others that these feelings and thoughts become real. Not objective space, the public is nonetheless where subjectivity is verified and validated. And tamed, too, Arendt suggests; going public can be a trade-off, intensity for assurance. For Arendt, public and private are distinct, and humans should participate in each fervently.

If action is acting anew, it follows that speech is using language anew, not conforming to what one’s heard or read, but discerning and articulating one’s own ideas. Habermas (1981/1984) draws upon Arendt’s understanding of public to develop his definition of the public sphere, a place where people must engage in “communicative action,” where they must use language to reimagine what they know and what they believe, to critique what they’re told to believe, to link their own life experiences to the institutions that otherwise might seem to control them. Through communicative action, as actors, people recognize how they shape the world that otherwise would seem to shape them. They become agents, not passive receptors, citizens, not clients. Nancy Fraser (1989) critiques Habermas for not recognizing that women, viewed as clients in a patriarchal society, do not have equal access with men to full and active citizenship. Communicative action is a tall order.
From Arendt and Habermas, Seyla Benhabib (2000) proposes how our contemporary public discussions can be more democratic and just. From Arendt, she retrieves an appreciation for private life, in the sense of private ideas as well as private space. She asks her contemporary readers to attend to Arendt’s “affirmation of ‘the home.’” For Arendt, the home is the place where one could “hide,” a place to deepen (p. 213). Benhabib acknowledges that this ideal of home is far from realized for many, many people – most extremely for the homeless, refugees, and migrants. Applying Arendt in contemporary times, she writes,

Viewed against the background of massive homelessness in our societies, the perspicacity of Arendt’s insight is clear: the home not only lends the self the depth without which it is nothing but a shadow in the streets, but the home also provides the space that protects, nurtures, and makes the individual fit to appear in the public realm. The homeless self is the individual ready to be ravaged by the forces of the social against which it must fight daily to protect itself. (p. 213)

Here, Benhabib suggests that the borders between public and private are increasingly porous. When homelessness, domestic abuse, toxic exposure, and other dangers prevent people from having safe homes, private space must become a more public issue. Public discussions must address debilitating domestic conditions that keep people from being “fit to appear in the public realm,” that prevent knowledge and self-worth, that physically harm rather than protect. Benhabib follows Habermas in arguing for full participation in the public sphere and sees in his work space for dissent. She wants to expand this space. Regarding any public discussion, Benhabib demands that what counts as worthy to discuss must be up for grabs. That is, she sees the very decision about whether something counts as public as a political issue. People should be able to demand a public airing of what others might deem private or irrelevant concerns.
Participatory pedagogy

Some educators have developed pedagogical approaches as means to foster broader participation in the public sphere. The liberatory pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1970/1990) is aimed at increasing participation in the public sphere by increasing literacy and awareness of subjectivity among the most marginalized groups in society. Freire’s work was based in an undemocratic political system, where peasants were not only separated from the products of their labor, but also separated from an idea of themselves as actors in the world. Freire’s first agenda was to empower peasants with a sense of their own ability to act. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he outlined a means to a curriculum that would lead to this outcome. He suggested that a team of researchers, of educated experts, should enter a community and through a process of investigation discover that community’s “generative themes” (p. 86) and use those themes to develop a curriculum for the community. He suggested that community members might join the research team. Generative themes were of two sorts – first, particular themes that were issues and topics that mattered to community members. For example, in the contemporary U.S. a particular theme might be the recent Ag-Mart case, where a common pesticide applied to fields was found to have caused birth defects in children born to migrant farmworkers. Second, universal themes were issues and topics that community members might be blinded to by the “limit situations” inherent in their oppressed state (p. 89). With regard to the Ag-Mart case, universal themes include environmental racism. While community members might name particular themes on their own, researchers and educators probably need to help them identify universal themes by facilitating discussion, bringing in outside information, and analyzing situations. To be “generative,” themes and topics need to be interesting and productive topics for discussion in a community.
Freire followed Marx’s materialist conception of history in interpreting the world as human-made. In *The German Ideology*, Marx (1846/1988) wrote that humans expressed their humanity through labor and that different modes of production shaped society, hence, the development of towns from agricultural labor and the development of cities from industrial work. Humans also created ideas. Marx wrote that humans ascend from earth to heaven, meaning that material reality was the basis of consciousness, including consciousness of God. In *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat*, Lukács (1923/1971) elaborated on a related idea of Marx. He explained Marx’s idea of reification, that in capitalism when humans become workers, producing things for “exchange-value” rather than simply for “use-value,” those things become commodities and lose their subjective meaning for the humans who created them. Commodities are things separated from their human makers, and reification makes them appear as though they weren’t created by humans. Ultimately, reification leads to an “objective” world, where objects seem to relate to one another as if there were no human creator behind them. Given the materialist conception of history, it follows that humans lose their key expression of humanity and, therefore, their humanity when commodification and reification mask their own productive capacity.

Freire, too, valorized the creative and productive capacity of human beings. In *Education and Critical Consciousness* (1973), he sought through the codifications he developed as curriculum to represent to students some of their creative and productive capabilities. In his location, this could have been a picture of a vase of flowers, or a picture of a cow. Freire’s initial goal was to humanize students by connecting them to the things they had produced and to their labor. Ultimately, he hoped to anchor them subjectively in the
world, so that they could participate in the world as actors and not simply perceive themselves as spectators. They were already acting through their work; they needed to be conscious of their action.

Once students were humanized, once they saw themselves as actors, they could have true dialogue with teachers (Freire, 1970/1990). Dialogue would lead to critical consciousness, an ability to see universal themes, to see beneath surface appearances to the reasons why things were the way they were, for example the ability to question one’s role as a worker rather than taking it for granted. For Freire, dialogue was an act of love, faith and courage, in which people could only participate successfully if they were humanized and if they accepted others as fully human. Dialogue was the key component of Freire’s critical pedagogy, and dialogue was comprised of words. The means Freire advocated for cultivating subjectivity and agency was literacy. He wrote of “naming the world” (p. 77) and speaking “true words” (p. 75). Naming the world meant interpreting the world from one’s particular vantage point, rather than accepting someone else’s interpretation as sufficient or valid. “True words” came from both reflection and action. So, as peasants gained literacy skills by learning words for the acts and objects pictured in codifications, they would begin to link the words with consciousness of their humanity and decisions about actions. Language and literacy were, for Freire, expressions of humanity, and the literate products of language were human creations. Ideas, the language of politics, and the world of culture would become more accessible when people began confidently and fluidly using language themselves. Taking hold of language meant challenging the reification of ideas, and could lead therefore to denying the power of unspecified others to control intellectual thought and creativity, as well as to holding specified others accountable for their uses of language.
These were possible outcomes of critical consciousness (an outcome of dialogue (an outcome of humanization)).

Many scholars in the United States find Freire’s ideas applicable in our educational contexts; but, faced with different contexts and different students, we need to be generous and creative with our applications. In his application of Freire, Ira Shor (1992) has discerned generative themes of college students in the contemporary United States, finding that their central theme is different from the theme in Friere’s community. They are actualized and can see that they can make an impact on the world, but they are limited by the belief that their impact will be individual, that each of them must somehow be self-reliant. Juan Guerra (2004) illuminates Freire’s work by interpreting critical consciousness as a process; people aren’t necessarily blind to larger generative themes (such as the myth of self-reliance); they are occasionally sighted, occasionally aware. Of his own years as a barrio student in a segregated high school in South Texas, Guerra wrote:

Like the peasants that Freire sometimes quotes in his work, I was submerged in ways that limited my opportunities to interpret the oppressive conditions that we faced in our South Texas schools and barrios. Like them, I would occasionally experience epiphanies, brief moments of clarity when I saw the world for what it was. Unfortunately, those epiphanies were fleeting moments at best and would quickly degenerate into sustained periods of self-doubt or, worse yet, into bouts of self-loathing that often led me to question my place in the world. Is it possible to think of these transient epiphanies as hints of an emerging critical consciousness? (pp. 16-17)

Here, Guerra suggests that for most people, critical consciousness is not a constant state; it’s a collection of moments. Some people have these moments more often, but many have access to them despite, perhaps even as a result of (Guerra suggests), a disempowering education. Shor and Guerra help update Freire for U.S. schools, where people have a greater diversity of opportunity.
Freire and his followers aim toward a critical literacy. Ideally, their students would use writing to express their point of view, to write of themselves in the first person creating and bringing about change, to write of themselves acting with others, to explore generative themes. Teachers guide students toward universal themes that they have recognized; teachers see their students’ full humanity and invite them into dialogue. Beginning in the 1960’s, scholars informed by an anthropological viewpoint have sought to understand literacy both in and beyond educational settings (Hull and Schultz, 2002). In particular, they have looked at how in-school reading and writing instruction intersects with out-of-school experiences. Teachers become one group among what Deborah Brandt (2001) calls “sponsors of literacy,” people (family members, community members, work supervisors, teachers) who influence how others view literacy practices (p. 19). In defining a theoretical framework of “situated literacy,” Barton and Hamilton (2000) write that literacy is “a set of social practices” that occur around the production of texts but are not limited to those texts. In their language, reading and writing represent “events,” and particular cultural attitudes around reading and writing are “literacy practices... the general ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives” (p. 7). Literacy practices are not only culturally informed; they are powerladen, purposeful, and historically situated. Barton and Hamilton’s framework of situated literacy reduces school-based writing to one among forms of writing at the same time that it acknowledges the greater clout and prestige of school-based writing. From Barton and Hamilton, Hull and Schultz (2002) argue that teachers must bridge in and out-of-school literacy practices for students from diverse backgrounds to succeed in schools. For some students, the bridge is much shorter and easier to cross. Here,
aspects of identity such as race, gender, class, and especially linguistic affiliation will influence experiences with literacy. For example, research has shown that the culture of U.S. schools is most similar to middle and upper class white culture, so students of this culture will likely feel most at ease drawing on both school-based and extracurricular literacy practices (Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983). Similarly, research has shown that the home and community learning experiences of Latino students are devalued in U.S. schools, that their own cultural resources are “subtracted” by schooling (Valenzuela, 1999). Consequently, Latino students may have experienced a greater division between school-based and extracurricular literacy practices, the one possessing more power and prestige than the other.

Critical race theorists have studied how the American legal system has enabled differential access to education, by valuing property rights over human rights (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995) and by historically assigning property rights to whites that others did not have. Legal scholar Cheryl Harris (1993) argues that whiteness itself has been constructed as property in American law; holders of whiteness have been entitled to privileges of reputation and expectation and they have been entitled to exclude non-whites from such privileges (Harris; Ladson-Billings and Tate). Harris traces this construction through court cases such as Brown v. Board of Education, which she argues upheld the value of whiteness by “leaving intact the ability of whites to control, manage, postpone, and if necessary, thwart change” (p. 1754). School districts were able to postpone desegregation because the Court did not require them to desegregate immediately. Furthermore, because the Court did not address white privilege as a cause of the violation of the rights of blacks, but identified segregation as the sole problem, whiteness maintained its power. Harris writes that even with adjustments to the law such as those made in the Brown decision, “whiteness
retains its value as a ‘consolation prize’: it does not mean that all whites will win, but simply that they will not lose’ (p. 1758). It seems to follow that all attempts to promote equity in schools inevitably will run up against whites’ unwillingness to sacrifice our expectations for our own educations. Whites preserve the right to maintain schools in which we can be successful, creating alternative, frequently stigmatizing, and probably substandard programs for students of color within the schools we dominate when they don’t meet the standards that we have set. This is the way that racism continues to operate in our educational system.

Today, students not only face racism and differential access to literacy and knowledge in classrooms. They also face a fairly systemic devaluation of the critical power of language. In *Literacy in American Lives*, Deborah Brandt (2001) argues that American schools continue to be driven by the needs and values of the marketplace, and that writing curriculum has been overly accountable to future employers. In such an environment, the literacy skills that matter are those that transfer to workplaces. For example, she compares the in and out-of-school educational experiences of the son of a computer science professor and the daughter of migrant laborers to show that, on the one hand, the skill of computer programming was highly transferable, and thus educationally valued, whereas the skill of biliteracy was not transferable in this time and place, and thus unvalued (pp. 184-185). Brandt suggests that students are differentially affected by writing curriculum based on the jobs they are expected to attain, and these expectations differ for students in part on the basis of their race, class, gender, and other factors. At the same time, she argues that all students are negatively affected by schools’ decisions to standardize writing instruction on the basis of future jobs. In this scenario, in Lukács’ terms, education becomes valued for its “exchange value” in the marketplace over its “use value” in the pursuit of knowledge. Writing threatens
to become rote, product-driven, a tool for pleasing readers who control the market (employers, buyers) rather than a tool for challenging them. Standardized testing furthers a reductionist agenda for writing.

Barton and Hamilton’s work not only allows for a critique of school-based literacy; it is also part of a small but definitive trend in both education and composition studies to look at extracurricular writing and reading as important sites of learning. Since Heath’s *Ways with Words* (1983), scholars have looked at out-of-school knowledge as a source for revisions of school practices. Hull and Schultz (2002) argue that teachers should figure out what kind of writing and reading students enjoy outside of school and bring those uses into the classroom. Somewhat opposite to them, Delpit (1995) argues that all students need access to school-based writing, that teachers can recognize and respect out-of-school practices but need to spend instructional time on school-based literacy. Valenzuela (1999) takes a different approach; rather than looking at what teachers teach, she looks at how they teach mainly through how they interact with their students. She argues that teachers need to demonstrate an ethic of care toward Mexican-American students and show respect for their bilingual and bicultural experiences. Without that, immigrant students can become disaffected from school. In each of these cases, the aim of understanding out-of-school literacy is mainly to improve school curriculum and instructional practices for engaging diverse learners. In composition studies, Gere (1994) has taken a similar approach in suggesting that understanding the “extracurriculum of composition” can lead university composition teachers to enrich their instructional practices. In her work, she looks at book clubs and civic groups as places where people read and write in meaningful ways.
In the field of adult education and lifelong learning, some scholars look at extracurricular writing practices as important in and of themselves. For example, Gregory (1991) sees self-publishing as a place where adults can grow in individual as well as collective confidence, voice, and agency. They can go from knowing how to read and write to doing something meaningful with reading and writing. Their writing may be creative, therapeutic, or activist in nature. Gregory’s work is informed by a Freirian notion that through using language, people can become more self-aware and efficacious.

Complicating the above studies on literacy, the New London Group (1996) has proposed that conventional notions of literacy as textual are no longer sufficient in an era of globalization, multilingualism and diversity. They propose an approach that embraces “multiliteracies,” which they define in two senses, that of multiculturalism and that of multimedia. One sense of multiliteracies is multicultural and multilingual; literacy practices need to cross linguistic and cultural divides. Rather than speaking and writing within situated discourses, people increasingly need to speak across languages and discourses, for example communicating with people who speak another language, speaking in a mixture of languages, and speaking with people who are used to a different discourse. The New London Group also speaks of multiliteracies in the sense of non-textual expressive practices, particularly those that embrace technology and possibilities of multimedia. Instead of just writing, people might create a multimedia presentation through a software application, design a website, or use visual art, movement, and music. The approach of multiliteracies is one way that scholars have sought to challenge the rigidity of some situated literacy practices.
Writing in service-learning and activism

Where the scholars mentioned above seek to help students apply out-of-school to in-school writing practices, some research into service-learning and campus-community collaborations has examined how writing in community placements can help students go in the other direction – applying in-school writing to out-of-school contexts. In his survey of writing assignments in service-learning courses, Deans (2000) identifies three types of assignments that students typically complete in conjunction with community placements.

“Writing about” assignments correspond most closely to regular college papers, with students typically using the knowledge they gain at their placement sites as source material for analytic and argumentative essays on social and political issues (p. 85). Common in service-learning, personal reflective writing or journaling is a form of “writing about,” with the subject typically oneself and one’s ability to make a difference. The two other types of assignments identified by Deans more closely resemble out-of-school writing tasks. In “writing for” assignments, students write newsletters, brochures and other pieces for agencies they are placed in (p. 53). In “writing with” assignments, they work with community members, perhaps students themselves, on pieces of writing (p. 110). These types of writing assignments meet the requirements of the post-process writing pedagogy increasingly dominant in composition programs; students are taught to write by identifying a context, an audience, a purpose in addition to the usual content (Breuch, 2003). Given this approach to writing, it follows that students will become more flexible and more successful writers if they learn to write in more than one setting. Peck, Flower and Higgins (1995) provide an example of a “writing with” assignment; at the Community Literacy Center in Philadelphia, college students “illiterate in the discourse of the inner city” (p. 215) work with high school students
to publish writing on generative themes in the teens’ lives, in one case gang violence. In this model, both college students and teens grow in knowledge of reading and writing by learning each other’s discourse practices and by working together to address an outside audience through publication. Peck, Flower and Higgins argue that this work is an example of a successful foray into intercultural communication, a “hybrid discourse” of the kind that certain scholars in composition studies have looked to hopefully over the past fifteen years and a few have begun to critique for its masking of power differentials between discourses. Jaime Armín Mejia (2007) argues that despite forays into hybridity, power in composition programs has not shifted. In other words, to return to Barton and Hamilton’s language, school-based writing continues to be the literacy practice most valued in society, and white, upper class culture continues to determine what that constitutes.

In certain ways, I find the various attempts to weigh, link, and oppose school-based and extracurricular literacy practices to be frustrating and irresolvable. My own experiences as a teacher in K-12, community college, university, and non-formal settings have tended to confirm Mejia and Delpit’s assertions that school standards are rigid, culturally biased, and, from a teacher’s or student’s perspectives, unchangeable. Like Peck, Flower and Higgins, who wrote admiringly of college students sharing argumentative strategies with teens that enabled them to more effectively express their views about gang violence, I do believe that analytical and argumentative essays typical of school-based writing have powerful consequences for writers’ intellectual growth. At the same time, I am discouraged by an over-reliance on formulas that I have consistently felt in school-based writing assignments. Inability to master formulas can frustrate weaker writers’ attempts to really express themselves or think in writing. For example, a poor thesis statement does little to advance a
writer’s thinking or impact on readers. Writing teachers tend to channel energy into teaching strong thesis statements where, if assignments were less formulaic, they might abandon the thesis statement and work from writers’ strengths or preferred modes of sharing ideas. While these strengths may be informed by students’ out-of-school literacy practices, I don’t believe that channeling out-of-school literacy practices into in-school writing is the answer to escaping formulaic writing. For one thing, certain out-of-school literacy practices are just as susceptible to stasis and governance by formula. I do believe with Valenzuela that how students are taught to write may matter more than what they are taught to write because in teacher-student interactions lies the possibility for the kind of cultural appreciation that can give students the confidence to express themselves and explore what they think. Like Delpit, I think school-based writing is best taught by naming what it is, why it’s important, whose interests it serves, and how it’s different from other kinds of writing. Finally, I tend to believe in a preservation of separate contexts for writing, believing like Arendt and Benhabib in the sacredness of both private and public spaces and, from there, the sacredness of discourses within the various communities to which individuals belong. Every conversation shouldn’t be accessible and comprehensible to every audience.

This point brings me to my main ethical concern with forays into community literacy by university folks like myself. I worry that we will gain the trust of people we work with, through that trust gain access to their thoughts and ideas, through that access and our access to other resources (resources of publication, of theoretical contexts) gain control over their words, and with that control make choices that may conflict with people’s thoughts and ideas. Here, I’m using “words” to refer to the actual language people use, and “thoughts and ideas” to interpretations they and we give to that language. Power over interpretation seems
key. In community publishing such as Gregory wrote about, people’s works may be reproduced whole as they wrote them, so editors and teachers don’t exercise control over interpretation. If editors and teachers change that work, some control is exercised. When ethnographers such as myself use people’s words in their own contexts, we take on the power and burden of interpretation. Community literacy endeavors present a range of possibilities of owning interpretation, from writers maintaining a say over their words to teachers and scholars interpreting those words. With each of these choices, comes ethical responsibility. We are, potentially, bridging people’s private and public lives when we publish their words, and we need, in qualitative research terms, their informed consent to do that, their permission and an assurance that they know to what they’re consenting.

At the same time that they present ethical dilemmas, I believe that campus-community collaborations, service-learning programs and other programs that are neither firmly school-based nor wholly extracurricular are interesting forums for language use. “Writing about” assignments can invite students to expand their notion of authority and expertise from published texts to experiential evidence and human actors. And students can be exposed to new genres, new audiences, and, perhaps most importantly, new reasons to write. In particular, extracurricular spaces with activist traditions are likely to promote activist uses of writing, providing students with tools and knowledge for participation in the public life of their campuses and communities. Political activity does take place in schools and on college campuses, and important work has explored school-related activism (Cecelski, 1994; Loeb, 1994). But the majority of political activity supersedes school life and in educational terms necessitates an approach of lifelong learning, an investigation into the places, communities, and movements to which people belong (both in and out-of-school)
and in which they might work toward the common good. The Community Literacy Center mentioned above was located in a Settlement House and thus drew upon Dorothy Day’s tradition of collective engagement with community problems. Eli Goldblatt (2005) wrote of a community-college writing partnership in a neighborhood center that drew upon traditions of community organizing through the involvement of a community organizer at the center. In an ethnographic study of attitudes toward political participation among residents of five North Carolina communities in the late 1990’s, Dorothy Holland et al. (2007) found that the greatest possibilities for meaningful political participation exist in community-based non-profit associations. These associations have grown in numbers in an era of “market rule” in which the government is increasingly turning over public works to private corporations and public-private partnerships. Holland et al. argue that the encouraging flip side of the privatization and unregulated profit-seeking characteristic of neoliberalism is actually an expansion of possibilities for political participation through these diverse activist associations (pp. 4-12). In short, they write that “activist associations are the best hope for revitalizing democracy in America” (p. xii). In the same volume, through their analysis of participant observation in the five communities and through interviews with a hundred diverse residents, they conclude that formal schooling does not tend to shape political involvement relative to other social forces such as family, church, and the media. Schooling’s contribution to activist involvement seems to be in the teaching of abstract ideals such as freedom and equality, which can inform people’s commitment to social causes. But the real impetus to act seems to come through other avenues and through affiliations with other groups of people (pp. 39-43). This work generally affirms the importance of looking beyond schools for
learning about political activity and specifically suggests that in non-profits such as SAF, people have the greatest chance of coming to a sense of themselves as political actors.

*The historical context of SAF*

The archive of SAF interns’ writing is informed both by SAF’s activist framework but also by the historical situation for farmworkers and Latino immigrants in the Carolinas during the period 1995 – 2005. Within SAF, interns have been exposed to a possibly new reason to write: to bolster their action for the public good of farmworkers. As part of praxis, writing as reflection ideally means deepening understanding of one’s actions prior to, during and after those actions. Critical reflection implies a commitment to questioning one’s position in relation to difficult issues and to seeing the universal themes at work beyond the particular. In other words, if SAF interns reflected in their writing, they may have written about the motivation, complexities, and implications of their actions; if they critically reflected, they may have linked their actions and the context of their actions to structural realities. For example, critical reflection may have led some interns to explore the role their own race played in their ability to act or the role that a farmworker’s race played in theirs.

In their curriculum, SAF has increasingly asked students to critically reflect about structural issues that inform their experiences and farmworkers’. Since SAF’s inception, orientation sessions and accompanying readings have taught interns to see the treatment of farmworkers in the United States from a critical perspective, teaching them the larger structural forces that mediate against improvement in farmworking conditions. For example, SAF teaches that white southern growers’ interests continue to influence policy decisions, sometimes continuing to allow the systematic exploitation of workers of color. Significant numbers of African-Americans migrated to do farm work through the 1960’s (Thompson &
Wiggins, 2002, p. 23), and white and black southerners once worked seasonally in the fields. As U.S.-born residents increasingly opted out of farm work, growers employed West Indians, Haitians, Southeast Asians and especially Latinos (pp. 24-26). The government established temporary work visa programs for certain foreign populations, including the “Bracero” program during WWII (p. 116) and the H-2A “guestworker” program renewed in 1986 (p. 118), through which North Carolina growers increasingly hire temporary workers from Mexico. SAF teaches interns that farmworkers have consistently been denied wage, sanitation, and other employment standards that other American workers take for granted (pp. 146-149), and that where H-2A contract standards and broader legislation have established more just policies for farmworkers, for example around housing and field sanitation, compliance and enforcement lag behind (pp. 133, 180, 203). I have observed such lessons of structural and race-based oppression as I have sat in on SAF orientations in 1993, 2005, and 2006. Also, staff assign interns readings that place farmworkers within this historical and social context; previously, interns received a packet of articles, and since 2002, they have read in *The Human Cost of Food*, a book of articles that Melinda co-edited with Charles Thompson on topics such as the H2-A program, farmworker housing, migrant education, health care, legislation, and the history of farm labor. The source of information I shared above, this book argues that farmworkers and their allies have successfully resisted structural oppression, for example through the United Farm Workers’ grape boycott, and that it continues to be necessary to fight for more just and equitable conditions for farmworkers.

While a structural critique of farm labor has been a part of SAF since its inception, in more recent years, staff have institutionalized an “anti-oppression framework” for themselves and for interns. This framework has gone hand-in-hand with the organization’s affirmative
action hiring policies and the aforementioned shift from a majority white staff to a majority Lat

ino staff. At current orientations, staff train students to consider how privilege and oppression have operated, not just in the lives of farmworkers, but in their own lives. Here, they once again unleash a structural critique, this one of the identity-based inequities prevalent along lines of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc. throughout the U.S. SAF interns have been encouraged to apply these structural critiques to their experiences in the communities of their placements. Here, it seems that SAF is attempting to enact a liberatory pedagogy like Freire’s, with particular and universal themes linked.

In addition to SAF’s curricular goals, interns have been exposed to a particular historical situation around farm labor in the Southeast. Approximately ninety percent of U.S. farm laborers are now Latino (75% are Mexican-born), and North Carolina has the sixth highest farmworker population of any U.S. state (U.S. Farmworker Factsheet, 2007). During the 1990’s, previously migrant farmworkers and other Latino immigrants began settling down in the southeastern U.S. in large numbers, due in part to an economic boon in the southeast, an economic crisis in Mexico, and the legalization of millions of previously undocumented immigrants following the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (Thompson & Wiggins, 2002, p. 27). SAF interns from western and border states often came from Latino families who had been in the United States for generations, and in North Carolina would have found first generation immigrants without the stability of family and local cultural foundations. Non-Latino interns who had grown up in the Carolinas likely became the first generation of southerners to know much about Latino culture. While SAF teaches interns to value cultural difference, the larger historical context was often hostile for new immigrants. Holland et al. (2007) suggest that when issues of Latino immigration made
it to the mainstream media, they were white people’s issues with Latinos, white people’s fears about immigration, drains on resources, perceptions of cultural differences, and fear of Latino youth. Issues Latinos were facing adjusting to a different culture, learning a new language, surviving in low-pay jobs with few benefits, lacking rights or an ability to demand rights due to vulnerable situations as undocumented workers or new immigrants, these were largely ignored in the press (pp. 65-72). In my experience, the historical context in which SAF interns operate has been a context in which many non-Latino southerners stereotype and stigmatize Latino immigrants; southerners enjoy eating out at Mexican restaurants and complain when Spanish-speaking children join their children’s classrooms.

In order to understand in more depth the reality that interns may have encountered over the years of this study, I conducted a key word search of the Raleigh News and Observer for the years of my study. I skimmed and categorized all articles that included any information of substance about farmworkers or migrant workers. In my search, I noticed a slight movement over the ten year period from a depiction of migrant workers as solely victims to a depiction, if not of farmworkers than at least of other Latino advocates, as doers. In the mid-nineties, there was an overrepresentation of articles about Latinos as victims of crime and drowning. In particular, a homicide of two migrant workers at a camp in northern Wake County and the prosecution of the suspects made the news. Along the same lines, a few stories dealt with the hiring of bilingual sheriffs and courthouse interpreters, and one article noted that at least one drowning could have been partially attributable to a language barriers; the drowning man’s friends had difficulty reaching anyone to help them. In 1999, the efforts by the Farm Labor Organizing Committee for a three-way negotiation with Mt. Olive Pickles and cucumber growers began making the news, particularly as the
boycott of Mt. Olive garnered support of first churches and later major grocery store chains. In 2003, several articles documented lawsuits over migrant housing owned by Ag-Mart, and these stories went into some detail about poor housing conditions. In this way, it seemed as though there was a small shift over the years from farmworkers as victims to farmworkers as plaintiffs and organizers. Concurrently, stories reported increasingly over the years of Latino advocates speaking on behalf of Latinos generally, including farmworkers. In 1998, the governor established a Hispanic council. In 2003, advocates organized the first Latino Legislative Day. In 2005, the second Latino Legislative Day focused on housing along with the North Carolina Latino Coalition gathering. There was therefore a slight trend both toward Latino self-advocacy and also toward a different conception of justice with regard to farmworkers reported in the news. In my search, I looked only at a small group of articles in arguably the state’s most liberal newspaper; a search of small town newspapers might reveal only what Holland and co-authors call the white perspective on immigration, white people’s fears, the demands immigrants place on communities rather than the contributions they make. Certainly, newspapers from Siler City would have reported on the anti-immigration backlash that engulfed that city in 2001 (Cuadros, 2006). Both my search of news articles and Holland and co-authors confirm the need for voices speaking on behalf of and with migrant workers and other new Latino immigrants in the public sphere, and the near absence of any celebration of Latino immigrant culture.

Personal narratives

Given this larger context, SAF’s choice to ask students to use writing to advocate for farmworkers makes sense. So does their choice to ask students to document farmworkers’ cultural traditions; these narratives of farmworkers’ lives could change people’s stereotypes.
But SAF has not just been responsible for increasing justice for farmworkers; they have also sought to make college students more critical, more self-aware and more efficacious. In this work, they have enlisted critical pedagogy and reflective writing on students’ own behalf. SAF’s written assignments seek to address both farmworkers’ and students’ needs. As I began this study, I wondered whether personal narratives might be the genre that could best address both sets of needs. Interns could document farmworkers’ stories of migration, and they could tell their own stories of activism. There is a precedent for telling farmworkers’ stories; Schaffer and Smith (2004) describe how first person narratives by marginalized people have played an increasingly important role in American and international human rights work in the late twentieth century, enabling marginalized and victimized people to voice their experiences and thereby challenge their status as victims (p. 13). Schaffer and Smith think that such stories can also help readers who have experienced victimization or marginalization on similar grounds understand and act from their experiences. Schaffer and Smith write that self and group narration take on extra importance in a context of growing migration, both chosen and forced, because narrators are challenged to negotiate their personal and collective identities across borders (p. 18). “In all cases,” they write, “storytelling functions as a crucial element in establishing new identities of longing (directed toward the past) and belonging (directed toward the future)” (p. 19). Schaffer and Smith’s notion that storytelling aids the establishment of new identities suggests that students having early experiences with activism might also benefit from writing personal narratives. As Loeb (1994) concludes from hundreds of interviews, many factors prevent young people from becoming activists, from fear to financial struggles to silence on the subject of activism in classrooms. According to Loeb, the activist identity is a threatened one in the contemporary
U.S.; it stands to reason that students need support in establishing a lasting practice of activism. Storytelling could be one such support.

I follow Schaffer and Smith in maintaining a cautious optimism about the use of personal narratives in the interest of greater social justice. In part, I am influenced by narrative theorist Paul Ricoeur’s belief that narrative is a “third-time” through which people can root their material lives in cosmological time (1985/1988, p. 99); I see in this belief the seeds for human agency within what I depart from Freire (1970/1990) in believing is not entirely a human-centered world. I see in Ricoeur’s work agency both for writers of narrative and readers. For readers, narratives can present alternate realities. Ricoeur wrote that narrative includes both “stasis” and “impetus” (p. 179). Stasis occurs when a narrative holds its readers in its grip, impetus when it lets them go. Stasis convinces readers of an alternate reality; impetus drives them to alter reality. Ricoeur argued that the more “unreal” a narrative is, the greater chance it will have to push its readers to act toward social change (p. 179). Why? “Unreality” in narrative is an altered state, a reimagined existence. Social change depends upon the chance to imagine that things could be another way. Ricoeur acknowledged that this is a paradox; stillness produces movement. He wrote: “Inasmuch as readers incorporate... into their vision of the world the lessons of their readings...then reading is for them something other than the place where they come to rest; it is a medium they cross through” (p. 178). Seen in this way, as a place of passage where readers are influenced by writers’ public accounts of their more private experiences, narrative has potential for challenging the norm in public spaces. For writers, creating what Ricoeur calls a “narrative identity” (p. 246) allows people a way to make sense of themselves in particular contexts. Black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins (1999) suggests that all societal critiques should
begin in and return to personal experience. For Collins, personal narrative cannot be individual because people’s personal experiences are shaped by their collective affiliations; thus, to honor the complexity of experience, autobiography should address the three levels of a person’s identity, individual, group and societal. I concur with Collins’ more complex view of autobiography, and as a feminist I believe that the personal is always political and vice versa. I also generally prefer storytelling to others forms of writing because I find it seems to match most people’s thought processes more closely than other forms and thus eases communication. Without the stories that lead to people’s arguments, I miss their motivation for arguing as they do. For me, storytelling and character development in the context of social justice work could involve impetus in another sense; knowing the impetus for someone’s involvement in a particular movement may spur others to consider their own relation to the movement and eventually choose to get involved.

In this study I draw upon Barton and Hamilton’s understanding that literacy practices are culturally informed, powerladen, purposeful and historically situated in order to analyze the role of writing within the SAF internship. I seek to understand how SAF has encouraged students to use writing and what SAF’s literacy practices as an agency are. Here, I consider readers’ possible uses of student writing since one of SAF’s goals is to act as an advocacy organization and increase support for farmworker justice. I delve into the archive of student writing to explore the generative themes students have described from the internship experience to better understand not only the use of narrative forms of writing to relate experiences around justice and injustice, but also the experiences themselves. In other words, I use students’ written work for insights into their experiences as political participants within the rural communities they have in most cases temporarily inhabited. I wonder the
degree to which they thought they could make change, which to me seems fundamentally related to the degree to which writing might help them realize change. I honor the distance between writing and experience and the various barriers that the act of writing can raise up in people’s lives. But I concur with most of the authors cited in this literature review that writing is only partially about the act of putting pen to paper; many other practices are relevant, including constructing stories, constructing a sense of self in stories, seeing oneself as an actor in the world, manipulating images and ideas, recognizing and learning conventions, and relating to audiences. While lack of access to school and other literacy resources can prevent people from writing effectively in certain situations, access to other kinds of cultural resources can create writers in various senses of the word. Ultimately, I define both reading and writing as fundamentally about the act of interpretation, and the written word is only part of that act. Following Polkinghorne’s application of Ricoeur to social science research, I use the written work to understand how SAF interns “made sense” of themselves during their internship (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 66). However, recognizing the limitations of my methodological approach, I treat their written work generously, imagining the range of experiences and interpretations that must have formed what’s on the page. Not that I’ve interpreted that imagined range – that would be poor research – but knowing it’s there has prevented me from evaluating writing and allowed me to appreciate it as one among many tools with which people have made meaning. This approach is encouraged by SAF’s curriculum and by frameworks of critical literacy (honoring agency), situated literacy (exploring contexts), and multiliteracies (seeking alternatives).
Methodological Framework

Participatory research, action research, and community-based research

My dissertation study is community-based and draws upon the traditions of action research and participatory research. These approaches differ from most scholarly research primarily because other stakeholders besides university researchers make key decisions. Orlando Fals-Borda (1991) used Freire’s work to develop an agenda for participatory research. Fundamentally, participatory research challenges the identity of researcher. For research to be truly participatory, all stakeholders must have a say in it. In Freire’s work, stakeholders were the community members whose generative themes were taken as a starting point for curriculum. Both Freire and Fals-Borda valued the expertise of researchers, maintaining that communities needed researchers to come in and lead them in the discovery of their themes. Perhaps the primary goal of participatory research is to share with community members outside the university – in particular, disenfranchised community members – the tools of social science research in the service of that community’s problems. Just as Freire thought literacy was a key to peasants’ ability to interpret and therefore act upon the world, so participatory researchers see research as key to disenfranchised community members’ ability to act in response to the situations and people that harm them. So, carrying out the research involves educating team members in the particular stages of research – asking research questions (akin to Freire’s problem-posing), designing a method for answering those questions, collecting and analyzing data, and sharing and/or acting upon the analysis of that data. The short term goal is a response to a particular problem, while the long term goal may be the empowerment of the community through “literacy” in research methods.
In fact, the shared decision-making at the heart of participatory research methodology may be more of an ideal than a reality. Certainly, power differentials inhibit this process, and when insisting on a university-based research model, researchers will maintain a position of authority (Park, 1993). They will be as teachers and community members as students. Such a model presupposes the existence of problems as a starting point, and this very presupposition denies other starting points that a community may have. Of course, some would argue that community members teach researchers about their community. But there’s an imbalance here between content, on the one hand, and process on the other, that denies the possibility of an alternate process, an alternate discourse, if you will, for community study.

Action research presents an alternate discourse for research. University researchers don’t enter a community as collaborators; rather, practitioners in a community carry out their own research projects. Practitioners decide both content and process. Action research is most prominent in the field of education, where teachers decide upon the questions they want to study, how to study them, and the answers. The basic research model is cyclical: planning leads to action; action leads to observation; observation leads to reflection; reflection leads to a new plan (McNiff, 1988). While many qualitative studies propose plans of action, they stop where action research continues, into the actual implementation, observation, and reflection upon plans of action. Action and the results of action become subjects of study. Action research is unique because, as Argyris (1985) writes, it initiates “communities of inquiry within communities of practice” (p. 34). Inquiry and practice are linked.

Still in its infancy, community-based research is another possible space for alternate research processes. Community-based research begins with a premise similar to action research, that community members, not university researchers, should initiate research,
perhaps enlisting university researchers to work toward their self-identified goals. Whereas action researchers are typically teachers, other kinds of practitioners in local non-profit and governmental agencies may initiate community-based research projects. Community-based research is collaborative, concerned with the knowledge of powerless people whose ideas are traditionally not heard, and directed toward social justice (Strand et al., 2003, p. 8). Community-based research has in common with Freire its participatory methodology and its concern with human agency.

My dissertation study draws upon participatory research in its concern with a community’s generative themes: the community being student interns working on behalf of farmworkers. The themes of currently migrant farmworkers are partially represented because many interns come from farmworking families and because SAF as an agency strives to follow the lead of farmworkers and farmworker-led organizations in much of its work. However, without full inclusion of farmworkers as participants, this study cannot aim to discern farmworkers’ generative themes. Furthermore, since I did not invite former interns (with the exception of those among staff) to help me generate my research questions and methodology, my study is not fully participatory. My invitation for interns’ feedback at the writing-up stage adds a participatory element; however, “member checks” are also an increasingly standard practice in qualitative research broadly. I take pains to make the disclaimer that this is not a participatory study because I believe that participatory research is an important practice whose aims and methodology should not be watered down.

Similarly, my study draws upon but is not action research. While we’ll discuss possible changes to the writing curriculum based on my findings, I won’t carry my analysis through the implementation of these changes. Action research has helped me see that
research is part of a cyclical process of critique and growth, that practitioners can incorporate 
research into the way they do their work. Being an alumna and volunteer with SAF, I can 
play a part in their ongoing critique and program development. As Melinda mentioned, SAF 
strives for a praxis model, always moving between reflection and action. Their invitation for 
me to carry out this research falls within this model. When I am done, staff will choose how 
to integrate my findings into their work.

I do see my work as community-based because I have let the organization’s needs 
guide my methodological choices. My study primarily involves document review rather than 
ethnographic work because that was SAF’s request of me, that I read past documentary 
projects and guided reports. While interviews would have revealed many insights into the 
learning experiences of interns, the written work was largely unexamined. Speculating that 
the written work could inform both curriculum development and advocacy work, staff 
wondered what was there.

My standpoint

I am a partial insider in this study because of my background as an intern and my 
ongoing affiliation with SAF. I make no claims to objective distance or impartial 
interpretation, sharing as I do SAF’s goal of increased agency for both students and 
farmworkers. I desire a redistribution of material resources, and I hope for empowerment 
through strengthened intellectual resources, such as access to the critical function of words 
that Freire wrote of. I must take these wants into consideration as I read. This study directs 
me both inward and outward, asking me to reflect generously and advocate decisively. I’m 
ethically obligated in both directions at the same time.
Realizing this dual obligation in myself points me toward a similar obligation interns may have felt when they wrote. If they didn’t feel it, their assignments nonetheless asked them to both critically assess situations and also lead imagined readers toward action. Habermas suggests that ideal communicative action involves people thoroughly examining their preconceptions and prior knowledge by challenging one another, working through their biases as they arrive at greater understanding. Ideal communicative action would mean I’d find interns frequently overturning their assumptions in their writing (and I’d frequently overturn my own assumptions during my research process). In actuality, communication is much less successful. Habermas (1981/1984) wrote, “A more realistic picture is that... of a diffuse, fragile, continuously revised and only momentarily successful communication in which the participants rely on problematic and unclarified presuppositions and feel their way from one occasional commonality to the next” (p. 101). Even research, one forum of communicative action aimed at greater understanding, is characterized by moments of understanding with longer periods of “ambiguity” and disagreement. Habermas wrote that in research, if researchers don’t examine their assumptions, “the process of understanding [will be] bound up in an unclarified way with a process of bringing something about” (p. 112). Recognizing that ideal communication is just that, an ideal, I know that at times critical blindsplots will color my interpretations. Sometimes, I will bring something about at the same moment that I am attempting to understand it; my understanding will be partial. Sometimes, advocacy requires decisiveness and speech before reflection is complete. As Melinda said, if you prepare, prepare, prepare before you act, you may never act. The same holds true for communication. Speech and writing are steps toward clarity of understanding, so no one act of speech or writing can be held to ideal standards. Interns and I wrote as steps
in our understanding; we’ve also had to write for audiences as though we understood. We must recognize our reliance on problematic and unclarified assumptions at the same time we assert our momentarily successful communication.

Research Questions and Study Design

This study addresses two main interwoven questions: As expressed through their written work, what are the generative themes of young people outside of a traditional school curriculum learning to act in solidarity with a marginalized group? How do written assignments enhance and/or inhibit student action in solidarity with others?

I mainly concentrated on document analysis of students’ written work assigned during the course of the internship and submitted to SAF staff. As I’ve mentioned, I concentrated on the written work because this is what staff asked of me. I concentrated on two archives: weekly guided reports, which virtually all interns completed from 1995 through 2005, and field notes and final narratives of documentary projects, which approximately two-thirds of the interns have completed since 1999. Documentary projects also included photographs and audio tapes, but I decided to focus on the writing and what it revealed; this choice proved to be one limitation of my study, given my eventual interest in the non-textual elements of the projects. I was able to gain insight into interns’ production of photographs and interviews through their field notes and my participation in documentary training sessions.

I read all of the guided reports and documentary projects for which I obtained consent. When I originally planned this study, I thought I would pull from the total archive of the written work of 309 former interns, a group of 100 students who would represent the whole in terms of gender, race, type of internship placement, and year of participation. I did
not plan to seek consent from former interns; they had granted SAF permission to publish excerpts of their writing through a signed release form. Many were lost to contact. However, the chair of UNC’s Institutional Review Board asked me to seek consent. After all, my purposes as a researcher differed from SAF’s purposes as an advocacy organization, and my use of the written work would differ from interns might have originally imagined. This decision proved to be quite meaningful for my study. First, I was able to reach over a hundred former interns by email and a few by telephone and realize that a network of former interns existed around the country. The world, no less; I received replies from interns in France, Bermuda, the Czech Republic, and the Dominican Republic in addition to my many replies from North Carolina, Texas, California, and elsewhere. Ultimately, I received written consent from ninety-six former interns, and this group was fairly well representative of the range I’d hoped for. I not only had the numbers I’d wanted, but I had the encouragement of friendly emails, offering further help, expressing interest in my findings. I felt a growing sense of responsibility to do right by this community, a responsibility that might have eluded me had I sought a waiver of consent. I used to imagine that my ethical standards surpassed those of the Institutional Review Board and I could follow my own moral compass if allowed. My interactions with the Board showed me otherwise, that the rules gave me permission to do my best work. Consent, while not sufficient to ensure ethical interactions with participants, is an important starting place.

To obtain consent, I sent two rounds of emails to all of the approximately 200 interns for whom SAF had current email addresses. In addition, I followed up by phone and/or mail with approximately ten interns. Ultimately, I gained consent from 96 interns. I checked the body of work for representativeness in the following areas: year of placement,
farmworker/non-farmworker background, gender, and type of internship placement (education, health, legal, ministry, organizing, environmental health, research, agricultural, and social services.) The group was representative with a few exceptions. In most categories, the number of actual participants only varied from the ideal number by zero to two people. I had slightly lower than desired representation among the following groups: 1997 interns (I had 3 participants instead of 8), students from farmworking families (37 instead of 43) education interns (21 instead of 25), and legal interns (6 instead of 9). Given my methods of obtaining consent, I need to recognize a bias toward interns who likely had a positive experience with SAF, since these are likely the ones who maintain contact with SAF and send updated contact information.

I used several other methods in addition to documentary analysis. I analyzed the writing assignments themselves – the questions interns were asked on guided reports and the folklife documentary assignment. I interviewed the four full-time staff of SAF (all of whom are also former interns - Laxmi Haynes [2001], Lupe Huitron [2005], Tony Macias [1998], and Melinda Wiggins [1993]) in order to understand how the writing assignments fit in with the overall curriculum and how they have changed over time. I carried out participant observation in my role as consultant (unpaid) with the organization. During orientations in 2005 and 2006, I attended part of orientation and assisted in training interns to carry out and write up documentary projects. In this role, I spend some time with the interns at different points during the summer. I also participated in Alumni Advisory and Documentary Advisory Committee meetings beginning in the spring of 2004, and I interacted with staff and alumni at fundraising and social gatherings. These experiences gave me further insight into SAF curriculum and goals.
Following Corinne Glesne (1999), once I drew tentative conclusions from the document analysis, I shared a summary of those findings with both staff and participating interns. With staff (there were now five full-time staff people with the addition of Rosie Rangel [2005]), I held a focus group. With former interns, I invited interns who lived in the area to attend a focus group, and four came (Lori Fernald Khamala [1999], Angelita Morado [2005], Andy Smith [1998], and Lynne Walter [1998]). In focus groups, I asked open-ended questions to elicit feedback – does anything seem unclear? does anything ring particularly true? does anything seem off-based? – and I included this feedback with the other data I collected. In each of these ways, I assessed my conclusions from perspectives other than my own, to see if they still made sense and held meaning for people with something at stake in the study.

Throughout the study, I have moved between past interns’ written work, SAF’s curriculum, and wider implications. At various times, people have wondered how this study might be relevant beyond SAF. At my proposal defense, committee members in the School of Education suggested that the findings could help them design written assignments for students in their teacher education courses; in particular, they wondered whether guided reports or documentary projects might instruct teachers toward greater empathy for their students. In my work with Writing Center colleagues in the Write On! workshops for teens in the Durham County Library, we have published teenagers’ written work for families and community members and considered the impact of such public presentation on teens’ sense of themselves as writers and public actors. I hope that my study will help us in Write On! as well as others doing similar “writing with” projects decide when to publish student writing and when to encourage private writing. I also hope we can more deeply think about the
connections between student writing and their actions. Finally, I hope that this study will be relevant to writers, photographers, and documentarians who attempt to write on behalf of, in solidarity with, or as marginalized people and allies. We should understand the potential of our published work for greater public awareness and action and the potential of all of our work, published or not, for a greater private sense of self-worth and self-understanding. At the same time, we should explore the material and philosophical problems that will inevitably arise when we attempt, through writing, to interpret our own lives and the lives of others. I hope that such consideration can help us choose wisely among possible writing projects and audiences for those projects.
Since 1995, all SAF interns have been expected to turn in eight or nine weekly “guided reports” to the staff member coordinating the summer internship. In the mid-90’s, they typically faxed these reports and turned some in to staff at mid-retreat and final retreat. Around 2001, they began emailing reports; a couple of years later, they attached reports to emails. By 2005, they submitted their reports over a blackboard website. Each year, staff have given a set of prompts to guide interns’ reports, and between years they have used the prompts, interns’ responses and evaluation materials to decide how to revise the prompts for the coming year. Each year’s prompts have maintained a consistent focus on interns’ learning experiences and their evolving knowledge of farmworkers, but they have varied somewhat in particulars. In 1995, all of the guided reports asked students to respond to the same prompt: “Reflect on an event, experience or conversation which you have had in the past week. Comment on how this is reinforcing or altering your thoughts about the conditions of farmworkers, rural poverty, and/or economic issues related to agriculture.” This prompt is a classic reflective prompt because it invites students to compare their experience with their prior knowledge and to integrate the two. In 1996, staff diversified the prompts. To questions like the previous one that invited reflection about farmworking conditions, staff added questions that invited reflection about personal growth, and they
added other questions that gave students the opportunity to try on the role of advocate. The personal growth questions included the following: “What are some challenges you are facing in your internship? How will you meet these challenges in the remainder of your internship?” Advocacy questions asked students to write newspaper articles for their hometown papers or invited them to consider how they would educate others; for example, one prompt read, “Write a plan educating other students and/or members of your home community about farmworkers, agribusiness, and/or rural poverty.” In 1999, staff introduced another kind of question, one that asked students to write persuasively on an issue related to farm work, such as “What responsibility does the US Government have to people who come here to work in agriculture?” Altogether, my analysis of guided report prompts revealed these four broad categories of questions: reflection about farmworking conditions, reflection about personal growth, advocacy for other audiences, and argumentative writing on issues.

The variation among guided report questions seems to stem from the interwoven literacy practices at the heart of SAF’s curriculum: reflection, advocacy, and documentary work. For example, when students reflect on farmworking conditions, they also document those conditions, and SAF lets them know that they’ll use their writing in their advocacy efforts. SAF asks interns to be their eyes and ears in the field. However, despite these multiple uses that SAF finds for student writing, reflection is the literacy practice that staff most wants the guided reports to inspire. This became clear to me during interviews, as staff spoke repeatedly about their desire for students to reflect and their disappointment with the written reports as a meaningful mode for reflection. Interviews and observation at SAF’s orientation also revealed to me that “reflection” and “guided reports” are not synonymous.
Guided reports are individual and written; reflection within SAF is collective and engages a variety of modes of expression, including the non-verbal. For SAF interns generally, reflection as a multi-modal, collective practice seems more successful than reflection as a written, individual practice. Given this, staff wonder what to do with the guided reports, this seeming relic of service-learning. Do they get rid of individual, written reflection, or do they improve the way they use it? Recognizing their ability to answer this question for themselves, in this dissertation I have tried to lay the groundwork for either answer. On the one hand, I have written about the most meaningful generative themes that I have found in the students’ written work, in the hopes that these themes will help SAF write more meaningful prompts for future interns and help them show future interns how they can harness the power of the written word to understand themselves and their society more deeply. At the same time, I have recognized the ways the written word has fallen short, and in my subsequent analysis of students’ documentary projects, I have shown the possibilities for collective, non-verbal communication that SAF engenders through documentary work. Looking at these possibilities can lead SAF to abandoning individual writing practices in favor of multi-modal, collective work. Chapters Two Three represent two foundations from which SAF and other organizations can grow their literacy practices. From the generative themes in students’ guided reports, they can develop written assignments that intentionally invite critical thinking. From the generative themes in students’ documentary work, they can develop meaningful collective and non-verbal assignments. They can do both.

Guided Reports

Guided reports are informed by SAF’s literacy practices of reflection, documentary work, and advocacy. Guided report questions suggest that SAF staff have believed that
interns can use written language both to deepen understanding of experience and also to spark further action in their own lives and in the lives of others. Deepening one’s understanding and generating further action in one’s life are uses of writing at the heart of praxis. Melinda firmly believes in praxis, which means she sees both staff and interns necessarily engaging in action and reflection simultaneously. Freire (1970/1990) defines praxis as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 36). This definition is consistent with SAF’s definition because it implies an interconnectedness between action and reflection as well as a goal of social justice. In Chapter One, I wrote of Arendt’s distinction between behavior and action, behavior meaning following social norms and action meaning starting anew. Reflection seems to be a necessary component of such action; to do what one chooses to do rather than to follow what others have done requires intentionality and thought, especially in the case of activism when one is seeking to understand the wants and needs of others besides oneself. Reflection requires, first and foremost, awareness – of oneself and of others. Freire (1970/1990) and Habermas (1984) would add that for people to participate from their true subjective standpoints, they must reflect critically by analyzing their place and the place of others within society, asking themselves how and why they have experienced what they have experienced.

As Melinda mentioned, SAF’s use of guided reports reflect the organization’s historical connection to campus-based service-learning programs. Reflection as a pedagogical tool has its roots in John Dewey’s work on experiential education, also a source that action research draws from. Dewey believed that reflection was the key to deriving learning from experience (Eyler, Giles and Schmiede, 1996). In the 1980’s, David Kolb adapted Dewey’s ideas in developing an influential cyclical model of reflection. In this
model, action was followed by reflection, though which a person should be able to deepen their understanding of the action and then act again, revising their action based on their renewed understanding (Eyler et al). This cyclical model is somewhat consistent with SAF’s past uses of guided report prompts. Within service-learning generally, one typical journal practice since the mid 1990’s has been the “critical incident journal,” in which students describe, analyze, and plan in response to an event that made an impact on them during their service (Cooper, 1998, pp. 48-49). In 1997, the following prompt seemed designed accordingly: “Identify and describe in detail an incident which occurred early in your internship. Then describe your thoughts and feelings about the incident, your perceptions of others’ thoughts, and how this event affected your co-workers’ and/or your work.” Such prompts suggest a belief that through analysis, one can derive knowledge from experience.

In general, prompts with the purpose of reflection have had as their audience the SAF staff member coordinating the internship. Since 1996, there has been one consistent exception in the form of a prompt that asks interns to write a letter to a mentor or professor at their home university describing their summer experience. Students from farmworking backgrounds often write their letters to their mentors through the College Assistance Migrant Program, a federal program that subsidizes the college education of students from migrant families. SAF consistently recruits from campuses with this program, and often students’ mentors through this program are also SAF contacts. Most years and in most cases, SAF has mailed the letters that students have written, with student permission. Both SAF staff and most college mentors are people knowledgeable about farmworkers and activist in their orientation to farmworker issues, so they can be generally characterized as “Safistas,” staff and interns’ term for those directly involved with SAF, or at least SAF allies.
Advocacy prompts between 1999 and 2002 such as the prompt to write a newspaper article ask students to write for audiences perhaps unfamiliar with farmworker issues or unconvinced of the need for farmworker activism. These kinds of prompts deviate from traditional reflection practices. Rather than attending to a cycle of thought and action within their own lives, these prompts ask students to spark action in the lives of others. We could even say that in these prompts writing becomes a form of action, rather than of reflection. A few of SAF’s assignments, such as the newspaper articles and a prompt asking students to produce a bumper sticker, T-shirt design, or flyer, fall under Deans’ “writing for” category. This type of assignment reflects a broader movement within college writing toward asking students to produce pieces of writing for audiences other than their professors (Isaacs & Jackson, 2001). Such work moves away from the traditional reflection model in service-learning and asks students to act in public ways through their writing, to write for others on behalf of others, to assert beliefs and arguments where they might have used writing to come to those beliefs through reflection.

In the past couple of years, fewer prompts have explicitly asked students to “write for” SAF in the above mentioned ways. At the same time, students know that all of the writing they produce in guided reports may be excerpted for publication by SAF. They sign a consent form at the beginning of the summer that grants SAF the right to use their writing in its publicity materials. And indeed the agency does use students’ writing in newsletters, on their website, in fundraising efforts, etc. At the 2006 orientation, staff explained to interns that they were their eyes and ears in the field, and that they would see things that staff weren’t able to see. SAF’s desire for students to use their guided reports to document conditions in the field is reflected in a prompt that students responded to three times over the
course of the summer in 2005 and 2006: “Tell a story from the field that you experienced with a farmworker. Reflect on conditions in the field that you have witnessed. Describe a situation that particularly affected you.” This prompt gives interns a chance to document their most memorable experiences in the fields and gives staff updates about farmworking conditions. It can be said that all of the guided reports have a “writing for” component and that students, in less they forget about the publicity release form, know that they are also potentially writing for other audiences than staff. Given this, interns may write directly to SAF staff but indirectly to the other audiences they imagine will read their work. In this, they may not differ from most writers, who composition theorists Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford (2003) argue typically write for multiple imagined readers even when they only share their work with one person. In SAF interns’ case, they write to Safistas and they may imagine other communities. Because SAF puts their work to advocacy purposes, these communities may include farmworkers and activists who are allies or would-be allies as well as generalized others who are unaware of farmworker issues and may be taught and persuaded to act.

Guided reports have a further function within the SAF internship. They connect interns to staff when they are physically separate; they allow SAF to “check in” with interns about how they are doing. Here, the practice of reflection is revealed to be more than solitary within SAF’s curriculum; interns and staff learn to reflect by checking in with each other. Writing’s employment in the service of reflection does have its roots in service-learning and also in logistical elements of the internship. The twenty-five or thirty interns are typically placed in about fifteen different sites throughout North and South Carolina. SAF uses the guided reports in part as a way to keep tabs on how interns are doing. They touch base in
other ways over the summer (phone calls, site visit), but reports are a fairly quick and easy method of weekly contact, especially with email and blackboard. In this way, reports’ reflective purpose has a tinge of accountability, especially since turning them in is one requirement for receiving summer stipends. This accountability is not simply about making sure they’re doing their work – placement sites have their own ways of monitoring completion of work – but also seems to be about making sure interns are representing SAF well and that they’re managing emotionally. As far as representing SAF, placement sites can be quite different from SAF, philosophically and logistically; Tony spoke of how these differences can shock students, particularly after they have spent the week of orientation bonding with fairly like-minded young people. Placement sites tend to be more ideologically conservative and to have a more disturbing kind of diversity – whereas interns likely find SAF to be diverse and non-hierarchical, at their sites, they may find diversity in the form of hierarchical, segregated groups, for example when mostly white teachers teach all Latino kids. Also, Tony mentioned that many supervisors at placement sites do not have the goal of leadership development that SAF has for students, so students may not be getting the mentorship and guidance that SAF would like to give them. Guided reports become a way for SAF to continue to deliver its learning goals to interns.

When she talked about reading the reports as internship coordinator, Lupe shed further light on the “checking in” function of guided reports. It’s not only interns’ Safista identity that needs shoring up, but also at times their emotional state. Lupe first described how she reads the guided reports on a weekly basis, often enjoying them, laughing or feeling angry or sad along with the interns. Occasionally, she will email back, but when the entries are particularly emotional or reveal worrisome thoughts or feelings, she will call.
[Reading the guided reports] also lets me know how the students are doing mentally, emotionally; sometimes they write very personal stuff. I can tell through their writings if they’re sad, if they’re upset, if they’re experiencing something that’s really affecting them. I feel like I want to acknowledge that. That’s when I would go home while I’m cooking and call them and say, how are you, I read this in your guided report. I feel the same way, I agree, I don’t know if you want to talk about it or whatever. Overall it’s an insight into how they are doing. Some more than others are personal.

I’m obviously looking for problems. Are they having problems with farmworkers they’ve had or with a supervisor, or are they writing about something, they shouldn’t be doing that. They’re not making a good judgment call, like they’re falling in love with a farmworker or they’re going out and doing outreach by themselves. Something like that…. I’ll be like so, what is going on with that? What’s up with that? A lot of it is judgment. A lot of it is yes, you know, they’re writing very emotionally, but it’s good emotion. A lot of emotions that students will go through because it is a very intense program. Some of them, they’re good emotions. Some of them, it seems like they need a little more going through.

Lupe revealed the side of prompts that has to do with keeping up with interns; in this way they serve a concrete communicative purpose and reveal written reflection within SAF’s curriculum to be a facilitated activity, one that helps staff monitor and, when necessary, intervene in students’ experiences. Lupe’s language of care – “I feel like I want to acknowledge that”; “How are you, I read this in your guided report” – reveals her interest in mentoring and supporting interns when they are at their placement sites. She also reveals her greater knowledge and status about acting with farmworkers when she says, “they shouldn’t be doing that,” expressing not simple compassion, but also an awareness of the mistakes interns will make and her responsibility to get involved. Whereas the literacy practices of advocacy and documentary work give guided reports a public aspect, the practice of reflection, and within that the function of checking in, give them what I would call a semi-public aspect. If interns put aside their awareness that their work might be excerpted for wider audiences, they likely nonetheless remain aware of their primary reader, a young person, recent college graduate, likely recent intern, likely fairly similarly-minded with
regard to farmworker issues but also more knowledgeable especially when the coordinator is from a farmworking background as Lupe is, with a degree of greater power given their position, and with a degree of empathy and desire to guide interns through difficult times. SAF’s reflective practice as expressed through the guided reports appears to be informed by supervisory needs as well as by an ethic of mentorship.

The Practice of Reflection

Guided reports are not synonymous with reflection in SAF’s curriculum. While staff want guided reports primarily to cultivate reflection, the assignments themselves pull upon SAF’s other literacy practices of documentary work and advocacy in ways I have described above. Just as guided reports expand beyond reflection, so does reflection expand beyond the guided reports. SAF uses a variety of modes of reflection in its gatherings with interns over the summer. One of the first things I noticed when I began collaborating with SAF staff was their practice of scheduling “check ins” to talk over my projects. The same happens with students. At orientation, at mid-retreat and at final retreat, staff schedule frequent reflection activities with students. In SAF’s curriculum, from staff’s perspectives, reflection seems to be a multi-faceted practice that can involve team-building, checking in, self-care, contemplation, and having fun. In this way, SAF’s practice of reflection is wider-ranging than the practice of critical reflection that I have mentioned previously. Sometimes SAF does use reflection to guide interns to deepen their understanding of situations and, especially when consciously incorporating their anti-oppression framework, to consider their own standpoint relative to the work. But other times, they use reflection to help interns step away from the work and find new energy for the work.
SAF, interns are first exposed to reflection through team-building reflection activities at the orientation. They learn to reflect with each other. As with the snaps activity described in the introduction, many activities give interns a chance to check in with themselves about how they are feeling and what they have brought to the experience and also a chance to share those ideas with other interns. In this way, SAF teaches students that their colleagues can help them reflect and make sense of their experiences, their goals, and their accomplishments. Laxmi described the purpose of another typical group reflection activity from orientation:

We do a lifesavers one where you pick two different colored lifesavers and for each one, you answer a question.... What’s one thing you want to accomplish? What’s a fear that you have? What do you want to learn this summer? It’s a way I guess for the group to know that there’s other people that have fears about the same things. A lot of times the non-native Spanish speakers will be like, I’m not sure if my Spanish is okay, and it’s good that they hear that there are other people in that same situation, that not everyone is fluent. Some people have fears about doing outreach, and it’s their first job. Some people are just looking forward to giving back to their community. Some people are looking forward to improving their Spanish. Some people are just looking forward to learning about the issues. It’s good for people to think ahead so they have some goals and are conscious about what they want to accomplish and how they are feeling before they go ahead with the job. It’s also sort of to help people feel connected with each other even if they may feel differently, I think it helps too because it helps you to get to know people together.

Laxmi’s choice of the subject “some people” to describe various feelings and behaviors indicates that through reflection people typically find a few others who share their hopes and fears, and that variation also exists within the group. Reflection activities are a chance for interns to recognize and honor both their similarities and differences. SAF uses their knowledge of the near inevitability of commonalities to structure activities so that people will not feel alone as they embark on a challenging summer. Also, Laxmi’s intentional attention to differences – some want to give back to their community; some want to improve their Spanish – seems consistent with SAF’s anti-oppression framework, through which at other
points in orientation staff teach interns to explore their positions vis-à-vis privilege and oppression and to think about the variety of roles they might play in the farmworker movement given their positions. At the same time, Laxmi’s repetition of “some people” expresses staff’s valuing of all positions as being worthy of attention. In this way, reflection feels like a safe space where people are encouraged to express their point of view.

Whereas reflection is practiced through many modes at group gatherings, it is relegated to writing over the nine weeks when the interns are separated at their placement site. Also, rather than continuing to be a group activity, since the guided reports have thus far only been submitted to the internship coordinator, it becomes an individual activity. In other words, SAF has to alter its preferred mode of reflection – collective and multi-modal – for the more practical mode of reflection in solitary writing. Over the years, this has created a situation when guided reports don’t seem to quite satisfy staff or interns as a mode of reflection. During interviews and on other occasions, SAF staff shared with me that they saw the primary purpose of the guided reports as being reflective and that they saw the guided reports as not being entirely successful as reflection. Melinda used the words “contemplation” and “self-care” to describe SAF’s practice of reflection. She also spoke of how she sees this practice as key for students to be able to sustain activist commitments.

While staff feel this practice works successfully at group gatherings, they recognize that it is not as successful a practice through the guided reports:

Some interns feel like the writings are a chore. And you know, I think our intent, and we’ve talked about this, is trying to do a better job of really explaining to them.... Sometimes, and I understand why this happens, once they get into the field, once they get to their placement, I don’t know if it’s just that they’re so overwhelmed, or there’s so much to do, or that’s just what’s present, that that becomes the ultimate, that becomes what’s most important, and it seems like the other pieces become less important. During the orientation, they’re all about the training and the discussions, you know, writing and all that is so valid. And as they get into their work, it seems
like it takes a backseat. And we try to pull it back together at the middle and the end. But I think it’s hard. I think this is for a lot of people. I feel like this is something I struggle with myself and it’s why I’m part of this interfaith spiritual group, because activists are activists because we act, we’re good and we like and we get energy from doing that kind of work, but it’s equally important to do the contemplation and have a contemplative life and be reflective. But it’s very hard when you get crazy activists and work a lot to do the other piece.

So, how can we start young people off right so they don’t burn out? Because part of it is that, it’s about taking care of yourself, really being conscious. It’s about being conscious about what you’re doing, or being conscientious about what you’re doing. How do we make sure that they get that from the summer. That it’s not just about the work, it’s about how you do the work. And you can’t know how you do the work unless you take time for reflection and self-care. I’ve just seen too many people that we work with burn out. I think if we’re really trying to build the next generation of farmworker leaders, we want them to stay. We want them to be able to be in it for the long run. And the only way they can do that is if they leave the summer valuing both of the pieces of our work.

For Melinda, “both of the pieces” are the work and the reflection on the work. Reflection does not necessarily involve writing; people can “do contemplation and have a contemplative life” in other ways. At orientation, staff even model some of these ways, for example by building in reflective art projects and activities with physical movement as well as by planning and encouraging spontaneous fun events in the evenings, like dancing. Laxmi spoke of the fun aspect of formal reflection activities, and when I have participated in orientation, I have heard staff tell students to be sure they remember to have fun in informal ways. Melinda’s comment that “writing and all that” feels valid at orientation and less so later on is telling about the vulnerable position of reflection in relation to work and action. People tend to jettison reflection. And in her experience Melinda has seen that this tendency creates burn-out. Given staff’s position that reflection can be fun, the possibility of burn-out without reflection makes sense.

Tony shared with me that some students don’t associate the practice of reflection with the event of writing guided reports. He predicted that during my study, I would come across
reports that didn’t help me understand interns’ experiences. He mentioned that some interns
didn’t “get” the assignment in the sense that they didn’t use the form to reflect. He said the
following with regard to my process of reading the reports:

In trying to understand what they’re telling, you have to make some assumptions that
they even knew what they were doing or accomplished that or were interested in
doing that. I just feel like there’s a lot of stuff in the reports that the intern didn’t get
it, didn’t entirely see what we were trying to do.... I don’t just mean those who
interpreted it differently because there were many interns who said, oh, this is what
I’m going to do with my guided reports; many just didn’t do it. Or didn’t do much.
Kind of did the bare minimum. And it kind of looked like a guided report but they
weren’t really reflecting. I wonder as you look through them all how much you’re
culling out or how much you’re finding not useful because the interns didn’t even get
to the point where you could say, oh, okay this is a guided report and they’re talking
about their experiences.

Tony’s insight helped me to see that guided reports and reflection are two different things,
and that some of the guided reports are not reflective. Kim Abels, the director of UNC’s
Writing Center, helped me see why this might be the case. Reports ask students to do other
things than reflect; students may not be entirely clear on reflection as the purpose or on the
meaning of reflection. Instead, they may concentrate on reporting to SAF that they are
fulfilling SAF’s expectations and/or writing for an imagined audience with whom SAF might
share their reports. Additionally, interns may have other conflicting ideas about writing from
their previous experiences with writing that are interfering with their ability to do the
assignments. If they keep private journals, such a mode of reflection may come naturally. If
they don’t, they may “default” to some other known literacy practice, such as filling in
timesheets or writing college essays; these forms are less reflective in nature. Another reason
why the reports may not be reflective is they are short weekly assignments that interns don’t
revise; each week, they respond to a new question and, given their limited time and space,
they sometimes respond superficially. Guided reports lack the group input and staff
facilitation that characterize the reflective practices used in group gatherings. In Chapter Four, I will return to the question of where staff might go in the future to more fully integrate writing and reflection.

For now, I want to turn to the reports that are somewhat reflective, in which students did “get it.” As I read reports, I did not classify them as “bare minimum” and “reflective.” The work itself is fuzzier than these categories, with flashes of insight coming in fairly perfunctory reports, and longer, more in-depth reports sometimes lacking insight into the generative themes of young activists that my research concerns required. At the same time, I did get a sense of what Tony meant, and while I was able to collect a group of common themes from the work, I found clearer examples and more in-depth discussion of those themes in some reports than in others. In the examples that I will share in the remainder of this chapter, students use guided reports for contemplation, self-care and/or critical insight into their experiences. They write about their feelings in relation to the work and about their in-process questions and conclusions. Because the reports are isolated weekly events and typically about one page in length, the reflection upon any particular experience or issue tends to be limited. But they do bring up generative themes that have the potential to spark further critical reflection among future SAF interns.

Method of Analyzing and Presenting Guided Reports

I read and coded all of the guided reports that had been submitted by the 96 interns who consented to be included in my study. For most interns, I was able to read eight or nine weekly reports; some had not submitted the complete set of reports. I read all of the guided reports at least twice, once carefully to discover what was there and the second time more quickly to identify themes. The first time I read the reports, I simply took notes in the
margins without confining myself to my research questions. Following the suggestions of Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) for working with ethnographic field notes, I took descriptive notes on what interns chose to write about. The second time I went through the reports, I used these notes to code entries, developing a list of about 150 descriptive codes (key words or phrases), following Glesne (1999) as often as possible from interns’ own words. I then sought to synthesize the key words, mainly by grouping related ideas together, and arrived at a list of about 35 analytical codes, once again as often as possible in interns’ words. I then attempted to order these codes and write an expository chapter in which I described them and gave examples from interns’ work. However, this task felt at once too overwhelming and too oversimplifying. It seemed as though in developing the codes, I had lost some of the variation and complexity in the work. The entire body of work was almost too diverse to be summed up in the space that I had.

So, instead of trying to represent the whole body of work, I began writing about individual interns’ experiences as narrated through their guided reports. I began with a 1995 intern whose work covered the common theme of making a difference and, less typically, named the racism of the rural south. Both making a difference and racism were generative themes in the archive of student work, but racism was one that few interns tackled directly and therefore represented what Freire (1970/1990) would have called a “universal” theme that people needed further critical consciousness to perceive. As I wrote about this intern’s work, I used her weekly reports to construct a narrative of her experience over the summer, using the two most prominent themes to structure the narrative. I found that this writing choice allowed me to preserve the uniqueness of the individual intern’s experience, to withhold generalizations, and also to preserve a narrative element in my dissertation; I hoped
that a narrative of one intern’s summer, as the themes within, would prove generative for readers and future SAF interns. From this first intern’s story, I moved chronologically forward in time, looking in each year for interns with generative themes and stories. As I selected interns, I sought to round out a picture, choosing different themes and stories from what I had already covered. As with the first intern, I sought experiences that many interns had named and also exemplary insights into common yet rarely named themes. Here, I thought about Guerra’s insight (2004) that critical consciousness often happens in moments, and I tried to capture some of those moments. In my selection, I also sought to preserve diversity of gender, farmworker/non-farmworker background, and type of placement site. As I chose particular interns and narrated their stories, I checked my work against my list of analytical codes, seeking to represent the complete list. Initially, Chapter Two felt complete with seven interns’ work until I realized that the topic of gender was unaddressed. Then, I sought a story that included the most common theme related to gender, the feeling of some women that they were not taken seriously because of their gender. Once I had added this story, the generative themes of the archive of guided reports felt well-represented. I checked back through my lists of codes and felt that nearly all of them were covered, to greater and lesser degrees. Later, I shared the themes of this chapter with former SAF interns and SAF staff in two focus groups, and they confirmed that they or other interns who they knew had these experiences. In Chapter Four, I will further discuss these focus groups. The focus group discussions helped me feel confident that through the interns’ stories, I had shared generative themes.

I cannot claim that any past intern would agree that her or his experience is represented below. First, the diversity of the group forecloses this possibility, and second, in
my analysis and in my write-up, I have tended to give greater attention to the themes that were most relevant to my research concerns. I have focused on interns’ stories of themselves as actors in relation to their historical context and their community placements, where and how they felt they could make a difference, and where and how they haven’t. I have also focused on interns’ attempts to relate to farmworkers, the comparisons and contrasts they have drawn between farmworkers’ lives and their own, the connections and disconnections they have felt as they visited migrant camps and encountered workers in clinics and other public settings. When interns write of their struggles to establish trust with farmworkers and to understand themselves in relation to farmworkers, they suggest that they are indeed attempting to act in solidarity with farmworkers, to think of themselves as acting with rather than acting for. By focusing on interns’ sense of agency in relation to their communities and in relation to farmworkers, I have told a particular story with the stories that follow. By telling each story separately, I hope that I have also preserved the diversity of the SAF archive.

Generative Themes in Interns’ Reflective Writing

“It kind of left me numb, the word Mexicans”

For the first time I went to a camp this week. It was a real strange feeling I got at first. I think it was because it was six women going to a camp that had 50 single men. I was kind of scared to get out of the van when I saw indeed how many there were. Yet their tired eyes and small bodies seemed harmless. I thought of how much they looked like my own uncles and father after a hard day in the fields. About 15 minutes later, I felt much more comfortable, then for the first time in my life I felt useless. A young man who was only about 24 years old kind of lingered near by after I had screened some other young guys. He seemed real anxious to ask me a question. I gave him a smile to encourage him to ask me whatever was bothering him. In a shy voice he asked me ‘Would you happen to know how I can send money to Panama in one day? I got a telegram yesterday saying my father died. I’ve only been here a month and I have no idea of where I’m at. I have nobody here, and I feel like my family needs money for the funeral.’ His deep green eyes pleaded me to help him. There I was soaking all of the information and I didn’t know what to say. I had only
been here for 3 days, clueless as much as he. There I was at a camp to help farmworkers and I couldn’t help the first one who asked me for help. All I could do was direct him to Sara, a girl who works [in social services]. Later I reflected on what had happened. I thought of his family, how he must feel not being with them. Now, I truly knew that I had to stay no matter what. If not to help at least to watch and learn so much from the farmworkers.

This is the first guided report of Lidia Vasquez, a 1995 intern¹. It is similar to her next four in that she describes an outreach visit that troubled her. In three more instances, she also heard about and saw situations that she did not have the power to change: a woman with a nine-month old baby told Lidia she didn’t have room in the camp fridge to store her food; a man told her “I wish I could go back to Mexico and never have to come back here”; a woman who was two months pregnant and cooking for twelve men told Lidia she was spotting. In this last case, Lidia writes,

I told Juan, the doctor, her situation. He asked her if she had seen a doctor yet and she told him ‘no.’ He told her to rest plenty and go to the doctor as soon as possible. When we left, I somehow felt she wouldn’t follow Juan’s instructions, and the possibility of losing her baby. The women farmworkers seem to suffer much more at the camps. They have to feed the men after working in the fields all day, and sometimes also tend their children if they have any. So the last thing on their minds would be their health. Whether that girl at the camp actually rested? I doubt it.

In each of these cases, Lidia witnesses suffering, and in her writing implies that what she has witnessed continues to trouble her: the suffering of women, the difficulty of being separated from families, the little she can do. When she writes of farmworkers, she characterizes them through their speech, what they say to her, how they pull her aside, if they’re shy, the look in their eyes. These experiences enable her to characterize them, mainly through how they convey the difficulties they face to her.

In another outreach scene, Lidia portrays a grower through his words and visage. He is a 50 year old Caucasian man with a beer belly whom she meets on a health screening visit.

¹ When writing about interns, I have used some real names and some pseudonyms, depending on their preference. When they named other people in their written work, I substituted pseudonyms.
He enters the house where she and her co-workers are screening workers and says he wants to be screened, too. Lidia writes,

The first time I had heard his voice, I knew immediately I didn’t like him at all. He kept saying how much he was loved by his workers, how he treated them so good. I think he thought we were from legal services. Then he said, ‘Hell, to them, I’m like Jesus.’ I found this comment the most distasteful from him. I don’t even know how someone can compare themselves with Jesus. After that Carmen accidentally asked him whether he was Caucasian. Big mistake! He said, ‘I’m a nigger.’ The farmworkers just looked at him and laughed along with their grower, not knowing at all what this ignorant man was saying. I wished at that moment I could be like them, not knowing what he was saying, not hearing his offensive remarks and rudeness. I quietly asked one of the workers if his boss was as great as he claimed. He said ‘Yes he gives us work every year.’ Maybe that’s why I quit working in the warehouse, because there I knew what was being said, and I got out. But those farmworkers all they want is work.

Description is interspersed with feeling, a record of the words that were said along with a record of how Lidia reacted internally to the words. Most of her reactions are this, internal, and the guided report becomes a place for her to record them, too. Where before she felt sorrow, here she seems to feel anger at the grower and an unidentifiable feeling toward the workers who continue to work for him. Her own choice to quit working in a presumably similar situation is validated. Whereas in her first guided report she drew closer to the workers over the course of the visit, here she seems to indicate that she grew more distant. Her report paints a more complicated picture of workers’ lives, not as just victims, but as people who make choices. Admittedly their choices are limited, but Lidia’s comments indicate a sense that they are indeed choices, and not ones she necessarily agrees with.

Lidia’s reports show the power of recording people’s words. To describe someone as ignorant is one thing; to record their speech is another. “Hell, to them I’m like Jesus.” This scene is one of the scenes that I remember from many written about in guided reports, and it’s the powerful words that keep it in my mind; I picture this man through his speech. While
it’s no surprise to find an example strengthening an argument, it is important to find a space in a semi-academic text for dialogue, not a direct quote from a book or article, but an average person’s spoken words. The translation of conversation into a piece of shared writing is a potentially powerful tool for critiquing everyday life. It’s a way to offer words up for analysis, to hold people accountable for what they say, to give people like Lidia and her readers a chance to ask where those words come from and how others can respond to them.

At the time, Lidia (and presumably Carmen) doesn’t talk back to the man, but Lidia does report whispering to the workers. And clearly the words stay with her. The scene, like others she documents, documents a snatch of conversation out of a longer scene. Here, she documents the moment of greatest conflict, just as in the scenes with farmworkers, she documented the moment of greatest need.

In another entry, Lidia also highlights an insulting remark that bothered her. In this case, she and a friend were at McDonald’s when they witnessed a one-car accident. Upon seeing that the man in the car was Latino, she offered to interpret between him and the police officer. She noticed that the man’s breath smelled of alcohol. After the paramedics came, the police officers told the man to get into their car. She wrote,

The Latino man kept looking at me kind of like saying ‘don’t leave me, don’t let them take me.’ All I could do was translate what the officer was saying. He was reluctant to leave, so the officer put cuffs on him and took him. I asked the officer if he would need anyone to interpret, and he told me he didn’t. So we left. I kept wondering whether the man was going to understand anything after that. When we got to the car my friend made a remark that left me thinking. She said, ‘It’s guys like him that put a bad reputation on the rest of the Mexicans.’ It kind of left me numb, the word ‘Mexicans.’ I hadn’t thought about the fact that he was ‘Mexican’ or how what he had just done made me look bad. I didn’t even think he was ‘Mexican,’ he looked Latino that was all. I guess what I’m trying to say is I didn’t feel bad until she made that comment.
Lidia goes on to write about how she sees people for who they are as individuals, not according to their race, and she quotes Martin Luther King on his dream that his children will be judged by the content of their character. In this case, Lidia uses the guided report format to reflect upon an incident of conflict in the community of her placement. Unlike when she records doing outreach, she takes a direct and active role in this situation – there is no Sarah or Juan to refer the man to – although again she is unable to see it through to the end. What seems to make this incident memorable is her friend’s comment which like the grower’s comments that he’s like Jesus, and a nigger, troubles her. She uses her guided report to interrogate the power of hastily uttered comments with the unexamined racism that they portray. Her deferral to MLK suggests that words can provide a salve, but she herself doesn’t have the power in the situation to deliver those words, not in the immediate moment. It seems that she is able to use the guided report format to reflect on the incident and put into words why her friend’s comment upset her.

“I felt we truly got to them”

Lidia makes a different use of her other three entries. She describes successes at work. Two of these successes are described from a distance; they are not one-time interactions but programs carried out over a period of time. She describes a SAF theater troupe she is part of, performing “College Me” for high school migrant youth and their families, and she describes a driver’s ed class she co-taught. The driver’s ed class she reports is a response to the pervasive dependence on cars in the United States; in it the women “become self-transporters.” The play performance got a pleased response when they performed it at a school.

I remembered how all the functions at my school were and how my parents never went to any of them. They got home too tired from work and my dad would say,
‘Even if I go, I won’t understand anything, so why go at all?’ So when we presented the play in Spanish, I was very happy. They all seemed to grasp the positive message. I felt we truly got to them when I heard the way they clapped. When I saw this community clapping, I almost began to cry.

In these cases, Lidia reports being part of a successful program. The interactions are different, not outreach where she’s responding to problems on the spot, but programs where she and her co-workers have developed a planned response to a particular issue. In both of these cases, whoever came up with these programs was responding to a previously identified community need, education for young people and need for cars. In these cases, Lidia is able to feel successful and as though she made a difference for the farmworkers they interact with.

In the case of the women in the drivers’ ed class, they are portrayed as being able to do something – self-transporters – and in the College Me case, parents may feel as though Lidia has increased their kids’ changes of going to college. So, she ends the summer, at least the guided reports that describe the summer, on a positive note, feeling that she has made a difference, whereas earlier in the summer she felt that she couldn’t. These guided reports don’t use dialogue in the same way; they are less depictions of farmworkers’ lives than they are accounts of Lidia’s successes as an intern. For the reader, having both sets of accounts leaves impressions of both accomplishment and ongoing need, since we don’t know whether the woman who was spotting ever got medical attention or whether the man from Panama got money to send home.

Lidia’s guided reports are an example of a series of reports that portray a trajectory from insecurity to success, from feeling a little overwhelmed and fearful upon meeting farmworkers to accepting their gratitude for the difference she has made in their lives. Twice she is left with the taste in her mouth of someone’s racist comment, and she wasn’t able to respond in the moment. She has memories of her own past the first time she goes to a
migrant camp, when she remembers quitting a job in which she was treated unjustly, and again when she remembers her parents’ not going to her school. Her previous life intersects with her temporary internship; each teaches her about the other. For instance, hearing that the workers won’t leave their jobs seems to help her validate her decision to have left her warehouse job. She knows the value of performing the play in Spanish because her parents couldn’t understand school programs. She becomes less fearful of the migrant workers because they remind her of the men in her own family. Briefly at points, her guided reports provide a place for her to have a conversation with her past life, and as a reader, I wonder what she’ll take from this to her future. As a reader, also, bits of what she says resonate with me in my life. When the grower says, “I’m a nigger,” I think of racists in my own family who would say racist things and I’d feel uncomfortable but not talk about it, and ultimately write about it. Her guided reports are valuable because they reveal a glimpse of the underbelly of the south, the racist things people say and know they can get away with saying, and the lack of year-round resources that necessitates temporary programs such as the SAF internship and College Me, the lack of resources that must exist for workers to confront Lidia, a college student, new here, with problems that she’s just as in the dark about. Her reports raise questions about the role of students in addressing difficult problems and the burden that may be left on them when these problems remain unresolved. Her entries beg the question why she’s so needed, why so much is thrust upon her. In this way and in their trajectory toward a narrative of making a difference, they are similar to many other entries; in their attention to spoken words, they are unusual.
“It makes me question the roots of my own life”

Sarah Hennessey was a 1996 intern. Her first entry is a typewritten letter to a friend. After describing her position as a health outreach worker and sharing some basic information about SAF and farmworkers, she gives her perceptions of the difficulties of life here for male workers separated from their families. She recalls her time in Mexico, where she got a sense of lives where they came from.

I think many of the conversations we have started in Guadalajara have been finished for me or at least added on to here. I don’t know exactly how to describe it because I haven’t had anybody to talk to who also knows both realities. Well, in one way, the part of Alista that we didn’t see is sitting over here in Johnston County. Here are the 19 to 25 year old husbands and brothers without their wives and sisters and mothers and children. Oh, it makes me sick. The work is hard, in the hot sun, that’s nothing new. Money. There is money. They are not being paid good for here, but because of the basic inequality in this universe and between the two countries it is more than well you know 100 pesos a week. Isolation. It is like a jail, a plantation, nothing I can describe. Twenty to a hundred men living in barracks, barracks, with little painted numbers on it and no transportation in the middle of fields. Fields of tobacco, cucumbers, sweet potatoes, cabbage, corn, cotton, watermelon. Fields. Fields. They try I see to keep their morals, to keep their devotion to family and community even when the are deprived of every possible support that family and community usually bring. There is lots of drinking, drugs, prostitutes, STD’s, and I have seen more active TB than I ever thought possible. YUCK.

Part of my reasoning for wanting to do this is that I could welcome people in my backyard who had welcomed me in their homeland. In a way that is true, and in another, I am still in their homes, standing in their kitchens taking water samples, entering my life into their personal space. And of course I have received invitations to visit their families in several states of Mexico. Here they are the foreigners, and I am still the guest. It is humbling. The more I serve the more and more I feel like a stranger, a rich stranger who is continually being fed by the only cup a poor family has.

In this letter, Sarah describes the isolation that workers seem to experience and she grapples with her own resulting emotions. She feels sick and humbled, and while she wishes that she could welcome workers, she feels that those efforts are inadequate. She visits them where they live, where they make her welcome, and she sees that the community she is part of – her
backyard – has not welcomed them, but exploits them. Further along, she expresses anger with the US’s historical “reliance on some form of a slave system” for agricultural production, and she writes, “It makes me question the roots of my own life. Where is the justice in a society that cannot produce its food without severely oppressing others. How can we once aware, choose to act, live and EAT IN THIS COUNTRY?” Throughout the letter, she blames the oppression of workers on Americans, she identifies as an American, and she suggests the sense of responsibility this identification bequeaths to her. Too, as a Southerner she is particularly responsible, since the south is “her backyard.”

“I want to be the water that flows between the two”

Sarah’s struggle to make sense of how her people treat farmworkers occurs simultaneously with her struggle to define her spiritual beliefs as a Christian. Throughout her entries, these struggles inform one another. In this particular letter, she switches gears from the “angry hopeless stuff” described above to her belief in solutions offered by Jesus, particularly the “finding of community” and “love.” How she interprets Jesus is clarified in a later entry, where she connects his message with the idea of community. She writes about how Jesus walked in the fields, told parables that involved mustard seeds and other “images from farmwork,” and chose to speak “to the people walking beside him in the field, waiting for the same harvest he was so they could eat.” For her, the basic “evil” in farmworkers’ living situations is “deprivation of community,” such as the community she sees Jesus embodying when he talks with the people walking beside him the fields. She writes, “What all the conditions of [farmworkers’] lives add up to is deprivation of community. The supports that are essential, elders and children in the same place, rhythm of the seasons, celebrations, the gathering around births and deaths, the town hall and the church
congregation are absent from the isolated camp.” She writes of the need for “health local communities,” and she describes the absence of this in the rural south where she is living. Instead, what she sees is “three worlds: farmers, seasonal workers, and migrants. Invisible lines divide their homes, their playgrounds, churches, stores, and restaurants.” But she is hopeful: “At the same time these three worlds intersect more than I ever seen. Intermarriages wedge holes in the boundaries and here working at the clinic we come from all those worlds and work together with one purpose.” Overall, Sarah moves toward a vision of “her backyard” in which people are moving toward walking together and building community, and as she does this she moves further away from the global system that she sees oppressing farmworkers. She looks for possibilities in the people around her. Over the course of the summer, she maintains a hopeful attitude and looks among the people she meets for signs that they can understand one another. All of the people she meets, she tries to describe as individuals, looking for their life stories, seeking possibilities of commonality. She prizes connection between people above all else and uses writing to record her vision of an ideal Christian community in which people connect across difference.

In her thoughts about community, Sarah considers her role. She depicts herself as able to cross the “invisible lines” that otherwise divide people, presumably due to her bilingualism, experiences in Mexico, spiritual beliefs, and Southerness. Increasingly as the summer progresses, she embraces the Southern aspect of her identity and contemplates her status as an insider in the rural south. She writes:

I could write about all the ways I feel alien at [the clinic], the shock of the newness, being in an office, having ‘co-workers,’ the whole she-bang. Already I could give a thorough analysis of how we could be more efficient and serve the farmworkers better and who needs to work at personality conflicts. But what surprises me most is all the ways I feel at home. My long hidden southern accent has come out strong. I love talking to people. Everything is straight up – no bullshit. I drive through the
fields every morning and evening, through Spivey’s Corner hollering capital of the world, past $2.99 fish dinner signs and tractors and pick-up trucks (like mine). A guy at the camp last night asked me, ‘Eres de aqui?’ [Are you from here?] And I was almost surprised because it is so accurate. I’m exactly from here – these counties, this land, these people. It’s been years since I could say that. This is the first summer I have spent at home in 7 years. I’ve always been from someplace else. I’ve always been la gringa – la extranjera [the foreigner], the girl from N.C. Now I’m home.

Here, Sarah writes as a Southerner, an insider, but from the perspective of having been away, of having been an outsider. Her ability to adopt a Southern accent and talk with Southerners in an easy way sets her apart from other interns who are not from here. When she writes, “Everything is straight up – no bullshit,” she interprets Southern customs from a particular standpoint, a standpoint of one who can fit in here. She has the power to come and go between communities, a power she embraces when she writes, “One thing I am adamant about is I don’t want to limit my community to whites – which is easy to do unthinkingly. The lines between the communities exist but I’ve also seen they are fluid. I want to be part of the water that flows between the two.” This is the work of a linguistic and cultural interpreter, and it’s work she wants to do. Like Lidia, she can translate between people of different cultures, but unlike Lidia, she is also an insider in the place of the rural south. This insider status confers on her a degree of power that she implicitly acknowledges in her ambition to be part of the water flowing between communities, part of the place itself, as it were. It’s no stretch to root herself there.

While critical of systems that oppress farmworkers, Sarah is only critical of individuals in one piece of writing. This is when she describes an outreach visit to a migrant camp with a team from the health clinic. She is disappointed at the way her co-workers behave toward farmworkers, how they seem to lecture them when they talk (the farmworkers
lower their eyes) and how they stand off separately talking among themselves when the screening is over.

We finished screening and talked a little bit. The darkness had swallowed the camp. The rain returned and we stood in single file under the edge of the building. The workers walked around us into the rain to pass their eyes down. I talked to the ones I had screened. It seems whenever we are done screening and we are waiting for the provider to finish, outreach stands in a little clump talking to itself and often laughing loudly. I never know quite what to do. I stand on the outside. I watch the men watching us and going back to their rooms. Then in a flash we jump back in the vans driving away, gone, not waving.

Here, Sarah uses her ability to move in and out of communities to step outside both groups and observe them. She uses her guided report to depict these groups from the outside, to show readers what happens when people don’t connect. As a writer, Sarah occasionally steps out of a scene that she is describing to depict the people in the scene as if from an observer’s point of view. She does this when she describes the farmworkers standing to one side and the clinic workers standing to the other. Though she has written that she wants to be the water flowing between two separate groups, here she takes a moment to simply observe and record their separateness, indicating that separation may be a practical flip side of idyllic connection. When she describes an actual scene such as this, Sarah suggests to her readers that her idea of a fluid community is utopian and that the south is still a place of division.

Sarah largely uses her entries to develop a core set of beliefs about community and her role within community; these beliefs draw from her ongoing conversation with Christianity and the valuing of community she finds there. For her, relationships must cross or dissolve barriers for people to achieve a Christian ideal of community. Her guided reports represent a working out of something, of her ideal of community, as though she’s trying to actualize her belief, walk with people as her beliefs teach her too. While documenting conditions that “make her sick,” she expresses confidence in an idyllic future. Along the
way, she uses her ability to move in and out of communities in her actual writing, depicting people from the point of view of a third person observer, giving readers a sense of their virtues, occasionally, their faults, and through her spiritually-inflected voice, their potential.

“I became more frightened when I thought about where he might have gotten the dead fishes”

Juan Carlos Vieyra was a 1999 intern. He begins the summer wanting to compare farmworking conditions in North Carolina to conditions in his native state of California. He is placed within a farmworker organizing group, specifically helping with a university-sponsored study of the effects of pesticides on farmworkers. He and his co-workers conduct interviews and pesticide trainings on labor camps. Early in the summer, he writes to a mentor at his university:

I think that the status of farmworkers here in North Carolina is a lot worse. It seems to me that in California people are more aware of the way farmworkers live and how much they suffer, probably because of the long history that California has of having farmworkers. However, here in North Carolina there are only a few people who really know about the farmworkers. It seems like the whole farmworker issue revolves around the farmer, farmworkers, and the people and agencies who care about the workers. I see that the community does not have much knowledge about them and there isn’t much involvement to help the farmworkers. I may be wrong. This is my perception at this point.

Juan Carlos’s main first impression is that North Carolinians are generally less aware of farmworkers than Californians are, leading to a lower public status for farmworkers.

One of the ways that Juan Carlos learns more about conditions in North Carolina is through a documentary project. The year he completed the internship, interns interviewed and photographed workers about folklife traditions. He chose to complete two oral histories with male farmworkers here with their families. In his field notes, he describes in more detail the difficult conditions that he alludes to in his guided reports. In the following entry, he describes his first visit to the camp where one of the men he’ll interview lives with his
family. The “menial” conditions in which farmworkers live and work, and his thoughts and feelings in response to those conditions, come alive. He writes,

When I went there the first time I got out of the car and I began to look around. The house was hidden far behind some tobacco fields. The house was in very bad living conditions. Most of the windows in the house were broken and covered with plywood. The house itself was damaged and old, and seemed very small.

After, I saw his wife behind the house with three of her children. At this point what I saw was somewhat unbelievable because I had seen it very few times. I saw Norberto’s wife on her knees washing her clothes on top of a small wooden table. She was there scrubbing and scrubbing the clothes. There was a hose that extended from the inside of the house, which provided her with the water to wash. She also had a couple of buckets, some had clothes and others detergent. Next to her were three children, all younger than three years.

When she saw me and my friend she got up and came towards us. As she approached us I could see exhaustion in her face. She was still young, but there were signs in her face which said that she was aging, possibly because of the work. However, she did seem very happy walking with her children at hand. My friend and her actually knew each other because at one time they had worked together. So, when she came go greet us they began talking to each other.

I introduced myself to her, but at that point I didn’t mention anything about my work doing oral history or about asking her for an interview. I didn’t think it was the appropriate time. As they both talked with each other I took a little walk around the house. I went to the place where she had been washing and saw that she was washing right next to a reservoir or murky water that the farmer used to drain the fields. The water looked very dirty and there was a lot of mud around there. Also behind the house there were some woods. Next to the house there was a small wooden garage and they had some things stored there. The ground of the garage was completely stained with motor oil, I guess from when they worked on the cars.

After I looked around I went back to where my friend was talking to Norberto’s wife. I began to talk to her children. All three of them were beautiful kids. It made me very sad to see them dressed in rags and dirty. One of her children, a boy, was hugging a small plastic cup. I was curious to see what was inside and I looked. What I saw were about four dead fishes. I was shocked. I asked his mom why he had the dead fishes and she answered that he was playing with them.
I became even more frightened when I thought about where he might have gotten the dead fishes. My first thought was that probably from the murky water behind the house. I thought about how many farmers drain their fields and a lot of the times the water contains pesticides. After that we said good bye and left. For the next couple of days I could hardly stop thinking about that poor family living in such conditions. I would never have thought that I would see that in North Carolina after all I had heard about the state.

Whereas in his guided reports, Juan Carlos wrote about knowledge in the abstract, here he shares the knowledge that he has gained through experience concretely. Juan Carlos uses the field notes to record details of place, fleshed out with the observational skills and knowledge of pesticides he’s presumably learned through his placement. What could be a project focused on biography and culture takes on an environmental dimension. He describes how Norberto and his family live, how his wife works, and speculates about poisoning of the water by pesticides that have drained from the nearby tobacco field. Many other observers would have recorded this scene without the dimension of pesticide poisoning.

The image of the dead fishes in the plastic cup is one of the images that I’ve kept with me from all of the reports that I have read. I see the scene, with its tension and unwanted revelation. Juan Carlos has been working with a pesticide education project, so he is all too familiar with the possibilities of poisoning. The young boy holds the cup in his hand as though it’s a toy, when the possibility of poison inside of it dawns on Juan Carlos. Presumably, he doesn’t say anything about this concern to the family, but he uses writing to record his concern, and he dwells on it for days. By using the field notes to record these details, Juan Carlos turns the form into a place of witnessing and a place to deliberate the ethical burden of what he has seen. Elsewhere in his writing, Juan Carlos has raised the question of public awareness; here he reveals a scene of injustice which is concealed from public view by the isolated circumstances in which this family lives. The effects of pesticide
exposure as well as worker exploitation are experienced privately. Juan Carlos uses the form of oral history field notes to begin the work of documenting these effects.

“He felt even more attached to me because we had a lot in common”

Juan Carlos has two more sets of field notes, one from a visit to set up the interview with Norberto, and one describing the interview itself. Norberto has chosen the time of the interview, and when Juan Carlos arrives, he is outside relaxing. They conduct the interview outside. Juan Carlos writes,

Once we began the interview he had no problem responding to my questions. He felt very comfortable talking. It was kind of difficult to believe that just in two days I had been a complete stranger to him, and now here he was sitting in front of me talking as if I was one of his real good friends. He had no shame in talking about his past life and about the struggles he had to endure. There were times when I would notice a difference in his tone of voice. Sometimes it would be full of emotion, especially when he remembered the difficult times he had when he was working in the area near the border. When he talked about his children his voice showed concern and was full of hope. It was clear to see that to him the most important thing in his life was his children.

After the interview, we sat for some little time and I began to share some of my life experiences as a migrant coming from Mexico.... I also talked to him about the difficulties that me and my family had being farmworkers. I think that after Norberto heard me talking about my life he felt even more attached to me because we shared a lot in common.

Here, Juan Carlos uses the field note format to document evolving “confianza,” or trust, between himself and the documentary participant. A separate document includes a tape index of the interview, and tapes give us the whole thing. The field notes are a place to record his overall impression of the setting as a relaxing environment, a place and time which Juan Carlos invited Norberto to choose. Juan Carlos notes the emotion in Norberto’s voice, and after the interview he notes a stronger bond with Juan Carlos because of the similarity of their background. The field notes leave an impression of a relationship rather than a study because Juan Carlos chooses to focus on his impressions of Norberto’s feelings rather than
the knowledge he necessarily gained. This portrayal complicates the idea of knowledge that has elsewhere been the main theme of Juan Carlos’ work; knowledge doesn’t just include the details of migrant camp life but also the toll it takes on workers, their hopes, their sueños. Overall, in his writing Juan Carlos does not write about particular white people who impose the difficult conditions, but here he does venture to write about particular farmworkers who live within them. These notes lend even more credibility to the claims that Juan Carlos makes elsewhere in his writing, because they are writings of witness with the sensory details of having witnessed; the details verify that he was indeed there, that he indeed saw Norberto’s wife, washing clothes by hand (with contaminated water? we began to wonder) and saw Norberto’s son with a cup of dead fish.

“Here I see farmworkers with a lot of fear in their eyes”

At the end of the summer, Juan Carlos confirms his initial impression of North Carolina. He mentions the prior knowledge he possessed from his experiences growing up with a family and friends who were farmworkers. He knew about the farmworking lifestyle – “the long hours of work, the summer heat, the poor working and living conditions” – yet he was surprised by what he found in North Carolina. “I heard more stories of racial discrimination against Mexican farmworkers here than back home. I heard more stories of workers becoming ill because of pesticides. I also heard more stories of farmers discriminating and treating their workers badly.” For Juan Carlos, the guided reports are a place to record his accumulating knowledge. He began learning about farmworkers in 1989, when he immigrated to this country with his family; in North Carolina, he learns that conditions are more difficult than he’d experienced. His primary knowledge is experiential,
and he supplements it with observations in the fields, including his observations as he conducts his documentary project.

Knowledge proffers an ethical obligation to act. In this final entry, Juan Carlos writes of the motivation that the summer leaves him with:

I have always lived among farmworkers, but I had never been interested in helping them and fighting for them so they can have better working conditions and to bring awareness to their life style. Back home workers work in the fields and they know it is hard work, but a lot of times they are happy with their work. Here I see farmworkers with a lot of fear in their eyes. After what I have lived through this summer I have committed myself to continue working with the farmworking community to bring more support and respect for them and to make changes so they can have more prosperous lives. There is nothing wrong with farmwork. It is decent, honest, and a source of income. The only thing that makes it a menial job are the conditions.

Here, the fear in farmworkers’ eyes seems to be a concrete example that motivates action.

“What I have lived through this summer” is Juan Carlos’s broader motivation. The guided reports and documentary project do not encompass all of that experience, but they do suggest parts of it. Juan Carlos gives a view of North Carolina from an outsider’s perspectives, with discrimination and contamination that Southerners have seemingly kept hidden and that he, perhaps because he belongs to the farmworker community, feels an obligation to change.

“I would like to spend this summer learning why students drop out”

Iris Booth was also a 1999 intern, a North Carolinian not from a farmworking background who writes often in the early part of the summer about the questions that the internship raises for her. Assigned to a migrant education program, she initially grapples with questions of how schools can best respond to the needs of migrant students. In her first entry, she writes of the difficulty that schools face in accommodating growing numbers of non-English speaking students:
It’s understandable how frustrated those working in the school system are. An incredible weight is placed on the schools who are forced to find new ways to accommodate different kinds of students. My philosophy, however, is if the center isn’t holding, move the center. These students shouldn’t be viewed as a burden, it is just a manifestation of the changing face of our society.

Here, Iris seems to write in reaction to school employees’ frustration with the needs of immigrant students. She acknowledges reasons for their frustration and replies through the form of the report that they should shift their perspective on the issue and cease viewing immigrants by their needs. Later in this same report, she writes about her frustration with the program she’s working in. It is meant to prevent drop-outs among migrant youth, but she believes that it has been designed without a real understanding of why students drop out. Explicitly drawing upon her college coursework, she writes, “I think trying to create a program from scratch without understanding the factors that create a social phenomena is like putting a band-aid on a gunshot wound.” Her response is to want to talk with youth and their families, in a sense to conduct an informal research study herself. “I would like to spend this summer learning why students drop out,” she writes. Three entries later, in a letter to a mentor at her college, she ventures an answer. With elementary school students, she notes the “sink or swim situation” created by English immersion programs, and she notes a general lack of resources and teachers. With middle school kids, she mentions racism, the language barrier, and the difficulty of that age. Rather than figuring out how to design curriculum, her solution has been to value their culture and their voice.

I don’t know how to address... drop-out prevention, so my time has just been about creating a safe space where they are allowed to speak their mind. Our discussions are in Spanish so they feel more comfortable. School for these kids is a hassle, a place of embarrassment and difficulty, denial of their culture. The time I give them is to affirm them.
Like some other interns, Iris uses her guided reports in part to ask questions. Sometimes she attempts to answer the questions (“if the center isn’t holding, move the center”), and other times she acknowledges that the questions are too large or complex to answer. This happens to a degree in her letter, when she recognizes that while she can provide a “safe space” for students, she can’t fix the drop-out prevention program. She also grapples with the question of whether to steer all of the middle school kids to college: “Assuming that all kids should go to college smacks of our values, not theirs. At the same time, I don’t want to put limits on what they can do. That is the balance.” Here she struggles with seemingly irreconcilable ideals, an ideal of honoring diversity and an ideal of providing equal opportunity.

Iris also struggles to find clear answers when writing about U.S. immigration policy (the current policy is biased racially and socio-economically, but the U.S. does need to limit immigration in order to prevent overpopulation) and when writing about hiring practices in agriculture (the hiring of undocumented immigrants keeps down wages and inhibits unionization, but immigrants need jobs here largely because of the economic damages U.S. policies have wrought in Mexico). As she explains in the letter to her mentor, “I have gotten to do a lot of different things this summer that has helped me learn a great deal, but also flooded my mind with questions. At the same time that my horizons are expanding and I see how big everything is, the world also seems to be shrinking. My mind is consumed with farmworker issues.” For Iris, the reports begin as a place to record the questions and ideas that her experiences and previous reading have sparked in her.

“I have never felt so strongly that being a woman has been such a barrier”

In her letter to her mentor, Iris also writes about her experiences teaching ESL classes with other interns at a migrant camp. She expresses a great sense of faith in farmworkers’
goodness as people. She writes, “It amazes me that even in the midst of such cruelty, the farmworkers I have met have received me with such kindness.” This theme of farmworkers’ kindness is common in many interns’ work. However, later in the summer, Iris’s belief in farmworkers’ kindness is challenged, and her views of issues surrounding solidarity with farmworkers become more complex. She describes being at a camp teaching a class when the grower arrives and accuses her and her colleagues of trespassing and, in response to explanation that they are just teaching English, denies the workers’ right to this service. The interns leave, feeling angry, and a little while later the farmworkers show up at their house, having found a ride, and invite them out for ice cream. Here, one of the farmworkers, who Iris knows to be married, asks her to be his girlfriend. She records feeling furious that the farmworker views her primarily as a sexual object; she is even more upset when they return to the camp and she learns that the other men knew of his plan.

I didn’t know how to feel about any of them anymore! I had really started believing we were all just friends, that we had gotten past all of the sexual tension/expectations. Now I had to question whether the guy we’d become so comfortable really did think of us as anything other than possible conquests, really – it had been my favorite part of the summer and I didn’t know how to view it.

A few days later, Iris describes returning to the camp and discussing with the men what had happened; the interns explained “what we as women here find insulting and offensive and how respect is important and comes in these forms.” Of their response, she writes that most of the men were “pretty receptive” and that “saying goodbye to them wasn’t as traumatic as it could have been now that I had all these questions about them swirling around in my head.”

In her last entry, Iris continues to write of her new awareness that her gender influences her relation with farmworkers in a negative way.

I think my role as a farmworker advocate might have to be giving presentations and educating different communities, even though I really like working w/ the
farmworkers themselves. I say this b/c my experience this summer has shown me a lot of obstacles in being an activist. I have never felt so strongly that being a woman has been such a barrier. All the men I work with try to protect me from the reality of what’s going on, sheltering me from their reality. ‘Don’t worry your pretty little head about it’ is the general feeling. It takes so much more time for us to build trust with the men. The first time we went to talk to some guys about having class, Javier told Francisco about an injury he had received while working. It wasn’t until our last night that Javier felt he could tell us about it. Luis came to our class once and the men talked to him so much about what was going on with their work. Even though we know about resources that can help support them, they never seemed to take us that seriously.

Here, Iris writes about a concern that comes up in other women’s written work, a theme of wanting to be taken seriously as outreach workers that typically arises in response to being asked out on dates by farmworkers. Some of these women attribute the men’s actions to the “machisto” aspect of Latino culture, as Iris suggests when she and her colleagues explain “what we as women here find insulting,” whereas others simply comment on gender oppression without commenting on any cultural roots. Iris is unusual in going from this experience to addressing implications for her activist work, that she may limit her interactions with farmworkers in response to sexism. While SAF had not yet introduced the language of solidarity to their trainings, Iris’ latter entries show that she has hit a barrier to establishing solidarity with workers.

Iris’ frustrating experience comes in the last two weeks of the summer and gives her much new information to process in her reports. The experience causes her to shift her practice of asking questions through entries to a practice of expressing strong opinions. Whereas in earlier entries she brought in previous knowledge from courses she had taken in college, in these latter entries, she writes solely of her experiential knowledge, focusing on the troubling dimensions of relationships with farmworkers that have developed with time and greater familiarity. Her reports show a trajectory that begins in textual knowledge and
ends with experiential knowledge, and begins with frustration of how others are treated to a
frustration with how she is treated. Given her practice of questioning, it is probable that she
continued to look for the causes and implications of these frustrations.

“I could see myself in them”

Felipe Olvera was a 2000 intern placed in a Migrant Education Program summer
school. He came from California, where he himself was classified as a migrant student and
attended migrant summer programs. In his guided reports, Felipe describes his identification
with migrant youth, sharing similar background, and also his identification as a teacher.
While he wants to be seen as a teacher, he is not wholly accepted as one, neither by the
students who seem to expect a more authoritarian teaching style, nor by the majority of the
other teachers, who treat him “like an assistant.” At the same time, he depicts a larger
summer school program with organizational problems and a lack of resources. The school
seems unable to serve the students that have been recruited. Overall, Felipe’s reports reveal
the tension between hope and frustration he feels as a migrant education intern.

When Felipe writes about the first week of summer school, he shares his concerns
about his own role in the school and also about the larger problems in the structure of the
program. He writes,

As the kids started coming in [the first day] I waited to say hello. I was observing
how they would react to Ms. Martinez and myself. I could see myself in them
because I attended summer school migrant programs and I know what they were
thinking and feeling. Once I was ready to introduce myself one of the students started
talking to me. After that I built a bond with them that nobody could break only them.

Here, readers can sense the force of his feelings for the youth and also the expectation of
closeness he carries into his relationships with them.
“There are no books to use”

As he continues, his initial enthusiasm gives way to doubts about the program:

The first day we had 10 students, the second day 11 students, the third day 13 students, and the fourth day 16 students and today we added one more. 17 students and counting (I think) I feel that the more kids we get the less they will be able to use the laptops. We only have three laptops and we struggle to get them all on. The director thinks we are going to use the laptops with all the classes. I don’t think we will have time to. There are no books to use for reading, math, science and history. We have to use what we can get our hands on. I think that is terrible. I will not let that stop us from teaching them what they can and will learn. Something I found that was weird is there is only one bilingual teacher besides Ms. Martinez and me. I felt uncomfortable the first couple days because they have a different point of view than I do.

Here, Felipe’s frustration with the program is apparent. More and more kids come, which seems promising, but there don’t appear to be sufficient resources to serve them, including the resource of bilingualism which will enable communication. This frustration is recurring over the summer, as Felipe expresses misgivings both about teachers and about the program’s lack of resources. Of other teachers, he writes, “I think [they] don’t care about the kids because I always over hear them and because the kids tell me.” Regarding resources, he writes to a mentor at his college: “The biggest problem we faced was we did not have any supplies to begin summer school, so we had to spend a lot of money to get what we needed. The thing I do not like is that the regular school people do not let us use their media center, library, copy machine, supplies and get Internet access. I do not know why but I am going to try to fix it for next year.” He does seem to believe that despite the program’s deficiencies, he can make a difference in the youth’s lives.

Felipe can relate with students and also sees himself as a teacher; being poised between the two gives him certain insights as well as causes him certain frustrations. He is able to build a bond with the students almost immediately because he can relate to them.
However, later in the summer he writes of behavior difficulties he encounters. He writes, “I myself get frustrated with the kids but I try and hide it. The closer we get the harder it is to draw the line.” And he writes of one girl who tells him she hates him; “I think she told me that because 50 percent of the time I am strict and the other 50 percent I like to be friendly. I don’t think she is used to my style of teaching.” At the same time, he writes about going out to giving kids haircuts, taking them to an Imax theater, visiting kids at the camps where they live. “Today I went to the White camp to visit my students.... I saw three of my students and talked to their parents. I think they were surprised to see us at the camp.” In going to the camps, he does what other teachers seemingly don’t do.

For his documentary project, Felipe interviews a couple and their 10-year-old son about the family’s educational aspirations for the son. In Mexico, the mother had four years of schooling and the father eight; because their families were poor, they left school to work. They hope that their son will have the chance they didn’t have to finish school. This hope echoes the hopes of other immigrant parents throughout the pages of this archive and feels particularly pressing in Felipe’s writings. Felipe writes of his frustration with the inadequate education kids are receiving in the migrant summer school; this frustration feels particularly keen when read alongside the testimony that their children’s education is precisely what drives many farmworkers to come to the United States and put up with everything they put up with. Throughout his entries, Felipe expresses both frustration and hope, with the hope coming largely from his ability and willingness to do what teachers and administrators can’t or won’t do: speak students’ language, visit their families, get to know them in an informal way, and show them otherwise hidden opportunities such as going to college. For Felipe, the guided reports serve as a way to document the ups and downs of his work placement, and he
focuses on who he is in relation to students and to teachers. His belief that he can both relate to students and also teach them challenges conventional ideas about teacher-student relationships. Further, he grapples with the multiple factors affecting students’ education, in particular expectations and available resources both at school and at home. He suggests both his own power to make a difference and also the necessity of other interventions.

“At this moment I feel there is little I can do for the workers”

Angelita Morado was a 2005 intern. From her first report responding to a chapter in SAF’s text (*The Human Cost of Food*, 2002), she used the form to reflect on similarities between her summer experiences and her childhood. She was placed in a health clinic, and the chapter she chose to respond to discussed migrant health. She wrote,

*The Human Cost of Food* mentions that in some instances children are asked to be interpreters for their own families. When I was about four or five years of age, I was once asked to interpret for my mother who had gone to see the doctor because she was feeling ill. I recall sitting on the floor as the doctor ordered me to ask my mother if she had transportation for the next visit. I merely sat there, frozen in terror because I had no idea what to say. I simply nodded my head in agreement. As it turns out, my mother did not have any means of transportation. You can imagine how horribly guilty I felt when she said, ‘You should have told him we don’t have a car!’

Angelita describes several more similarities between what the book says and her childhood, validating the book as she writes. When she writes a letter to a mentor at her university, she suggests that her personal experience will enable her to do the internship more effectively. She writes,

I feel I can reach [farmworkers] at a much personal level because my family was once migrated to areas such as Florida, Ohio, Michigan, Texas, South Carolina, and even North Carolina. I worked in the fields, lived in campsites not suitable for families to live in, deal with the problems that come with scarcity of money, etc. From personal experience, I am able to understand barriers such as language, access to health care, lack of transportation, and so on.
From the beginning of the summer, Angelita recognizes the relevance of her personal stories to the situation she encounters as a SAF intern; she believes that being from a farmworking family herself will help her make a difference. She’s especially prepared for this work because she lived on a migrant camp in North Carolina.

In her third report, in response to the common 2005 prompt to tell a story from the field, Angelita describes her first outreach visit with a health outreach team. She was a nursing student at this time – another factor that she notes contributes to her ability to make a difference – and eager to put her knowledge into practice. Also, she was eager to sit down with farmworkers and talk with them, the way she remembers doing as a child. Her first outreach visit proves disappointing, both because the conventions of medical outreach don’t allow her to relate to workers personally as she’d hoped to and because health concerns are not fully resolved:

When I thought about going out to the campsites and provide services for the farmworkers, I envisioned camps like the ones I lived in a few years back. Long, dark barracks where the farmworkers slept, large grassy areas where they kick back after work; small community showers, one restroom kept in poor conditions.....I thought I would have a chance to sit with and listen to their lives stories. I imagined I would feel the same way I do when I sit with my own grandparents and ask them to tell me about their experiences. I could not have been more wrong. I am not complaining; however, when doing outreach in the evenings, we merely have time to gather pertinent information, such as name, DOB, age, address, take blood pressures, and check blood sugar levels. The provider then addresses any questions or concerns the workers have.

At this moment I feel there is little I can do for the workers. I often take blood pressure and do finger sticks, but I mostly engage in translating for the provider. Since I am attending nursing school, I feel I am able to better understand the farmworkers sign/symptoms and explain them to both the patient and doctor. One particular situation that strikes me the most is the case of the young man who presented with slight numbness to his left thigh. Liz, the physician assistant for that night, feared it might be a case of MS – a degenerative disorder affecting major muscles and nerves in the body. Liz suggested the man should visit the clinic and get a CAT scan of his brain to rule out MS. This procedure generally runs around $4000 but with the Migrant Form, this man would only pay $20 if appropriate funding is
available. The man, however, was still reluctant to come to the clinic and be further assessed. He was worried about losing a day at work, even more so since he has not worked as many hours as he would have liked. Refusal of medical care is one of the major problems outreach workers face regularly. Such is the case with this particular man.... One can only render services if they are accepted.

Angelita expresses a belief that her knowledge as a nursing student helps her communicate more effectively with workers. At the same time, she reflects that there are limits to what she can do given workers’ rights to make their own decisions, admittedly under restricted conditions; if the man choose not to come, there’s nothing else she can do. In a later entry, she reflects further on this case in response to the question, “Do you consider yourself a farmworker advocate?” She writes, “As an advocate, things may not always go as I hoped. There are times where I may not be able to reach everyone as I wished, much less change their way of thinking from one day to the next. Nevertheless, I must respect their decisions and render my services in an unbiased fashion.” Angelita is one of just a few students to bring up an awareness of “their decisions,” that even given available resources, farmworkers may not choose what interns might have them choose. Her discussion of this issue in the context of advocacy shows her awareness of the complexity of this question. Advocates cannot take for granted the positions of those they seek to advocate for.

“I have relearned to appreciate and value what I have”

In her last three entries, Angelita compares her childhood with this summer. In one case, she finds farmworker housing that does remind her of a place her family lived, but this similarity is neither encouraging nor connected to the warm memories she had evoked earlier. In this entry, she reflects on the question of whether change for the better is possible when it comes to farmworking housing; she answers this question by remembering one of the
worst places her family lived and then describing two camps in North Carolina, one with
similarly awful conditions and one with better ones. She begins with her own experience:

The last time I migrated with my family was the summer of 1999 to a little town
called Hale Center in northern Texas. My family and I lived in a little room (a shack
more so) that had been poorly added to a house. It was an old wooden room with two
small windows that faced the opposite direction from where the wind blew from.
You can imagine how terribly hot it was inside. We had a stove and an ill-working
refrigerator but no other furniture; as a result, we ended up sleeping on the hard
wooden floor after a twelve-hour work day. It made me sadder to see my two-year-
old and six-year-old siblings sleeping on the floor. I recall those first few nights in
my new home; I had difficulty sleeping at night because I was awoken frantically
when I felt a bug, insect, cockroach or whatever, crawling on me. I was afraid I’d be
bitten by a spider or a scorpion, since it was dark and I could not see.

Without furniture, we had to improvise and stored our clothes in boxes we gathered
from local stores or simply in piles on the floor. Since we did not have a table, we all
sat on the floor at dinner time. We had an old broken down shower with no hot
water. To solve the problem of not having hot water, I filled buckets of water and left
them out in the sun all day so that the water would be nice and warm by the time we
came back from work. Being a girl who worked hard at house chores, I was really
bothered by the fact that we did not have running water inside other than the shower.
I ended up making trips outside to wash my hands or face all the time. I had to carry
buckets of water inside each time I had to wash dishes or cook for the family.

These conditions are almost the exact same conditions I experienced when I lived in a
camp here in Newton Grove. With the exception that we had old beaten down
community showers at the other side of the camp. I revisited this camp with the
theatre group about two weeks ago, but I must say that things have not changed
much.

Here, Angelita reflects on the poorest housing she has seen and is saddened to find that an
awful camp in Newton Grove has not changed from when her family lived there. Then, she
describes a farmworker camp she has visited that is much better. She describes an air
conditioned dining room with stoves, sinks and refrigerators (four of each for sixty men) and
bedrooms with cordless phones and television. She concludes,

I would like to see that today’s farmworkers live in better housing than I did, work
under better conditions than I did, and be happier than what I used to be.
I am not ashamed to say I come from a farmworker family and describe the vast hardships my family encountered during that time. My experiences have only made me grow stronger every day. They have made me realize that there is so much work yet to be done in this world. Like the old Spanish proverb says: Puede mas el que quiere, que el que puede [The one who wants can, more than the one who can.]— and I want to, I must, struggle to make this a better world for all of us who to live in.

Over the summer, Angelita writes increasingly about her desire to be involved in improving conditions for farmworkers, and she brings in her childhood memories to support the idea that things can improve.

She also continues to reflect on decisions farmworkers may make that differ from what she would decide for them; in doing this, she begins to further develop how she sees herself. At one point, she reports visiting a camp where she used to live and finding the crewleader’s wife whom she hadn’t seen in twelve years. After chatting together, the woman asked Angelita if she worked with the Farm Labor Organizing Committee – Angelita didn’t – and the woman expressed her opinion that FLOC was “ripping off workers” by taking money out of their checks for dues. FLOC is the union that in 2004 had successfully negotiated a contract between cucumber growers, workers, and the Mt. Olive Pickle Company (the first union contract for farmworkers in the state’s history). Angelita writes,

I have heard both good and bad stories about FLOC at the different camps I have performed at. Let me make it clear that I am not passing judgment on what FLOC does or does not do because I am not familiar with this organization. It makes me glad, though, to know farmworkers have the courage to raise their voice and complain if they have been mistreated. My fellow Safistas are also an integral part of the farmworker movement because they care about these men. Together we will make a difference, one day at a time.

Here, Angelita uses the report to wonder about, not just her people, the farmworkers she’s met, but her SAF cohort; this is the first time she refers to the group explicitly, and it almost seems as though the last bit of this entry is dedicated to them. Though she is a farmworker, and farmworkers make different decisions about FLOC (as they do about health care), she is
a farmworker who has chosen to be a Safista, and this sets her apart. She’ll support labor organizing in that role. Her guided reports therefore reflect one of SAF’s goals, and that is a group identify formation; having learned the SAF line on FLOC, Angelita knows how to react to this woman’s comment.

In her final entry, Angelita reflects on herself. She writes,

I come from a poor family – a family who also lived in camps, poor housing, worked long hours under the hot, scourging sun, rainy weather, and what not. But I started to forget what all this felt like since I started attended UTPA four years ago. Coming back to this same area I lived in twelve years ago and work with people like my family and me, has taught me once again, that I should never forget where I come from. This summer has taught me to be more humble than what I thought I already was. I have relearned to appreciate and value what I have simply because it has cost me hard work; it has not been handed to me on a silver platter. I have learned to value my family more.

Here, Angelita reflects a common theme in the writings of interns from farmworking backgrounds, an increased sense of indebtedness and gratitude to their families for what they have.

She also writes about a physician assistant whom she interprets for on outreach visits. She writes admiringly of him; he suffers back pain but still makes the rounds to see farmworkers. Every time he arrives at a camp, he shakes the men’s hands and greets them in Spanish; “each time he tells the worker something, he makes sure he looks him straight in the eye and tells him – not me or any other interpreter – what he has to say. He is always looking out for their best interest.” She writes of this man’s mentorship of her:

He takes into account that I am a nursing student and tries to accommodate to my learning needs as well. He will often explain other things once he gets in the van and leaves – things that may not be appropriate to say in front of the patient himself. He will often be reading an article in a magazine and passes it down to me to read – topics that range from hypertension to nail fungi to diabetes to what not. He encourages me and says I can do just about anything with my degree; he says, ‘You pretty much have your ticket to do whatever you want.’ I mentioned I recently thought about going to medical school and specialize in psychiatry after getting my
master’s degree in nursing. He explained, ‘Being a smart girl like you, I would have imagined you thought about this a long time ago.’ It really makes a difference when I hear encouraging comments like this.

This entry is a reminder to readers that interns are not only going through a process of helping others, but they are also at a crucial stage of their own lives, deciding what they will do for a career, for instance, perhaps if they plan to have a family, how they see their activism fitting in. Here, Angelita reveals the need to be taught and also encouraged in her abilities. John’s words to her stick with her because they express belief in her abilities, perhaps something she herself is just developing. Throughout her entries, she has dealt with her past as the child of a farmworking family alongside her present working with farmworkers; here she deals with her future. The guided reports depict her journey from the small child sitting at her mother’s feet nodding in terror to a doctor’s questions that she didn’t understand, to a nursing student considering a medical degree in psychiatry. The entries are a place for her to reflect on this journey, which she does by telling stories of her past experiences and of the present summer. She explicitly states early in the summer that she’d hoped to sit at camps and here farmworkers’ “life stories,” and indeed midway through the summer, through the theater troupe she is part of, she has that opportunity. She writes that when she visits camps as part of the troupe, “I am able to hear stories that I have not heard through my usual outreach duties.” Angelita uses the format of guided reports to share and record some of those stories – the farmworkers’ and her own. She is “not ashamed” to do so. “My experiences have only made me grow stronger every day.” In her use of this format, stories possess a strengthening effect; perhaps it is for this reason that she goes to camps in search of them and writes them down in these reports.
Two aspects of Angelita’s entries suggest changes in SAF that have taken place over the years. First, she attends more carefully to her own autobiographical experiences than interns tended to in the earlier years. Whereas Lidia, Sarah, Juan Carlos and Felipe alluded to past experiences that present situations reminded them of, they did not go into the type of detail that Angelita goes into here. They mentioned the ways they identified themselves, as a Southerner, as a Californian, as a farmworker, but they did not necessarily reflect on that identity to the extent that Angelita does when she writes that she is “not ashamed” of where she comes from. With a growing emphasis on an anti-oppression framework, SAF is increasingly interested in helping students name their own positionality vis-à-vis the farmworker movement and the ways they have benefited from and/or been hurt by racism and other forms of societal oppression. In Angelita’s writing, this concern may have contributed to her ability and willingness to tell her own life stories with detail and reflection, therefore giving a more nuanced depiction of farmworker life. Her statement “I am not ashamed to say I come from a farmworking family” suggests that something in people’s reactions, past and present, have made her feel she should be ashamed, and also that part of her identity as a farmworker, and now a nursing student, is to not take on that shame.

In addition to a strong autobiographical focus, Angelita’s guided reports reflect a strengthening of the SAF group identity, marked by her use of the fairly recent term “Safista” to describe herself. In 2005, her identification as a “Safista” suggests SAF’s shift in affiliation from the service-learning organization to the farmworker movement which Melinda spoke about in our interview. Safistas have a group affiliation and an activist orientation, both of which seem to have grown as SAF has reoriented itself with the farm labor movement. When Angelita mentions that she is a Safista in the context of reflecting on
an interaction in the field, she adds to the multiple ways in which interns can bring identity issues to their written work.

“It also has helped me to be more open, outgoing and go out of my comfort zone”

Alicia Marquez and Joslyn Wiley were also 2005 interns, placed together in a health clinic. Their experience was somewhat unusual because they worked with Latino and African-American clientele, and many interns do not encounter African-American workers over the summer. They were also assigned to be documentary partners; in this work, they chose to interview Mrs. Jackson, a 68 year old African American woman who was a farmworker and shared with them her traditions with cooking, gardening and healing with herbs. In their guided reports, both reflect on their changed perceptions through the documentary experience and other outreach experiences with African-American farmworkers.

Alicia comes from a farmworking family of Mexican descent. Early in the summer, she describes her initial perceptions about African-American workers:

I have realized that, I do not want to say it like this, but the Mexican population are more open to this kind of outreach; for instance, when we approach Mexicans they don’t know what to offer (soda, water, or even food), they invite us to come in, and we all talk about everything. But on the other hand, the African population, they don’t want to talk to us, they close the doors, they said to us that when they need the services they’ll look for us, they are just too close-minded. I do not want to generalize because we have gone to places where even though it’s outside the house (standing) they treat us politely, but the thing is that I’m being able to see the difference among these two cultures. When I would visit a Mexican house they told me to please not forget about them and to come back. On the other hand, the majority of African-Americans do not even want to receive us, yet there has been a couple of times where old ladies treat us very nice and are happy that we have visited them, but this kind of situation is very rare. I don’t like to be targeting a culture but that’s what I have seen since we started.

Here, Alicia uses her guided report to interpret cultural differences on the basis of outreach visits. Elsewhere, other interns have had a similar inclination with Latino clients, to describe
culture on the basis of particular observations. In the case of Latino clients, Anglo interns tend to write about the generosity in Latino culture and they compare that generosity favorably to Anglo culture. For Alicia, the difference goes the other way; because Latino clients invite them in and offer them food or drink, the African-Americans who react differently appear “close-minded.” The link from particular experience to generalization about culture is one that Alicia herself recognizes she should probably not make when she writes “I do not want to generalize, but....”

Two weeks later, after further outreach visits, Alicia has a chance to revise her generalization. She writes,

Meciento muy avergonzada, [I feel very ashamed] I’m ashamed of myself because of what I’ve been thinking. You know my situation, I didn’t really want to work with the African American population, not because I have something against them... the thing is that for me it is more easy to work with people that I can relate with and all that you know. But those thoughts are gone (thank God) and you know what made me change well let me tell you... We are visiting this old couple, they were extremely nice with us, the lady was a wonderful person, and she was very kind. But what made me change is that she thanked ME for being here, she said that she thanks God for white people helping her. I told her that I was not a white person and I’m Mexican and very proud for it. But she kept thanking me and she said something about the race differences which made me realize that there is no such thing as differences because we all come from the same origin, same God, plus everybody will end up in the same hole, the thing is that some sooner than others.

Here, Alicia uses a particular experience to revise her earlier generalization about African-American culture, which did not explain this woman’s warmth. As she writes, she develops a different kind of generalization, claiming “There is no such thing as differences.” Here, she focuses on shared humanity and ignores other differences, somewhat as other white interns have done when they have sought to connect with Latino farmworkers. Humanization is a theme common to many interns’ work.
Alicia continues to write about her revised assumption in response to her experience completing a documentary project. However, her later reports imply that what she realizes she shares with Mrs. Jackson, the documentary participant, is not just status as human beings, but shared background as farmworkers. A new guided report question in 2005 asks, “How has the documentary project changed the way you understand farmworkers and the movement? How has it influenced you differently than working in our agency has?” Alicia writes,

All my life I have been surrounded by fields, I was born and grew up in a farm; therefore it is kind of hard for me to explain how was changed by the documentary project the way I see farmworkers. I mean, I am one of them and for me this question is like when you ask a native speaker don’t you know the rules of grammar, you, as a native speaker, know how to talk and you could correct other people who are learning the language. However, if you don’t know the grammar rules and someone asks you why something is pronounced or written the way it is, you might not know how to explain, yet you know it is right. That’s something similar I feel with this question.

Given the previous separation she felt from African-American clients, here Alicia relates strongly to the African-American documentary participant, intuiting that the “rules” at work in both of their lives are the same. She continues in this vein as she describes the time she spends with Mrs. Jackson and then connects her life to Mrs. Jackson’s life. She describes Mrs. Jackson’s garden as a “sacred space” and her small white house as “neat.” She explains that Mrs. Jackson has survived many health problems, and that “her strength and empowerment of all her life has been God.” Alicia then writes,

I love the way she transfers her faith through words, talking with her you could feel that her faith is unbreakable.... The documentary project has not only revealed to me a great human being, but it also has helped me to be more open, outgoing and go out of my comfort zone. Since I was a child, I remember myself being eager to help my people, but through this internship as well through this project I’m being able to know another culture and realize that we are not different from each other and that most of the time we go through the same or similar experiences working hard for justice and respect.
When Alicia writes, “most of the time we go through the same or similar experiences working hard for justice and respect,” the similarity she acknowledges is somewhat more complicated than the similarity of shared humanity. “Working hard for justice and respect” implies some kind of odds worked against. So, Alicia’s report hints at finer gradations of similarity and difference. In the guided report format, she doesn’t explore those gradations, but, like Sarah and some other interns, chooses to focus on the celebratory feeling of connecting across difference. In field notes, Alicia describes a feeling of “awe” at how Mrs. Jackson opens up to her and Joslyn, in particular sharing with them the memory of her husband’s death. She writes, “I couldn’t believe I had found someone with such amazing stories to share and that she was sharing these stories with two people she had met less than an hour ago.” In contrast to her earlier depiction of African-American farmworkers in general as unaccepting, here she characterizes Mrs. Jackson in particular as warm. Throughout her reports, Alicia indicates that she is attempting to integrate new experiences with preconceptions, especially knowledge gained about particular people with generalizations about a group of people.

Alicia’s partner Joslyn also uses guided reports to reflect on what she learns over the summer, including previous book knowledge that experience confirms and also changed perceptions. She begins the summer by stating that she is planning to be a doctor and that she hopes her summer experience will help her learn to interact with patients holistically. From the beginning of the summer, she attends to a variety of new knowledge about Latino immigrants and farmworkers. In her second entry, she writes to her Spanish teacher of what she learned at orientation about Latino youth’s experiences:

They talked, for example, about how important differences in skin color are in their native countries and how, even after coming to the United States, they were
discriminated against by people of their own race. Some of them also spoke of how, after starting school in the US, their guidance counselors tried to keep them off of the college prep track, thinking that because they were recent immigrants to the United States, they would not be able to accomplish the same things that other students can. It was really interesting and also more than a little sad to see that many of the issues we discussed in class really are issues.

Whereas some of the students from farmworking backgrounds verify what they’re learning with their own previous experiences, Joslyn verifies her class knowledge with the new knowledge. Both sets of students reveal that book knowledge is tentative until it’s corroborated by experience. Yes, some farmworker students say, I know what the book says is true because I experienced it. Now, Joslyn writes, I know what I learned in class must be true because now I’m hearing it again. It’s interesting that for the students, experience takes primacy over book knowledge, since colleges do not privilege experience. Of course, it may be the kind of students who apply to SAF are hungry for experience.

Similarly to Alicia, Joslyn tries to make sense of differences between Latino and African-American workers on the basis of her experiences. In particular, she looks for corroboration and contradiction of something she learned at orientation, that conflict exists between the two groups. Joslyn records what she learned and then gives a counter-example from outreach:

Many African-American farmworkers are being replaced by cheaper labor available through Hispanics, and this causes them to look on the Hispanic population with resentment. Mrs. Richmond showed no such attitude, though. Instead, she laughingly spoke of her pitiful attempts to learn Spanish. She talked about how Hope, the Mexican woman with whom she is friends, makes Mexican food and shares it with her. She showed us the peppers she had planted with seeds obtained from Hope, and she shared with us how it amazed her that Hope and her children could bite into hot peppers like they were apples. Alicia laughed and admitted that she and her family occasionally do the same thing.

Of herself and Alicia, Joslyn writes, “It makes me wonder what people think when they see Alicia and I working side by side. Perhaps we, too, are a source of inspiration to others and a
reminder that racial hatred does not have to be the norm.” Here, Joslyn’s experience complicates what she learned at orientation, as the particular woman she meets defies the group expectation that was shared. Joslyn also uses the report to record a self-awareness about her partnership with Alicia, seeing that they themselves have a power to change other people’s perceptions. This belief recalls Sarah’s belief that by making personal choices to interact with people from many backgrounds, she could affect change in her community; modeling connection across difference that could lead to greater connection across difference. In expressing a similar confidence, Joslyn implies an identity-based power that can endow personal choices with wider influence.

Joslyn reports that this summer is a challenge for her because the work is difficult, she never knows how they will be received when they go out on outreach, and she has to speak up for a marginalized community, which she’s never had to do before:

I have to put myself in the forefront in a way that I never have before. This summer, I have to be willing not only to talk to others about the problems that farmworkers face but also talk and work with farmworkers themselves. I have made plenty of presentations in my life before, but I have never before had to struggle for entrance and acceptance into a marginalized and abused community. This is a daily effort for me this summer, and people like Mrs. Gray make it a little easier and give me additional willpower that I need the most.

Here, Joslyn reflects on the difficulty of speaking with and for people who have had much more difficult lives than hers. To persevere, she depends on energy from farmworkers who express their belief in her. Joslyn suggests that advocacy on behalf of people requires their will, too, because that's where the motivation comes from to do the otherwise difficult work.

“I became a little more perceptive during our outreach visits”

For Joslyn, the greatest changed perception happens, not about African-American workers, but about health problems in the fields. Toward the end of the summer, she writes
about an outreach visit in which farmworker shared with them an incident of pesticide exposure in the field.

‘We were spraying earlier today,’ he said when Joy stopped speaking for a moment to search our bags for additional information on pesticides. ‘I started to feel weak and tired. I was sweating a lot and I felt like I was going to fall out. I finally just had to sit down and rest for a while.’ I listened to this with amazement. Though we had been educated on the dangers of pesticides both at our orientation at Warren Wilson and through farmworker health education that Patricia had given us to watch, we had never come across someone who had actually appeared to have suffered from at least a minor case of pesticide poisoning.

After giving more health information, I spoke more with the man who had been sick earlier that afternoon. I asked him if he had been wearing what he was wearing when we saw him when he sprayed in the fields, and he said yes. He was dressed in jeans and a t-shirt. When I asked him about personal protective gear, he said that he had never heard of it. He said he had never even had any training on how to handle pesticides. I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. The dangers of farmwork portrayed at orientation and in the farmworker health videos were coming to life before my eyes. What was most disturbing was the fact that the grower hadn’t informed his workers that what they were spraying was dangerous. He hadn’t informed them of the precautions that they needed to take nor had he made an effort to protect them by providing them with personal protective gear. I had never before witnessed such blatant abuse while doing outreach.

After that experience, I became a little more perceptive during our outreach visits. Now when workers tell us that they have had green tobacco sickness in the past, for example, I no longer think that it was just a case of them not being as careful as they should have been. I instead wonder if they have access to the basic information that could help to prevent many farmwork-related health problems. I wonder if this is information the grower doesn’t know or simply doesn’t bother to share. After talking with a worker who may have suffered from pesticide poisoning, I’ve realized that the information we share is never useless. Ignorance is simply too widespread for that. If even one farmworker who has retired or taken a temporary break from farmwork decides to return to farmwork armed with the information that Alicia and I have shared with him or her, he or she will hopefully be able to avoid the only too real dangers that come with farmwork.

In this entry, Joslyn reveals some of the complexity behind farmworkers’ decision-making. One might assume in this situation that the farmworker had chosen not to wear appropriate clothing to work in the field and thus was responsible for his pesticide exposure. However, by questioning him, Joslyn learns that he did not receive training on pesticides, did not know
what type of clothing was appropriate, and didn’t have access to that clothing. Joslyn uses her guided reports to record her deepening awareness of farmworkers’ situations, here recording their lack of access to information that might keep them healthy. Her starting point was the class she took in college, from there orientation, and now knowledge she is gaining by talking with farmworkers in the fields. In this entry, she documents how her learning has happened. She’s listened and thought about new information and then she’s taken that into her future experiences. Where before she might have assumed green tobacco sickness, now she considers the possibility of pesticide poisoning. Where before she might have assumed knowledge, now she knows part of her role is to educate. For her, the guided reports become a place where she can record her learning process, both what she is learning about farmworkers and also the role she can play on behalf of farmworkers.

Synthesis of Themes

With regard to themes, there is more consistency than change over the period of the study; that is, while interns as a whole have covered many themes, the variation rarely depends on year of placement. The few shifts over time I did note suggest SAF’s evolution toward solidarity. The first five interns I wrote about in this chapter completed the internship between 1995 and 2000, and the last three completed the internship in 2005. My process of choosing interns led (unintentionally) to me leaving out these intervening years, but an interesting outcome was an ability to compare journals in two time periods. In 2005, Alicia and Joslyn reveal that involvement in the documentary projects, an element that was instituted in 1999, has led them to see farmworkers as cultural actors. Also in 2005, Angelita’s use of the term “Safista” to describe herself and her attention to her own autobiography reflects SAF’s concern with centering the farmworker movement and
centering students from farmworker backgrounds in that movement. Further, in the work I have chosen we have seen snatches of Spanish, early on in the work of a native English speaker, and later in the work of native Spanish speakers, reflecting SAF’s recently verbalized approval of bilingual or Spanglish writing. Throughout the period of the study, interns have used the guided reports to consider whether it’s possible for them to improve conditions for individual farmworkers against obstacles in the wider community. Taking Angelita’s question of whether change has occurred and whether more change is possible, I’d also give her answer – sometimes. Small strides have been made toward inclusion of farmworkers and bilingual actors in the public sphere, but these strides have not brought with them noticeably improved working conditions, schooling, or health care – at least not as recorded in these reports. With regard to whether people believe they can affect change in solidarity with farmworker, the reports generally reveal persistence and motivation in finding one’s role to play. Below, I group the major themes from the guided reports.

*Haciendo la diferencia [making a difference] in the segregated south*

The guided reports cumulatively present a portrait of North Carolina where migrants and new immigrants are exploited for their labor and not properly provided for. Education interns document deficiencies in the schools, a lack of organization, resources, and linguistic and cultural sensitivity on the part of staff. In 1999, Juan Carlos depicted the isolation of farmworkers and their lack of representation in public conversations. Further, he suggested what is not immediately obvious even to farmworker advocates, for instance pesticide poisoning which can only be perceived through education about pesticides and keen observation. For Juan Carlos, a central problem for farmworkers was the lack of public status that they had in North Carolina; presumably their public status in California had helped
them achieve better living and working conditions. Six years later, Joslyn found farmworkers who were unable to protect themselves against pesticide exposure. Many interns’ entries give credence to Juan Carlos’ claim that the only people who know about farmworkers are farmworkers, their employers, and the service providers directly working on issues. The issues and programs we see happen on migrant camps or in migrant clinics or migrant summer schools. The issue does seem to be separated from the rest of the geographic community, which has shaped itself without attention to farmworkers. Lidia shows a reason for this segregation by depicting the racism within the larger community, and Sarah depicts the lines that separate people in the south by race and status. While Angelita notes some migrant camps with decent living conditions and Alicia and Joslyn model solidarity across difference for farmworking clients, in general, the interns portray a rural south with entrenched racism and separation, where farmworkers are exploited for their labor and people keep silent about the exploitation.

These interns act toward a better future. As the reports in this chapter have shown, they work with projects that seek to change the isolated status of farmworkers, and they can bring to these projects key skills such as bilingualism, desire to connect with farmworkers in more than a superficial way, and a will to give farmworkers greater access to public life. For example, Lidia works with a drivers’ education class to enable women to become “self-transporters,” and she participates in a theater group that educates migrant youth and their families about the possibility of college. Through College Me, she is able to contribute her bilingualism, her knowledge of reaching college, and her empathy with monolingual parents toward making an impact on youth. When parents thank her for what she has done, she feels confident that, despite the trying moments of the summer, she has made a difference. Both
of these programs seek to give farmworkers greater opportunities in U.S. public life. The programs’ status as temporary summer programs dependent on bilingual interns from out-of-state suggests their vulnerable status and their inability to encourage full integration of farmworkers into public life. Juan Carlos’ note that the only people who seem to care about farmworkers are those directly involved is played out here; when these programs end, other opportunities will likely be scant.

In the southeast during the period of this study, English was a necessary tool for public participation. In the mid-90’s, knowledge of the Spanish language did not enable public participation, and bilingualism was a scarce resource. Gradually, bilingualism grew, perhaps not conferring power on Spanish, but nonetheless increasing the chances for native Spanish speakers to contribute to public discourse. Because they came from a region of greater bilingualism, SAF interns from farmworking backgrounds brought with them a resource that they may have taken for granted but was highly prized in the southeast. When they wrote of their experiences, they reveal how desperately they were needed. As 1995 intern Nora Alcalar wrote, sometimes she felt like “everybody’s necessity” due to the connection she could make with Latino immigrants through her language and culture. The interns mentioned thus far were similarly necessary in their placement sites, valued by monolingual Spanish speakers such as the parents who thanked Lidia for her participation in College Day, and sometimes underappreciated by monolingual English speakers such as the sheriffs who thanked Lidia for her (uninvited) help as they arrested the man she’d interpreted for and drove him away. Lidia’s experience with the sheriff is one that shows the necessity of being able to speak English or find an interpreter and also the inadequacy of English given other forms of oppression.
Toward solidarity

As interns seek to make a difference, they attempt to connect both through commonalities and across differences. Some write of connecting with the people they meet through obvious commonalities – having been a migrant student, having immigrated to the U.S. Others acknowledge their differences, perhaps believing they can connect by translating across differences; for instance, Sarah feels she can understand various communities, including white Southerners and farmworkers, and Alicia learns what African-American and Latino farmworkers have in common. Some students from farmworking backgrounds note differences in themselves from the farmworkers they meet, including a greater degree of education or an unwillingness to put up with what workers seem to put up with. Some students not from farmworking backgrounds note cultural differences between themselves and some farmworkers, for example when Iris saw farmworkers’ culture as more sexist than her own. Both awareness of similarity and awareness of difference can spark questions and deepening knowledge. Iris writes about the implications of the severed trust she feels with farmworkers, and Juan Carlos writes of the greater awareness of farmworkers’ marginalization that he will take back to his farmworking community in California.

Throughout the archive of student writing, interns attempt to identify farmworkers in relation to themselves. We saw this briefly in Felipe’s work, when he wrote, “I could see myself in them.” Overall, there are three general ways that interns tend to identify farmworkers, as “my people,” as “these people,” and as “just people.” Some interns from farmworking backgrounds, particularly in the later years, refer to farmworkers as “my people” or “mi gente.” These interns tend to write about a sense of responsibility toward farmworkers that is rooted in their childhood experiences and in the possibilities that their
families created for them. Grateful to their own families, they feel an obligation to other farmworkers, and they express an identity-based sense of community with workers. Other interns, some from farmworking backgrounds and some not, tend to write about farmworkers as “these people,” emphasizing the extreme difference of farmworkers’ lives from their own. These interns tend to stress the difficult conditions that workers face; interns tend to write “these people” in the context of dawning realizations of injustice, as in “these people deserve decent housing,” “these people perform backbreaking labor,” etc. “These people” implies difference, farmworkers’ marginalization, and the speaker’s own privilege. Even some students from farmworking backgrounds speak of the farmworkers they encounter as different from them, when the conditions they see in North Carolina are worse than those they’ve seen before. Alicia and Joslyn’s writings exemplify another way of seeing farmworkers, as “just people.” This perception also seems to begin in perceived difference. Perhaps interns have imagined farmworkers would be quite different from themselves, or they are responding to a societal dehumanization of farmworkers. Interns realize that the only thing most people know about farmworkers is the labor they perform, and/or that workers are exploited for that labor. Consequently, when interns begin to know workers on a deeper level – this especially happens through the documentary projects – they see the ways in which workers are fully human, a seeing that has previously been denied to them. Many interns record instances of growing intimacy with farmworkers in which they are both gratified and motivated. They feel grateful that workers have taught them something about themselves, their background, and their cultural practices, and they feel motivated to speak on behalf of workers to others who lack this varied knowledge. Interns often seem to
conclude that if they can show readers and listeners that farmworkers are “just people” like them, those wider audiences will also feel motivated to act in farmworkers’ interests.

By virtue of the fact that they write about similarities and differences and describe moments of connection and disconnection with farmworkers, these interns seem to be on some level struggling to act with farmworkers, not simply on their behalf. This is especially the case in migrant education programs, where some interns seek to value migrant youth’s culture and language and thus counteract larger forces in their schools that devalue their culture. Here, interns concur with Valenzuela in viewing an ethic of care and cultural respect as central to success in school. They also echo Valenzuela’s assertion that schools “subtract” Mexican-American youth’s cultural resources. Nowhere is this sentiment expressed more strongly than in the 2000 reports of Gustavo Razo, who contrasted the “false perception that many people, mainly teachers, have about migrant students” with the reality he saw, that “their learning capabilities are amazing. They learn really fast and are always willing to work.” He wrote,

I consider that if migrant students were enrolled in classes that require more intellectual effort, migrant students would have more representation in the society, universities and businesses.... Quality in education is important and productive. On the contrary, quantity of education that does not teach anything is completely worthless. This is what happens with too many students.

Here, Gustavo brings to light the often unseen entity of school curriculum and shows that curriculum to be subtractive for migrant students. As with Felipe, Iris, and other education interns, he seeks to counteract the dominant curriculum by relating with students on a more personal level, speaking with them in Spanish, and mentoring them to think about college.

At the same time that interns struggle to act with farmworkers, they confront barriers to solidarity. Two barriers that these entries describe are the barrier of farmworkers’ fear,
described by Juan Carlos, and the barrier of differing perceptions of gender roles and gender oppression, described by Iris. The barrier of farmworkers’ fear points toward societal factors in the way farmworkers have historically been hired and treated in the U.S., denied full rights to participation, and admitted only for their labor. This historical situation means the U.S. agricultural industry and growers and other communities of people charged with its functioning can treat farmworkers solely as laborers, without the rights of citizenship. Farmworkers can be left with fear to do anything but work, miss work for a health appointment, see visitors who want to offer English classes or interview them, speak out. The barrier of differing perception of gender oppression also has societal implications, given prevalent patriarchal views and their ability to influence people where no critical intervention has occurred (such as may have occurred for Iris in her coursework or in her family).

Both the “fear barrier” and the “gender barrier” also have personal implications for relationships between farmworkers and farmworker allies. The guided reports suggest that from interns’ perspectives, the fear barrier will be relevant sooner in the summer; farmworkers’ initial response to would-be allies will likely often be fear, but building trust through respect and communication can help bring down this barrier. However, the gender barrier may not arise for interns until later in the summer; in Iris’ case, it arose after trust had seemingly been established, revealing the trust to be more superficial than what she had hoped existed. We cannot know from the reports how farmworkers experienced these barriers, but it is interesting that fear seems to be more often ascribed to them, and anger about sexism is more often ascribed to interns. Anger about sexism seems particularly complicated given a layer of cultural diversity; some interns associate sexism solely with “machismo,” or Latino sexism, without critical reflection into sexism in Anglo culture.
The fear and gender barriers within relationships between interns and farmworkers can interact with external barriers of racism and exploitation of migrant workers to reduce interns’ sense of agency. Perhaps they can’t make a difference. Moments of achievement are matched by moments of frustration and dismay. When he writes of the run-off beside Norberto’s family’s trailer that may contain pesticides, Juan Carlos’s entries call attention to the likelihood that things may, in fact, be worse than they seem. The ten-week summer internship may not only give interns a chance to begin to make a difference; it may teach them about the depths of human and environmental degradation. Many, many interns have written in their entries about their “eyes being opened” during the SAF experience. One 1995 intern wrote, “The more and more my eyes are opened, the less and less I want to see.” The SAF internship gives knowledge and the burden of knowledge, which some interns express a belief that they can bear, and others express doubt – it’s too great.

Activism and the role of writing

An undercurrent in interns’ guided reports is the question of what to do with the knowledge that’s been gained over the summer, whether acting on it is possible or not. Interns’ own affiliations to particular communities influence their choices, consciously or not. Both Juan Carlos and Sarah raise the issue of “community” in their entries. For Sarah, community is geographical, the particular place in which she lives with its people; she strives to find ways for people living there to bridge differences and through doing this she sees people as being able to make change. For Juan Carlos, community is identity-based; he writes of the farmworking community of which he is part, which connects him as a farmworker from California with farmworkers here in North Carolina. Both Sarah and Juan Carlos suggest that their community affiliations obligate them to be involved. Sarah is
obligated as a Southerner with access to white Southern and farmworker communities. Juan Carlos is obligated as a western farmworker with access to knowledge that farmworkers in the southeast are undergoing especially great hardships. Many interns do not directly address the question of how their own status and position affects their ability, or their desire, to shoulder the burden of the knowledge they’ve gained and continue to be involved. The feeling that one can close one’s eyes to the problem seems to come with the privilege of belonging to more privileged communities; as someone from a farmworking family, it’s not really possible to close one’s eyes to the injustices that face farmworkers. As a white Southerner, given that this is the norm for white Southerners, it is.

In the format of the reports, occasions of doubt or refusal to act tend to be momentary; the intern who wrote “the less and less I want to see” rebounded and by the end of the summer expressed a belief that she could make a difference. Nearly all interns conclude their summer asserting they can make a difference, and they sometimes do so with a deepened understanding of the barriers they face. Felipe shows us this when he writes about the lack of computers and books for students in an educational program; many education interns start the summer assuming that summer school will be a positive experience for migrant students, and they often end the summer wondering. By the same token, many interns begin the summer impressed with the number of “people who care” about migrant workers, and they end the summer with an awareness of the limits of caring. Some interns become more realistic and less naïve about both migrant farmworkers’ behavior and also their allies’ behavior. At the same time, the format of the guided reports tends to lead them to be idealistic about their own behavior, to state a belief in their capacity to make a difference. This may be both a strength and a drawback of individual writing. People seem
drawn to pronounce great hopes for themselves; at the same the form has allowed them to confront real barriers to their agency. Because the reports are an individual form, we tend to lose the sense of collective agency that SAF promotes elsewhere in their curriculum – the sense that the way to confront huge problems is through collective action. An exception is when Angelita writes of her affiliation with other Safistas. Collective action may be the missing link between anger with societal inequities and making a difference; we know from SAF’s program that interns are encouraged to identify as a group, but the reports don’t often allow us to see that group. Reflection happens in groups at orientation and retreats, but we don’t have written records of those exchanges.

Over the eleven years of this study, SAF increasingly privileged experiential knowledge. Staff deemphasized book knowledge and strengthened the voices of students with firsthand experience of the issues. They brought in an anti-oppression framework, which said that a critical perspective on oppression and privilege in one’s life and the lives of farmworkers counted as knowledge. They wanted students to learn through their actions and to consider their own life experiences as source material. When staff asked students to write, they increasingly asked them to write from their experiences. One prompt early in the summer has invited interns to respond to a chapter from *The Human Cost of Food*, but even here interns are invited to respond by comparing and contrasting their experiences with the information in the chapter. In the rest of the reports, they are not asked to refer to sources other than their own experience. The benefit of this approach is that interns can learn an alternative set of values to those typically found in their college classrooms; they can learn to seek authority where it is not typically sought.
A drawback to the focus on experiential knowledge is apparent in writing. A convention of academic expository writing is generalization. Another convention is problem-solving. Together, these conventions can lead writers to jump from particular evidence to unwarranted conclusions, and also to tack hopeful pronouncements onto the end of dismal stories. Sometimes, on the basis of limited experience, SAF interns too quickly generalize and too quickly leap to cures. This especially happens when they meet individuals and generalize about their culture on the basis of interactions. It can happen when the culture feels similar to interns’ own and also when it feels different, though the risk of misunderstanding may be greater when the culture is different. With regard to cures, interns may express a sense of impending progress in their reports, when the facts suggest no such progress may be imminent. In this case, interns may set themselves up to feel like failures, like they have not made a difference; then, they may lose their motivation when what first appeared to be a cure proves not to be. Without the critical component of dialogue, reflection can be a palliative rather than a tool. Facilitated reading and/or discussions can promote such dialogue.

The opportunity to discuss generative themes and stories can help SAF interns and other activists move forward in their critical thinking. Critical consciousness, as Freire (1970/1990) tells us, requires dialogue. Where writers have an opportunity to share their in-process work, readers can ask deepening how and why questions and questions of clarification. For example, this archive shows that some white interns feel they can help farmworkers and rural southerners connect, while Latino interns may write of their commonalities with other Latino and black farmworkers. Readers might push their thinking by asking, why have Latinos and blacks had similar experiences, and why can white people
relate to the power-holders in their communities? Here and elsewhere, dialogue could allow students to move from themes and experiences they can see to those they can’t. At orientation, SAF staff engage interns in dialogue, and they begin the process of guiding interns toward critical consciousness by discussing topics such as racism, anti-oppression work, and the historical context of farm labor. Over the course of the summer, when they release interns to their placement site, staff lose the ability to facilitate dialogue with them. Therefore, when interns write, they may have a weak sense of the larger structural themes that SAF hopes they will arrive at. In mid-retreats and final retreats, they may arrive again at these themes. But during the weekly reports, dialogue with those themes comes and goes. Hasty solutions and generalizations in the archive of interns’ work suggest to staff that they need to find a way to promote dialogue throughout the summer, not just at group gatherings. If staff want students to critically reflect in their reports, they need to have them do so in conversation, if not with texts than with each other. They could do this by having students respond to each other’s or previous interns’ reports over the course of the summer. This way, staff could help guide students toward a deeper understanding of their ability to act in solidarity with others. Staff could also help students avoid untenable conclusions and instead move from their particular experiences to small, well-founded generalizations. Experiential knowledge is a great addition to students’ learning; as with other kinds of knowledge, dialogue can deepen it.
Since 1999, approximately two-thirds of the SAF interns have been required to complete a documentary project with a farmworker or group of farmworkers. The other third have participated in a theater group, performing popular theater for farmworker audiences. Until 2004, the subject of the documentary projects could be any area of folklife, and in 2005, the focus was narrowed to verbal traditions. Interns have been indirectly guided by the expertise of folklorists and documentarians at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University and other local universities. In helping SAF design their trainings and materials, these experts have directed interns toward a wide range of what counts as folklife traditions: material traditions such as arts and crafts, cooking, and healing practices; verbal traditions such as songwriting, storytelling, and poetry; customary traditions such as religious observances and holiday traditions; and oral histories. During the summer, interns were expected to spend approximately five hours a week beyond their hours at their work placement working on their documentary projects. They had to find someone or a group of people who had a particular folklife practice or a life history to share, and document it through photographs and one or two recorded interviews. Ideally, they would spend some informal time with documentary participants prior to taking photographs and conducting the interviews. They were expected to write field notes about each of their interactions with
documentary participants, and at the end they were to write a three page final narrative, and
give a presentation to other interns and guests at SAF’s final retreat. The purposes for doing
the documentary projects are at least three fold. First, interns can get to know a farmworker
or group of farmworkers on a deeper level than they are able to do through their work.
Secondly, they can develop their Spanish language skills and also their skills in writing,
photography, interviewing. Finally, SAF can use what they produce to educate other
audiences about farmworkers. Here, SAF’s motivation is political. Aware that most people
view farmworkers as laborers and victims, SAF teaches students to use folklife projects to
portray them as creators of culture.

SAF has developed documentary projects largely because it has office spaces in the
Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, a center devoted to advancing the work
of professional documentarians and also educating non-professionals to use documentary
tools through community programs such as Youth Documenting Durham and Literacy
through Photography. The Center has a particular interest in work that deals with social
issues. While SAF was incorporated as a non-profit in 1992 and began the summer
internship program in 1993, the idea of uniting students with farmworkers sprung out of a
Duke course in the early 1970’s, which sent college students into the fields to document
conditions of farmworkers. These students wrote reports from their experiences which were
used in hearings before the U.S. Civil Rights Commission (SAF-CDS, 2005). Therefore,
SAF has a fairly long history of using documentary work to advocate for farmworkers.
Recently, as the Center has developed more programs in audio documentary, SAF has
followed suit, most recently trying out audio diaries with its 2006 intern class. In its use of
documentary projects to indirectly advocate for social justice for farmworkers, SAF seems to
also belong to a community of national and international human rights groups increasingly using personal narratives to advocate for exploited and victimized groups (Schaffer and Smith, 2004). While the documentary projects consciously focus on cultural work rather than victimization and thus depart from the standard use of narratives described by Schaffer and Smith, staff do pull from students’ reports descriptions of farmworking conditions to support advocacy efforts around issues such as immigration reform and farmworker housing.

When Tony speaks about the documentary projects with interns, me, and others, he speaks of them as collaborations. He wants interns to treat participants as their collaborators in doing the work. Namely, participants should have a say in choosing the story that is told about their lives or their practice and in choosing how the story is told. Because of structural limitations in the internship and society, it is nearly impossible for participants to actually help produce the documentary projects through taking photographs or writing themselves. Interns only have five hours a week over the summer to work on documentary projects and about ten hours of training on documentary work. During this training time, SAF has to teach interns to use cameras, take photographs, use audio recorders, ask good interview questions, conduct interviews, transcribe interviews, and more. There don’t appear to be resources or sufficient time to also teach interns to share documentary resources and skills with farmworkers, for example by working with farmworkers to write or take photographs themselves. Having said this, SAF tries in other areas of its work to extend such resources to farmworkers, for example in its programming with migrant youth and in the inclusion of farmworker students in the internship program.

While interns are typically unable to share use of documentary tools, they are encouraged to share the work of interpretation with their participants. The most concrete
example I have seen of a collaborative aspect came at the 2006 mid-retreat, in a session led by Bart Evans, a student from the University of California at Santa Cruz who interned with SAF as a documentary consultant. Bart suggested to students that once they had finished taking their photographs and conducting their interviews, they go back and meet with participants again to make decisions about representation. They should talk with participants about how they wanted to be portrayed, which photographs they wanted to be used, which parts of their story told. Furthermore, documentary training sessions not only cover the tools and methods of documentary work, they also teach ethical and respectful relationships with farmworker participants – a key prerequisite for shared interpretation and decision-making. Trainings have covered topics such as getting acquainted, explaining the project and obtaining written consent, and showing gratitude. The knowledge that interns gain about farmworkers’ lives in other areas of orientation also directs them toward understanding and respecting farmworkers. Furthermore, some interns are familiar with some cultural traditions encountered over the summer and share their insights with other documentarians; such familiarity can quicken the process of understanding and trust in documentary relationships.

Ultimately, the writing that most interns produce about documentary participants is their own, pulled from interviews, photographs, and informal interactions. In the process of producing this writing, interns move from the relatively private writing of field notes to the more public writing of narratives. Field notes are meant to be seen only by a staffmember and then used as source material for the final narrative, which will be shared with others. In their private nature, field notes bear a resemblance to the reflective guided reports. But in their aims, the genres differ. Guided reports include more requests for analysis of experience, whereas field notes call for detailed, accurate observations of experience. Where
the aim of writing guided reports is to generate more meaningful action, the aim of writing field notes is to generate more writing. Novice documentarians are taught to record details of setting, character, conversation, so that when it comes time to write up the final narrative, they’ll have much to draw upon. In contrast, students do not write guided reports in preparation for another piece of writing; each week, they write a new report and send it in. Consequently, field notes allow writers to engage in a form of drafting, pre-writing, which the form of guided reports do not allow.

The final narratives of the documentary projects, along with the photographs that interns choose as their best, are public documents. Not only do interns use them to make the final presentations to interns and others at the final retreat of the summer, but staff also pull from them for publications and exhibitions. Using excerpts and photographs from the documentary projects, SAF has published and distributed two bilingual booklets about farmworkers’ folklife traditions — *Cultured Ground/Tierra Aculturada* and *Recollections of Home/Recuerdos de mi Tierra* — as well as two fotonovelas in Spanish and newsletters. SAF has also created photographic exhibitions with accompanying text, which have traveled around the state. The audiences of these publications vary. The fotonovelas were created specifically for farmworkers and other Latino audiences, using a form popular in Latin American countries. The other publications and exhibitions have been distributed to Latino and Anglo audiences on and off college campuses. Interns know when they do these projects that portions of their projects will be published, and when they explain the projects and obtain consent from participants, they share the likelihood of publication with them. So, the projects always have a public element.
Summary of My Previous Study of Documentary Projects

The documentary projects have much to teach audiences about the cultural traditions of migrant farmworkers and other Latino immigrants in the Carolinas at the turn of the 21st century. When I wrote my report for SAF staff, I drew some conclusions about folklife traditions from the entire archive of documentary projects. These conclusions are part of the context in which I have analyzed participating students’ written work. They suggest what students learned from farmworkers during this process and what they chose to present to wider audiences. They suggest what the archive may have to teach future readers about farmworkers’ folklife traditions. First, it’s important to acknowledge that interns and documentary participants made choices about what counted as folklife traditions. These choices were influenced by the assignment; “folklife” had certain connotations for people, and examples and categories provided would have sent interns in search of certain types of traditions. However, choices were not entirely determined by the assignment; interns and documentary participants sometimes hit upon unexpected topics, or worked out stories or conclusions in their conversations that did not entirely fit with the topic of folklife. For instance, Lori Fernald Khamala made the choice in 1999 to record the organizing traditions not only of farmworkers but also of other workers. In her project, she wrote that this was an unconventional choice. When unconventional choices were made, these choices helped shape the assignment and future projects. Interns peruse past projects as they work on their old projects, and trainers refer to past projects to make suggestions. So, the process of choosing topics was dynamic, never entirely happening from the ground up or the top down.
In drawing conclusions, I looked first at the demographic make-up of documentary participants, to get a sense of who was represented. Some documentarians chose to interview migrant farmworkers, but others seasonal workers, former farmworkers, and other Latinos whose cultural practices are part of the farmworking community. For instance, one project focused on the owners of a taco stand that served farmworkers and other locals. The majority of projects have focused on Latino participants – mostly Mexican-born, with a few from Central America or Columbia – with a few exceptions among non-Latinos. Most participants have lived in North Carolina, a few in South Carolina.

I then looked at what the projects had to say about cultural traditions of those represented, what they were and how they were practiced. Within the spectrum of what counts as folklife, projects present a range of traditions. The largest number have focused on traditions related to Catholicism (such as the quinceñera, a cultural and religious celebration around a girl’s fifteenth birthday), craft traditions (woodworking, crochet, beltmaking, piñatas), and cooking traditions. Most of the cooks have carried on their tradition in the home, with a few owning businesses and one even a hog-killer. The next largest number of projects are oral histories and projects on musical traditions. Finally, there are a few projects each on dance, healing (through herbs and also through massage), secular celebrations, writing, and work (for instance, farming itself). A few of the practitioners actually make a living from their tradition (for example, when it’s farming, and the masseuse), while many make money on the side, such as some of the musicians, the hog-killer, and the belt-maker. Still others earn no money from their tradition.

The projects show some of the things that artists need to be able to practice their folklife traditions. They needed resources like wellness, materials, and education to be able
to practice their traditions. A few projects documented the negative effects of illness, poverty, and lack of access to education. They also needed communities of people to learn from and share their practices with. Projects reveal that in most cases, community needed to exist on some level both in the country of origin (in the majority of cases, Mexico) and in the United States. In most cases, traditions were learned in Mexico or the other home country, passed down through family members, community members, schoolteachers, and other artists. In the United States, artists attempted to preserve and practice their traditions, despite barriers such as a lack of a strong community network, people who appreciated and wanted to partake of their tradition. In a few cases, artists adapted their practices to suit “American” tastes, out of necessity to use materials at hand, and/or to reach wider audiences.

In addition to looking at the projects’ insights into Latino and farmworker culture in the Carolinas, I looked at what the projects reveal about the student documentarians’ process. Interns’ projects have varied not only in focus but also in length and depth. Interns particularly varied their means of documenting experiences. Some interns seemed to put more energy and time into the written components of their projects than others, but this doesn’t necessarily mean that their projects were thinner over all. Some spent more time on photographs and/or interviews than on their write-ups. Similarly, interviews cannot be taken as an indicator of the wealth of a project, because some interns clearly relied on informal interactions and participant observation (cooking together, hanging out at a party together, playing volleyball, etc.) more than on interviews. These interns often included briefer audio cassettes or none at all. Others conducted and transcribed rich in-depth interviews. Sometimes cassettes also included recorded songs, both formal and casual renditions. Both approaches – interviews and participant observations – seem to have been productive for
interns. The choice of approach probably depended upon interns’ and artists’ personalities as well as constraints of time and work. Interns also varied in the number of times that they visited with artists. Some went as many as 5 or 6 times, others as few as once. Again, both approaches worked. Often, multiple visits yielded deeper connections, but when artists were particularly loquacious or self-confident, one visit could work. Interns varied the extent to which they treated their own experience of doing the field work. Largely, this variation played out in the length and subject of field notes. Some interns used field notes simply to record what they learned about farmworkers, while many used them to elaborate on their feelings doing documentary work and developing relationships with farmworkers. A few explicitly addressed issues of justice and injustice. The form and content of the final narratives has been flexible, so some interns have primarily excerpted quotes from their interview, some have written an argument-driven essay, and some have written in the first person about the time they spent with the subject of the piece.

Beyond seeing how they used the forms differently, I delved into students’ writing to understand what particular challenges and rewards they encountered in doing the projects. Staff wanted to know how they could use past projects to train future interns, and it was here that I found the most potential for learning. In the writing, I identified particular ways that interns were able to feel successful and rewarded in the projects. These things didn’t always happen, but when they did they enhanced the documentary experience; other interns and documentarians can learn from these “tips” for finding meaning. First, interns wrote of their excitement when they found someone to interview who seemed just right for the project. They were successful when they noticed possibilities of folklife traditions, even when they weren’t specifically looking. For example, two interns were thrilled to discover that
farmworkers at a camp that they visited with their health outreach team made scorpions out of found wire. Second, interns documented a meaningful experience when they found a setting and people with cultural practices that felt familiar to them, such as cooking practices that reminded them of home. Third, interns seemed to learn the most about people’s histories and traditions when they established trust. In their notes, they documented initial barriers, such as nervousness and language differences, as well as the establishment of trust over time. Fourth, interns documented feeling satisfaction when they were able to thank people for their time, for example by sharing copies of photographs, expressing their appreciation, or eating together. Last, interns who worked in partnership with other interns sometimes expressed gratitude to their partner, who made the work easier and more meaningful. The flip side of most of these tips suggests a barrier. For example, interns struggled when they couldn’t identify traditions or possible participants; when they met with participants only once or under constrained conditions; when conversations stayed superficial. When traditions were culturally unfamiliar to interns, this didn’t necessarily create a barrier, not if the interns were respectful and interested.

Method of Identifying Generative Themes

During this dissertation study, I have taken my earlier conclusions as a starting point and used the opportunity for more in-depth study to treat several issues that are related to the role of writing in establishing solidarity with a marginalized group. In each of these areas, I am interested in the fairly private interactions between participants and documentarians within the more public context of the representation they are creating for other audiences. First, I have looked more closely at the process of choosing a documentary participant, and from there, choosing a focus for the project. In other words, I have looked at the issue of
how people have decided what counts as folklife, how collaborative these decisions have been, and the implications of these decisions on the representation of folklife traditions. Second, I have looked at how interns and participants seemed to respond to the tools of documentary work – particularly interviewing and photography – how they were able to use these tools in their interactions and arrive at products that seemed worthy for viewing by others. Finally, I have looked at the range of relationships that documentarians established with their participants. These three processes – finding a focus, using documentary tools, and establishing relationships – belong to the larger process of doing documentary work that field notes, a relatively private form of writing, in particular help reveal. However, calling the process private and the product public would be too simplistic, since private choices influence public consequences and vice versa. In particular, finding a focus and using documentary tools are important processes precisely because they lead to a public product. Finding a focus stems from SAF’s belief that the public needs to understand who farmworkers are by seeing what they do besides work in the fields – a fuller identity. And teaching interns to use documentary tools is SAF’s chosen method for achieving that understanding. Establishing relationships also has a public dimension; without relationships, interns and farmworkers won’t reach a depth of understanding that will teach the public anything genuine about farmworkers. Through the documentary projects, interns both learn farmworkers’ identities as creators of culture and portray those identities to others.

In that I have isolated several areas of the documentary work for my study, my approach to this chapter differs from that in Chapter Two. Whereas Chapter Two described the individual guided reports of eight interns, the remainder of this chapter is organized around the three thematic areas I have identified as most relevant to my research questions,
and within each area I draw upon the work of several interns; I have purposely chosen interns whose work I didn’t treat in Chapter Two to pull in more of my study’s participants. This chapter’s approach is different partly because I have been looking at this material longer and also because the material itself lends itself more readily to a thematic approach. In Chapter Two, I organized my material by particular interns because there was so much variation in the material. While documentary projects do contain variation, they are less variable than guided reports because the assignment has changed little over the seven year period, where guided report prompts often changed. Also, interns have received more specific directions and training on how to produce documentary projects than they have on guided reports. Both the three overall themes and the sub-themes addressed below I still define as generative, since I came to an understanding of them from my analysis of interns’ work. However, because I have focused my attention in particular areas, they are not the only generative themes in documentary projects; documentary projects also contain generative themes about farmworkers’ folklife traditions themselves, but since my project focuses on interns as writers and actors, I have left those themes for another discussion.

Deciding What Counts

“How [it] qualifies as folklife per se”

Some interns use field notes to discuss the process of finding the right person and deciding what counts as folklife. The right person is someone they feel at ease with and also can make time to see, who has time to see them – this sometimes disqualifies farmworkers whose work days are too long. The right person also has a practice that’s recognizable as folklife, and/or a life story they’re willing to share. Life stories make oral history, and that counts as folklife, but in the absence of that kind of openness, interns tend to look for
tangible practices to count as folklife. In a few projects, interns use their field notes to explicitly address their questions of, is this the right person? Does this count as folk life? These particular projects are interesting to look at because they explicitly address what is elsewhere implicit, the process of drawing conclusions about people and their practices.

Intern Scott Pryor [2001] interviewed and photographed Gabriel Torres, an H-2A worker who lived on a labor camp with other men harvesting Christmas trees and who also wrote poetry, which he primarily sent to his wife in Mexico. Scott used his first set of field notes to document his first interview with Gabriel, whom he had already met. Scott arrived at the labor camp after himself having a long day of work, feeling tired, unmotivated, and a little awkward about singling out Gabriel from among the other men at the camp to conduct the project with. In his notes, he wrote that he chatted briefly with the other men, and then he and Gabriel went to sit in his car to conduct the interview because it was the quietest place to talk to conduct the interview. He noted that the interview is a good start, and that he plans to listen to the recording and return with more specific follow-up questions.

Scott returned with his camera and with a resolve to follow up on his awkward feeling about the other men at the camp by including them in his photo shoot. He writes:

Since I hadn’t yet been able or comfortable enough to take many photos of Gabriel, I decided to spend the evening with ‘the guys’ at the labor camp. Since I only need portraits of Gabriel to accompany the interview component, I’ve decided to try and document the labor camp as a whole taking photos of all the workers. I feel somewhat liberated by this decision because it allows me to take more pictures and to not focus so completely on Gabriel, which I’ve felt uncomfortable doing.

After work, a trip to the grocery store, and an hour or so of rest, I drove to the camp right at 7 pm., when the guys get home from work. I just hung out for a while in the kitchen while people cooked and washed up. I had my camera bag on the table in plain view to try and get people accustomed to it. Eventually I asked everyone in the room if they’d be alright with me taking some pictures, and they said, sure, go ahead.

With documentary participants’ pseudonyms, I have preserved authors’ choices about naming. Some used first names, others used Mr./Ms. or Señor/Señora, and others used Don/Doña, a term of respect for elders.
They gave each other a hard time about it, and I joined in. It ended up being a very comfortable thing – a testimony, I think, to the strong relationship we’ve established with each other. The evening light was amazing – deep orange and pouring through the kitchen windows. I shot black and white with my manual camera and a couple color with my snapshot camera. They encouraged me to document not only themselves, but their housing. For the first time they invited me into their dormitory room and asked me to take pictures of their beds. I hung out snapping shots until about 8:30, at which point I left.

All in all I felt really good about the evening. It was fun and everyone seemed to be at ease. We were all laid back about it, which was nice. I hope to spend at least one more evening there taking shots. I’d like to get a good three rolls of black and white, and hopefully a roll of slide film too.

In these field notes, the nature of Scott’s work as a documentarian stands out from work we’ve read about elsewhere in the archive: health outreach work, teaching, etc. Instead of stopping what they are doing to get screened, take a class, etc., the men finish up what they’re doing while Scott waits. And then, the equipment he had with him was different, not a flip chart for class or a blood pressure cuff, but a camera; “I had my camera bag on the table in plain view to try and get people accustomed to it.” Here, Scott perceives the camera as having a degree of power. When he gets ready to take pictures, everyone gives each other a “hard time,” implying there’s an intimate quality to the work of taking pictures, and also a pleasurable one. The camera has changed the dynamics among the group. And then, what do we make of this? “They encouraged me to document not only themselves, but their housing.” What is the motivation behind this? From what we know of labor camps, housing is usually inadequate. Who do the men expect will see the housing? What do they imagine will be the reaction? Their request to Scott suggests they are exercising at least a little influence over the project.

Around the same time, Scott uses a guided report separate from the field notes to reflect on whether this project counts as folklife. He writes,
I also have questions about how Gabriel’s poetry qualifies as ‘folklife’ per se. It’s not something that was passed down from other generations or a communal tradition. His is a private art that he shares with other people. I don’t think that this makes him any less of a valid subject for this project. Gabriel writes poetry to express himself and help deal with the difficulties of being a migrant farmworker, and I think that documenting such practices is what is at the heart of the documentary project’s purpose. However, it is a question that I have been mulling over.

Scott seems to be trying to decide for himself what folklife is. Initially, Gabriel’s poetry didn’t seem to count because it’s private. But Scott realizes that from Gabriel’s point of view, his practice somehow “counts” – maybe not explicitly; they may not have talked about the “folklife” criteria. But it counts because it’s how he chooses “to express himself and help deal with the difficulties of being a migrant farmworker.” In this way, folklife seems to be reinterpreted as the ways people enrich their lives. In his final set of field notes, Scott answers his question. After conducting a second interview with Gabriel, he writes,

The direction of the documentary project became more clear. It makes sense to highlight his poetry as a way of maintaining connection and love between him and his wife and family. My previous questions about whether or not Gabriel’s poetry could be considered ‘folklife’ were silenced after tonight’s interview. Even if this doesn’t fit the academic category, it struck me as an important story and talent that needs to be documented.

Scott is still not sure that his topic exactly fits the assignment, but he’s confident that it’s the right choice for his project.

In his narrative, Scott conveys his certainty about the purpose of Gabriel’s practice:

Gabriel Torres learned to write in secondary school. He began writing poetry in 1982 at around the age of twenty. He learned to write poetry largely of his own volition, but inspired by many of the great Latin American, and specifically, Mexican, poets. He writes most often when he is in the U.S., generally from March to November, and he writes when work is slow or on days off. His poetry is very expressive of the feelings that many migrant farmworkers experience: loneliness, homesickness and love for his family back home. Gabriel writes poems and prose pieces about numerous topics including his wife, kids, love, loss, nature, and jealousy.

‘[Writing] gives me a way to remember, simply, my family and my wife while I am far away. It’s what makes me write most... I think about my wife all the time. I think
about her more than anything because since we were married there has always been a very good union between us. And now that we have our children, some grown and others still young, I think it is a good motive to always stay together. When I get homesick, that’s what most draws me to write – to think about how they are [back home] and what they might need. That’s what inspires me most.

‘Well, yes, even though [my wife] is a bit suspicious of me. She has told me many times, and I ask her, ‘why are you suspicious?’ She knows well that I don’t think of anyone but her... And for this reason I write, so that she doesn’t feel bad and we can continue with our family together without having to fight... I believe [writing] is a way to always be united with the family – to write and think of my wife so that our relationship is an example for my children.

‘To write [for my family] is like a means to always have them in my heart, to always carry them with me. In a way I’m able to create the illusion that I am with them and they are with me and that we never had to be apart. This is what draws me to write – the illusion that I never had to leave them.

‘I began to write because in secondary school I believed very much in the writers of neoclassicism... Well... I don’t know which [literary] age they would belong to, but [writers like] Manuel Lopez Velarde, Pablo Neruda [and] Guillermo Prieto from Mexico – many writers that have come out of Mexico and other countries. I thought about them and how they wrote. What did they base themselves in to be able to write such beautiful things? And from there I came. Writing grabbed my attention and I began to write, and I saw that I liked it... I liked the words and the meaning that I gave to the words.’

In the narrative, these segments from the interview are followed by several of Gabriel’s poems. Fleshe out by Scott’s more private field notes, we understand that this isn’t just a description of Gabriel’s practice of writing poetry; it’s also an argument that this is an important cultural tradition, one that may make readers rethink what counts as “folklife” and what they expect people to practice as folklife. Poetry may initially seem more private, but upon further exploration, it has family and communal ties; for Gabriel, community may have included the poets he spoke of as his inspiration. Emboldened by the decisions he’s made in his field notes, Scott is able to use the final narrative to agree with Gabriel’s definition of folklife over what the assignment seemed to require.
“This is great, but it’s not giving me much to work with”

In her documentary project with migrant farmworkers, Gina Humble [2003] chose to focus on five brothers’ paid work of harvesting tobacco, and to look at the choices that had led them to come to the US and do this work. She initially heard about the five brothers through their sister, whom she met at church, went to a birthday party to meet them, conducted an interview with them at the trailer where they lived, and then went twice to the fields to observe them at their work with the grower they worked for. This project is unusual in its focus on work practices and also in Gina’s honesty about frustrations she felt in trying to get beneath the surface to tell a true story about the men’s lives. Instead, during the interview, she felt that they were only telling her what they thought she wanted to hear. Her field notes suggest some of the barriers that documentarians can face in establishing trust and getting to know their participants, language barriers, limited time, and also power differences. She describes her visit to the trailer to conduct the interview:

At 4:00 in the afternoon, I’m traveling down the end of a bumpy gravel road that I’m certain is leading nowhere. I stop and ask directions and am told to keep going, on past the barn, up the hill and I’ll see two trailers. Sure enough, I push past the barn and the road dead ends at the foot of two narrow white trailers, and nothing but green fields below. One of the brothers opens the front door to one of the trailers and waves. I’m in the right place.

Inside the trailer, I’m offered a cold soda and a seat on the beat up couch. The brothers barely fit into the room. Two are left standing. There’s a stale heat which begins to evaporate as an approaching storm blows cool air through the open window. There’s a bit of awkwardness... me trying to act casual and comfortable in a new environment with five strange men. I’m certain they may feel strange as well.... a young woman wanting to interview five grown men about their work... We make a bit of small talk... then I explain the project again in more detail. The brothers say they are happy to answer any questions I might have.

We start the interview with general introductions. I ask them to repeat their names several times, but the only one I can truly understand is Manuel. The rest seem to
talk so fast and casual... I’m lost. We are also having to compete with the roar of thunder and pouring rain on the metal roof. Twenty minutes into the interview I check the tape to make sure we’re doing all right, only to discover that we are recording at slow speed. I change batteries, apologize profusely and have them do their introductions at least, once again. I’m thinking I’d like to stick my head in the sand. The brothers are patient, however, and don’t show signs of annoyance.

I’m feeling myself a bit frustrated by the interview. My ‘well thought out’ questions seem to be leading us in circles. Suddenly I’m not sure what it was I wanted to know, or how to tie these bits of information into some coherent theme. My nerves prohibit me from thinking more clearly. I’m worried that the interview is taking too long. Is Manuel falling asleep on the couch? I’m not getting the answers I expected. When I ask about roles in work and at home the answer is always, “We do everything the same. We’re all equal. We’re a united family.” This is great, but it’s not giving me much to work with.

Here, Gina uses her field notes to document her struggles: getting underway, dealing with equipment difficulties, figuring out how to get beneath the surface in the interview. The last problem is probably compounded by the fact that this is the first time they’ve interacted in this way, in this place. While she had met the men at the birthday party and even danced with one of them, that was a somewhat informal occasion. Here, everything seems formal: she’s offered a drink, two of the men stay standing, the equipment necessitates certain procedures. Gina’s nervousness and self-consciousness compound her confusion about whether the interview is going well. Gina records that during this interview, the men speak of their cooperativeness with one another, but then she also notes,

The tall gentleman with long hair, I think his name is Luis, tends to be the most talkative and open. Although the brothers say they are equal, I sense that Luis has some degree of clout and influence. The brothers are respectful towards me and offer several times to trade my lukewarm coke for a fresh one. Several times I apologize that the interview is too long, and as a chorus they respond, ‘no, no hay problem, a tu ordenes.’ (That’s not a problem, at your service.)

Here again, there’s a certain formality, as well as a hint of power differentials in the room: she senses a power differential among the brothers and, by recording what’s said, the phrase
‘at your service,’ suggests that there is also a power difference between the brothers and herself.

Gina suggests that she remains somewhat a stranger to the Mendéz brothers, and them to her. They seem to have chosen to maintain a fairly formal, professional relationship. In one of her guided reports, a letter to a faculty member at her college Gina shed light on her feelings about establishing relationships with farmworkers through her work as a member of a health outreach team. She wrote,

Most of the workers we’re meeting with are H2A workers meaning young single males. I’m finding it tricky to present myself in a relaxed and warm, yet professional manner. I like to make jokes to break the ice and establish a connection, yet maintain a sense of boundaries and professionalism in order to ward off any confusion in terms of my role. I think it will be a challenge, but an interesting one.

In her field notes, she echoes this concern with her role as a documentarian when she writes “There’s a bit of awkwardness... I’m certain they may feel strange as well... a young woman wanting to interview five young men about their work.” Like her health outreach work, Gina seems to perceive the interviewing relationship as professional, with a little flexibility, but necessary boundaries. She’s not entirely sure, and at times she seems to want something else, more honesty, more connection, but ultimately she accepts her role as an outsider as the proper role for her to take.

In her next two sets of field notes, Gina records going to the field to watch the men work. Here, she seems to become more convinced of the men’s claim of partnership and unity in their work. Except for brief mentions of Luis giving instructions, she writes of the men working together; she even comments that the grower, their employer, works “alongside” them. The language she chooses emphasizes the collaborative and productive nature of their work. For example, of the process of hanging the tobacco leaves on the racker
in the barn, she writes, “The brothers establish a flawless and efficient rhythm, quietly handling the tobacco, turning, twisting their bodies, working like a well oiled machine.” A brief interaction with the grower seems to confirm that he and the men labor without conflict: “Joe says the Mendéz brothers have been with him for nearly eight years. ‘They’re good boys,’ he says. ‘They know what to expect from me. I know what to expect from them.’”

Although in the first set of field notes, Gina noted power differentials in the room that were not spoken of, here in the field, she doesn’t note power differentials among the brothers or between the grower and them. She no longer uses her field notes to reveal her inner thoughts and feelings, but rather to record details of the men’s work. Her account of cooperation and harmony seems colored by what the men told her in the interview – “‘We do everything the same. We’re all equal. We’re a united family.’” The final narrative continues this same line of interpretation, with Gina having changed the simile of a well-oiled machine to a well-rehearsed play:

Watching the brothers at work is not unlike watching a well rehearsed play. In the fields, Luis stands out as a leader. He uses simple sign language to communicate with Omar across the long rows of tobacco. During the unloading and racking of the tobacco, he initiates a brief discussion about who will do what, where and how... and the boys take their places, nodding in agreement.

According to this description, it seems as though when the men work, everything goes smoothly; there are no complications. She echoes what they have told her, and what the grower has told her, down to his characterization of the men as “boys”; the language choices of the brothers and the growers influence her own.

Gina also chooses to include in the narrative pieces of the interview which portray a more difficult reality, the men’s lives outside their work. She includes several brothers’ comments from the interview on the difficulty of leaving their families behind:
Hernán, normally soft spoken, pipes up on the subject of family: ‘I have 17 children, 12 living, and five dead. The youngest is one year, and the oldest is 18.’ He becomes serious and talks about the difficulty of leaving the family behind. “It’s horrible. It’s the most difficult thing one can face.” Luis adds, “We come out of necessity.” Eloy talks about counting down the months, weeks, and days until he can see his family again. ‘I tell you that this place [North Carolina] is beautiful here, it’s green here, the trees, it’s very pretty, but for me it’s not pretty. No because if I was with my family, then everything would be pretty, but without them, no.’

Gina chooses to echo this sentiment when she concludes her narrative: “And so, as the summer comes to a close, and one hard day’s work blends with another, Eloy will surely begin to count down... the months, the weeks, the days, till he can return home with his brothers, and life will be beautiful again.” Gina seems to have attempted to portray the men as they asked to be portrayed, although this “they” is a collectivity and may not represent the wishes of the individual brothers. They told her they liked working together, and they told her they were sad being apart from their families; she reported both of these aspects of their lives. Gina portrayed both the harmony and productivity of their work hours and also the broader inequity and lack of power in their lives, for example by sharing Luis’ statement “We come out of necessity” and by finally dismissing the summer’s work, not as harmonious and productive, but as a burden to be born until life could be resumed. While her choices echo the men’s choices in what they revealed to her, in her narrative, Gina does not return to the issue she raised in her first set of field notes: what they may not have revealed.

Gina’s oral history is representative of other oral histories of farmworkers in its attention to the resolve that is necessary to endure life in the U.S. For Gabriel, this resolve depended on poetry as an outlet. In this oral history, the Mendéz brothers don’t express such an outlet, though it could be there, in what isn’t said. According to Scott, what counts as folklife is Gabriel’s ability “to express himself and help deal with the difficulties of being a migrant farmworker.” For Gina, folklife is the labor itself. By portraying the men as
cooperative and productive in their labor, she too partly counters the notion that farmworkers are victims, laborers yes, but victims in their labor, no. It’s not the work itself that’s bad; it’s the life that surrounds the work. The very absence of folklife, what Scott interprets as activities that enrich one’s life, emphasizes an emptiness there. Gina’s project with the Mendéz brothers suggests that some migrant farmworkers may not feel that they participate in meaningful cultural traditions outside of work during their time in the U.S.; instead they are biding their time until they return home. What about all of the farmworkers who interns chose not to interview, who didn’t seem right for the project – did their lives beyond work look equally empty?

“Flow with the problem and look at where it’s taking us”

In field notes of a few other projects, interns struggle with a question about interviewing that Gina raised: what do you do if you aren’t getting the answers you wanted? They reveal that problems inherent in the interviewing process, for example, the power on the side of the interviewer, who knows what the assignment is, knows what they are looking for, knows how to use the equipment. In this way, it may be hard for an interviewee to do much more than follow “a tus ordenes.” Like Gina, the honesty that these interns bring to their field notes suggests the sometimes unacknowledged limitations of documentary work, particularly when conducted over a short time period between people who do not know each other well and who have uneven access to the knowledge that matters in the situation.

Gina’s and Scott’s projects stand out in their explicit attention to the difficulties of finding an appropriate and meaningful focus for their documentary projects. In a similar vein, Michael Sinohui [2001] found the initial responses to his and his partner’s interview questions to be “off topic,” irrelevant to folklife traditions, but after awhile he found that the
“off topic” responses led the interview in a more interesting direction. He wrote, “the mistakes Chris and I have made have made us realize we really can’t improve the problem however, flow with the problem and look at where it’s taking us.” Their participant was a 19-year-old farmworker who, having graduated from high school in Mexico, had come to the United States to work under his uncle, a crewleader, and save money to go to college back in Mexico. Domingo shared his experiences of schooling in Mexico and his ambition for a higher education, seemingly the topics of most importance to him. Along the way, he also shared that, out of necessity, he had learned how to cook in this country. This topic met Michael’s and Chris’ understanding of folklife criteria, and they were able to name cooking as a folklife tradition while also writing in their narrative about Domingo’s desire to continue his schooling.

Similarly, Amanda Grove [2003] and the young pregnant woman she was interviewing struggled to reach a common understanding of the sort of knowledge that counted for the project. Amanda wanted to record Mexican traditions around pregnancy and child-rearing, but Marisol – pregnant for this first time, in the United States, living an isolated life without transportation, alone when her husband went to work – insisted that she didn’t know any traditions, and that Amanda should really talk to her sisters-in-law. Eventually the two came around to a conversation about what she did know. Amanda writes in her field notes that Marisol told her that the documentary project needed to be a secret from her husband; during the second interview, he comes home, they tell him about the documentary, and he joins in. Like Gina’s field notes, Amanda’s field notes suggest unexplored power differentials. By including them, interns help round out the picture of immigrants’ lives and complicate our understanding of the traditions chosen to be pursued.
there. How much do people choose their own traditions? How much are they chosen for them? How are they shaped and changed in the US? Domingo and Marisol practiced traditions seemingly different from what their traditions would have been in their home countries. Domingo didn’t cook in Mexico; Marisol might have learned traditions more identifiable as Mexican folk life from her sisters-in-law. Instead of suggesting the preservation of somehow pure or unassimilated traditions, the projects tend to show the reality of traditions in transition. Some interns’ struggles to fulfill the assignment may result in part from a mismatch between their expectations of folk life and the reality of cultural practices for immigrants.

Viewed as collaborations, we can think of defining a focus for a documentary project as a joint endeavor. In Scott’s and Gina’s projects, the participants clearly knew their practice when the project began, and Scott and Gina had to think about how to document it, what to do with it. However, in Amanda’s and Michael’s projects, both documentarian and participant seemed a little unsure of the tradition when the project began. They worked it out between themselves, in part through trial and error. The work of defining a focus for a project calls our attention to the fairly ambiguous nature of the open assignment; SAF provides a direction for the folk life work but also suggests that interns and farmworkers can define folk life for themselves. This was my impression during 2006 orientation, when we were introducing a new focus of educational aspirations. The group brainstormed what this meant, and eventually someone asked whether non-formal educational traditions could count, such as what people had learned in their families and communities. Fearing that they were reverting to the status quo – what they’d seen in the previous documentary projects; they might also go in search of crochet – I discouraged this direction. Tony, however, welcomed
it, and one of the interns in the training said, wiser than both of us, it should be how the
farmworker views education that determines it. And that’s what we settled on. In many
ways, the documentary projects have been defined as SAF has gone along. I’ve seen this
from year to year when interns go in search of what they’ve seen in the slideshows of
previous projects. When interns feel comfortable with ambiguity and let open-ended
questions go in unexpected directions, farmworkers have shaped the definition of folklife
from the ground up. That is, they always shape it because the traditions are theirs, but they
shape it more completely when they decide what traditions should count.

However, farmworkers don’t always shape the definition of folklife; often, interns
continue searching for someone with a fairly obvious material or musical tradition rather than
exploring the more ambiguous route of oral history or counting Americanized cultural
practice as folklife. Farmworkers may not steer interns in an unsuggested direction in part
because they generally have less status and education than the documentarians. So, they may
not view their knowledge as counting or significant. We see this in the projects, participants
discounting what they know or deferring to others. When students aren’t entirely clear about
the assignment, they may feel a similar insecurity – does this count? Perhaps students need
to start with the confidence to name what counts before they can extend that naming process
to farmworkers. The opening up the process of naming what counts seems important for
achieving fuller collaboration in the documentary projects. There is some tension in the
projects not between documentarians and participants, but between interns and the
assignment itself. Participants might have something to share, but it might not entirely fit,
and the trick is to find a way to hit on it. Once it’s hit on, it’s recognizable, and you can learn
to flow with it. But if the right questions are never asked, a degree of comfort isn’t
established, the person’s right topic might not flow out. And that flowing out is essential for true use of language.

Using Documentary Tools

“It was rather amusing how much my hands were shaking”

The documentary process is also made trickier by the presence of sometimes daunting equipment: cameras and tape recorders. Many interns include difficulties with equipment – camera batteries dying, audio inaudible. While precautions can be taken – extra batteries, practicing the questions ahead of time – inevitably difficulties will arise. The trick for interns seems to have been to roll with them and try to make up for them, return with a working camera, schedule another interview. This can be hard given the limited time that they have to do the projects. Just as ubiquitous as equipment trouble is nervousness, a little around photography, a lot around interviewing, for the documentarians and/or their participants. It’s the movement from informal to formal that seems to throw them, from talking to recording a conversation, from looking to photographing a scene. The equipment itself is daunting, as Scott seemed to acknowledge when he purposefully left the camera out on the table so people could get comfortable with it. And what it stands for may also be daunting.

Gina’s account of the awkwardness of the first interview is representative of nervousness and tension that many documentarians and participants bring to the interview process. Before her first interview with the mariachi musician Pablo Jiménez, Alison Blaine [2001] records feeling intensely nervous. For instance, she records going to the public library and sitting in a quiet space to collect her thoughts and write down her interview questions. She writes: “1:40 pm. Sitting in the library, I put on headphones and begin listening to the Gypsy Kings. I am nervous. Repeat: very nervous about this interview that I
will be conducting in 2 hours. Tick-tock, the waiting is the hardest part.” On the car ride there, she writes “I practice rolling my ‘r’s’ quite loudly in the car – anything to help give me more confidence with my accent.” Like other interns whose first language isn’t Spanish, Alison’s nervousness is compounded by her insecurity with Spanish. She starts to relax after arriving at Mr. Jiménez house and after the interview gets underway, when she realizes that he is also nervous: “He takes care with his words, almost as if there are right and wrong answers to the questions and he wants to make sure and give the right ones. I recognize in him the same shyness I have dealt with throughout my life. From this point on, I feel a connection to Mr. Jiménez, and this helps me relax more and enjoy the interview.” In this case, Alison feels humble around Mr. Jiménez; he’s the one who speaks fluent Spanish and has an impressive musical tradition. Though the interview is her assignment, she needs him to help her feel at ease.

Even Gerardo Martinez [2002] was quite nervous doing his documentary interview, and his participant was one of his housemates, another SAF intern who practiced folkloric dancing. Of their interview, he wrote: “I have been living with Maribel for the entire duration of the internship, so I was confident that the interview would go smoothly. The interview did go smoothly, but it was rather amusing how much my hands were shaking. I also don’t remember a lot about the conversation that we had because I kept on concentrating on the next question that I was going to ask, and how to ask it in an articulate manner so that our conversation didn’t sound too choppy.” Here, Gerardo suggests imagining others listening to the tape recording and wanting it to sound good, so this interview has a public quality that other conversations he has had with Maribel haven’t. Perhaps like Alison, he is shy and the interview brings about extra tension, or perhaps the questioning format feels
unfamiliar to him, so the interview is new territory. Not all interns record feelings of nervousness around interviews, but many do, and this nervousness seems to inhibit the process of deepening their relationships with participants.

“I tried to see what the limits were of him feeling comfortable”

Elida Molina [2004], not nervous herself, found a way to get around her participant’s discomfort with the interview process. Elida and a partner interviewed a man about his tradition of cooking and growing herbs for his family. She used her field notes to flesh out the dynamics of their first interview with him. She wrote:

As Don Raymundo sat down on the couch, he began to explain to us how he wasn’t as educated as us and to forgive him if he said something incorrectly. We insisted that the questions we were going to ask were simple questions that didn’t need any type of education to answer. For some reason, he continuously repeated this over and over to us, even though we continuously insisted to answer normally and to relax. I think it was his way of dealing with his nervousness, as he had no idea of what questions we were going to ask or of what we were going to do.

During the interview, Don Raymundo never looked me in the eyes. I definitely think it goes back to the cultural belief that Hispanic families raised in Mexico have that they are not to look at a superior in the eyes because it was a sign of disrespect. Here, I will reiterate that he thought we were superior to him as he let us know by telling us that he didn’t have the opportunity to get educated as we did. Thankfully, I was aware of this belief from an Interpersonal Communication class I had taken this past semester. At the beginning of the interview, I tried to see what the limits were of him feeling comfortable. I first continued to look at him in the eyes as I asked and as he answered the questions. I began to notice that he continuously looked away. By looking at him in the eyes more often he became more and more uneasy. I think looked him in the eyes when I asked the question I wanted to ask him and then looked away from him as he answered, and I immediately noticed that the questions I asked were being answered more openly and personally rather than robotically as I had heard before. I continued this tactic with the rest of the family that we interviewed.

Here, Elida accepts Don Raymundo’s perception of the power differential between them. Rather than seeking to change that perception, she adapts and tries to make the situation more comfortable for him given how he is used to interacting with those “superior” to him. Don Raymundo raises the issue of formal education as being relevant to the documentary project.
And Elida perceives his nervousness as stemming from the newness of the experience of being interviewed and not knowing what kinds of questions she was going to ask. The field notes suggest that Don Raymundo is intimidated by formal educational experiences, and this feels like one.

It seems that the interview makes people uncomfortable because of its formality. Rather than seeking to make the process less formal, Elida’s response is to perceive what would make the participant more comfortable, and adapt. She does what’s needed to help Don Raymundo participate given the formality he perceives. To speak to a superior, he needs freedom from eye contact. She gives him that. Other interns and participants respond by trying to reduce formality before and after the interview; some interns seem to try to change participants’ minds about their superiority. It’s hard to do this in an interview; this shifting seems to happen before and after interviews when documentarians joke around, when participants offer drinks, when the two do something else entirely together, such as cook a meal or even play volleyball. Still, it’s hard to affect the interview process itself. One telling fact is that when a conversation takes an intimate turn, several interns document turning off the tape recorder. The formal, public aspect of a recorded interview is nearly impossible to escape.

“It’s just absolutely, completely him”

Photo shoots seem to bring about fewer feelings of nervousness and insecurity, at least from interns’ perspectives, than interviews. As Scott described, taking photographs sometimes allows people to relax and enjoy themselves. Noah Raper [2005] recorded joked around during his photo shoot at a labor camp: “While we were inside, I took a photo of another worker who was outside with his face pressed against the window screen, which
some of the workers thought was hilarious.” Seema Kakad [2003] used her field notes to
describe a moment when photography brought her and her participants closer together:

In addition to pictures that I would be using for my project, I also took a lot of family
pictures. Just as my experience was in Mexico, I’ve found that people tend to
respond really well to digital cameras since you can see the picture immediately after
you’ve taken it. This was their first time seeing such a camera and I think they really
enjoyed it. After taking pictures indoors I looked outside and noticed how beautiful
the light was. Even though it was slightly drizzling, I asked them to come outside to
take pictures and they were up for it. I took their family portrait outside of their
house and then just as everyone was getting ready to go in, Tommy stands on the
porch, grabs a broom, and then goes dancing crazily around pretending the broom is a
guitar. What began as a joke of me taking that picture actually turned out to be my
favorite photo of this entire project. It’s just absolutely, completely him. Music runs
through his blood. It’s all he thinks about – even when he sees a broom.

In addition to appearing fun, this moment in her photography experience helped Seema
articulate what she’d learned from her project. She had started off being interested in
Tommy’s family’s tradition of performing in a band. Through the project, Tommy’s father
helped her see a compelling aspect of this tradition; everyone, even the children, participated
in some way. Now, Tommy’s clowning performance as a guitarist for the camera captured
the tradition’s heart. Photography’s appeal for both photographer and participants made this
capture possible.

Use of photography and recording call attention to the tension between the private
work of getting to know people and the more public work of representing them to others
through pictures and words. In the use of these tools, interns become more nervous or at
least more thoughtful about their choices because they know that this is a permanent record
that others will see of their encounter. When Gerardo wondered about whether the interview
with Maribel would sound “choppy,” when Seema took a photograph that she felt would
capture Tommy’s love of words, they sought truth through their representations, an
approximation of reality, in Gerardo’s case the reality of every day conversation, in Seema’s
case perhaps a deeper reality, not just Tommy’s actions but Tommy’s actions as representative of his identity as a musician. Here, Seema in particular suggests the truth-making quality of both pictures and words, that the way writers and photographers choose to present people has a lasting on viewers, and the only way to make that a truthful impact is to get to know them well enough to make a well-informed choice. This process may include an explicit conversation with the person about how they want to be seen and it may also include getting to know them well enough that the natural choice comes out. By taking a picture of Tommy with a broom, Seema demonstrated her attention to the family, what mattered to them, in the context of this documentary project – what would most convey the meaning that they’d made together during the course of the project. She used her camera to help her do the work of interpretation that was fundamental to a successful documentary project.

“I’m reminded that [photography] is a tool that can be used with unselfish motives”

In describing their uses of photography, a few interns are explicit about the possibilities and problems inherent in taking pictures of people and publishing those pictures for others. Erin Barker [2001] saw herself as a photographer before embarking on the summer internship, and she worried her photo shoots could actually create barriers between herself and others. In a letter to her mentor, she wrote about her conflicted feelings about photography.

I am really re-evaluating my place in society as a middle class white girl. Some days I feel that photography is merely a selfish pastime. Something that I love to do, rather than something I can give to my community. But, I’m reminded that it is a tool that can be used with unselfish motives. Another issue that I’ve been dealing with is my inability to have a balanced life when I’m shooting. I have this overwhelming drive to do everything perfectly, primarily photography. So, when I’m photographing I lose sight of other parts of myself I value, thus becoming an entirely one-sided person.
Here, Erin expresses concerns about losing herself in an identity as a photographer, which seems to associate with her identity as a “middle class white girl.” She wonders about photography’s effect on her herself, and also about its usefulness, or lack of usefulness, for others. She seems to be grappling with her role in service or activism and to wonder whether “photographer” is a legitimate role.

Erin and her partner documented a quinceñera, visiting with the family in the days leading up to the quinceñera, for the event itself, and following the event. In her field notes, Erin leaves behind her worries as she develops a relationship with the family. On the first day, she documents her nervousness and her worries about intruding into their lives. She describes her feelings when she and her partner drove down the drive to their trailer:

It is really nerve wracking to know you are about to be in the intruder into someone else’s life. You are about to ask for an invitation into their life – into their special event. On top of just being present at that moment, you want to take images away and share them with others. It’s tough and hard to gage a response....

It has always seemed easy for me to use my camera as an excuse to enter someone’s life – it opens doors, but I haven’t yet found a way to explain myself in Spanish that makes it appear that I’m not just someone who wants to exploit my subjects. In English, I have grown accustomed to explaining my actions in photography, but it is hard to jump over into another language and have others realize your intentions.

When they arrive at the trailer, the father of the family seems to greet them with suspicion, and Erin documents feeling “taken aback,” worrying that they’re unwelcome, and forgetting the Spanish that generally she knows. At that moment, her partner, a native Spanish speaker and Mexican-born, jumps in and explains why they are there – “we wanted to document his daughter’s quinceñera in hopes of educating people about the Hispanic culture and thus breakdown any stereotypes.” Then Erin records that he’s welcoming, introduces them to his wife, who agreed for them to come to the event and take photos. Erin documents feeling wonderful. In her next four sets of field notes, she leaves behind the question of any barrier
that a camera serves between herself and participants as she merely concentrates on
describing time spent with the family, at the quinceñera festivities, and afterwards when she
and her partner go to take the family prints of the photographs. Of their last visit, she writes:

Well, here we go. It is hard to reflect on something that is so hard. Last night was
the last night that we will spend laughing in the living room with our newfound
family. They cracked jokes as we turned down meat tamales because we were
vegetarians, and gave us huge bowls of amazing watermelon. We sat and talked
wanting to avoid the conversation involved with ending the documentary project. I
gave them more prints and took notes on what they wanted. We then talked about the
evening as if it had happened years ago, instead of only weeks. We then discussed
the situation of the Hispanics in this North Carolina area and what could be possibly
done to help. It was an intense conversation that ended in tears as we shut the door
behind us. It was truly amazing to hug everyone goodbye and see that every single
one of us was touched. Even the father, who I had at first thought was really stern
was tearing up. Driving away tonight was harder than ever and it was hard to avoid
the urge to return to their warmth.

The experience of giving prints to the documentary participants is a common one in the field
notes, one that SAF encourages as a means of reciprocating the time that participants have
given to the project. Other interns take prints; a few also take other things, such as baked
goods, to give thanks. In these notes, Erin documents the process that Bart taught in 2006:
check in with participants about how they want to be presented. It seems here that she’s no
longer questioning whether photography is a selfish pastime or a tool for that can be used
with unselfish motives. It seems as though it feels unselfish to her, because the family, like
she and her partner, have been touched through the project, she’s been able to concretely
share prints with them, and as her partner suggested the project itself, when shared, has the
potential of breaking down stereotypes of Latino immigrants. In this way, the photographs
seem to take on the possibility of doing good on a personal level and also in the public
sphere. Developing a relationship with her participants, which was made possible by the
help of her partner, put her fears to rest. When they were part of the process, she no longer
expressed worries about her middle-class white status or the all-consuming photographer identity.

“I think this program has so much potential to make kids learn about themselves”

Both Seema and Erin wrote of sharing their photographic images with their participants, and this process seemed to help them interpret folklife traditions. In Seema’s case, the family’s excitement about the pictures seems to have directly led to Tommy’s grabbing the guitar, which Seema than caught on camera as representative of him. When Erin and her partner went to take photographs to the family they worked with, they were able to sit down together and talk about “the situation with Hispanics in North Carolina and what could possibly be done to help,” a topic integrally related to the purpose of the documentary projects. A few other times over the past couple of years, interns have explicitly shared the work of interpretation with folklife participants by sharing documentary tools. For instance, several interns over the years have given participants clients cameras to document their lives themselves. This is a practice popularized by Wendy Ewald, a documentary photographer and educator who started the Literacy Through Photography program at the Center for Documentary Studies. Laura Greeson [2000] worked in a Literacy Through Photography program in a summer Migrant Education Program and documented some success in having the children take self-portraits. In particular, she found that by taking photographs and writing about themselves, the girls in the program became less-critical, one even writing “I love myself.” Laura wrote, “I think this program has so much potential to make kids learn about themselves, especially at the middle-school age when they’re experiencing so many new changes and emotions.” In this case, being able to take photographs themselves seemed to help the girls in the program learn to accept and value themselves. Elizabeth Baker [1997]
had less success when she gave cameras to adult women in a women’s group to document their lives, mainly because of the logistical challenges of distributing cameras and collecting photographs. The material reality of the women’s lives interfered with them all doing as much with the project as Elizabeth hoped, but some did take rolls of film, share them with Elizabeth, and plan to share them with family members as descriptive of their life in the U.S. Elizabeth was struck by the fact that the women tended to prefer photographs other than the ones that she liked best. For example, one liked photographs of the tobacco barn even though they were not well-shot because they showed details she wanted others to know about her life. Elizabeth’s and Laura’s projects show that if interns do share the documentary tools with participants, projects are likely to develop in quite different ways.

Forming Documentary Relationships

The ability to share documentary tools and share decisions about what counts as folklife depends to some degree on the quality of relationships established between documentarians and participants. However, no one relationship results in the right kind of documentary project, partly because of the diversity among both interns and documentary participants. We have seen some of the diversity among interns in the above accounts. Elida and Gina both consciously attended to the types of relationships they wanted to establish with documentary participants and consciously made the choice to keep relationships fairly formal. In Elida’s case, she used what she had learned in her interpersonal communications class to negotiate her interview. Gina had already written in a letter to her mentor about her desire to be “relaxed and warm, yet professional” on her outreach visits, to “maintain a sense of boundaries and professionalism in order to ward off any confusion in terms of my role.” A few interns may come with specific training on establishing professional relationships if
they have been studying a field like social work or nursing. Others may receive this training in their work placements. Other interns consciously seek to break down boundaries, or this breaking down happens over time, as in Erin’s project with her partner when by the end she called the documentary participants “her newfound family.” For some interns, the issue of boundaries, defining them, maintaining them, overcoming them, is an important issue that they hint at or talk around in their field notes. For others, particularly some interns who come from farmworking backgrounds and find documentary participants’ life stories and traditions to feel culturally familiar, barriers may be minimal, and deciding whether to overcome or preserve those barriers may be a non-issue. The issue of boundaries is also affected by the diversity of participants; participants’ age, gender, folklife tradition, work and living conditions, and personalities play a large part in shaping relationships as well. Ultimately, past documentary projects reveal that there is no one farmworker culture, neither is their one set way to go about recording that culture.

“Together we display the suits on chairs”

Alison Blaine’s project with Pablo Jiménez [2001] is an example of a formal, respectful relationship consistently focused on an easily recognizable folklife tradition. Alison interviews Mr. Jiménez, a mariachi musician, about his musical traditions. She first conducted an interview in his home and later went with her mother to hear him play at a local restaurant. This is one of the few instances when field notes record a public performance of a tradition. Throughout her field notes and documentary project, Alison maintains a somewhat formal tone, referring to the musician as Mr. Jiménez. Like other interns, she records feeling quite nervous leading up to the interview, and relaxing somewhat as it continues. At his home, Mr. Jiménez mentions that he has costumes that he wears to perform, but he
apologizes that they are not better; she asks to see them and records a feeling like reverence when she photographs these costumes. She describes taking photographs of him with his violin and costume. She writes that after she has taken pictures of his violin,

He asks... if I would like to see the two mariachi suits he used to wear. I am delighted.... Before he brings them out, he apologizes that they are very simple and old, but I insist they will be perfect for my photos. When he does bring them out, he apologizes profusely that they are not ironed and wonders if I should even take pictures of them. I continue insisting that they are wonderful. Together we display the suits on chairs in the living room, one blue and one burgundy. Mr. Jiménez takes great care in arranging the vests, bowties, jackets and pants with shiny buttons running down the sides of the legs. Frequently throughout the photo shoot he notices something out of place on the suits and gets up to fix them. I consider this a great effort due to his difficulty walking because of his limp, but he wants his suits to look their best.

Alison maintains a tone of awe and appreciation toward Mr. Jiménez into her next set of field notes, which record her visit to a restaurant to hear him play. Her mother accompanies her, and Mr. Jiménez stops by to chat with them briefly. Most of the encounter consists of them sitting in the restaurant observing the surroundings and listening to the music. Alison’s ability to maintain a somewhat formal relationship with Mr. Jiménez may draw on several factors, including her perceptions of the documentarian’s work, Mr. Jiménez’s perceptions, and the fact that he is accustomed to performing and being thought of as a folklife artist. He does not need Alison to help him maintain his tradition; she can be an audience member. At the same time, her hope is to raise people’s awareness of the cultural contributions of Latinos in the North Carolina mountains, which she reveals when she writes up her final narrative.

“‘Whatever you want,’ ‘whatever you want,’ ‘but what is easiest for you,’ ‘whatever is easiest for you....’”

In contrast, Laura Podolsky [2000] also interviewed a man about his artistic pursuits, but he was a farmworker and his craft was fairly private, at least unpaid for in this country.
In addition to playing music in a band in his hometown, here he makes crafts - “painted, wove huarache sandals, made flowers and baskets from crepe paper, jewelry from ribbon, amulets from stone and wood.” Unlike Pablo Jiménez, Patricio was working as a farmworker when Laura did this project, so she visited him at the migrant camp where he shared a room with his brother and two others. Like Alison, she used her first set of field notes to document visiting him to conduct an interview, and she described the setting, how his room was decorated with objects of art that he had made:

Patricio had hung a small, colorful cross from a shelf running above his bed, and beside it a handout from English class about the alphabet; in the window beside it, he had taped up a paper doily like the one he’d shown me how to make before. In the window sill lay a few small carvings – a wooden horse’s head, the beginnings of a stone butterfly. Facing his bed was a tall metal locker with newspaper flowers lolling over the top of it. Above his bed were pictures of his family – his father and some other brothers on a sandy hill, eating cactus fruit, a sister’s wedding; the band in which he plays with eight other brothers – attached to a piece of cardboard and sheathed in plastic. ‘I taught them all to play,’ he later told me, indicating the picture of the band.

For Patricio, it seems that the heart of his tradition may lie elsewhere, in the band he plays in with his brothers. Without them here, his traditions don’t have public acknowledgement.

Whereas in her second set of field notes, Alison documents going to the restaurant to hear Mr. Jiménez play and only interacting with him briefly, in her second set of field notes Laura documents a lengthier interaction. The day began with Laura taking Patricio and another worker to get his identification card and then by Wal-mart to get art supplies. The first stop seemed to be part of her work, and the second related to the documentary project. At the Wal-mart they spend some time discussing what colors of ribbon to buy.

Patricio kept telling me to pick out the colors I wanted, but since I didn’t know what we were going to be making, I told him I thought he should do it. Back and forth we went. We would repeat this volleying of politeness several more times: ‘whatever you want,’ ‘whatever you want,’ ‘but what is easiest for you,’ whatever is easiest for you....’ We weren’t able to find a suitable rock file or headband, so we left with just...
the ribbon, which, to my great chagrin, Patricio insisted on paying for. I almost yelled at him. I really almost yelled at him when he insisted on buying my sandwich at Subway. ‘This is just how I am,’ he said. ‘And I want to thank you for taking an interest. No one has ever taken such an interest.’ I explained to him that he was helping me out already, that I had to do this project and he was enabling me to do so, and making it enjoyable to boot,’ ‘and so let me buy my own sandwich, and yours, for that matter’ – ‘but this is how I am,’ and thus he remained.’

We were a little bit delayed by Juan’s disappearance; I’m still not sure where he went, but luckily he came back. Juan has a good bit of swagger and is more confident in his English than most other farmworkers I’ve met; still, I was worried he’d gotten lost or in some kind of trouble. It’s strange to feel myself getting so camp counselor-parental with these grown men, but I feel responsible for them when we go into town. So I was much relieved when Antonio returned.

....We actually ended up being there for awhile, the night ending with two guitars and many voices stirred up in a festive rendition of La Bamba. Throughout the evening, however, despite all the social activity going on around us, Patricio stayed focused on the ribbon, which he folded and wove and sewed into shapes I hadn’t seen before. His demonstrations drew others to speak – ‘In my village, we make things with flowers,’ ‘The next town over is famous for their leather work,’ ‘I used to draw, when I was still in school.’

Laura uses her field notes to document some of the tensions around gratitude, reciprocity and vulnerability that can cloud documentary projects with migrant farmworkers. She takes him to buy materials for the project. She feels “parental” toward another worker who goes along for the ride, obviously with much more power and status than them. They struggle over who is going to buy something, Patricio seemingly wanting to show his gratitude, Laura aware of the little money that he has. Laura’s description of her disagreement with Patricio over who will purchase the materials – whatever you want; no, whatever you want – is representative of the complex negotiations that interns and farmworkers make as they seek to establish a relationship in somewhat unfamiliar territory. Each seems to feel indebted to the other, and both must be aware of the large difference in the power and wealth available to them. The performance of the tradition itself calls attention to the folklife tradition’s uneasy place in a public conversation: the informal gathering of workers at a labor camp versus the more
formal setting of the restaurant. Now, differences may not be as sharp as I am noting, especially since Patricio does tell Laura that he performs music for audiences in Mexico. Rather they call attention to the political and social context of cultural traditions and to inequities among practitioners given varying degrees of temporariness and permanence, freedom and restriction, confiding and performing.

“They thanked us for the rain that we had brought”

Similar to Laura’s project are two projects involving a camp where the workers make wire scorpions with found materials. In 2002, Coby and her partner are delighted when they are doing health outreach and see the scorpions; they have found the subject for their project. On a later date they return with the team and stay for a lesson in making the materials, a visit that ended with a moment of connection:

We arrived early in the evening and spent quite a while doing the HIV tests. Then, Joyce left and we began to talk to the guys about the documentary. All of a sudden scorpions appeared left and right. Since the last time that we had been there, yet another one of the guys had begun to make them. They call him... araña (Spider). We talked for a bit, but it was beginning to get dark and starting to drizzle, so we went inside their comedor, dining room. There was a big group of us there – a whole crowd around the table. We told them that we wanted to ask a few questions about the scorpions... and they began to tell us stories. I asked if it was ok if I got out my camera, and they agreed. So, while sitting across the table from Victor and being surrounded by other farmworkers, I took photos of the scorpions and their makers while they told stories about scorpions in Mexico. This was the first time that I ever spent a significant amount of time with farmworkers. It was funny because one of the farmworkers came up to me and pointed at his belly (that was pretty inflated) and said, “Lombrices.” I just looked at him kind of funny and asked him what he was talking about. He just said, “Lombrices” again and then told me that there were two other workers who had the same problem. One of the younger guys looked at me and said, “Parásitos.” Oh! Parasites! They asked if I had any medication for this and I told them I wasn’t sure. I was still a little paranoid as I listened to them because they kept giggling. It took me a minute to catch on... but then I figured out that they were joking around. Later on when we were chatting, Nkechi took a picture of me and the guy who had blown his stomach out for me competing to see who could make their tummy stick out more. We were all practically rolling around on the floor we were laughing so hard.
This was one of the most fun nights that I ever had at a camp. Everybody seemed so excited and happy that we were there. They gave us a number of scorpions to take home and I felt like we had really bonded with them. As we left to drive home later that night, they thanked us for the rain that we had brought, it was the first time that it had rained in ages... all the more reason to have permanent smiles on our faces.

These field notes reveal a purpose other than documentary farmworkers’ folklife traditions, that of getting to know workers on a deeper level than interns are able to at work, not just to present these deeper sides to other audiences, but to give the interns a meaningful summer experience. This is something that some interns write about wanting. In their reports, they mention their eagerness to get out to camps and also their desire to have conversations with workers. Some who come from farmworking backgrounds or others who have been abroad are looking for something they have had before. For others, the connection may come as a surprise, and they may find themselves having fun in the context of a professional relationship and struggle a bit with what to do with that. This is the case a bit on the last visit to this camp when the man who was the main focus of the project invited the interns out to dinner:

Jaime came over and gave me a scorpion made of red, green, white and black wiring that had a chain so I could hang it from my rear view window. I also showed them my first scorpion – a tiny little guy that I labored over for an hour last week. I want to make them something prettier to give to them as gifts. They have been so incredibly generous in what they have given us. Victor invited Nkechi and I out to dinner next Sunday, but I have a baptism to go to so we are going to try and do it the following Sunday. At first I really did not want to accept, but Maribel and Anna told me later on that it would have been very rude to not accept. He said that if we provided the transportation then he would pay for us.

Here, she finds herself negotiating an unfamiliar situation. As a health outreach worker, this might not be an issue, but what about as a documentarian? What about as a friend? What is the nature of this relationship? The field notes don’t answer these questions but raise them.
Coby suggests that for her the decision whether to accept her documentary participant’s dinner invitation is a difficult one, and other interns write of similar questions.

In Alison’s case, Mr. Jiménez’s folklife tradition is public; he plays violin for an audience, he identifies as a musician. When documentary participants share more privately practiced traditions or their life stories, it may be more challenging for participants and documentarians to find a topic that they can consistently use as a focal point for their evolving relationships. So, more than likely, other activities will intervene. If interns follow Michael’s advice and flow with where interviews take them, they may end up rolling around the floor in laughter, which may in turn lead to a relationship that feels significant enough that a dinner out together seems called for. In this way, the status of a participant’s tradition as public or private can affect documentary relationships.

Perhaps even more significant is the participant’s current living and working status. As I mentioned before, some participants have settled out of farmwork, are working seasonally, or only practice their tradition in a Latino or farmworker community rather than being farmworkers themselves. Often (not always) these participants are more financially stable, and this financial stability can influence the project. In the examples above, Pablo Jiménez was paid for his tradition and had transportation to get to the restaurant where he would perform; Alison could arrange to go to the restaurant and listen as an audience member. In Coby’s project and Laura’s project, their participants were currently migrant farmworkers here with temporary work visas under the H2-A program and had neither money to spend on their traditions nor transportation to obtain materials (or take documentarians out to eat in gratitude). Also, Laura’s awareness of her participant’s lack of financial resources probably led her to offer to buy lunch and the project supplies.
Given their low pay and often isolated conditions, currently migrant farmworkers are more likely than other documentary participants to have lower public status and fewer resources. Also, they have more reason to be distrustful of people coming to visit them with the intention of documenting their lives. Remember that Juan Carlos wrote of the prevalent “fear” in farmworkers’ eyes. A common theme in all of the guided reports and documentary reports is farmworkers’ fear. The fear is natural given the undocumented status of some and the temporary status of many, who come here under the H2-A program and are generally kept in the dark about their rights and dependent on growers in virtually every way. Growers may tell them that they are not allowed to have visitors, and they may not know that such regulation is against the law. Representatives of legal aid and organizing groups are particularly disliked by many growers, so farmworkers may fear their visits more than others’. Health and school workers are more accepted, but even with them, there are questions about outreach workers’ views and their alliance with other organizations. Even with them, visits may be cast as a distraction from workers’ main purpose: laboring in the fields. When even a health appointment for an illness or injury may be dismissed as a distraction, a documentary project is a vulnerable proposition. Given the prevalence of fear on labor camps, establishing trust is a crucial step in the documentary projects. And clearly, when people have developed trust against such odds, they need to take extra care in honoring that trust and in appreciating the resulting relationship.

“Siento algo que me identifica con ellos o que me hacer recordar de mis padres”

[“I feel something that makes me identify with them or makes me remember my parents”]

When interns are familiar with farmworkers’ cultural traditions and life stories, they are less likely to dwell on the issue of boundaries between themselves and farmworkers.
Alicia Marquez [2005] shed light on how the documentary work with farmworkers may feel somewhat natural to some interns with a farmworking backgrounds themselves. She wrote the following in response to the question: “How has your documentary or theater project changed the way you understand farmworkers and the movement?”

All my life I have been surrounded by fields, I was born and grew up in a farm; therefore it is kind of hard for me to explain how I was changed by the documentary project the way I see farmworkers. I mean, I am one of them and for me this question is like when you ask a native speaker don’t you know the rules of grammar, you, as a native speaker, know how to talk and you could correct other people who is learning the language. However, if you don’t know the grammar rules and someone asks you why something is pronounced or written the way it is, you might not know how to explain, yet you know it is right. That’s something similar I feel with this question.

Alicia’s documentary participant shared her life story and some of her current practices, such as gardening and cooking. Her comments here suggest that for Alicia, the documentary project was a way of formalizing something she had always known. She may not have needed to consciously negotiate a documentary relationship, if passing the time talking of a familiar lifestyle felt like something she had done in other settings.

In 2005, Lupita Lopez and Julia Finkelstein completed a documentary project together, an oral history of Señora Nuñez, a Mexican-American woman who shared her experiences coming to and living in the U.S. Lupita was Latina and a native Spanish speaker, Julia white and a native English speaker. In their field notes, Lupita reveals that she felt immediate comfortable with Señora Nuñez and in her home and that she helped Julia also feel at ease in the setting. In her first set of field notes, Lupita wrote that Señora Nuñez’s home immediately reminded her of her home, and after just a few minutes talking with the woman, Lupita felt like she’d known her a long time. Señora Nuñez reminded Lupita of her own mother, because they are both “fighters, and they fight until they win.” When Señora Nuñez offered her orange juice, even the juice was as her mother made it. For Julia on the
the encounter was an encounter across difference. She found her “mesmerizing,” but not familiar, and she felt insecure about her Spanish; perhaps as a consequence Julia described having “butterflies” in her stomach. She wrote, “I was eager to understand the life of this woman” – whereas much of already seemed clear to Lupita – “and excited about what was to come in the future.”

In her field notes about the second visit, Lupita writes about trying to help Julia feel more comfortable. They had been conducting the interview and then broken off into informal conversation. Lupita wrote,

Algo muy curioso ocurrió, yo estaba sentada al lado de la señora y Julia enfrente de las dos en el otro sofá. No sé que me dio por voltear y mire a mi compañera muy callada, solo escuchándonos. Se me hizo muy raro verla tan callada, porque de lo que yo la conozco siempre esta hablando y preguntando cosas a la gente. En la primera ocasión me acuerdo que ella me dijo que se sentía como una extraña y por eso en esta segunda ocasión le di la oportunidad de que platicara y se envolviera mas en la conversación con Señora Nuñez. [Something very strange occurred. I was sitting to the Senora’s side, and Julia across from the two of us on the other sofa. I don’t know what made me turn and see that my partner was very quiet, just listening to us. It seemed very strange to see her quiet, because from what I know of her she is always talking as asking people questions. Then I remembered that the first time she had told me that she felt like a stranger and therefore in this moment, I gave her the chance to talk and involve herself more in the conversation with Señora Nuñez.]

Here, Lupita seemed to perceive that Julia was less comfortable in the situation than she, and she sought to help her feel more comfortable. In Julia’s field notes, she had been describing the setting and the interview and drawing some tentative conclusions about Señora Nuñez on the basis: For instance, “I don’t think there is ever a quiet moment in the Nuñez casa. Between the phone ringing, TV in the background, Pancho laughing or yelling about the goal he just scored in a soccer game on the computer, there is rarely a dull moment. Maybe that is why she enjoys crocheting so much; it is her only solace.” Here, Julia’s field notes, because the scene is apparently unfamiliar to her, suggest that her interpretation of folk life can be
colored by her own experience; perhaps because the activity seems somewhat overwhelming to her, she assumes that Señora Nuñez must like crocheting for its solitary nature.

“I had never really been asked this question before out of an academic context”

Julia’s field notes then shift to the conversation at hand, presumably after the moment described above by Lupita:

[Señora Nuñez] then posed a question to me. She asked me why I was doing this internship, what made me want to get involved in this cause. Surprisingly, this question caught me off guard. Sure, I was used to giving an academic answer about globalization, agribusiness, and immigration laws in this country. I have explained many times my reasoning for getting involved with farmworker issues and the inhumane conditions they face in the fields as well as within their communities. I had never really been asked this question before out of an academic context though, by a Hispanic person with genuine curiosity in her eyes for why a white, seemingly middle class American woman would actually care about the lives of farmworkers. Seeing this look in her eyes made me want to give her the most honest and genuine answer back. ‘Because we’re all human beings and we deserve to be treated with the same amount of respect no matter where we’re from, what our legal status is, what kind of job we have, or what language we speak.’ These were the words that began flowing out of my mouth. I then told her that knowing about the conditions of farmworkers and the people that try to cross the frontera every day are met by violence and discrimination, I could not separate my own life and my own humanity from the lives of these people. I told her that myself and other Americans don’t need to travel to another country to speak Spanish or to witness oppression. We simply need to open our eyes to what is going on around us and strive to make changes within the system and our own lives.

She then told me I should become president, change the laws, and open up the borders. She then said, ‘People like myself want to come here in peace, work, and have a better life for themselves and their families... nada mas.’

In this case, when Lupita and Señora Nuñez bring Julia out of her shell, they reverse the typical hierarchy between documentarians and participants. Lupita encourages Señora Nuñez to ask Julia a question, and Julia is put off-guard. Typically, documentarians ask all the questions and thus, perhaps without meaning to, retain greater control of an interview. Here, control is relinquished in the conversation among the three, in part through Lupita’s actions. Julia rises to the occasion and works to give a true answer. In doing this, she
communicates a fundamental belief that she is only used to articulate to other audiences. The answer seems to feel more meaningful to her because she is uttering it in this new context, to a farmworker who she’s been used to representing. While the “public” presentation in most documentary projects occurs in publication for other audiences, in this project Julia goes public to Señora Nuñez. This powerful reversal of status is one possible outcome of documentary projects that are not only collaborative between participants and documentarians, but also between documentary partners.

For Lupita, the documentary project is a chance to publicize the traditions that have been an intimate part of her private life for as long as she can remember. In writing about Señora Nuñez, she is also honoring her memories of her mother. And father, too. In a guided report, she mentions the impact of talking with Señora Nuñez’s husband about his past: “Siempre que salgo a reclutar escucho a los trabajadores del campo y siempre siento algo que me identifica con ellos o que me hacer recordar de mis padres. Por todo lo que tienen que pasar por no conocer a nadie quien los oriente o pueda ayudar y también por no hablar Ingles.” [Whenever I go on outreach, I listen to farmworkers, and I also feel something that enables me to identify with them or that makes me remember my parents. For everything that must have happened by not knowing anyone who could orient or help them and also by not knowing English.] For Lupita, the documentary project may be in part about indebtedness. She writes: “This documentary project has given me a better understanding of up to how much people are willing to risk their lives and work hard to earn a little bit more and help their families have a better future.” In short, the project has helped her honor her own family’s traditions and their sacrifices for her.
Lupita’s and Julia’s notes shed light on the practice of publishing oral histories of farmworkers and folklife projects of their traditions. In Lupita’s case, she articulates in a new way what nearly every intern expresses at some point over the summer: farmworkers make important contributions to U.S. that go unrecognized. While in their advocacy work, interns ask readers to appreciate farmworkers for the food they eat, in documentary projects, they ask readers to appreciate farmworkers for their rich cultural traditions. Sometimes, this process of appreciation is one they themselves undergo during the course of the project. A theme of humanization comes through the public documentary narratives that reminds me of the “just people” theme in the guided reports. Farmworkers – interns say or imply – are also people with cultural traditions and life stories. This may seem obvious, except that farmworkers’ low public status and exploitation as workers actually does suggest that many people haven’t regarded them as fully human or at the least haven’t taken the time to mull over their full humanity. Julia’s notes show the reality of an audience that will listen to the documentary projects. Typically, SAF interns have seemed to imagine for their public narratives an audience of people who do not know about farmworkers. Julia’s speech to Señora Nuñez reminds me, and could remind other Safistas, that their documentary audiences, do in fact include farmworkers and people who know about farmworkers. It’s a powerful writing act to transform what one might say to one audience to another one, to one differing in status, power, position. If students from diverse backgrounds bring different degrees of familiarity to their documentary projects, if farmworkers from diverse backgrounds bring different levels of participation, then readers too will bring different levels of knowledge and motivation. By following the lead of Señora Nuñez, Lupita, and Julia and repositioning documentary participants interviewers and audience members, documentarians
may find themselves challenged to speak about farmworkers in new ways. This is another possible element to collaborative folklife projects, another possible way to integrate participants into the powerful work of interpretation.

Synthesis of Themes

In Chapter Two, I mentioned that the major themes in guided reports related to interns’ identification with farmworkers, their knowledge of the injustice farmworkers experience, their anger and frustration with injustice, and their own ability to make a difference. In documentary projects, identification with farmworkers remains an important theme, but the other themes become less important, or shift. In the case of knowledge, interns still write about what they’re learning, but it’s different. Where they wrote about injustice in guided reports, here they write of their deepening knowledge of farmworkers’ lives beyond the injustice they experience in the field: their life histories, their cultural traditions, and their aspirations. Interns sometimes identify this knowledge as deeper because it takes into account farmworkers’ whole being, not just their identity at work. With regard to other significant themes in guided reports, anger and frustration with injustice no longer stay a focus because injustice itself is no longer a focus. And interns don’t use the documentary projects to grapple with their ability to make a difference in the way they often use the guided reports because, given the fact that farmworkers are carrying on their cultural traditions, making a difference isn’t as front and center.

Interns’ consistent emphasis on the theme of identification with farmworkers and the shift in knowledge as it’s written about in the documentary projects support SAF’s mission of teaching interns to think of themselves acting in solidarity with workers. Guided reports and documentary projects suggest that interns felt the need to establish some sort of basis of
comparison and contrast between themselves and farmworkers. This is important work for solidarit
Comparison showed them how they could connect; contrast what they had to offer and, especially in the documentary projects, what they had to gain. SAF staff teach interns that farmworkers need to lead the farmworker movement. Documentary projects encourage a belief that farmworkers have that capacity by revealing farmworkers to be knowledgeable.

Solidarity implies a shared sense of purpose. Solidarity implies unity. But when a diverse group attempts solidarity, they must address their differences. I began this study informed by Benhabib’s (2000) call for deliberate and inclusive communication in public spaces. Arendt (1958) defined public in two ways, a material public and a public of ideas. When one group attempts to act in solidarity with a more marginalized group, a material public isn’t shared. The marginalized group, in this case farmworkers, lacks access to resources – decent housing, a toxin-free environment, financial security, transportation, etc. While some interns also find themselves without these resources, this happens to a lesser degree. Too, farmworkers often do not have access to the public of ideas. This happens when public conversations are English only, when farmworkers are afraid to speak due to their status as undocumented immigrants or guest workers, and when growers do not provide them with adequate training about, for example, protection against pesticides.

Interns are often charged at their placement sites with the work of sharing the material public with farmworkers – giving them rides, helping them pay their bills, documenting housing violations to report to the Department of Labor. Their guided reports reveal that as they do this, they often become aware of the need to also bring farmworkers into the public of ideas. They do this by sharing knowledge. Health interns strive to keep clients fully
apprised of their health condition through accurate interpretation. Legal interns share information about their legal rights with clients. Education interns teach kids about the possibilities of going to college and in some cases, through bilingual programming, extend this information to parents. Many interns teach ESL classes at migrant camps in the evening. As they share knowledge, interns work against the barrier of farmworkers’ fear, and they work against the causes of that fear: racism, exploitation and segregation in the rural south. They also work against cultural and language differences between themselves and farmworkers, sometimes seeking to learn from farmworkers – better Spanish, their cultural practices. Many other times, interns act as teachers, or at the least cultural interpreters, implicitly teaching migrant farmworkers how things are done in the U.S. For how things are done, they draw not only on prior knowledge but on SAF’s particular view of history being made from the ground up.

Interns’ access to material resources comes through their placements, and their access to knowledge resources comes through their prior experiences and through SAF’s pedagogy, which teaches them to honor that experiential knowledge. Experiential knowledge is especially cultivated with students from farmworking families, who SAF increasingly asks to share their stories as models for others to learn from, to share their stories with each other, to share them with farmworkers. Students from non-farmworking backgrounds have thus far done less to share their own autobiographies and to find relevance in them to their work with farmworkers. Knowledge resources include knowledge of English, of health problems, of the law. They include a knowledge of farm labor history and especially a knowledge of farmworker resistance to oppression. Some interns from farmworking backgrounds bring this knowledge when their families have been involved with the United Farmworkers or
when they group up aware of Cesar Chavez. Others gain it from reading *The Human Cost of Food* and sitting in on SAF’s training. The knowledge of farmworker resistance is at the heart of what interns are charged to share with farmworkers, an attitude that informs how people choose to respond to health appointments, legal violations, educational opportunities. In their guided reports, SAF interns record their attempts to share knowledge with farmworkers in the form of what they could do in response to a situation, more than just sit idly by. They also record an awareness that farmworkers will make “their decisions” with that knowledge.

As a form, guided reports push interns to reflect on what they have to offer farmworkers and the farmworker movement. The reports do allow for documentation of experiences, but because they are individual pieces and because many of the prompts ask interns to write about their actions and thoughts, guided reports tend to focus on interns’ evolving knowledge of themselves. Documentary projects, on the other hand, ask them to put their own knowledge on a back burner while they concentrate on the knowledge of farmworkers. No longer are farmworkers people ignorant of their rights, English, health concerns; they become people with knowledge. Finding that knowledge, deciding it counts, putting a story to it is a challenge that interns face, but they rarely if ever defer to themselves as more knowledgeable or suggest that farmworkers lack something to offer. Documentary projects become learning opportunities for interns, who deepen their knowledge about farmworkers in a way that seems different from other work they do. We see this in Chapter Two, when Juan Carlos and Alicia and Joslyn write about the deepening knowledge they gained through prolonged contact with documentary participants. Students are more truly
students in the documentary projects, learning from an unusual source they don’t usually have a chance to learn from in their college classes.

Collaboration is an important piece of recognizing and drawing out farmworkers’ knowledge and an important addition to SAF’s pedagogy of solidarity. Where guided reports were a solitary form in which people could consider their communal obligations, documentary projects are a collaborative form in which they can actually practice acting out those obligations. Whether or not they are able to truly collaborate with farmworkers in the documentary projects is influenced by barriers and possibilities they encounter as documentarians such as the ones I have written about in this chapter. There are several key moments in documentary work when interns can either collaborate with farmworkers or make sole decisions. One is in the relationship itself; how do interns choose to relate to farmworkers? As I have said, there is no one right type of relationship. Some interns can handle fairly intimate relationships, feeling like family as Erin did, or at home, as Lupita did. Others seek a relationship that feels more professional, as Elida did when she honored Don Raymundo’s treatment of her as a superior, as Alison did when she related to Mr. Jiménez solely as a musician, and as Gina did when she consciously maintained a professional role and did not seek to break down the barriers she found between herself and the workers. Decisions about relationships both on interns’ and farmworkers’ part help determine whether a collaboration can happen.

Second, the moments when the topic of the project is being named can make or break a collaboration. What counts as folklife, and who gets to decide? Barriers to including farmworkers in this decision have been an overreliance on the assignment and on rigid ideas of what counts as folklife. When interns have looked for traditions that seem, for example,
authentically Mexican, they may have missed opportunities to see culture in transition. On the other hand, when interns have gone with the flow, so to speak, and respected practices that farmworkers spoke about as folklife traditions, they have enabled participants to collaborate. Often, circumstances prevent farmworkers from practicing the same traditions they might have practiced in Mexico, or cause them to start other traditions, or cause them to change their traditions. Some participants have chosen to describe traditions from home, others describe traditions here; when interns have been open to participants’ self-definitions, such a range of approaches has been possible.

Collaboration has also been enhanced and hindered through the use of cameras and audio-recorders. Here, SAF’s practice of documentary work allows more for collaborative interpretation than for collaborative production of projects. As I’ve mentioned, only a few interns have actually given cameras to farmworkers to record their traditions, and none that I know of have given tape recorders. However, some interns have managed to include farmworkers in choices about photographs and interviews by listening and watching for what mattered to them; for example, Seema Kakad responded to Tommy’s choice to grab a guitar by taking a photograph that captured the essence of his love of music, and Scott Pryor responded to his participants’ request that he photograph their housing. Also, many interns have given prints to farmworkers, and more have begun to then ask farmworkers to choose which prints will be included in the final project. SAF could continue to encourage collaborative interpretation by using this practice of sharing prints to shape a practice of sharing written work, having farmworkers read narratives and give responses. Whether or not SAF wants to have farmworkers collaborate as producers of the work remains up in the air. Thus far, they have not gone this route. At times, I have thought interns should share the
actual tools, believing this might allow participants to be even more involved in interpretation. But more and more, when I think of the role as possessors and sharers of knowledge that farmworkers take on in the documentary projects, I agree with SAF’s decision to have interns take photographs and conduct interviews. If farmworkers learn to use the cameras and audio-recorders from interns, they will likely become learners. By allowing collaborative interpretation and intern-driven production, the documentary projects leave farmworker participants in the role of expert, someone with something to say whose only need is an audience to say it to.

Freire’s work suggests that the key to fuller participation in public life is interpretation. Not only being able to do it, but first recognizing your ability to do it, interpret your life, your place in the world, the world itself. Identifying themes is a key first step for beginning to name your own life. From there, dialogue is a process by which people begin to share their interpretations, in Freire’s model with educators who honor their interpretive abilities. Interpretation in the form of identifying themes and dialogue is a possible outcome of SAF’s documentary process. The more it can be shared between documentarians and participants, the more collaborative the process is. I have discussed some of the ways the process has been shared and some of the barriers to more complete sharing. Just as speaking in solidarity with farmworkers remains an ideal within SAF alongside the sometimes more prevalent everyday reality of speaking on behalf, so collaboration remains something of an ideal alongside the everyday reality of documentary work. To recognize that it is not always achieved is to recognize the unequal access to status and resources that necessitates programs such as SAF in the first place. Collaboration may be more widely achieved as solidarity is more widely achieved, influenced by situations
beyond the internship that the internship also influences: namely the broader access that farmworkers have to public conversations in the U.S. Documentary project seek fuller access at the same time they suffer from lack of access.

Documentary projects draw upon SAF’s interwoven literacy practices of documentary work and advocacy. For SAF, documentary work is a tool for increasing representation of marginalized people in more public conversations. In recent years, SAF staff have added documentary projects to the media it uses to motivate wider audiences to action. When they use documentation of poor housing and labor conditions, they hope that viewers will find such exploitation morally unacceptable. But this hasn’t happened often enough; Southerners continue to close our eyes to exploitation of agricultural laborers. Absurdly, cultural practices may have a greater capacity to surprise and awaken viewers than exploitation seems to. We have not been encouraged by other media presentations to see farmworkers as producers of anything. They are rarely given credit for producing crops, much less poetry or crochet. Instead, popular representation of farmworkers reinforces government policy that admits them as laborers who are unsuitable for full inclusion in American public life, non-citizens who are permitted to work, but little else. In the popular view, when farmworkers do venture off the fields, it’s to drain America resources, certainly not contribute to them (Holland et al., 2007). By giving viewers images of farmworkers contributing culture on top of the food we eat – a double challenge to our assumptions – SAF hopes to change people’s fundamental beliefs about immigrant laborers. In order to give viewers these images, SAF first teaches interns to value farmworkers for their contributions and knowledge. Many interns already believe farmworkers are knowledgeable; in these cases, SAF shows them how to apply their belief in multi-media action.
In their writing assignments, SAF has sought to combine literacy practices. In guided reports, staff ask interns to reflect for themselves, and they then use interns’ work to advocate to other audiences. In documentary projects, they ask interns to document farmworkers’ folklife conditions, once again using their projects in advocacy efforts. In both cases, SAF seeks to persuade other audiences that farmworkers make valuable contributions. SAF staff rely on the witnessing that interns do through both guided reports and documentary projects to carry on their organizational practice of advocacy.

SAF’s practice of advocacy colors the writing assignments in interesting ways, making what might be private writing more public, asking students to think of not only Safistas but other possible audiences when they write, and asking them to write as Safistas. Given this, the differences between Safistas and their wider audience is important. Safistas are a group that’s diverse racially, socio-economically, and geographically, yet homogenous in age and status as college students. They are ideologically left of the majority. The wider audience they imagine writing for seems to be whiter, more privileged, southern, and more conservative. I say this because when they write more public pieces, interns tend to assume a degree of ignorance about farmworkers; they tell their readers who farmworkers are, what their lives are like, how they deserve credit for picking the food we eat. They also tend to assume that readers can get involved to make a difference, by welcoming immigrants into
their communities, by being grateful for their work, by supporting farmworker boycotts and other actions. In their public pieces, interns rarely blame the U.S. government or growers for treating farmworkers unjustly, the way they often do in private pieces. They don’t express frustration with systemic oppression the way they do elsewhere. Rather, when speaking to wider audiences, they tend to assume a degree of good will in their readers. If readers only knew who farmworkers were and how they were treated, they would want to get involved. In public pieces, interns tend to express an optimism about people’s behavior generally that belies the frustration they express in their guided reports. These tendencies lead me to believe that they view their readers as more conservative, unlikely to see societal oppression as SAF sees it, and also as Southerners with the status to make a difference through their actions. As the form of guided reports tends to create an optimism about interns’ own ability to make a difference, public writing tends to create an optimism about others’ ability to make a difference. This seems to be one shortcoming of writing: writers, perhaps influenced by dominant cultural narratives, seem to seek happy endings.

SAF staff have confirmed that if they continue to have students write guided reports, they want to continue to have them both write within SAF and more publicly for other audiences; they want to continue to ask questions that invite both reflection and argumentation. They also want to preserve and even strengthen the public aspect of their documentary work. In 2006, SAF collaborated with the Center for Documentary Studies to change the direction of the documentary projects from folklife traditions to documentation of farmworkers’ educational aspirations. They made this decision for largely political reasons, wanting to accumulate an archive of material to use in advocacy efforts to increase schooling opportunities, including opportunities for affordable education, for immigrant youth. They
are increasing their use of other media than writing, aiming ultimately toward the production of radio pieces. Here, as they have before, interns will supply material in the form of interviews, a number of photographs, and final narratives about farmworkers, and SAF and Center staff will compile and edit this material into finished pieces. So, students will still not be charged with the task of preparing completely public materials; they will write and make decisions with the idea of a wider audience in their minds, but they will turn over their work for someone else to reach that audience.

In general, over the eleven years of this study, SAF has used writing in increasingly public ways. This has happened because documentary projects were introduced in 1999, because the work of reflection has itself become more public and has been spread out to other avenues, and because staff have found more and more ways to share student work with other audiences, through exhibitions, publications, newsletters, and the like. This shift has several important implications. For individual interns, writing ends up being less stressed. While the practice of reflection continues to be strong, it is not limited to writing. It’s collective, involves conversations, activities, and non-textual expression. Some students will always reflect in solitary writing; these are students that might keep a journal or write letters and emails about their experiences even if they weren’t assigned writing. Students without this predilection rely on SAF’s other modes of reflection and likely on conversations with friends and colleagues over the summer to reflect. Another way that writing is underemphasized is that, while the practice of advocacy is increasingly important, staff don’t expect interns to produce publishable pieces. Instead, staff do much of the work of translating students’ guided reports and documentary projects into advocacy. By asking students to write what they will then excerpt for publication, staff seem to hope that students will still be candid and
opinionated in their writing, that they will not take on the extra responsibility of changing their words for imagined audiences. Here, staff are being realistic. They work with professional documentarians who can create high quality audio and written pieces with student work. What they lack is the time over the ten week internship to teach students how to create such pieces. With everything else they have to do in their curriculum, they cannot also teach more than basic skills of writing, photography, and audio recording. Consequently, students may make certain choices with their writing that editors will then override in publication for audiences. Student mastery of writing is not a goal of writing assignments. In the case of guided reports, staff accept that some students do the “bare minimum” with reports and accept that others will find better ways to reflect. With documentary projects, they don’t ask students to take the extra steps to polish their work. Writing is a tool of activist work within a group but not, SAF implies, an utterly essential tool for every individual within the group. If you don’t like writing or feel successful at writing, you can use other means to get your ideas across. If you aren’t great at writing, your documentary partner can do more of the writing for a project, and editors can get your work into better shape.

While SAF does not promote writing as an essential tool for every intern, the organization does rely on the writing that interns collectively produce to sustain its work. In the moment and over time, through community presentations and through publications, they use interns’ perspectives to diversify and humanize public conversations. Now, they are starting to realize that they’ve accumulated a substantial and valuable archive of student writing of witness. Recently, the organization has decided to store all of students’ written work in the library at Duke University, which means that readers will be able to access it,
learning about the lives of farmworkers and college students during a time of change, a time when increasing numbers of Latino immigrants settled in the southeast and a time when increasing numbers of students participated in service-learning and experiential learning programs outside of school. In addition to teaching new readers, the archive has the potential to sustain Safistas and other activists, who can use it to better understand their experiences. By acknowledging from the beginning that student writing is public work, SAF has created a space for collective memory, an important practice for the preservation of history. By guiding interns to reflect and witness in their writing, they have ensured that this archive contains some rich material with something to teach readers. Toward the end of this study, I held two focus groups, one with SAF’s staff and one with former interns; these discussions led to the above conclusions, as participants addressed both the usefulness of writing in sustaining activist work and also the challenges of assigning writing within SAF’s curriculum.

Intern Focus Group

As I mentioned in my methods section, I held a focus group with four former interns to discuss my tentative findings. These interns were Lynne Walter [1998], Andy Smith [1998], Lori Fernald Khamala [1999], and Angelita Morado [2005]. At the focus group, I gave participants their guided reports to read through. As they read, they occasionally laughed and commented on what they were reading. We then talked about what they could remember about the process of writing the reports and how they felt the reports compared with what they remembered of their SAF experience. Not surprisingly, Angelita’s memories of writing the reports were the most vivid; the others chalked this up to her youth. Of writing the reports, Angelita remembered:
I didn’t expect to do any writing, or at least not every week when I got here. I remember every Friday I would get up early, which was like at ten o’clock in the morning, that was early enough, and typing my paper before I could go to work and mail it. So, I looked forward to it. I like writing. I don’t do it now, but I do. [Pause.] I guess because a lot of things I could relate to. That’s why I didn’t have a problem with writing. ‘Cause I was a farmworker.

Angelita ascribed her vivid memory not just to her youth, but also to her enjoyment of writing. She attributed enjoyment of the writing assignments to being able to relate to the experiences she was having. In contrast, Lori couldn’t remember writing the reports at all. She said, “The things that I remember were about the relationships with the other interns and the experience of working at the organization, but I had almost even forgotten that [writing] was a part of it.” And Lynne remembered writing the reports, but with less fondness than Angelita.

I remember being like, I don’t want to write this damn weekly report, and there being weeks when I was like, I’ll just write bigger, and fill it up faster. You know, we had to do it every single week. After a while, long weeks, you’re like, I don’t want to do this.... At the end of a really long week, I don’t want to have to sit down and answer these arbitrary, seemingly arbitrary, questions. But I also remember enjoying a lot of them; some of the topics I liked better than others.

Lynne’s remembrance of feeling annoyance when sitting down to write the reports contrasts with Angelita’s feeling of expectation; this contrast suggests the variation of attitudes toward writing that staff confirm has existed among the group as a whole.

The interns agreed that the questions had something to do with their enjoyment of the reports. They generally felt that the more open-ended questions were, the better. They concurred with Lynne’s assessment that some of the questions were “seemingly arbitrary.” Lynne and Andy noted that during their year, two of the reports gave them the chance to write a “free report,” on a topic of their choice, and it was these reports that they found the most meaningful to read again. In his, Andy said he wrote about “All kind of stuff. Some
personal stuff, some of what was going on in the internship, what I was thinking about that. A bunch of things.” In looking through her prompts, Angelita noticed that the prompts her year tended to be open-ended; in 2005, the same open-ended question was repeated three times: “Tell a story from the field.” Angelita felt this prompt may have led her to being able to write so often on her favorite subject: visits to migrant camps. She said, “Almost in every paper, I write something about a camp. I think it says, tell the story from the field or something, and everything is about this camp or the other camp. It’s always about that.” Given her own experience having lived on migrant camps, including one in North Carolina, it follows that outreach to camps was the kind of experience she could relate to and thus feel inspired to write about.

In comparing their reports to their memories of the experiences, the interns noted how their ideas had since shifted or progressed. Lori was struck by differences in how she thinks. At the time, she wrote that students were essential to the farmworker movement, whereas now in her work as a farmworker organizer, she finds students are the least reliable. Also she noticed a change in how she saw herself in relation to the movement. “I said I wouldn’t describe myself as, ‘Hi, I’m Lori, I’m part of the farmworker movement.’ And now I would. I guess it just seemed so bigger and broader than what I was.” These comments show the guided reports to be a moment in time and the ideas expressed therein to be in process. In contrast, Andy was struck by the similarity of the issues he’s written about to issues he’s thinking about now, nine years later. While he was writing about them in a more tentative way, he saw in his reports the seeds of his later thinking. In this way, the writing assignments seemed to have allowed him to capture important ideas as he was developing them. He explained,
Even looking back at it... there are a lot of things that have become more important or ideas that have become more concrete. But I look back and it’s like, oh yeah, just the beginning of some things, the seeds of some things that are still developing. It’s interesting to see things that have developed a lot more. Like talk about privilege and things. At the time I was just starting to notice or become aware of, I think I’m still working on that, things that have become a lot more important over time.

Andy’s feeling that he had been able to get at important ideas in his reports and Lori’s feelings that what she’d written wasn’t true to her later beliefs may have to do with their different attitudes toward writing. Andy said that he always processes in writing; therefore, it makes sense that in that form he would be more likely to get at something meaningful to him. Lori didn’t remember writing and said that her preferred mode of processing is to talk with people.

I gave interns a list of all the prompts that had been used over the years and asked them to star the ones they liked. They didn’t only star the open-ended ones, which suggests that open-endedness may be less importance than relevance (the opposite of Lynne’s “arbitrariness”). Determining relevance depends on tying particular interests to general ones, as the process of identifying generative themes. Andy thought that a question about privilege would be good; in his reports, it was an issue he was becoming interested in. When a little bit later, I handed the interns a list of the themes I’d come up with in the chapter on documentary reports, the three interns not from farmworking backgrounds agreed that they didn’t relate to the theme “I could see myself in them.” This gap seemed to speak to Andy’s feeling that a question needed to ask students to grapple with their privilege. It seemed that interns not from farmworking backgrounds were not being invited specifically enough to reflect on their backgrounds and the relevance of their backgrounds for their work.

Angelita gave purpose to our discussion comparing reports to remembered experiences, a reason why reports should be comprehensive in what they reported. She said,
“I really enjoy writing, and it helps us work through our stuff, and then somebody like Julie comes along later on and tries do something different, and then all we have is this paper, so it helps us and it helps people in the future.” In other words, guided reports have purposes to readers, which had come out given the activity of my dissertation study. I was reading the reports and I was going to write about them for other audiences, so they took on an additional meaning. They would enable the writers to “help people in the future.” The other interns reflected on the purpose their writing might serve for other readers. The following exchange begins with Lynne’s response to Angelita:

Lynne: The point you’d made earlier, you write these things and that’s what’s there, I think particular to activism, writing is really important so that people down the road can see where people have been and what happened before, and also because so many people’s voices are silenced. So I think writing plays a really important part in activism. Because a lot of traditional methods for people’s opinions being heard are closed off for folks who are oppressed. So writing opens the door for people’s stories which might not be heard in any other medium.

Lori: I’m finding, at least about the first part of what you said, I’m thinking about leaving my position [as a farmworker organizer]. You see also how much knowledge or experience I’ve gained in my experience over the last six years on my job, thinking about how to transmit that. Luckily I’m overlapping with someone who is taking over my position, so that we’re doing a lot of training verbally and experientially, but we do keep thinking, she’s not going to be around forever either, how do you try to record some of the, not necessarily techniques, some of the lessons learned, I guess, so that other people can benefit from that. There are things that it takes years to build up or things I’ve learned just because I’ve been around for a little while. How do you make sure that someone isn’t going to have to do it all over again?

Lynne: Especially in this country where history really isn’t valued. You have these 100 year old homes that, I’m just going to tear them down and put up condos. Things are, what’s the word I want, just seem to be so temporary? Like, oh, email, no one writes letters anymore, so our kids aren’t going to be like, grandma and grandpa wrote these romantic letters to each other. It’s going to be, there might be some emails or some text messages, if they didn’t delete them. In that way too, there’s a record, this is what’s been done. You don’t have to start from square one every couple of years, that writing is also important.

Angelita: Nurses document everything. It’s just a part of me already. Because like you said, people can sue up to twenty years later, so all you fall back is on the
documentation you had at the time. I’m not going to remember twenty years later what I did with this patient. Everything is about writing and writing and writing.

In this conversation, Lori and Angelita moved from thinking about the role of writing in the internship to the role of writing in their professional lives. Lori and Angelita were both doing work similar to the work they did in SAF, Lori in organizing and Angelita in health care. They linked their writing habits. For Angelita, everything is about writing and writing and writing. Lori, a less willing writer, nonetheless acknowledged how writing could be useful in her current situation.

Also in the above conversation, Lynne addressed the importance of preserving SAF interns’ guided reports for future readers, to show them what activists have done. Here, she reinforced Angelita’s comment about writing not only “helping [writers] with our stuff,” but also “helping readers.” Given the power of written narrative, Angelita wished that her reports described time she’d spent with a group of workers that were like family to her; they’d been such an important part of the summer. But she had gotten to know these workers too late to have written about them. “I think that’s one thing that would’ve been great,” she said, “if it had happened before or during the time, and then you could have captured that too. Now, the only people that know is us.” She suggested that SAF might ask interns to write something later on about what they’re doing now, in part to capture what’s missing from the guided reports. Both Angelita’s comment that SAF could get interns to write something additional and all of the participants’ interest in finding the prompts that would have best enabled them to write about all their experiences point to writing’s potential to document experience both for selves and others. Given this purpose, it seems important for SAF to find the prompts that are going to best enable interns to document all of their experiences. However, the fact that not all the interns liked to write suggests that even the most carefully
thought out prompts might not do the trick for everyone. A comprehensive record is important; written work alone won’t accomplish that.

Staff Focus Group

A few weeks after the intern focus group, I met with SAF’s five full-time staff. This meeting was different because I spent the majority of our time summarizing my findings from my dissertation draft and asking them to contribute questions and ideas. SAF continued to confirm that, beyond the role of writing, they do take pride in and want to continue to cultivate their practice of reflection. In Chapter Two, I shared some of their comments in interviews about the importance of reflection for self-care, contemplation, prevention of burn-out, and team-building. During our focus group, they validated my description of the value they place on reflection. In fact, at the end of the meeting, several staff emphasized the theme of reflection as being the most important to come out of the findings I had shared.

When Melinda asked me for a summary of my main point – she joked, my “thesis statement” – which I couldn’t yet articulate, Lupe jumped in to help me out: “What I take from it is the importance of reflection. I’ve done many an internship where you just kind of go through the motions, where you don’t get anything out of it, but the intent of reflection, having it part of the program can make a huge difference in how much you get out of it, and how much you change.” Later, Laxmi picked up on the phrase “intent of reflection” in her suggestion that my title, also undecided at this point, have the word “reflection” in it. Staff’s affirmation of reflection in the focus group echoed the feelings they had shared in interviews.

Staff’s affirmation of reflection in the focus group seemed to be influenced by the generative themes I had shared from student writing. As I talked, there were frequent nods of agreement and recollection. Lupe said, “All the themes that students spoke about, all the
ones you read, are themes I can relate to and that I felt during the summertime.” While there wasn’t enough time for us to discuss each of the themes in depth, a few proved to be “generative” in evoking lively discussion in the group. For example, the idea of “my people” resonated strongly with Lupe, who remembered interns writing about “my people” “all the time.” And both Lupe and Rosie, who’d been interns in 2005, remembered how often their class used the term “Safista.” The theme that generated the most discussion in the whole group was the theme I’d coded “California,” that interns from elsewhere found conditions for farmworkers much worse here than where they’d come from. Juan Carlos’ work exemplified this theme when he wrote that in North Carolina, “Here, I see farmworkers with a lot of fear in their eyes,” and he wrote that having seen this motivated him to work for farmworkers when he returned to California. This theme sparked conversation among staff, perhaps because it dealt with two important ideas, changed perceptions and motivation for doing the work. Staff remembered that many students from elsewhere perceived conditions here as worse for farmworkers. Rosie noted that Juan Carlos might have felt motivated to return to California and make sure things didn’t slide back to where they had been. Melinda felt that it wasn’t only students from outside North Carolina who changed their perceptions as a result of the SAF experience. Even students who had grown up here, by virtue of new situations and new colleagues, began to see their surroundings in new ways. Melinda wondered whether the changed situation itself caused the changed perception. Conditions in North Carolina may not actually be so different; it’s just that the internship has created a space for interns to see what had been hidden. Clearly what started in my analysis as the theme of “California” has layers of possible meaning for interns geographically located and dislocated.
The staff focus group indicated the possibilities for discussion that could come out of such past generative themes.

Despite the fact that some interns’ writing appeared to be successful at drawing out important themes, Lupe’s comment also sparked a conversation in the group about whether or not writing is an effective way to fulfill the “intent of reflection.” We discussed the problems with writing, particularly around a distinction I had addressed in Chapter One between “standards-based” school literacy and SAF’s literacy practices, which challenge school literacy by drawing upon the collective practice of reflection, the audio-visual as well as textual practice of documentary work, and the extracurricular tradition of advocacy. We discussed the exclusivity of writing and the fact that many students, particularly those for whom English is not their first language, feel intimidated by writing. Given this, staff wondered about whether they wanted to continue to choose writing. The following discussion took place:

Tony: What if we had an internship without any reflective writing? What would happen? What would it lack? Thinking about that, people might not get those opportunities, [but] they might get opportunities to reflect. There are different ways; some reflection doesn’t happen in writing....

Melinda: Using writing as a reflection tool is sort of continuing a standard out there; it’s not challenging. We live in a really literacy-based society, and so, we do provide lots of opportunities for people to reflect orally, and have conversations and discussions and all, but we are giving some sort of stamp of approval of the role of written word and the role it plays in our larger society. And I don’t know if we’re ready to take on challenging that notion. Instead of doing that, we’ve embraced it. We’ve said writing is a tool of activism, writing is a tool that people can use to make a difference in their communities, and we’re going to have this process where they use it to reflect and do all these things. So, I don’t know, we haven’t questioned the concept of the written word and the role of literacy, which is very much a part of standard, whatever you call it, standards-based education. We challenge it by offering a lot of other opportunities but we still include writing as an important piece.
Rosie: Well, it’s also important to be realistic and say, in our daily life, this is a skill you’re going to have to have. As much as we want to question it, it’s a good thing to make sure you’ve got it.

Tony: We may not have fundamentally questioned whether writing is valid and how we might have gone to the root of it, and said okay, and questioned the validity of writing as a craft and to challenge why it’s there. I do think we’ve questioned the way that writing is practiced to throw in all sorts of things to change the way writing is practiced, to include Spanish, handwritten, poems, all kinds of things, that may not be fundamentally saying, is writing good or bad, but can writing be good and how can we change it for the better?

Melinda: We haven’t really tackled that question, but by not tackling it we have answered it. Just because you don’t address a question doesn’t mean you don’t go forward in support of it. We’re supporting writing. Our response is we are using writing. Just because we haven’t spent an hour going through that root question, we still have answered it for ourselves.

This discussion included a couple of distinctions. Whether to write is distinct from how to write, and SAF softened their choice to use writing by recognizing that they’d opened up the possibilities of how to write. And there’s the distinction between written and oral words. Everyone seemed to concur that if SAF continues to require written reports, it should continue to offer writing as one among the choices of reflection they offer, though Melinda pointed out that they’d given the “stamp of approval” to written language by continuing to require it. Finally, there was a distinction in the focus group between what I named “standards-based education” and SAF’s approach to writing, what Lupe would later refer to as “pop ed,” or “allowing people to write as they feel.” (The term “pop ed” is short for “popular education,” another term for the pedagogy that has developed out of Freire’s work.) Rosie’s point about being “realistic” suggested that “standards-based education” might also have some value in SAF’s pop ed-influenced curriculum. The discussion ended with the possibility that after this summer’s internship, which was close on our heels, SAF might choose to “spend an hour going through that root question” – why and whether to write.
At the time of this focus group, staff were busy preparing for the arrival of a new class of interns. This was not the time to address a serious revision of writing assignments. Staff decided to return to the question of whether they wanted to continue to have students write guided reports at all. Wondering whether we could keep the guided reports but try to make them more meaningful to more students, we discussed two possible changes. One was to be more intentional in giving students freedom in completing assignments. Lupe wondered how they could be more explicit about the possibilities for writing so that students wouldn’t fall back on more traditional forms, the kind they might feel ill-equipped to produce. She said,

So how do we communicate with our students to write whatever they’re most comfortable in? Last summer I told them if you want to do something different just let me know. I’m fine with it. Then we had some interns write poems and writing in Spanish and things like that. But I don’t think I really made it a purpose to really emphasize it. I kind of just said it, if you want to write about something different, let me know. I’m not a strict person, right. How do we create that space and that comfort? So they’re comfortable with that. I think that’s really pop ed, you know, allowing people to write as they feel.

The group felt that sharing models of guided reports, including creative responses like poetry, would be a good idea. While some worried that models would be too directive, Rosie felt that the risk of overly directing some interns would be worth the advantage gained from providing strong examples for interns.

The second change we considered was sharing guided reports among interns, both giving past guided reports as models or discussion starters and/or having interns exchange their guided reports on blackboard or a Facebook site. Students might post their reports publicly for each other to read, or they might have the option of posting publicly or privately. There was some discussion about whether public posting would interfere with interns’ ability to share personal information in the guided reports, with some feeling that they would and
others acknowledging that SAF publishes student work anyway, sometimes as soon as the summer ends. Staff felt the advantage of public posting would be greater support for interns when they were dealing with difficult times; they would know that others were having similar struggles. They felt that this would be an especially useful outlet for interns who are not living with other interns and who experience isolation. Tony said that staff are always challenged to respond to interns’ struggles, and having students’ guided reports as an additional resource could help them meet these challenges. By way of example, he said, “Oh, you’re homesick, look, other interns felt this way, maybe you can get some insight from how they dealt with it.” Melinda remembered that at past mid-retreats, they have sometimes included an activity where interns read aloud their guided reports and discuss them in small groups. At this point, the greatest disadvantage to public posting seemed to be the time the coordinator would need to spend implementing and monitoring such a new system. There certainly wouldn’t be time to implement such a change for the upcoming summer.

Implications for SAF’s Uses of Writing

Attending to public and private

Ultimately staff decided that the important point to come out of this discussion was to be more “intentional” about its writing practices. They wanted to first get clear on why they have students write, and then in Melinda’s words, to answer the question, “Is our writing doing what we want it to do overall in a larger scheme of things? Are these different forms of writing playing the role we want them to play in the overall internship?” As I wrote in Chapter Two, based on my findings, I would say that SAF has students write guided reports because it’s the most convenient way for them to continue the practice of reflection that is so important to their work. Guided reports serve as a chance for students to reflect on their
actions in the situations they find themselves in, for SAF to check in on how they are doing, and for SAF to have an archive of material from which to publish in support of their advocacy and program work. Also, staff believe that writing is a way that some students express themselves best, so it should be one among the options of reflection. In answer to the question, is writing doing what they want it to do, I’d say partially. In their first purpose, that writing enable students to reflect, for those students who feel comfortable with writing as a reflective tool, it’s working fairly well. But in the short weekly prompts and without opportunity for substantial feedback and dialogue, critical reflection is not as substantial as it could be. Further, for those for whom writing isn’t comfortable, those who write the “bare minimum,” it appears that the guided reports may not be an entirely successful reflective practice. They lack the collective and non-textual elements that may make group reflection a more successful practice for certain interns. And there isn’t enough time to devote to the practice of writing as the internship now stands for students who are not comfortable with writing to become so. With regard to SAF’s other purposes for writing, guided reports do seem to be working fairly well as a way for the internship coordinator to check in on their 25-30 interns each week. And I believe that this study testifies to the fact that SAF has been able to accumulate an impressive archive of materials that’s not only served them in their advocacy and fundraising work, but also now can be culled for models of activism for future readers. In the long view, there’s much of worth here, but the material does need to be culled to find it because for some students, the reports weren’t effective enough. For SAF as an organization, writing is an effective practice; for individual interns, guided reports are not always so. Staff’s idea about having interns share guided reports with each other may appeal to some students who dislike writing for its isolating nature, and their idea about explicitly
encouraging more creative responses may appeal to some students who dislike expository writing. Beyond creative responses such as poetry, they could also allow non-textual responses such as scrapbooks, drawings, and audio diaries (a form they are now experimenting with). None of these possibilities will appeal to all students because students’ preferred modes of expressing themselves will always be varied. If staff want to meet students where they are, choice in form of expression and content of responses seems key.

Another possibility for the future is to follow Rosie’s train of thought in saying that writing is an important skill to be learned. Those who might not have been exposed to writing as a reflective tool deserve the opportunity to be. If SAF goes in this direction, they may also need to decide whether they want to support students’ acquisition of the power and status-laden literacy practices of schools. In this case, they might decide against encouraging more freedom in responses and instead try to motivate students to want to use more traditional expository forms. There are some precedents for this approach. Peck, Flower and Higgins (1995) explain that conventions of argumentative writing typical in college classrooms can empower young people to field alternative points of view and strengthen their own analyses of situations. And Freire (1970/1990) accepts the written word as powerful and seeks to harness its most liberatory uses. For example, learning to speak as “I” can help people acknowledge their point of view. Speaking of their actions in the world can help them feel they have agency. Personal narratives are a fairly conventional expository form through which interns could express their own positions in potentially empowering ways. Much of the writing that I have shared shows these possibilities. By more intentionally teaching writing’s critical potential, staff might be able to guide more students to use writing in meaningful ways. Without such intentionality, many students will likely associate
conventional academic writing, through which they’ve likely be judged and graded for years, with preservation of the status quo.

Choosing writing would not only mean intentionally embracing writing’s critical potential, but also its reflective potential. Perhaps SAF wants to expose students who haven’t reflected in writing to what many find to be a powerful practice. They may decide to pursue writing’s potential to help people build the “contemplative life” that staff feel is essential to sustaining activist commitments. The rich material I have found in the SAF archive supports this decision. Many students have found in writing the ability to understand their experiences more deeply. And students’ reflective writing is more interesting and more powerful than the pieces they intentionally write for public audiences. Going entirely public with writing might mean SAF would miss some of the honesty and insight that characterizes the private pieces that have likely helped interns make sense of their experience. In private pieces, students witness, making more interesting writing choices than when they consciously advocate. They describe, which reveals more to readers than generalizations about the work farmworkers do and the debt we owe them.

With regard to documentary projects, SAF has students write so they can deepen their knowledge of farmworkers and so they can channel that knowledge to wider audiences. They hope both students and other audiences will be transformed by seeing farmworkers as producers of knowledge and culture. As to whether the documentary projects are succeeding in this way, I’d say, most of the time, especially as a means for students to deepen their knowledge of farmworkers. Field notes and guided reports document the complex knowledge interns acquire through prolonged contact with one person or a group of people. Students grapple with the challenges of using new equipment, mastering interview
techniques, and explaining their purposes to participants. They seem to feel motivated by the chance to take photographs and interviews in a way that writing alone isn’t motivating. Staff attend to interns’ questions and struggles in refining their training each year and increasingly integrate opportunities for collaboration into the curriculum.

With regard to educating others, SAF draws upon its archive of documentary materials to educate and motivate a variety of audiences. Staff have spoken about the documentary projects as reaching audiences in a way that materials focused on injustice are unable to. Viewers connect with workers; a strengths-based approach may relieve feelings of anxiety and helplessness that some viewers associate with social justice work. Instead, they may see that they have something to gain from interacting with farmworkers.

To further define its practice of publishing this work for public audiences, SAF could integrate its advocacy practice with interns’ work of witnessing. They might work with interns to revise and edit their pieces themselves. If they don’t have the time for this, they could still involve interns in the public use of their work by helping them analyze the audiences the agency wants to reach. SAF’s audiences are diverse, yet when interns do write public pieces, they seem to aim them toward a homogenous audience, one largely ignorant of farmworker lives, one with unarticulated cultural practices of their own. Perhaps by fleshing out an audience for documentary projects, interns will become more thoughtful about their writing choices. Readers aren’t just privileged white people, but this is a default readership that school-based literacy practices tend to imagine. Imagining such an audience, or ignoring the diversity of audiences, can prevent writers from connecting with people they would do better to connect with. What if interns were to write some of their pieces to farmworkers? The possibilities for solidarity would be magnified.
In Chapter Three, I described an excerpt in which an intern, Julia, explained to her documentary participant why she, a white woman, was doing this work. Here, her audience was one of the people she was learning to speak for; she had to think, not about how she’d tell her college community, but how she’d speak to farmworkers. As the south continues to diversify and (we hope) become more participatory, perhaps audiences will diversify, and folks like SAF students won’t have to distinguish between writing for farmworkers and writing for others. Maybe they will write for a diverse audience, such as the one they practice writing for as Safistas – each other. Beginning to name that audience can help them choose how they want to come across and how they want to bring farmworkers across. They will become more accomplished writers when they learn to negotiate their private examinations with their public presentations, perhaps more proud as Julia was of the more strenuous choices they had to make between thought and word.

Enhancing reflection

Over the next few months and prior to the arrival of the 2008 intern class, SAF staff will use my study to revise and preserve elements of their writing assignments. I would like to end this chapter by proposing a direction that could work well for SAF and also be adapted to other activist and service-learning settings.

With regard to the documentary projects, I encourage SAF to continue in the direction of teaching interns to collaborate. I would definitely continue to teach interns how to check in with their participants at critical stages, for example when deciding on a topic for the project, when selecting photographs and audio clips for public presentation, and when writing up the final project. I would also give interns the choice of including farmworkers as photographers and recorders. Were farmworkers to participate using the tools of
documentary work, the projects would not only be more collaborative, but they would also allow farmworkers to bring their generative themes and questions to the projects. In this way, farmworkers and students would more fully speak out together and SAF’s goals of solidarity would be furthered.

With regard to the guided reports, I would clearly articulate their purpose and audience with interns. I would explain that the purpose is critical reflection, to give interns a chance not only to record their experiences but also to connect their experiences back to their understanding of the context of farmworkers’ lives and their attempts to act in solidarity with farmworkers to improve their lives. I would differentiate reports that would be read publicly from those that would only be read by other Safistas. I would also provide the opportunity for interns to share their reports with each other and give each other feedback in order to increase the possibility of dialogue, which is such a crucial piece of critical reflection. Finally, I would strengthen the practice of allowing choice of topics in the completion of writing assignments, and I would continue to encourage students to make unconventional choices in their writing, such as the choice to write in Spanglish or Spanish.

Given these ideals, I would revise the assignment of the guided reports as follows. For the first half of the summer, week one through mid-retreat, I would have interns write weekly guided reports only with an audience of their fellows Safistas in mind. I would not excerpt these reports for publication. I would explain the purpose of critical reflection at orientation. I would give interns a list of questions and prompts but not require them to answer a particular one in a given week; instead, each intern could choose what feels most relevant to what they are experiencing. Staff would come up with this list of questions based on generative themes identified in this study and on their learning goals for interns.
At mid-retreat, I would hold a session in which interns would share their guided reports in small reports and give each other feedback. Melinda mentioned that such sharing has happened in the past. Prior to the feedback session, I would model with students how to give feedback that encourages critical reflection: as a reader, focus on an important theme or idea and ask how and why questions to help the writer deepen it. Following the feedback session, I would have a whole group session in which I presented the writing assignment for the remainder of the summer. I would explain that each intern could choose from one of three options. Within these options, they would have the choice of writing just for Safistas or for larger audiences. They could also choose between writing a longer piece or continuing to write self-contained weekly reports. Longer pieces shouldn’t take more time than the hour or two a week spent on guided reports; interns should still use the same hour or two to write, just recognize they’re working toward something longer. I would explain the following three choices, telling students that with any of the options they could include photographs, drawings, and/or audio-visual elements.

Option 1) Write a longer autobiographical piece about your experiences as a SAF intern. Decide whether you want this piece to remain private or whether you are willing to let SAF publish it for wider audiences. If you decide to publish, then identify a particular audience that you would like to write for. This piece would be consistent with what we know about the importance of personal narrative in activism, both for writers and also for potential readers. There is a precedent for this work in the work of former SAF interns who have benefited from reflecting on their own autobiographies in their reports. Not only students from farmworking families, but also other students could benefit from reflecting on privilege and oppression through their own experiences.
Option 2) Write a longer piece for publication about a particular aspect of farmworkers’ lives, using *The Human Cost of Food*, what you’re learning at your placement site, your background, and/or other sources. Choose an aspect of farmworkers’ lives that SAF has a need to understand further: farmworker women, high school experiences, farmworker-led boycotts, etc. SAF staff would need to decide what other possible topics to include. This choice is consistent with what we know about writers’ need to understand purpose when they are writing. If SAF identifies an area that they need to know more about, then students will feel that their writing is meaningful. SAF already has many pieces on the importance of farmworkers’ work and culture to our communities. They lack pieces on specific areas of farmworkers’ lives. This choice would allow students who are not interested in writing reflectively about themselves to use writing to report and advocate. They might realize writing can actually be a form of action, and this realization could lead them to use writing meaningfully in the future.

Option 3: Continue to do weekly reflective reports choosing from a list of prompts. Choose this option if you have found that weekly writing helps you think critically and reflectively about your experiences. Only other Safistas will read what you have written. Some students, such as those who already kept journals prior to the summer, thrive with weekly private reflection; they could continue to grow personally and intellectually with this opportunity.

Around Week 7, I would require all students to post rough drafts of their writing to Blackboard. I would arrange small discussion groups on Blackboard and give students specific questions to guide their feedback to each other. Students could use this feedback to revise their final pieces. Feedback and revision are crucial to dialogue, and therefore to
critical reflection. I would then require students to submit their final pieces prior to final retreat so I could print them in a binder for others to browse through. At the final retreat, I would encourage interns to browse through the binder when they have free time, so that a real audience could validate the work of writing. Also at final retreat, I would ask interns to sign SAF’s consent forms to share their writing if they have chosen publication. By signing the forms at the end of the summer, rather than the beginning, interns would retain more control over the use of their words.

The revision I am proposing requires that a staff member invest more time in the guided report component of the internship. However, I believe this investment of time is worth it because the writing would holistically support SAF’s goal of guiding interns to reflect and also their goal of accumulating written work to use in their advocacy efforts. Interns would have more control over the direction and use of their work, which would advance SAF’s goal of privileging student voices. Through these choice-laden assignments, staff would also model to interns ethical engagement with farmworkers in creative efforts and advocacy. The revision I am proposing also presupposes an answer of yes to Melinda’s question, whether to write. I contend that, despite many authorities’ reduction of writing to its exchange value, writing has the potential to deepen writers’ understanding of experience and their knowledge of their positions in the world. I believe that before they can make informed decisions about whether to choose writing, young people need more exposure to this potential.
Conclusion

Implications Beyond SAF

In the fields, Southerners carry on a legacy of racism, exploitation, and denial of resources. Too often, Southern communities collaborate with growers in allowing this legacy to continue through their practices of silence, charity, and acceptance of social stratification. SAF challenges us to change our practices. They do this by inviting children of farmworkers from the west coast and from border states to come here and bring their knowledge resources of bilingualism, empathy with farmworkers, and awareness of farmworker resistance; by supporting farmworker-led organizations; and by using a participatory pedagogy to encourage students, and through them farmworkers, to speak out. SAF’s literacy practices diverge from dominant practices of reading and writing. In particular, both guided reports and documentary projects depart from the norm in their use of bilingualism. Documentary projects also use non-verbal practices and an understanding of farmworkers as valuable sources of knowledge. The goal of advocacy underlying all of the projects departs from an individualistic idea of reflection. And SAF’s group and non-written reflection activities contest a curricular insistence upon journal reflection prominent in service-learning. By going beyond monolingual and solitary writing, SAF has demonstrated a range of possible literacy practices that other students and activists can use.

Others can learn from SAF’s model to analyze not only their uses of writing but also their broader literacy practices. For example, how else besides through writing do they
encourage students to express themselves? To gauge their growth? To interact with others? How does their use of writing compare with these other practices? If students effectively use writing, but don’t effectively express themselves orally, reflect with others, or have fun together, they may be ill-served by writing. SAF’s example shows that as a tool of reflection, writing is best used as one among many powerful tools. This is especially true when an organization’s or course’s goals involve uniting diverse constituents and when the goals include asking one group of people to act on another’s behalf. SAF would challenge such organizations to aim for solidarity. To encourage solidarity, literacy practices need to be open enough to allow many people to participate. They shouldn’t be monolingual or solely textual. If students don’t effectively use writing, then educators can learn from SAF’s example how to analyze their uses of writing. They need to ask Melinda’s question, is our writing doing what we want it to do? And even more deeply to wonder, is writing necessary to do the work we want to do? In answering these questions, they may find as we have found that they have multiple purposes for writing, and that these purposes may differ according to their constituent groups. They will need to decide whether the same assignments can serve different groups’ needs, as SAF’s do when documentary projects give interns professional skills and also teach wider audiences to respect farmworkers and want them in our communities. They will need to decide which of their groups will be best served by carrying out writing themselves, and which might be involved as collaborators, co-interpreters, knowledge-sharers.

Others will also need to grapple with the question we began to grapple with in the staff focus group, how public to make reflective writing. Community publishing, blogs and websites with discussion boards have multiplied the possibilities for public sharing of
writing. Online, students and group members can share with a facilitator, with each other, and/or with completely public audiences. Decisions about when to go public with writing are more complicated than they may at first seem. I am one educator who has quickly jumped on the bandwagon of publishing writing; publication motivates writers who might not be otherwise motivated, and publication seems to turn writing into action by supplying readers. However, Arendt’s (1958) and Benhabib’s (2000) cautions against going public everywhere remind me of writing’s use in preserving private life. Arendt wrote, “There are a great many things which cannot withstand the implacable, bright light of the constant presence of others on the public scene” (1958, p. 51). In a time when college students do share aspects of their intimate lives with strangers and acquaintances on internet sites, it seems important to provide them with the space and tools to think about the implications of going public about their personal lives. Educators working on the borders between school, out-of-school, service, and work settings may find themselves well situated to help students think about who to share what with when. Publication no longer requires the steps it once required; achieved so easily, people may do it with little thought. Educators have new obligations to help students understand the implications of publication.

I mentioned in Chapter One that one tradition in activist writing is the publication of personal narratives. This tradition raise questions about boundaries between private and public lives. Schaffer and Smith (2004) say that personal narratives can be powerful tools for human rights campaigns, but they also suggest some of the pitfalls, including exploitation and misrepresentation of narrators. The personal narratives SAF has collected through students’ documentary projects so far seem to avoid these pitfalls. SAF teaches its interns practices of reciprocity so they give back to the participants who share their stories. Also,
SAF has purposely chosen stories of cultural renewal and continuity rather than stories of suffering. At the same time, some participants have shared painful stories, particularly of border crossings. Other educators can look at SAF’s range of documentary work and be aware of the types of issues that may arise when they send students to interview people who have likely experienced great hardship in their lives. Before sending students to do such work, they should prepare students for what they will hear and give them strategies and resources (including mentors who can talk with them) for responding. SAF interns are prepared because they do documentary work in the context of other learning about farmworkers. In orientation they learn a tremendous amount about farmworkers, they meet many people from farmworking backgrounds, and they meet staff members who can mentor them through difficulties. Also, they have supervisors at their placement sites who regularly work with farmworkers and know about resources. SAF interns are supported if sensitive situations arise. Even so, documentary project field notes reveal that some interns still find themselves in ethical quandaries, negotiating new kinds of relationships. Before sending students off to document people’s life histories, other educators need to make sure that students have adequate information and support.

In this study, I followed the assertion of Holland et al. (2007) that a non-profit association is a place where people can feel empowered to participate in civic life, and I believed that in such an association they would likely find themselves using literacy practices that deviate from school-based literacy practices and thus feel more relevant to adults’ multifaceted lives. In such settings, and in campus-community collaborations, students may be able to learn uses of reading and writing that will serve them well outside of school. In an activist association, perhaps they will learn literacy practices that will help sustain them as
activists. I have found some support for these ideas in literacy practices that do look
different from the literacy practices found on college campuses and in schools. Overall,
SAF’s literacy practices are less individualistic than school literacy, more inclusive, and
blend a concern for different groups’ needs. At the same time, I have implicitly concurred
with Barton and Hamilton (2000) that it’s impossible to study literacy practices in a vacuum.
Individuals can’t freely take hold of an organization’s literacy practices without feeling the
influence of other practices, and educators don’t want them to. If we did, we’d deny our
influence over their future writing and reading choices. When looking at an organization like
SAF that uses a participatory, liberatory approach to writing, remember what they are up
against. SAF’s literacy practices have less status than other literacy practices that most
young people have been exposed to in their schools and communities. Spanish has less status
than English; Spanglish has less status than either. Visual and auditory representations have
cachet in certain circles but won’t help someone pass a standardized writing test or an essay
exam. Advocacy is too biased for most university writing because an explicit agenda exists
prior to research. And reflection is too personal for most university writing. While oral
history is a university-sanctioned literacy practice, SAF’s political agenda is a challenge to
most folklore approaches. Finally, university writing typically requires textual evidence, not
experiential evidence or personal stories. Exceptions exist; qualitative research invites
spoken truths, and work has been done to validate personal narratives in academic contexts
(Danielewicz, 2007). And critical ethnography gives researchers the right to have a political
agenda in their work. But in general, academic writing is more textual and more concerned
with claims to objectivity than SAF’s.
Given the distinctions between academic writing and the writing that tends to take place in campus-community collaborations and non-profit associations, between academic writing and activist writing, implementation of alternative literacy practices is fragile work. It’s unlikely that ten weeks is a long enough period of time to instill new uses of reading and writing. SAF interns have often spoken of the experience as being a life-changing one, so there’s potential. But to add changed ideas of reading and writing on top of ideas about social justice and action seems a tall order. For challenging literacy practices to “take,” people need other chances to try them. Angelita’s suggestion that SAF should have interns write something later on might be one such chance. If other campus-community collaborations and service-learning programs adapt practices like SAF’s in their work, then more students will have more chances. Service-learning and community-based work are growing in prominence on college campuses; it’s a perfect opportunity to examine uses of reading and writing in many settings, and a chance to increase the status of status-poor literacy practices so they ultimately might not seem so irrelevant to public life. Given the increase in new immigrants in the communities students are likely working in, now is also a perfect time for those working between colleges and communities to challenge the dominance of English in writing and, as Mejía (2007) said, to challenge white people’s control over standards of English.

In addition to literacy practices, other programs can use the generative themes from SAF’s archive to imagine typical struggles and successes that students and young activists will face when doing service or activist work with a marginalized community. For example, if students are truly attempting to act in solidarity with others, they should be grappling with their ability to connect with others, noticing barriers to connection, commonalities, and
means of connecting through differences. They shouldn’t just be writing about what they have to offer and what others need; they should be noticing that relationships go two ways. They should be writing about what they learn as well as what they give. The themes of changed perceptions in guided reports and deepening knowledge in documentary projects show interns attending to their own blind spots and the complexities of situations. Also, some SAF interns show an awareness of the multiple factors influencing people’s lives; they may vacillate between feeling they can make a difference and feeling they can do little. For example, in migrant education programs, some notice structural problems, racism and cultural insensitivity on the part of the staff, and also their own ability to influence migrant youth’s lives in positive ways. Education interns’ writing supports the contention of Valenzuela (1999) that for Mexican-American students, schooling is often subtractive. Further, interns’ writing suggests they also feel that individuals can make a difference by caring for students and honoring their cultural resources. This awareness of agency and the limits of agency seems important for young activists to develop; otherwise, they may grow discouraged when their personal efforts fall short of their hopes.

Generative themes is a useful concept that others can use to shape programs, reflection activities, and writing assignments. In this study, I have attempted to identify generative themes of former interns. In focus groups, we talked about how these themes could be used to generate further conversations, to help interns understand how others have dealt with similar issues, and to model reflection. Some interns may not notice themes that other interns have noticed. Those with stronger “moments” of critical consciousness may help lead other interns to those moments. For example, only a few interns have explicitly written about racism; by naming racism, they may help other interns see it. My list of SAF’s
generative themes is limited by my focus on writing and could be further developed by a
more thorough analysis of the entire internship experience, for example through analysis of
audio-visual materials from documentary projects, through further observations at group
gatherings, and through visits with interns at placement sites. Also, my list could be refined
by sharing it in survey form with former interns over email and inviting them to mark themes
they relate to. If other organizations want to analyze their members’ generative themes and
apply those themes to their work, I would recommend a team approach and also a multi-step
process. My process included steps of open-ended reading, descriptive note taking, synthetic
coding, checking in with participants, and finally writing up findings. From here, findings
should be checked with participants, cycled back into curriculum in the way of action
research.

My attempt to do this study as community-based research can serve as an example.
Community-based research has been getting attention on college campuses lately, and some
service-learning programs, including UNC-Chapel Hill’s and Duke’s, are implementing
community-based research projects. My study is also informed by my background in
qualitative research; that training (as well as experience teaching writing) is what I was able
to offer SAF. Community-based research does not have its own methodology; rather,
researchers and practitioners decide together what methods are most appropriate for
answering their questions. In my case, we chose reading an archive where we might have
chosen interviews. One of the weaknesses of this study is its lack of quantitative data;
because that is not an area of strength for me, SAF may still want numerical information
around generative themes and uses of writing, especially given the growing number of
Safistas. For community-based research projects to be successful, participants need to be
aware of different methods available to them and be able to match those methods with their questions. Furthermore, SAF’s model suggests that community-based research, like service-learning, should be a two-way street, with all parties both offering and gaining.

According to Strand et al. (2003), community-based research is concerned with the ideas of people who typically don’t get to voice their ideas in research conversations. Given this, researchers must be especially attuned to the ethical issues I have raised in this dissertation. They must attend to whether people want to share their stories and ideas, and they should seek to present those ideas in culturally appropriate and politically sensitive ways. The most challenging piece of community-based research is decision-making, which is supposed to take place between all parties. I have done my best in this study to make decisions with Safistas, but time and scheduling constraints have forced me to go ahead on my own at certain points. Researchers and practitioners would do well to schedule a timeline together, marking points to check in about key steps in the research study. Finally, community-based research methodology stresses creative dissemination of findings. Findings should be presented in ways that are meaningful to constituents. In my case, following the completion of this dissertation, I am going to work with an editorial team of SAF staff and former interns to produce a bilingual booklet for SAF’s constituents, including past and future interns, other students, and activists. In this way, I hope to complete the circle of this research project. Given the time-consuming nature of community-based research, those trying it for the first time would do well to start with a very small study; in this way, they can ensure time for the necessary check-ins and follow-ups.

My study is as much about method as it is about content. Even some of the content, students’ documentary work, teaches us about method. I finish feeling rewarded by what I
have learned. Sometimes, research seems so ethically daunting that I’ve avoided taking it on. In SAF’s work, ethical challenges are faced up to. Ultimately, I believe SAF does ethical work by seeking to break down hierarchies. Rather than students acting for farmworkers, they learn to act with them. What may seem like a fine linguistic point is actually a potential ideological shift, one other students, researchers, and participants would do well to reflect upon.
REFERENCES


