

**Experiencing AmeriCorps:  
The Beginning Of A Journey That  
Will Change Lives Forever**



by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables and Figures .....	viii
Executive Summary .....	ix
<b>Chapter 1: Prime Destinations: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Open Roads: AmeriCorps and National Service.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Historical Perspectives .....	4
Where We are Today: AmeriCorps .....	6
Key Terms for the Traveler.....	7
Members in Service .....	7
Service-Learning .....	8
Reflective Techniques.....	10
Visioning.....	11
Mission statements.....	13
Life development plans.....	14
<b>Chapter 3: Welcome to Our World: The Context .....</b>	<b>15</b>
The Setting.....	16
The Local Economy .....	18
Community Development and AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads .....	20
<b>Chapter 4 : Planning the Itinerary: The Method .....</b>	<b>22</b>
The Focus .....	22
The Participants .....	23
Theoretical Bases .....	28
Themes in Qualitative Inquiry .....	30
A Participatory Approach.....	32
Grounded Theory.....	34

Sampling .....	34
The Qualitative Interview .....	36
Data Collection Procedures .....	37
Ethical Concerns .....	39
<b>Chapter 5: Highways and Byways: Serving &amp; Learning in Our Own Home Town .....</b>	<b>44</b>
There’s No Place Like Home.....	45
Learning from Experience .....	47
Mutual Support, Storytelling, and Reflective Distance.....	51
Focusing the Learning on Common Practice-Based Concerns ...	52
Valuing Members’ Experiences and Creative Ideas as Sources of New Knowledge.....	54
Appreciating Individuals’ Cultural and Biographical Differences .....	56
Opportunities to Ask Questions and Reflect upon Feedback.....	58
Service as the Link.....	58
Mentoring: The Leader as Coach.....	61
Modeling Service-Learning at Every Level .....	63
<b>Chapter 6: A Single Step On This Journey Can Define a Lifetime: The Outcomes .....</b>	<b>67</b>
Making a Difference: “We Are Really Getting Things Done!”.....	67
Transforming Lives Through Service: Developing Members and Strengthening Communities .....	70
Our New Vision: Seeing Ourselves as Resources .....	70
Interpersonal Skills.....	72
Personal Qualities .....	74

Appreciation of Diversity.....	75
Competence to Participate in Democratic Society.....	77
Communication Skills .....	78
Finding the Linkages Between Service, Community and Family.....	80
Reflection.....	81
21 <sup>st</sup> Century Skills.....	82
Members’ Children.....	90
A Plan for Life .....	93
AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads and Welfare Reform .....	94
AmeriCorps Members and the Local Community College .....	95
The Mission Statements .....	100
<b>Chapter 7: Tips from the Trenches: Lessons Learned .....</b>	<b>101</b>
Diversity Redefined.....	102
Expanding the Learning Environment .....	104
The Crucial Role of Design.....	105
The Key Link – Connecting the Learning to Meaningful Service....	106
Communities as Partners .....	107
Developing a Lifelong Commitment to Learning and Service .....	107
Strengthening the Family Household as Ground of Commitment ...	108
Recognizing that “Home” Extends Beyond the Domicile .....	109
Participatory Research Processes .....	109
The Need for Further Research .....	109
<b>Chapter 8: Oh, the Places We’ve Been!: Conclusion .....</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Appendices: A – Sample Consent Forms.....</b>	<b>117</b>
B – Sample Interview Questions.....	120
C – Curricular Material Created by AmeriCorps Member.....	124

D – Vision, Mission and Life Development Statements.....	126
E – Assessment of Student Reading Achievement Scores .....	130
<b>References</b> .....	<b>137</b>
<b>About the Author</b> .....	<b>145</b>

**LIST OF TABLES**

**Table one:** Gadsden AmeriCorps members by gender ..... 24

**Table two:** Gadsden AmeriCorps members by race ..... 25

**Table three:** Gadsden AmeriCorps members by age ..... 25

**Table four:** Basic assistance levels of Gadsden AmeriCorps members ..... 26

**LIST OF FIGURES**

**Figure one:** Map of Gadsden County ..... 17

**Figure two:** Service-learning model ..... 60

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Experiencing AmeriCorps:  
The Beginning of a Journey That Will Change Lives Forever**

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National voluntary service as public policy, based on shared values and the belief in the virtues of service to the community, has strong roots in American history and tradition. Yet, the effects of involvement in active service upon participants' learning and development have not yet been fully investigated. While research and practice have shown that the national service experience exposes individuals to new situations which can help enhance the quality of civic participation as well as cognitive development, there are yet opportunities for further study on this timely topic. The findings of this study will deepen our knowledge about the potential for national service to have an impact on low-income communities and their residents in America today.

In this study, a qualitative research process was used to investigate the experience of participants in one selected national service program in order to discover actual and perceived impacts – such as changes in attitude, multicultural understanding, social responsibility, motivation to participate in postsecondary education, and improved self-esteem. The site selected was Gadsden County, a low-income rural community in Northern Florida. The interviewees included AmeriCorps members, community residents, school children, teachers and program staff from a wide range of ages, ethnicities, and economic backgrounds.

When President Clinton inaugurated AmeriCorps, he spoke about national service as a journey, and this presentation is organized as a series of progressive steps on that journey. Beginning with a historical overview of national service and AmeriCorps, and a profile of the community under study, the document moves on to discuss the methods used to arrive at a deeper understanding of the program and its impacts on key players. The next sections look at some of the program's processes and procedures, as well as the outcomes and effects on participants. Finally, some of the

important lessons learned from this excursion through the life and times of one AmeriCorps site are recapped.

Some key findings of the study are:

- 1) Working as a team with others of diverse backgrounds enables members to become more open to a variety of perspectives and to imagine a variety of contexts for understanding;
- 2) Members develop increased motivation to engage in self-directed learning and are enabled to re-vision their own role in society;
- 3) Discovering and developing one's own ability to give back to society is the most important link for many participants;
- 4) Knowing that the group's collective efforts can make a real difference in the community reinvigorates people's commitments to civic responsibility; and
- 5) Participants discover and cultivate connections with individuals and institutions that strengthen and enlarge the family circle.

Additionally, preliminary findings indicate that the impact on children and families served by AmeriCorps members has been positive and productive. Future researchers will shed new light on these programs by studying the longitudinal impacts of programs such as AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads on communities, families and institutions in America today.

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

*This year 20,000 Americans, most of whom are young, some of whom are young in spirit and determined to serve and also go on to finish their education, mark the beginning of a journey that will change their lives forever. It will also change the life of this nation for many seasons to come.*

*(Clinton, 1994)*

With these words, President Bill Clinton set into motion the AmeriCorps program, his administration's initiative to further the legacy of national service, which has become an American tradition. In using the journey motif to describe this new program, Clinton drew parallels between national service and concepts of lifespan psychology, which begin with earliest memories of home and community, expanding to a sense of identification with others and the conviction that everyone counts. He spoke of AmeriCorps as a long-cherished dream, and congratulated those who would have the privilege of helping to make that dream become a reality.

In this study, a qualitative research design has been used to investigate the experience of participants in a selected national service program, known as 'AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads' – AmeriCorps members, community residents, school children, teachers and program staff – in order to discover the actual and perceived impacts, such as changes in attitude, multicultural understanding, social responsibility, motivation to participate in postsecondary education, and self-esteem. The interviewees have included people of a range of ages, ethnicities and class backgrounds.

The research project was designed to learn more about the impacts of AmeriCorps experience through conduct of in-depth interviews with selected participants involved in this service-learning enterprise based in their own home community. Because of the importance of understanding more about this form of

experiential education linking individuals with areas of need in American towns and cities, “thick description” was used as a means for uncovering layers of meaning in the narrative of each interviewee. In this technique, the researcher attempts to capture the meanings, actions and feelings present in an interactional experience. Thick interpretation assumes that multiple meanings will always be present in any situation (Denzin, 1989).

This document is organized as a series of progressive steps on a journey. Chapters two and three present a historical overview of national service and AmeriCorps, and a profile of the community under study. The fourth chapter discusses methods used in this research project to arrive at a deeper understanding of the case under study and its key players. Chapter five looks at some of the program’s processes and procedures, leading to the outcomes (Chapter six) and effects on participants. Chapter seven recaps some of the important lessons learned from this excursion through the life and times of one AmeriCorps site, in rural North Florida. A conclusion and questions for future research are summarized in Chapter eight. So, put on your walking shoes and let’s be on our way!

## CHAPTER 2

### Open Roads: Americorps And National Service

*Opportunity for all means giving every young American the chance . . . to go to the streets of our cities and be teachers, to be policemen where we need community policemen, to be nurses where there's a nursing shortage, to be family service workers where families are breaking down and children are abused and neglected, to rebuild America from the people point of view. We can do that with a national service . . .*

*(Clinton, 9/21/91)*

Americans have long favored the idea of service to the neighborhood and to the nation, often casting civic education as a primary mission of schools and colleges. Since the earliest years of our nation, these educational institutions have claimed to be distinguished from their European counterparts in that they promoted learning for the benefit of the community. Their mission included the goal “. . . to transmit knowledge that would be useful, not merely in the classical sense of preparing gentlemen, but for the practical demands of a changing world” (Boyer & Hechinger, 1981, p. 9).

National voluntary service as public policy, based on shared values and belief in the virtues of service to the community, also has strong roots in American traditions. While partisan debates and attacks by special-interest groups on national service policies have continued over the years, interest among ordinary people has waxed and waned, but overall has remained strong. In 1936 a Gallup Poll found that 82% of the public favored continuation of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). A 1966 Gallup Poll found that 72% of the public favored requiring all young men to give 2 years of either military or non-military service. A 1987 Gallup poll found that 83% of the public backed voluntary service; 55% were willing to make it mandatory.

## Historical Perspectives

National service has had different meanings at different times in history. As a general term, it refers to a period of service given by an individual to the nation or community. The two major propositions linked to the concept of a national service are: a) that some service to society is part of individual citizenship responsibility, and b) society should offer opportunities for citizens to make meaningful contributions to the nation.

The first non-military national service was mandatory for conscientious objectors under the Lincoln administration (Moskos, 1988). These men were required to serve as hospital workers and teachers of freed slaves. William James' (1910) "Moral Equivalent of War" was the first major call for national service and remains one of the best known humanist justifications for a national youth service program. In the 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created national service programs that continue to serve as models. His administration's Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), established in 1933, placed nearly three million young men in forests and park camps. CCC members wore uniforms and lived in the field in camps. The CCC planted two billion trees, constructed 126,000 miles of minor roads, and improved 40 million acres of farmland (Janowitz, 1983), earning high respect from the general population. In spite of its prominence and wide acclaim, however, the CCC was always viewed by Congress and the American people as a temporary program (Sherraden & Eberly, 1982).

Toward the end of World War II, the GI Bill was passed, providing funding for military veterans to attend college. This bill, considered to be one of the best investments made by the U.S. Government (Sherraden & Eberly, 1982), opened the door for millions who otherwise would not have been able to afford college tuition. The principles of the CCC and the GI Bill opened the door for later national service programs like the Peace Corps and AmeriCorps.

In the 1960s, the call to service came once again when President John F. Kennedy challenged Americans to “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” He created the Peace Corps in 1961, providing opportunities for young Americans to offer their talents and skills to people in need in the poorest corners of the earth. The service provided by the Peace Corps has benefited many countries throughout the world; many also believe that the greatest impact was the benefit gained by the volunteers themselves through their service. Many of the service providers reported that they had learned more through active service to others than they had in traditional classrooms. This outcome helped plant the seeds for future service-learning programs.

In the 1980s new service models began to emerge. A Princeton student, Wendy Kopp, created Teach for America, which recruited college graduates to work in inner-city school districts. City Year and the Youth Build network were set up, engaging young people from low-income neighborhoods to serve in their own localities. George Bush’s Points of Light Foundation helped promote some of these activities. In 1984, Campus Compact was convened by the presidents of three universities (Brown, Georgetown, and Stanford) and the Education Commission of the States. They believed that college students should be given the opportunity to serve their communities, and thus founded a national organization with this goal. Housed at Brown University, Campus Compact primarily focused on increasing opportunities for promoting volunteer involvement on college campuses with a guiding vision of helping students develop as active citizens.

One of the roles the Compact played was that of supporting the legislative initiatives that ultimately became the National and Community Service Trust Act. This legislation, growing out of bipartisan efforts initiated in the mid-1980s by legislators such as David Nurenberger (R-MN) and Ted Kennedy (D-MA), established the federal Commission on National and Community Service under President George Bush. This

commission was the predecessor to the Corporation for National Service created by Congress under the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. Today the Corporation administers a number of programs, including AmeriCorps, the national service program that links community service to higher education benefits.

### Where We are Today: AmeriCorps

The National and Community Service Trust Act passed in 1993 was designed to reflect the growing bipartisan interest in increasing funding for service, especially by young people. The AmeriCorps initiative proposed a voluntary program that would enroll Americans in full-time service in exchange for modest stipends and college aid. The primary purposes of the service program are reflected in the AmeriCorps Member Pledge:

*I will get things done for America – to make our people safer, smarter, and healthier. I will bring Americans together to strengthen our communities. Faced with apathy, I will take action. Faced with conflict, I will seek common ground. Faced with adversity, I will persevere. I will carry this commitment with me this year and beyond. I am an AmeriCorps member, and I will get things done.*

Other important goals for the AmeriCorps national service plan include building bridges between classes and races, fostering a renewed civic ethic, and building discipline and self-confidence among young people. The program emphasizes its bipartisan roots and its non-partisan character.

### Key Terms for the Traveler

*We have many volunteers and few citizens.*

*(Barber, cited in Bates, 1996)*

### Members in Service

AmeriCorps staff consistently accentuates the distinction between the members' roles in this program and typical human service or work experience programs. Their agenda revolves around service, and they refer to themselves as members, not employees or volunteers. Therefore, those who join the ranks of the program remind themselves and others that they are neither working nor volunteering in their daily activities. The program calls for a "new ethos of individual responsibility and caring" (Clinton, 1993) that enables participants to experience active citizenry through personal, first-hand interactions with local communities and some of their most pressing needs.

One way to look at how an AmeriCorps program emphasizes the pivotal concept of service to the community is by looking at some of the recruitment techniques used with potential members. Applicants may be asked, for example, "What does *commitment* mean to you and how are you prepared for living your commitments?"; "Are you willing to serve more than 40 hours per week and on weekends if that is necessary?"; or "If you were tutoring a child that would not communicate with you, what would you do?"

### Service-Learning

Subscribing to the idea that the whole community can play an important role in the education of young people as they become active citizens in today's complex, multicultural world, service-learning recognizes the importance of experience and local community in developing the whole student. Service-learning has been defined as both a program type and a philosophy of education (Giles, Honnet, & Migliore, 1991). That is, discussion of this topic may look at either programs that engage students in meaningful service to society, connecting it to academic study on related topics, or at

ways in which experiential learning opportunities can contribute to building democratic communities. While service-learning is most often discussed in the context of schools or universities, it is a useful framework as well for investigating community-based programs not necessarily connected to the classroom.

Research on the impacts of service-learning activity in higher education (i.e., Giles & Eyler, 1994; Markus et al., 1993; Munter, 1997) has found that this methodology helps college students develop: a) problem-solving skills, b) a greater willingness to take risks and accept new challenges, c) cross-cultural skills, d) a stronger citizenship ethic, e) changes in attitudes and behaviors toward others communities and cultures, and f) a greater interest in pursuing service careers. At the institutional level, service-learning helps: a) create a more dynamic learning environment, b) bridge the gap between theory and practice, and c) institutionalize the validation and recognition of student experiences.

Director of Evaluation at the Florida Commission on Community Service stated that an “. . . explicit goal of AmeriCorps programs is to incorporate service-learning practice into program activities and processes” (J.B. Wise, personal communication, April 2, 1998). The effects of the service-learning strategy in community-building enterprises such as AmeriCorps have not yet been fully investigated, however, leaving much for future researchers to uncover. AmeriCorps programs offer unique opportunities for discovering ways in which service to local communities and diverse learning processes interact with and reinforce each other.

### Reflective Techniques

Much has been written about the importance of consistent reflection interspersed with service activities in fostering transformative learning in young people (Hatcher &

Bringle, 1997; Kitchener & King, 1994; Mezirow, 1990; Osterman, 1990; Silcox, 1993). Advocates of service-learning in schools and colleges contend that reflection is central to transforming volunteerism into service-learning. While there are a wide variety of definitions and applications of reflective learning, practitioners, researchers and educators involved in planning and supervising service and service-learning programs agree on the essential role of reflection in ensuring that learning and service play complementary roles, thus developing service providers who will renew their commitment to responsible citizenry.

In AmeriCorps programs the emphasis on combining service with learning extends beyond recruitment, including extensive opportunities for participants to reflect both individually and collectively on their activities through a variety of well-established techniques. Reflective practice is a dialectic process in which thought is integrally linked with action, and problems are seen as opportunities that support growth and enhance organizational effectiveness. Schön (1987) describes it as a “dialogue of thinking and doing through which [the learners] become more skillful” (p. 31). Prompted by the discrepancy between the real and the ideal (that is, between what occurred and what was expected), the practitioners step back and examine their actions and the reasons for their actions. They reflect on the effectiveness and legitimacy of these action choices, and they use this new perception as a means of developing alternate strategies. Through this dialectic process of thought and action, the service provider takes an active role in shaping his or her own growth.

Much of the reflection in AmeriCorps occurs through small group discussion sessions held on a consistent and regular basis. Belenky et al. (1986) discussed women’s ways of knowing and learning in these terms: “Through mutual stretching and sharing, the group achieves a vision richer than any individual could achieve alone” (p. 119). The process of describing one’s own experience increases opportunities for communication and collaboration among all parties involved in service and learning

situations, such as those of AmeriCorps programs. When sharing takes place in a public forum, with other like-minded colleagues, the process of communication leads not only to new knowledge but also to greater understanding of others and self. Out of this communication comes understanding and a sense of community – a commonality of purpose despite differences of opinion. Through reflection and communication focused on common concerns, the ideas of others become less strange, those others cease to be strangers, and the search for new and better ways of achieving professional goals becomes a public and collaborative process, rather than an isolated and individual effort. Other reflective techniques utilized on a consistent basis in the AmeriCorps program under study include vision exercises, the development of mission statements and life development plans.

Visioning. The vision exercises consist of talking with the members about their conception of the program as an ideal future state made concrete through words and pictures. Some of the research participants' reflections on the visioning process for their AmeriCorps program follow here:

*“Our vision started out as a goal that we were all determined to reach, even if we didn't know how or if we could make it. One thing I can say is that through strength, faith, and believing in ourselves as well our students, we made it. Each step was a learning experience. Though mistakes were made (and we made lots of them) we were able to overcome, and we know now those mistakes also bring correction, courage and willpower to do better. I believe we have become better people physically, mentally and emotionally.”*

*“Well, for me this is another year of instead of ‘Getting Things Done,’ I can say we ‘Got Things Done.’ Another successful year. . . . The students have increased their*

*reading levels and are looking forward to another year in the AmeriCorps program. Just looking at the smiles on their faces, you can see the joy in their eyes. The students have touched all our hearts in more ways than we can say . . .”*

*“AmeriCorps Gadsden members have learned to communicate with diverse cultures . . .”*

*“As a team we have pulled together to bring in more community involvement . . .”*

*“The children of Greensboro Elementary School now have a greater love for books and for reading.”*

*“We have all had a chance to experience teaching and learning new reading techniques that we will use later in our futures.”*

*“We now all have our mission statement for life.”*

Mission statements. The mission statement enables the members of the program to focus their thoughts and energies on the task or purpose of the group. Each of the members creates an individual mission statement to express present and future goals. Some of the statements from members follow here:

*“My mission is to understand, value each child individually, protect their feelings, and stand as a role model for their education.”*

*“My mission is to accomplish, encourage, understand and help people, especially youth with art and books. I realize that I am a natural artist, books are my life, and I love children.”*

*“My mission is to completely surrender my life to God’s will for renewal on a daily basis, create written or musical works that inspire individual/spiritual growth, and enlighten the lives of others through education and faith.”*

Life development plans. The Life Development Plan is a plan for life after AmeriCorps that involves setting goals and finding ways to accomplish them, assisting members to educate themselves during the program, setting up ongoing education opportunities after the program ends, and gaining assistance in order to develop an individual financial plan. In the words of a Gadsden member:

*“The Career Planning Course has given me a better way to prepare my résumé and prepare for an interview. Thanks to a great instructor, I have more confidence in myself now as an independent woman.”*

We will hear more from these members about their roles, activities and goals later on. Now that we have a feeling for the open roads on which we will be traveling, let’s move on to Gadsden County, Florida, where we will be warmly welcomed into a rural community with an AmeriCorps program of its own.

## CHAPTER 3

### Welcome To Our World: The Context



*We are born fragile, we are born needy, we are born ignorant, we are born unformed, we are born weak, we are born foolish, we are born unimaginative. We're born small, defenseless, unthinking infants. We are in fact born in chains and only acquire liberty through civil society. . . . Our identity is forged in a dialectical relationship with others . . . . Consequently we are all embedded, like it or not, in families and tribes and in communities . . .*

*Barber, 1992a, p.10)*

The community in which this study takes place dramatically contradicts the image of Florida held by most people, whose information basically comes from tourist brochures. The image of a sunny vacation paradise complete with swaying palm trees and beautiful beaches stands in stark contrast to the one of green pastures dotted with rusting trailers, abandoned cars and run-down homes that embody rural poverty in Northern Florida – the daily reality for the young women and men in this study.

#### The Setting

Gadsden County is located in Florida's Panhandle region, 23 miles west of Tallahassee and approximately 60 miles from the Gulf of Mexico (see Figure 1). The

county is bordered on the north by Georgia, on the east by Leon County, on the west by Jackson County and on the south by Liberty County. With 516 square miles, it has a population density of 96 persons per square mile, with the total population being 49,740 (Florida Statistical Abstract, 1997). The predominant private sector employers are agricultural services (62.1% of the workforce), with retail/wholesale trade following far behind (19%).

Settled in the early 1800s, numerous plantations dotted the landscape and over one-half of Florida's 61,745 slaves were concentrated in six counties, including Gadsden. Agriculture formed the county's economic base; slavery thrived, as did the growing of cotton and tobacco. After the Civil War, the stability of farm life led many former slaves to stay in the community (61% of Gadsden County's current population is African American, the highest percentage of any county in Florida). Shade tobacco farming grew to such levels that in 1946, Gadsden and Madison Counties in Florida and two Georgia counties produced 95% of American-grown wrapper leaf tobacco, representing a \$100 million industry.



Figure 1. Map of Gadsden County



### The Local Economy

Up until the early 1970s, Gadsden County's economy remained centered around the production of shade tobacco, light industry, and family-owned businesses. The workforce population was essentially stable. However in the mid-1970s, the shade tobacco industry relocated outside the United States. Gadsden County was left with a large segment of its population out of work, unskilled and under-educated. Wholesale nurseries, tomato and mushroom farming, and packing industries that also rely on a labor-intensive, non-educated workforce replaced the tobacco farms. This shift brought on a radical change in the workforce, however, when the new employers brought Hispanic, (predominately non-English speaking) migrant workers to the community. Cultural and socioeconomic gaps in the community widened as the majority of the agricultural workforce became a migrant population and remains so to this day.

The agricultural workforce has had few job options and thus little incentive to complete their education. Today, 40.1% of the community's adults over the age of 25

have not completed high school, with 19% having less than 9 years of formal education. While children under age 18 comprise almost 30% of Gadsden County's total population (second highest percentage per county in the state), 88% of the students in Gadsden County Schools are living below the poverty level (as indicated by federally supported free lunch). As a result of the above mentioned factors, Gadsden County receives more direct public assistance per person than any other county in the State of Florida: \$121.41 per capita.

Approximately 35% of the population's income are below the poverty level, and a proportionally very large number of young girls become mothers each year. In 1994, for example, 25.5% of births were to mothers below the age of 19 (over twice the Florida average). Research has provided substantial evidence that children of mothers with less than a high school education are particularly at risk for poor intellectual outcomes, school failure, and developmental delays (Center for Education Research and Development, 1995). Public school test scores in the Gadsden County School system fall in the bottom portion of Florida's ranking system. In 1995, for example, 50% of Gadsden County's schools were determined to be "Critically Low" in comparison to other schools within the state. This information revealed that many students are performing at low levels in reading comprehension, mathematics concepts and applications, and process writing. Just 6 years ago, Gadsden graduated 70.65% of its high school students. Since then the rate has dropped precipitously to only 50% – the second lowest graduation rate in the state.



Community

AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads

Development and

Nevertheless, this diverse community grapples with the consequences of its heritage and its infrastructure in creative, collaborative ways. Citizens representing all cultures have come together to face some of the challenges that impact the community. Gadsden Citizens for Healthy Babies, Literacy Volunteers of Gadsden County, Gadsden Men of Action, Gadsden Neighbors in Partnership, and Gadsden Looks to Books are among the many community-based groups that have come together to work collaboratively to strengthen the community.

The community's youth have been especially targeted for increased awareness of the importance and benefits of civic education through community service. The Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) Program teaches gang prevention throughout the public schools by encouraging raised self-esteem for the participants. Other efforts, combining resources and energies of the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice and local public schools, provide after-school and weekend mentoring programs for youth throughout the county.

AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads, initiated in February 1997, has developed strong partnerships with many of the above-mentioned programs and organizations, such as the Gadsden County School District, the State Department of Children and Family Services, Gadsden Literacy Volunteers of America, Gadsden Looks to Books, and

others. The AmeriCorps team has planned and implemented a wide variety of service initiatives in Gadsden County as well, (e.g., promoting an ethic of service in the community by recruiting volunteers for the Gadsden Summer Reading Program, handing out Red Cross disaster preparation fliers to county residents, and painting the Greensboro Public Library sign). The program has also set up an option for AmeriCorps members to do independent service hours, during which they cooperate with a community organization and set up their service activities under the guidance of a supervisor. Some of the diverse service sites chosen by AmeriCorps members have included the Red Cross, Literacy Volunteers of America, the Quincy Educational Center (delivering adult literacy instruction), day care facilities, food drives, and after-school tutoring programs.

In the following leg of our journey, we will learn more about the itinerary planned for this journey – that is; we will discuss the methods used to take us from here on a journey that has changed many lives forever.

## CHAPTER 4

### Planning The Itinerary: The Method



*Authentic participation in research means sharing in the way research is conceptualized, practiced, and brought to bear on the life-world. It means ownership – responsible agency in the production of knowledge and the improvement of practice . . .*

*(McTaggart, 1991, p. 171)*

#### The Focus

While the central focus of the program under study is *GETTING THINGS DONE* by promoting literacy in a rural North Florida County, the outcomes this qualitative study will focus on deal primarily with the AmeriCorps members in this remarkable program. As a research endeavor, the case study (in-depth investigation of a single program, group or individual) contributes uniquely to our knowledge and understanding of individual, social, and organizational phenomena. The case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events – such as individual life cycles and community change – while enabling the reader to understand complex social phenomena and their processes. Because some of the impacts on participants, such as changes in attitude, social responsibility, expansion of career horizons and self-esteem are ultimately measured by the behaviors of an

individual over a lifetime, studies such as this one often use short-term predictors of long-term changes.

The Participants

The AmeriCorps members, program staff, school teachers, administrators, students and families whose voices we will hear come from a variety of backgrounds. Their involvement in different levels of this national service program confers authority on them to speak about this community based service-learning enterprise from an insider’s perspective. The insightful observations of these actors in a selected AmeriCorps project point clearly to some of the most significant aspects of this initiative. Their voices add a rich dimension of authenticity, helping to substantiate the growing body of literature on this component of local community development.

Statistics in Tables 1 – 4 are from the 1997- 1998 AmeriCorps term in the AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads program. Out of a total of twenty members, eleven were included in the sample. Additional voices included a top school administrator, three school teachers, a third-grade student, and a community partner/recruiter. Seven individuals out of this group chose to participate in the focus group.

Table 1  
Gadsden AmeriCorps Members by Gender

	Gadsden AmeriCorps	Sample	Focus Group
Female	100%	100%	100%
Male	---	---	---

The Gadsden AmeriCorps program has had a small number of male members at various times throughout the duration of the project, and continues to actively promote recruitment of men. Anecdotal information and observations, however, indicate that women are more prone to commit to long-term service in a program such as this one primarily because the nature of the service activity (elementary school tutoring) itself draws more women than men. The staff at Greensboro Elementary School (i.e., the principal, vice-principal, and most teachers) is 94% female. The program director pointed out that AmeriCorps programs with a different focus (i.e., AmeriCorps Florida State Parks programs) attract a far greater number of men. Programs like these, which carry out activities such as renovating trees or construction, tend to appeal more to men (see Miller, 1994, for further discussion of gender differences in service programming and recruitment).

Table 2

Gadsden AmeriCorps Members by Race

	Gadsden AmeriCorps	Sample	Focus Group
African American	73%	60%	50%
Hispanic	18%	20%	25%
Caucasian	9%	20%	25%

This statistic closely reflects the population of Gadsden County schools, which are 82% African American; 8% Hispanic; and 10% Caucasian (Scoon, 1998). Gadsden is the only Florida County in which the majority of residents are African American and the enrollees in AmeriCorps reflect this population statistic.

Table 3

Gadsden AmeriCorps Members by Age

	Gadsden AmeriCorps	Sample	Focus Group
17-24 yrs.	59%	40%	50%
25-35 yrs.	27%	40%	50%
36+ yrs.	14%	20%	----

While many of the national service programs historically have focused on youth service, AmeriCorps programs are inclusive of those who are young as well as those who are young in spirit. That is, the principle of inclusion of diversity applies not only to ethnic and social class categories, but also to differences of religion, marital status, education levels and adults in different stages of the life span.

TABLE 4

Basic assistance levels of AmeriCorps Gadsden members

	Gadsden AmeriCorps	Sample	Focus Group
AFDC/TANF	50%	44.5%	37.5%
Food Stamps	19%	11%	12.5%
No Public Assistance	31%	44.5%	50%

The majority of the AmeriCorps members in this program are (or have been) on public assistance in one form or another. Their participation in this program provides opportunities for these adults to develop skills and prepare themselves for a successful higher education opportunity and experience. This is a reflection of the low-income community in which the program is located. As a result of the high poverty rate, Gadsden County receives more public assistance per person than any other county in Florida: \$121.41 per capita.

The outcomes for individuals who enroll in programs similar to AmeriCorps have long been of interest to researchers (Chase-Lansdale, 1995; McIntyre & Chan, 1997; Quiett, 1995) and policymakers. The focus of most outcomes research is usually: a) short-term outcomes, for example, why or why not current participants decide to maintain their enrollment for another year; and/or b) longitudinal outcomes that are measured much later in the life of the individual. Some of these might include: involvement in civic organizations, maintaining a job over the long term, attainment of higher education credentials, the life circumstances and development of children in low-income families, and facilitating community change.

In studying long- or short-term outcomes, current approaches have chiefly used quantitative research approaches, involving the collection of data through the administration of surveys with precoded response alternatives and the analysis of these data by means of multivariate statistical techniques of varying sophistication. That is, the design presumes that the initial actor (whether researcher or practitioner) knows what is significant from the outset. The interpretation of this data, however, only has significance if our imagery of the underlying processes is accurate. The success of this approach largely depends on the prior conceptualization that informs the selection of the questions (or, in other words, the variables and their indicators) and the particular statistical technique employed (Torbert, 1981).

Even the most well done studies in this genre of outcomes research are limited in their ability to help one understand why and how particular outcomes occur because of their inability to capture more than superficially the perspectives of the individuals whose outcomes are of concern. Increasing attention is being focused on research methods which give voice to the informant(s) – capturing her/his perspective of aspects of actual lived experience. The following sections will discuss some of the theoretical bases and implementation issues associated with conducting participatory qualitative study. From this research, quantitative studies can be designed based on findings generated from the perspectives and insights of individuals who have been full participants in the program and its activities.

### Theoretical Bases

Numerous researchers have come to recognize what seems to be an inescapable fact – the ways different people make sense out of their lived experience are of essential concern. This contrasts with positivist and empiricist conceptions which view the world as an objective universe of facts, overlooking the constitution of these facts through human consciousness, as well as their basis in a primary life-world. The concern of this research method with meaning is based in the philosophy of phenomenology. The aim is to have participants reconstruct their experience and reflect on the meaning they make of that experience. In phenomenological work, rather than taking a position outside of the thing or person to be studied, the researcher attempts to become as one with the researched (Barer-Stein, 1990). That the meaning an individual makes of his or her experiences is accessible when the individual reflects on the constitutive factors of that experience is convincingly argued by Schutz (1967). The approach attempts to gain entry into the conceptual world of its subjects, rather than beginning with the assumption that the researcher knows what things mean to the people being studied.

This discussion of the theoretical bases of a research agenda leads us to a cursory explication of the term *paradigm*. A paradigm is the basic belief system that guides the methods and practice of its adherents. Each paradigm can be defined by the answers it provides to three basic questions:

1. *What is the nature of reality (ontology)?*
2. *What is the nature of the relationship between the knower and the known? (epistemology)*
3. *How should one go about finding new knowledge? (methodology)*

The conventional paradigm adopted by educational researchers since the time of Descartes has been positivism, rooted in a realist ontology. That is, adherents of this belief system subscribe to the idea that there exists a reality out there, and the business of research is to discover the true nature of reality and how it truly works. Thus, quantitative studies tend to be more precise, explicit, predetermined and assume that the relevant variables can be identified in advance and validly measured. They direct attention to variables of interest, reduce distractions, permit fine discriminations, and facilitate concise analysis and management of data. They use mathematical models as simplified representations of substantive problems, so that results depend not only on proper analysis but also on the fit between the model and the problem.

Qualitative studies, in contrast, spring from alternative paradigms based on an interpretive framework and rely on more provisional questions, data collection sites, people to interview and things to observe. They assume less in advance, including which variables are relevant, and are more open-ended, sensitive to context, and likely to be focused on the intentions, explanations and judgements of participants. Alternative paradigms refer to views of mind and knowledge that reject the idea that there is only one single way to know truth, something called “the scientific method.” To understand others, one must gain access to their lived experience so as to clarify and elucidate the way they interpret it.

### Themes in Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative inquiry plays an important role in research by assisting us in raising new questions, leading us to question assumptions, cultivating an appreciation for complexity, and expanding our frames of reference. By changing the set of lenses through which we view the world, we come to recognize that the ways people make meaning out of their life experiences influences the patterns of human behavior and action. While qualitative research is no longer considered “new,” and is now a well-accepted part of educational research programs of study, the following section presents a simplified introduction to some of the basic tenets and principles of qualitative inquiry for the uninitiated.

Some of the themes of hallmarks of qualitative research, which allow us to group a wide range of research methodologies under the rubric of “qualitative” follow here:

- 1) *Qualitative research is context-specific.* That is, it posits that people and events cannot be understood in isolation from their context. The researcher doesn’t attempt to manipulate the program or its participants for purposes of the study.
- 2) *Research should take place in natural settings.* Qualitative researchers observe people as they go about their daily lives on their home turf, rather than setting up experimental situations under controlled conditions. The qualitative study attempts to explicate program processes, document variations and explore important individual differences between various participants’ experiences and outcomes.
- 3) *Experience is studied holistically.* This contradicts qualitative methods, which look at a program, person, or event as a sum of discrete disconnected parts. The qualitative perspective posits that isolated variables, scales, or dimensions cannot be understood without understanding their relationships to other aspects of the culture

- being studied. The parts are so interconnected and interdependent that any simple cause-effect formula distorts the picture.
- 4) *The researcher takes on the role of learner.* The relationship between a qualitative researcher and the respondents is an asymmetrical one. Especially at the beginning of fieldwork, the researcher, not the respondents (as in other types of research) assumes a student/apprentice role. The assumption here is that whatever the interests of the research study, she or he must understand the way group members interpret the flow of events in their lives.
  - 5) *Firsthand observation is required.* Direct, prolonged contact is considered essential in order to learn the complex patterns of people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. This data is complemented by interviews, documents and other triangulation methods used to enhance understanding of the situation.
  - 6) *Long-term observation is the norm.* Qualitative researchers believe significant time must be spent in the field to acquire sufficient information and understanding of a group of people. One year is ordinarily considered a minimum, because a year usually allows people to go through their regular routines, patterns of work and play, and special activities, thus allowing the ethnographer sufficient time to observe a relatively full and representative range of behavior and activities. Multiyear projects are not at all unusual.
  - 7) *Participant observation.* Ethnographers are directly involved in community life, observing and talking with people as they learn from them their views of reality. Qualitative researchers are not merely recorders of people's statements and actions. To a greater or lesser extent, they live in much the same way as the people they are studying.

### A Participatory Approach

In participatory research co-researchers work collaboratively to make decisions rather than operating in a hierarchical fashion. The participants in this type of study become much more a part of the research process by helping to choose methods, deciding what should be focused on within the research, sharing in the ownership of data, being involved in the interpretation of results and making decisions about the use of these in changing the operation of their program (Anyanwu, 1988; Park, 1993). Lather (1986), a researcher committed to participatory principles, points out that “research offers a powerful opportunity for praxis to the extent that the research process enables people to change by encouraging self-reflection and deeper understanding of their particular situations” (p. 263).

While there are many variations on the qualitative process in research, this study seeks a narrative construction that allows the participants in the research to speak their meanings in ways that encourage them to recognize themselves and their own perspectives as valid sources of knowledge generation. Through speaking their own stories these individuals move from the numbers and statistics of the dominant educational discourse into fully three-dimensional people with whom we can identify. Engaging in the program from the inside, as participant-observer, I was able to record relationships, processes and patterns that help illuminate the reader’s understanding of the AmeriCorps experience in the context of a low-income community. I have used the video camera, the tape recorder, and other mechanical equipment during interviews and observation sessions.

This approach to the participants in the study is grounded in the Freirean concept that redefines the category of intellectual and argues that all women and men, regardless of social and economic function, are intellectuals (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Freire, 1997; Giroux, 1988b). That is, all human beings perform as intellectuals by constantly interpreting and giving meaning to the world. The oppressed, moreover,

“need to develop their own organic and transformative intellectuals who can learn . . . while simultaneously helping to foster modes of self-education and struggle against various forms of oppression” (Giroux, 1988b, p. 118).

My own subjective experience as a co-equal participant in the program is woven into the story as it unfolds. The recent movement to recognize the autobiographical voice as a legitimate way of speaking in academe (Behar, 1994) provides additional justification and gives force to this study of national service in which I present my own views and experiences as a participant. Participatory researchers often choose to use personal experience and self-disclosure as the very starting point of a study. These researchers acknowledge that all texts are personal statements, as any piece of writing carries the traces of its author (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994). Researchers who adopt this view draw on a new epistemology of “insiderness” that sees life and work as intertwined (Delgado-Gaitan, 1993; Maguire, 1987).

### Grounded Theory

In all of these research techniques, the grounded theory approach, in which the researcher enters the field with as open a mind as possible in order to develop analytical schemes grounded in empirical data, has been applied. Grounded theory means that theory emanates from data. That is, data drive toward theory; they do not derive from it. Just as the researcher refrains from cultural determinism, he or she refrains from making a priori assumptions. While we recognize diverse cultural values, we don’t judge them. Thus, as patterns have begun to emerge in the data collection process, they have become the themes of the research and the bases of the analytical framework, which the process intended to discover. The grounded theory process is, in a sense, like a funnel, beginning by observing many possible themes to develop and gradually focusing on a particular theme or a set of themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

## Sampling

The sampling strategy followed throughout the study was purposeful (see Patton, 1990, pp. 169-186). This strategy was used in order to gain an understanding of certain select information-rich cases without attempting to generalize to all such cases. This sampling technique contrasts with the method typically used by quantitative researchers, based on selecting a large enough sample through a stratified, randomized approach to permit confident generalization from the sample to a larger population. Randomness is a statistical concept that depends on a method of selection such that the probability of selecting each sample from the population is the same.

Many qualitative research studies look in depth at one or a small number of units rather than utilizing random sampling of a population of subjects. Case studies can be helpful for a number of reasons – to illustrate an idea, to explain the process of development over time, to explore uncharted issues by starting with a limited case, and to pose provocative questions.

The task of the qualitative interviewer is to go to such depth in each interview that surface considerations of representativeness and generalizability are replaced by a compelling evocation of each individual's experience. The argument for qualitative methodology has never been that its claims for generalizability are exceptionally strong (Firestone, 1993). Rather, the researcher may find connections among the experiences of the individuals he/she interviews. Such links among people whose individual lives are quite different but who are affected by common social forces can help the reader see patterns in that experience. Furthermore, by presenting the stories of participants' experience, interviewers open up for readers the possibility of connecting their own stories to those presented in the study.

### The Qualitative Interview

Qualitative researchers advocate, first and foremost, a concern with the phenomenal role of lived experience, with the ways in which members interpret their own lives and the world around them. Through this methodology, the inner life of the person, his/her moral struggles, hopes and ideals are revealed. Typically, this involves spending many hours talking with the subject, gathering up his or her perceptions of the world, encouraging these to be written down, reading through letters and journals, and developing an intimate familiarity with one or more concrete lives.

The in-depth qualitative interview presents a person's experiences as he or she defines them, and thus, the person's interpretations of his/her life and critical incidents provide central data for the final report. That is, the subject's definition of the situation takes precedence over the objective situation. Thus, in obtaining in-depth accounts from these participants, their definitions of the situation were gathered first, and then the perspective of others who bear directly upon those definitions were studied. This strategy, known as triangulation, permitted the analysis of varying definitions as they related to the same experiential unit.

One of the distinctions of the qualitative interview is that the interviewer does not predetermine the phrases or categories that must be used by respondents to express themselves. The objective of the interview is to learn how people in a program view their program, to learn their terminology and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences. The primary data of in-depth interviews are direct quotations from the persons involved. A principle underlying much of qualitative research is that the perspectives and experiences of the people being interviewed are best captured by using the actual words of the person being interviewed. Thus, tape recording interviews is a technique commonly used in the qualitative interview. The use of a tape recorder permits the interviewer to be more attentive to the interviewee and

increases the accuracy of data collection. Later transcriptions of these conversations are enormously useful in the data analysis phase of the project.

### Data Collection Procedures

In learning about and striving to understand the interviewees' experience, it was important that they understood themselves to be neither subjects nor objects of the study; rather they have been co-participants in the research work as it unfolded. Lessons learned from this study are products of the mutual collaboration of all involved. The participants in the group are co-authors of the story as it is told. The questions asked and areas investigated were not pre-determined but unfolded through getting to know the experience of those who were directly involved. Members of the AmeriCorps group were each invited to participate in the data analysis phase. I also invited each participant to read the transcript of their own interviews and to make any corrections or edit any information as they saw fit.

Interviews were held with 18 people over a period of 7 months. Eleven study participants were AmeriCorps members, directly involved as tutors and mentors to the students in Gadsden Elementary School. Seven other interviews were held with program staff, school teachers, community partners, parents and children. Most of the interview/observation sessions were held at Gadsden Elementary School in classrooms/cubicles reserved for AmeriCorps use. Others were held in nearby communities at a variety of sites. Each interview lasted from 40 minutes to 1 hour in length. During these conversations, the persons being interviewed were encouraged to speak about a variety of topics in their own words to express their own personal perspectives on a variety of topics related to the program and their participation in it. In the individual and small-group interviews, community members and college student volunteers were given the opportunity to share their ideas and opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of the program. This process worked especially well in the

small-group context because it tapped into the dynamics of the group process. Emphasis in these group sessions was not on consensus, but on the diversity and range of opinions of individuals within the group as well as lived group experience (Krueger, 1986). These interviews were approximately 2 hours in duration. They were held in Gadsden County, in the portable classrooms attached to the Gadsden Elementary School. There were 23 individual interviews, while the remaining two meetings were in groups of eight and twelve at a time. After the initial interview, members were given a copy of their own transcript. They then met with me again within a week or two to discuss changes or additions to their own narrative.

Focus group interviews were held at two points during the project with eight self-selected AmeriCorps members in order to spend more time in study and discussion of the preliminary findings and analysis. Members of this group read early drafts of the data presentation section and then met as a collective body to share ideas on possible revisions, modifications and additions to this piece of work. Some of the advantages of using the focus group format included: a) a wider range of insights and ideas could be obtained in a group setting; b) comments by one individual often triggered a chain of responses from other participants; and c) participants often were more spontaneous in a focus group, since no individual was required to answer any given question. The purpose of the focus group interview was to collect data in a social context where people could consider their own views in the context of the views of others (Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1991; Stewart & Shamdassani, 1990). The group dialogue helped enhance the data collection and analysis processes and also gave participants greater ownership in the research process.

The qualitative software program “Nonnumerical Unstructured Data-Indexing, Searching, & Theorizing” (NUD-IST 4) was very helpful in coding the text, dividing it into segments and chunks, and manipulating the coded data in various contexts.

### Ethical Concerns

Ethical and moral concerns must be addressed when engaged in a study of people's lives. In particularly sensitive cases, such as that of former welfare recipients, migrant farmworker families, and others, the decision to abstain from or delay in publishing certain materials is an option that must be kept open. All participants have had the right to withhold or withdraw personal information from the study at any time. At the same time, I have attempted to devise ways of presenting sensitive issues that do not reflect on the reputation of known individuals, that protect subjects from harm, and that avoid deception. These principles have included preserving informants' anonymity, nonmanipulation of participants in the study, obtaining informed consent, and engaging in ongoing open dialogue with all participants as the study develops (American Anthropological Association, 1997; Merriam, 1988; Smith, 1990). This meant honestly explaining to each participant in the study the goals and processes of the research project. I made clear to all those who agreed to be interviewed that excerpts from their narrative could be used and published in this study (subject, of course, to their editing of the transcripts). We agreed that pseudonyms would be used, and when individuals spoke about topics which they felt were too private to be printed, I continued listening to their stories, but turned off the tape recorder and stopped taking notes. Furthermore, the program participants helped make decisions about which of the many photographs taken over the period of this 10-month research study would be published in the final document.

There were other indications of additional concerns during initial interview encounters and later revision processes. Concerns were expressed by some of the participants over how parts of their stories might be read by politicians, government employees, or other unknown audiences. Over a period of 3 months we held individual and small group sessions at Greensboro Elementary School to discuss the issue of consent. Discussions with school administrators were held as well, to clarify

the issue of parental consent for the inclusion of photographs and other data from the school children in this study. Parts of the individual stories were not included in this document because of these concerns. Concerns were also expressed that such officials might not understand or value their language use. Some chose to revise their stories with an eye to making them congruent with Standard English. The group members developed a revised form of the Consent and Release Form sent from the Corporation for National Service, which was agreed to after many hours of collective input from the study participants (see Appendix A).

It was important to develop a methodology that would enable the women and men being interviewed to assist in the analysis of their own tape-recorded narratives and to try to avoid imposing alien constructions on their experiences. I attempted to achieve this by being as open as possible with the women and men about my theoretical orientation and the model I was developing in the course of analyzing their stories. I organized the interviews around a short list of seven open-ended questions, but allowed interviewees to talk about other related subjects if they wished, keeping the sessions as natural and conversational as possible.

At first, I limited interviews to 60 minutes – the length of one cassette tape. However, as this cut off some respondents in mid-story, I decided to continue most of the interviews to a second or third session. To ensure that the interviews covered as much ground as possible, I suggested a questionnaire protocol (see Appendix B) and used a checklist. When each first interview had been transcribed, I underlined it and noted emerging coding categories in the margins. I made extra copies of each transcript, keeping one intact in my file. The second copy of each interview was delivered to the person interviewed, and she/he was asked to comment on both the transcript, the interview, and the coding used.

The excerpts from participants' voices are presented literally as they were spoken. I spent long hours carefully transcribing recorded interviews word for word.

The following chapters attempt to explore some of the deeper meanings behind the speakers' comments and identify the themes that underlie them and link them together in order to help us to understand the program from the insider's perspective. To do this, I have grouped the excerpts from the unedited narratives so that voices speaking to related topics may be heard together. In actuality, the speakers weren't all gathered around a table talking about these topics simultaneously (except at the focus group interviews). Many of the interviews were held with one individual at a time, while others were conducted with small groups at the school, in the community, or at members' homes. I have given "front stage" in these chapters to the words of these collaborators (printed in italics) because they capture the dynamics of the process more eloquently than could any commentary on their work.

The pseudonyms of the participants who agreed to be interviewed for this research project follow here (in alphabetical order):

*Betty: 40 year old African American AmeriCorps member*

*Billy: third-grade AmeriCorps student*

*Camille: 19-year old Hispanic AmeriCorps member; mother of three children*

*Cathy: 26-year old African American AmeriCorps member; mother of four children*

*Ms. Hoffman: top school administrator*

*Iris: 25-year old Hispanic AmeriCorps member; mother of three children*

*Janine: 20-year old Caucasian AmeriCorps member*

*Joyce: 25-year old Caucasian AmeriCorps member; mother of one child*

*Katrina: 23-year old African American AmeriCorps member; mother of two children*

*Ms. King: a community partner*

*Ms. Lucy: AmeriCorps Program Director*

*MC: parent of an AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads student*

*Martha: 35-year old African American AmeriCorps member*

*Ms. Plath: school teacher*

*Mr. Stillman: school teacher*

*Tracy: 19-year old African American AmeriCorps member; mother of one child*

*Violet: 35-year old African American AmeriCorps member; mother of three children*

*Ms. Waxman: school teacher*

In the following chapters, their voices and stories will lead us on through the territory of service to the community in the AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads program. Let's follow along!

## CHAPTER 5

### Highways and Byways:

#### Serving and Learning In Our Own Home Town



The integration of service into educational programs of study in the context of academia is a subject of great interest to many researchers and educators in schools and universities in America today. Less is known, however, about the processes and outcomes of service-learning in community-based programs such as AmeriCorps. That is, rather than centering on formal education and its agenda for students, programs such as this one combine learning and service in diverse conditions and circumstances, allowing participants to view themselves as lifelong learners and the community as a nonformal classroom where experience is the basis for developing new insights and understanding.

#### There's No Place Like Home

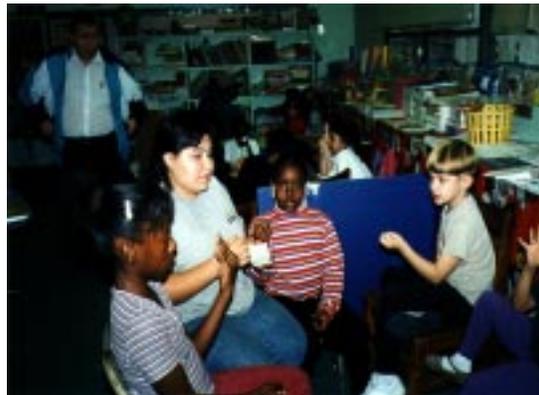
The combination of service with learning in their own primary community has had a powerful effect on these program participants. Through realizing that their lives can actually have a positive, meaningful effect on their immediate surroundings,

individuals begin to sense their own potential for making a real difference in society.

Let's listen to the voices of program participants:

*Joyce: "I was willing to join the Peace Corps. I thought that was just the thing to do! But when I was about 20 my son was born, so I decided I would have to put that off for a while. But . . . Clinton started AmeriCorps in '93, and in '93 was when he was born. So when I heard about that I thought, 'Well, there's something I could do, and not have to go so far away.' But I still thought that I'd have to go to another state or another town. So when this one started [in my own home town] I thought, 'Well, this is just for me!' So I went ahead and got into it and I've loved it so far."*

*Janine: "Seeing the kids from when I first started working with them and now – the improvement they've made . . . and the trust they have! When I go in there in the mornings they all want to come and read!"*



*Katrina: "We've actually had parents from our own town come and tell us, 'Because of you my child is doing better!' That is a wonderful feeling. It really is! It makes me feel like what I'm doing is worthwhile. It's just a wonderful feeling!"*

*Violet (agreeing with Katrina):*

*“I feel like that all the time,  
especially when I see the good  
results in a child that I’ve  
spent time with. And  
sometimes I think about it.*

*I let my mind go far beyond*



*and I think about it. I say, ‘In my old age, will one of those students that I helped teach to read, will that one become somebody big or somebody famous? And will they talk about, ‘[W]hen I was in the first grade, I remember this lady . . .’ and just call out my name! Before I die, I want to hear something like that! ‘She taught me. She taught me how to try hard. She taught me how to stay with it!’”*

*Ms. Waxman: “AmeriCorps has worked real well [in our school] . . . Most of the members went to school here. We [the teachers and administrators] already knew them, so we were not bringing strangers onto campus to have to get to know . . . that helped tremendously. They were already people who believed in our school, they know what we wanted out of our school, and were willing to help us. A lot of them graduated from here . . . I think it made the program get off to a better start than if they’d all been strangers . . . I like seeing them always in the classrooms working. . . . They’re actually out there getting things done every day.”*

*Ms. Hoffman: “Sometimes the AmeriCorps members go into the rooms, and sometimes the children go into the AmeriCorps’ room. But either way, it’s worked. The children are excited – the teachers are excited – and we [the administrators] are excited about what they are accomplishing with our students.”*

It appears then, that teachers and school staff agree with program participants on the impacts of recruiting these AmeriCorps members from the local community and its residents. Empowering local people to take responsibility for improving the community is a key to the effectiveness of this program. It is self evident to many of these educators that insiders, who both understand and support the community in its present stage of development, are more likely to succeed in garnering support and working effectively with the community in getting things done.

### Learning from Experience

*The experiential approach is a powerful motivator for learning because it is positive, meaningful and real. The learning environment is success-oriented rather than competitive. It offers opportunities for critical problem solving in which feedback is uncontrived and immediate, and in which results are real-life physical and emotional consequences. Because the learners participate in the design, implementation and management of their own learning, they are invested in the goal, hence internally motivated. . . .*

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The experiential context for serving and learning provides opportunities for these young adults to discover many of their own gifts and talents in ways that are both personal and meaningful. Let's listen to what one of the participants has to say about this dimension of the AmeriCorps experience in her own words:

*Katrina: “[When] I was much younger . . . I don’t mean I didn’t care about school, but the interest wasn’t quite there like it is now. Right now, I have the hands-on experience. I’m actually loving what I’m learning. So, I’d have to say it’s totally different [from what I experienced in school as a child]. It’s hands-on experience. Instead of me sitting in the class and the teacher telling me about it, I’m actually playing the role of that teacher. . . . You’re actually doing it. It’s a big difference.”*



Experiential education is holistic in the sense that it addresses learners in their entirety – as thinking, feeling, physical, emotional, spiritual and social beings. Experience involves any combinations of senses (i.e., touch, smell, hearing, sight, taste); emotions (e.g., empathy, attachment, pleasure, anxiety); physical condition (e.g., temperature, strength, energy level); and cognition (e.g., constructing knowledge, establishing beliefs, solving problems). The terrain includes the social dynamics of the group, the physical, emotional and psychological conditions that the groups and its members have obtained, the nature of the environment, its location (geographic, political or otherwise), and the resources available. Experiential education viewed through the lens of meaningful service is an empowering encounter through which people experience personal and social change, enabling them to take action to achieve influence over the organizations and institutions which affect their lives and the communities in which they live. \_

*Joyce: “You learn a million things [in a traditional classroom] that you never use, and half of them you don’t remember. But the things that we learn from this program, we’ll remember them. They’re stuck in our brain. That’s why they come out of our mouths all the time, and we use them almost constantly.”*

The learning component of this experience contrasts sharply with the traditional pedagogical model within which most of these young adults were educated. In Polakow’s (1993) discussion of the “discourse of otherness” which has arisen to define poor women and



their children, she observes that students in public schools in low-income communities are drilled on following the rules, rather than encouraged to *learn*. Children are trained to be docile and compliant, and creativity is often punished. Children who challenge the classroom order are reprimanded. These schoolroom observations are framed within a discourse that defines poor children in terms of their potential costs to society rather than their potential contributions.

Freire’s extensive writings (e.g., 1970, 1973, 1994, 1997) constitute an important contribution to experiential as well as a radical critique of educational systems. His argument is that education should encourage the development of “critical consciousness” in people through the active exploration of the personal, experiential meaning of abstract concepts by means of dialogue among equals. Learners are viewed as valuable resources for their own education, the education of others, and the well being of the communities of which they are members.

As people reconnect to their communities, they begin to understand some of the most pressing problems and work toward becoming part of the solution. Many advocates of community service learning believe that there is a synergetic relationship between democratic education, learner empowerment, and community service learning (Barber 1992a, 1992b; Boyer, 1990; Boyte, 1991; Gabelnick, 1997; Garman, 1995). Young people reduce their alienation and emphasis on self by becoming actively involved with others. These programs help them see the opportunity to increase commitment to the community and develop an understanding of democratic citizenship and responsibility.

Furthermore, learning in the context of this study has a meaning beyond simply acquiring skills or training. It involves the individual's enhanced awareness of self and community as active agents with both the capacity and the right to influence life and social conditions; that they are not simply pawns in the hands of either fate or the outside expert. Empowerment does not come from information alone, but rather from critically reflective learning. Some of the important goals of democratic practice in educational programs include: identifying with and advancing the goals and concerns of others, learning to form productive and satisfying relations with others, developing a concern for other people and groups, and developing an appreciation of cultures different from one's own. The next section discusses some of the collaborative processes and group dynamics of the program.

#### Mutual Support, Storytelling, and Reflective Distance

The AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads program structure exhibits several noteworthy features that have supported members' reflective learning within collaborative networks. Particular components that seemed especially key are not often found in either school- or community-based organizations for women and men in learning

programs such as these. An example of this can be seen in the “Morning Gatherings,” held each day before the tutoring begins.

### Focusing the Learning on Common Practice-Based Concerns

At 8:00 in the morning, from Monday through Friday, 15 AmeriCorps members gather together in a portable classroom attached to the Gadsden Elementary School. These ladies, most of whom are long-time residents of Gadsden County themselves, arrive at the school by car, by van, or by school bus. Some leave their children with family members, while others drop them at subsidized day care at various locations in the area. The classroom they come to is much different from what they were accustomed to in their younger years as students. As the women gather, one of them takes charge of the first activity of the day, the “Morning Gathering.” This session is designed to give women the opportunity to give voice to their own creative ideas on issues surrounding literacy, intercultural learning, and a wide variety of poems and short stories. These women not only increase their reading, writing, and speaking skills, they also realize the power of the intellect. They see themselves as knowers as well as readers and writers.



Fingeret (1991) states that “the construction of meaning is at the heart of literacy, and it is rooted in experience, culture and language. . . . It has to do with

dignity, power, strength, and authority” (p. 10). People who have not had successful experiences in school not only have problems with reading and writing, they often

have problems speaking also. For some adults, especially those who may have been neglected or abused as children, the mind experiences silence (Belenky et al., 1986). Speaking in a supportive, collaborative setting combines self-expression with reading and writing and thinking to increase valuable skills on a variety of levels. Some examples follow in the next sections.

Valuing Members' Experiences and Creative Ideas as Sources of New Knowledge

*Cathy: "It's better to use your own material [with the children] than to use the textbook. With me, I see that you can explain your own directions that you made up to the student better than the book can."*

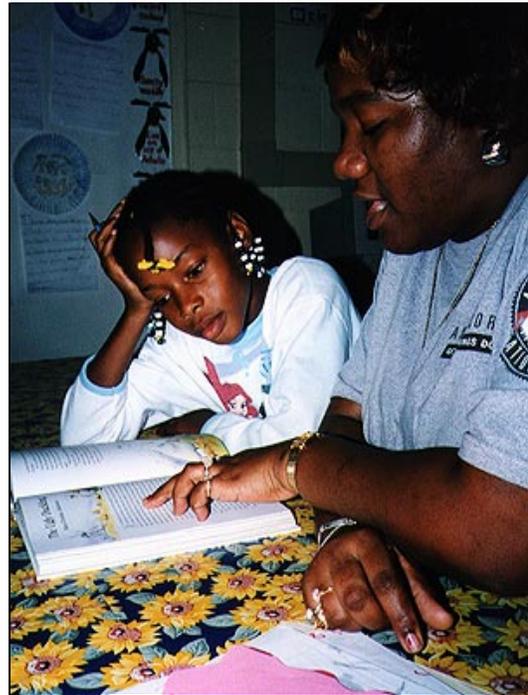
*Iris: "I think we're just joined. We need each other. In order for us to succeed, we have to work together. In order for us to even keep going we have to communicate.*

*We give input to each other and it all comes together."*

*Katrina: "I've learned to communicate myself with others. This is the first situation where I've had to actually learn to communicate with everyone. . . . You just learn everyone and their different ways . . ."*

The issues that dominate the conversations come out of members' common, practice-based experiences rather than external theory. This type of natural focus encourages a depth of understanding and prevents these beginning tutors from being overwhelmed by new information that is irrelevant to their current needs.

*Janine: "Every day I learn something new with them [the children I tutor]. If they didn't know something, it might teach me another way to approach it, another way to*



*help them learn it. Or if I have a question, I can ask the question a different way and learn that way.”*

*Camille: “Yes, and sometimes we just come up with our own ideas and we’ll share them. You know, when I come up with an idea, I’ll share it with someone else. When they come up with an idea, they’ll share it with everybody. We mostly share things . . .”*

The program design enables members to value their own and each other’s experiences as creative sources of new knowledge. One example of this is the book folder, a creative curricular material designed and constructed by each AmeriCorps member. (See Appendix C for a sample book folder from the AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads program.) Many school textbooks are standardized for easier management and consumption, and published with the intent of being marketed for large general student audiences. The recognition that students come from different histories and embody different experiences, linguistic practices, cultures and talents creates a strong foundation for teachers/tutors from local communities creating curriculum materials. This notion contradicts the assumption that all students can learn from the same materials, pedagogies, and modes of evaluation. Let’s listen to one of the AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads members discuss some of the effects of creating her own instructional materials on the students and on herself:

*Violet: “It’s better to use your own material than to use the textbook. . . . I like to create something of [my] own, and then teach the children with it and [see them] succeed from it. [T]hat’s a good feeling! It makes me feel good to know I’m pulling this out of me, sharing it, and it’s making a difference.”*



### Appreciating Members’ Cultural and Biographical Differences

As members served, learned and talked together, they developed a deeper understanding of their common concerns, but also how their different life experiences, similar goals and values as tutors and community members informed their current perspectives. They learned to understand, appreciate, and even celebrate both their connections and their differences. While the changing demographics of Gadsden County are bringing African Americans, Caucasian Americans and newly arrived Hispanic families into close proximity with each other, many community members have had little or no direct contact with others from backgrounds different from their own. Their interactions with other members, as well as with children and their families, was eye-opening for many of them. Let’s hear what the members have to say about intercultural connections the AmeriCorps experience has helped them develop:

*Violet: “I have always wanted to learn about different races and different cultures. I sit with M. at the table and she always talks about the kind of foods [from her country] that she cooks. I like foods with different tastes – I don’t like the same taste all the time. I like something different . . . I want to learn more about different cultures. I’ve learned a little from the people [here] already.”*

*Tracy: "I work with a lot of Hispanics. I have learned about . . . not just ways of life, but ways of learning. Most of them . . . are trying to learn English, and I can see the different learning abilities they have . . ."*



### Opportunities to Ask Questions and Reflect upon Feedback

Conversations in group meetings, training sessions and in visiting other classrooms seemed to afford the participants opportunities to explore broad questions. Many of the reflective sessions occurred within the Community College program (see Chapter 6). Members created Vision Statements, Mission Statements and reflected on their future directions after AmeriCorps in Life Development Plans. (See Appendix D for samples of each of these.)

*Janine: "Sometimes I might get discouraged with a child because they're not doing as good as I think they should be doing. And I wonder, 'Am I not doing it right? Am I not teaching it right for them to learn more?' And then I'll go to [the others] and I'll ask, 'Give me your opinion of this. What do you think I should do?' And from there we go on . . ."*

### Service as the Link

*We must be the change we wish to see in the world.*

*(Gandhi, in Shaffer & Anundsen, 1993, p. 324)*

*No matter the kind of service being rendered . . . the ultimate worth of the effort will depend a good deal on how a particular person manages to connect with those others being in some way taught or healed or advised or assisted: the chemistry of giving and receiving as it works back and forth between individuals [is the key] . . .*

*(Coles, 1993, p. 65)*

The combination of service and learning in a community of need offers many potential benefits for service-providers as well as recipients. In the case of the Gadsden AmeriCorps program, members not only experience real-life situations in which they can make a difference, they engage in critical reflection on that experience. Issues that these adult learners confront help them develop problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, collaborative learning skills and many others. Social relations in classrooms that glorify the teacher as the expert, the dispenser of knowledge, can end up crippling learners' imagination and creativity. The service-learning scenario, in contrast, is one of mutual collaboration – learners take an active role in relation to their own learning and development.

While much of the research on service-learning sets the context for this method/philosophy of education in the context of schools and colleges, programs such as AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads illustrate the usefulness of this strategy for programs not necessarily based in schools. Learning and practicing citizenship are lifelong activities which extend far beyond the conclusion of formal education. Service-learning can be used to increase the citizenship skills of participants of any age or background. There are three basic components to effective service-learning: a) sufficient preparation, which includes setting objectives for skills to be learned or issues to consider, and includes planning projects so they contribute to learning at the same time work gets done, b) simply performing service, and c) analyzing the experience and drawing lessons, through such means as discussion with others and reflection on the work (Corporation for National and Community Service, 1994, p. 52)

Some of the complex processes involved in the service-learning scenario are illustrated in Figure 2.

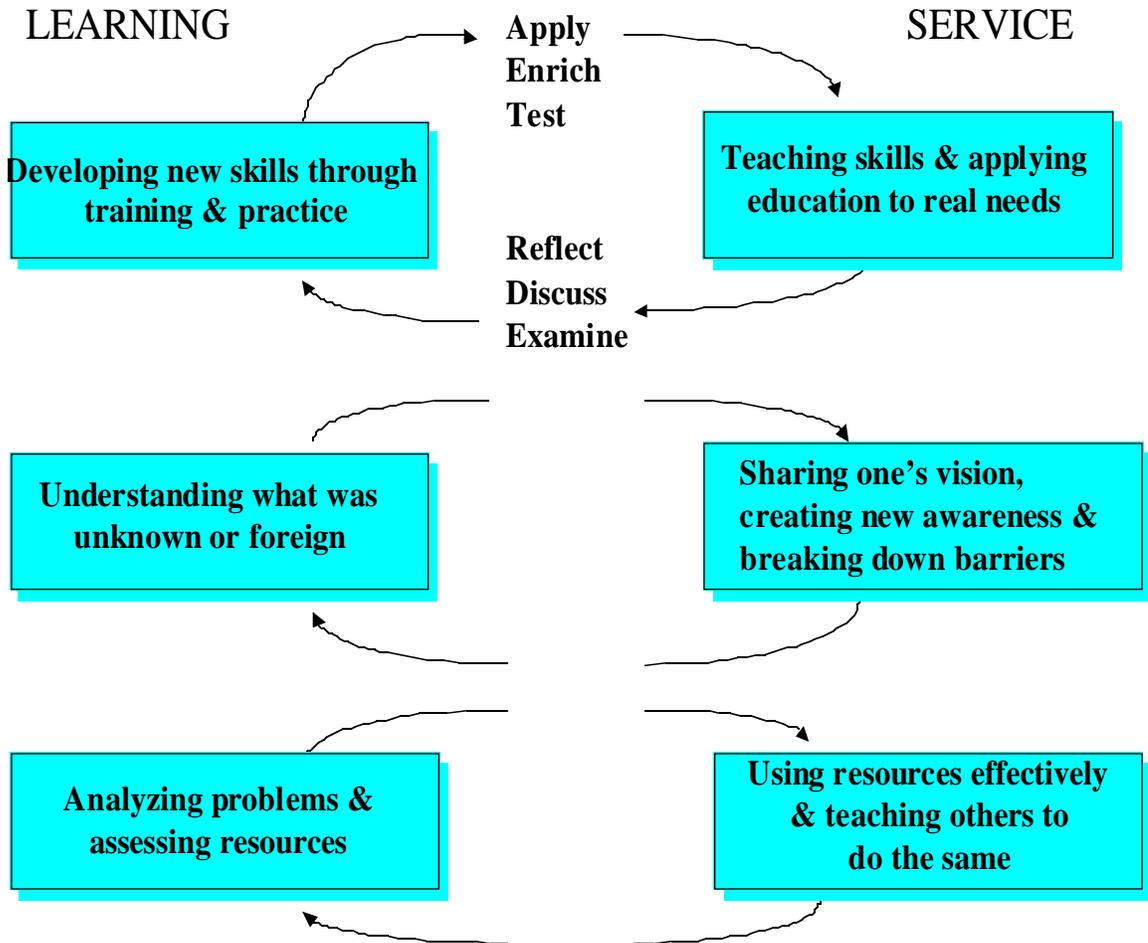


Figure 2. Service-learning model.

The figure illustrates the balancing act which is crucial to the successful service-learning experience – participants in this process grow and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized experiences that meet actual community needs and are coordinated with ongoing reflection. In the next section we'll look at the role the AmeriCorps staff members play in organizing and facilitating program activities and reflection.

## Mentoring: The Leader as Coach

*The civil group leader must not only be alert to the possibility that any member of the group may come up with the best solution to a given problem, but also then be prepared to follow that person's lead.*

*(M. Scott Peck, in Shaffer & Anundsen, 1993, p.274)*

*Ms. Lucy: "I'm trying to get to a point where I'm more of a coach instead of making all the decisions. They [the members] are making the decisions, and I'm helping them to provide guidelines that will make their decisions . . . smoother for them to come to, just giving them tools . . ."*



*Kris: "Every day [in AmeriCorps] there's that one-on-one, or that two-on-one . . ."*

*Katrina: "They [the AmeriCorps staff] don't have to help us get into college. They really don't have to do that at all, but they do. That's good thing! That's a blessing!"*

Mentoring is a unique one-to-one teaching and learning method that incorporates a variety of important elements such as collaboration, challenge, critical reflection, and praxis. Daloz (1986) describes the mentor as a guide, helping a protégé move along a journey toward discovering and examining newfound territory. The purpose of a mentoring relationship is to uncover new perspectives and new ways of thinking and acting. The mentor's role is to "affirm that [other] person's essential

integrity, to say that no matter what is to come, she is fundamentally okay” (p. 209). Building on that trust within the relationship, the mentor challenges the learner to view the world from new perspectives by raising challenging questions and inviting the learner to entertain alternative ways of thinking and acting. Finally, mentors often ask learners appropriate questions about their aspirations, dreams, learning needs and so on to help each one design a map to her goal or destination.

The leadership style of staff in the AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads program helps members develop their own potential by challenging each one to develop additional skills in an atmosphere of encouragement and support. A survey administered to this group by the Florida Commission on Community Service in April 1998 indicated that 33% of the members are highly satisfied with their AmeriCorps supervisors and the remaining 67% are satisfied. Further questions showed that 83.4% of the members are satisfied (or highly satisfied) with the way people in the program work together. Respondents added further comments, such as *“I developed leadership qualities through AmeriCorps . . . boldness and being unafraid to bring up my ideas and branch out on them . . .”*

The notion of combining service with learning in a supportive environment extends beyond the activities of the members themselves with their tutees, to the interactions these young children have with one other through AmeriCorps’ intervention.

### Modeling Service-Learning Practice at Every Level

*Joyce: “. . . And Joe (a sixth-grader), he loves working with little kids. In fact, he’s working with the first-graders, teaching them phonics and how to read. So, I think also by working with AmeriCorps these kids are learning to help other people too – and they love it!”*



Another unique feature of the AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads program is the commitment of its staff to developing strategies that combine service with learning at every level. As public school classrooms become more and more racially and linguistically diverse, the levels of achievement in any one classroom may span more than five grades. The heterogeneity of groups of students compounds the obstacles facing elementary teachers in trying to reach out to each individual learner. Peer tutoring as a pedagogical strategy allows older, more experienced students to work with younger beginning learners in structured, reciprocal, one-to-one interaction. The strategy permits frequent opportunity for the learner to respond, facilitates immediate corrective feedback, increases academic engaged time, and offers social support and encouragement. Furthermore, as older students take on responsibilities for younger students’ learning and development, they also benefit greatly. Teachers at Greensboro Elementary report that the children involved in the Peer Assisted Learning Strategy program (PALS) have shown improvements not only in reading achievement, but also in motivation, discipline and attendance at school.

In national longitudinal outcome studies (i.e., Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Patton & Polloway, 1996), the postschool status outcomes of students who lived in poverty (Slavin, 1989) and who were culturally diverse and/or limited English

proficient (Miramontes et al., 1997) are typically at elevated risk for early school failure and lifelong illiteracy. A number of studies have found the most effective strategies for teaching children to read promote a motivation to learn how to learn and a motivation to read on their own, rather than focusing solely on mechanics and discrete skills. Bandura (1993), for example, has looked at the effect of developing self-efficacy in learners. That is, students who feel that they have the power to produce an effect and can actively control their own learning will be more confident and motivated to work toward a learning goal.

Students teaching students provide another layer in the model for service and study through AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads. Teachers, tutors and children agree that when students teach each other, something magic happens. Classroom teachers spend much of their time trying to create connecting moments of inspiration when new ideas light up a child's face. The cooperative relationship at this elementary school between sixth graders and kindergarten students seems highly motivating for both tutors and tutees.

The PALS program has been shown to result in important benefits for beginning readers (Fuchs et al., 1996; Greenwood & Delquadri, 1995). This reading program has been found to:

1. Provide students with instruction in and practice of critical comprehension and decoding strategies.
2. Include tasks that all students can perform successfully.
3. Motivate students to become better readers.
4. Expand instructional resources and strategies in the classroom.
5. Involve all students; create opportunity for lower-functioning students to assume an integral role in a valued activity.
6. Provide for positive and productive peer interaction.
7. Enhance social relationships.

8. Promote greater student achievement in reading than more conventional reading strategies.

Thus, the combination of service with learning throughout the Gadsden AmeriCorps program has produced a variety of effects at several levels. While the primary focus of this preliminary study has been the AmeriCorps members, looking at their personal, social and intellectual growth, it is important to note that their experience is centered on the school children they work with. This national service program is founded on the principle of “Getting Things Done” in local communities. The next section of our journey will present the reader with a discussion of some of the effects of program participation on several key participants, as well as introducing preliminary findings reflecting the improvement in AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads children’s achievement scores.

Let’s continue on then, and look at some of the diverse outcomes of the processes described in this chapter on participants in AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads.

## CHAPTER 6

### A Single Step On This Journey Can Define A Lifetime:

#### The Outcomes



Making a

Difference –

#### “We Are Really Getting Things Done!”

*Violet: “I started off with first graders who didn’t even know all of the alphabet. They’d get halfway and they couldn’t say the rest of it. One of the students I worked with was like that . . . I worked hard with him, I really did. Now he’s reading! I’m not going to wonder if I had an effect on that – I know I did!”*

*Camille: “We’ve done a variety of things, like painting the mural down at the public library and the Greensboro school sign. From these activities and what the teachers have said about us, it has kind of spread in the community. There’s a fair bit of publicity come out about us . . . We must be doing something good!”*

*MC: “My son is part of the AmeriCorps program. Seven weeks ago when we joined the AmeriCorps program . . . my son couldn’t read . . . AmeriCorps stepped in – and in seven weeks my son has got the confidence to read. He is trying so hard! He has gone from zero on his spelling test to 100 in seven weeks – due to AmeriCorps!*

*Without this group of people my son would not be where he is today and may not have had a future! I can't tell you as a parent thank you enough!"*

*Ms. Platt: "The AmeriCorps members helped their group of children write. They've also helped them with their reading assignments. They've been able to do all the things I don't have time to do. Plus, they give these children the one-on-one attention . . . I have seen such a major improvement in the ones they've worked with. Their reading comprehension has come up; their word calling has come up. Their writing skills have come up . . . The children write with confidence. They write stories that are more in-depth . . . I was probably the most skeptical teacher in the school – and now I'm sold! It's been everything it was supposed to be!"*

*Tracy: "[W]hen it's time to go into class it makes your day to know that you can make a difference in a child's life . . . To know that you can make a difference in someone else's life keeps you going. It keeps you going and going and going, even though it might get rough (laughter)! It makes me personally feel good that somebody's going to remember me in a good way. I could be someone's inspiration!"*

*Billy: "Since AmeriCorps has come to my school I have met some nice people . . . the AmeriCorps members are nice. They take time for us even when they have something important to do . . . We write and read. Reading makes me use my imagination. I feel smart when I am on the computer. I also feel very special because AmeriCorps cares about me . . ."*

The AmeriCorps experience has enabled participants to see beyond themselves and learn to focus a major part of their attention on the concerns of other people. This vantage point is a new perspective for some, who have begun to take an interest in

pursuing service careers. Violet, for example, reminded me of the contrasts between her former lifestyle as a welfare recipient, and this new road of service to others that she was learning to traverse. As a single mother receiving government help, her vision and goals for the future were limited and somewhat bleak. The new opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of others on a daily basis has helped her see herself in a new light, and she plans to continue teaching literacy in her town as well as in her own family circle.

Evaluation designs for programs that offer individualized tutoring and mentoring over an extended period of time typically administer pre- and post-tests as well as conducting monitoring and other activities in order to determine explicit measures of quality. While this research project shares many common characteristics with evaluation designs, the purpose of the current study has not been to evaluate the effectiveness of the program on children's academic achievement. Preliminary tests administered by program staff, however, indicate that the AmeriCorps tutors are having a positive impact. Scores on standardized tests show that the students have improved 1.93 grade levels on basic reading scores over a period of 8 months. (See Appendix E for further details.)

Transforming Lives through Service:  
Developing Members and Strengthening Communities

*The language of citizenship suggests that self-interests are always embedded in communities of action and that in serving neighbors one also serves oneself . . .*

*(Barber, 1992b, p. 249)*

*"I smile more than I ever did before . . . and that has to do with the people I've met and their influence on me, and learning ways that were not my own . . . You learn a lot of other ways of looking at life . . . and that's helped me out."*

*(Joyce)*

Our New Vision: Seeing Ourselves  
As Resources.

As the twenty-first century approaches, population trends in our nation are expanding notions of culture and community in ways that must be more inclusive of diversity, with a greater urgency because of shifting demographics and power relationships. Multicultural educators (i.e., Diaz, 1994; Hutchinson, 1996; Morris, 1990) argue for new conceptions of community, educational paradigms, and civic competence that reflect the plurality of peoples, cultures, and contributions in the United States.

Many would argue that civic education occurs as people learn about and participate in the give-and-take of the everyday public work through which citizens deal with the social and political issues facing our communities (Barber, 1992b; Battistoni, 1995; Garman, 1995). Pratte (1988) proposes “community service as a just, viable, coherent, and virtuous vehicle for negotiating the terms of membership in a society by citizens exhibiting the virtues of mutuality, trust, kindness, concern, caring, tolerance, and respect” (p. 109).

*Katrina: “[T]his is the school where I grew up, and some of the same teachers I’m working with now taught me back when [I was a child]. So, I mean, I love it! I must say, I love the program!”*

*Ms. Lucy: “Along with tutoring every day in school, some of the members have volunteered with Red Cross, some with Literacy Volunteers of America . . . at the county Educational Center, and at day care facilities. . . . Now there’s a lot of doors open if they choose to do volunteer work after the program ends. They know where to go, they know the people in most volunteer programs in the county . . .”*

*Ms. Hoffman: “AmeriCorps . . . are really a part of our [school’s] staff . . . [We’ve had] other volunteers [and] we were happy to have them, but it was like they would come today and it might be next Thursday before they came again. But this group [AmeriCorps] is here every day . . .”*

### Interpersonal Skills



*Ms. Lucy: “It was also a development of knowledge and understanding as they became closer, and realizing that the more they learned about themselves, the more they were learning about other cultures. It kind of shocked their worldview. Learning how to analyze your own worldview has a lot to do with cultural diversity . . .”*

*Joyce: “All these kids are on a different level, but that’s because they all learn different . . . You know, all their learning styles are different . . . We [also] had to take tests ourselves and discover what our own learning style was . . .”*

These AmeriCorps members talked about the many ways in which they have learned to feel more at home with diversity through their service experience. In their daily activities at school and in the community, they’ve learned to work effectively with people of different ethnic, social, or educational backgrounds; understand the cultural

differences of diverse groups; and help people in these groups make cultural adjustments when necessary. Some of the personal skills learned by the members of the AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads program are summarized here:

Social	Showing understanding, friendliness, and respect for feelings of others; asserting oneself when appropriate; taking an interest in what people say and why they think and act as they do.
Negotiation	Identifying common goals among different parties; clearly presenting one's own position; understanding other party's position; examining possible options; making reasonable compromises.
Leadership	Communicating thoughts and feelings to justify a position; encouraging or convincing others; making positive use of rules or values; demonstrating ability to have others believe in and trust you because of your competence and honesty.
Teamwork	Contributing to group with ideas and effort; doing one's own share of work; encouraging team members; resolving differences for benefit of the team; responsibly challenging existing procedures.

Personal Qualities

*Cathy: “At first when I started, you know, I had my doubts, you know, am I making it? Am I doing fine? But as the days go by I learn to love the kids and – I love what I do, I really do.”*



*Ms. King: “I have had women walk in [to my county office] directly from an abuse situation – police station – hospital – just picking up the pieces, physically picking up the pieces. . . . And it’s difficult to encourage [many of these] women to go into professions. A lot of them don’t have the basic self-esteem, self-image – whatever it takes to feel that, ‘I am capable of this and I can do this’ . . . I thought an AmeriCorps experience would provide them with more of that growth and structure that they would actually need to go out there . . . and be successful . . .”*

In a low-income county like Gadsden, it’s no surprise that many of the members who serve as AmeriCorps members come from disadvantaged backgrounds themselves. Thus, in learning to serve at-risk children in their own community, these members develop skills and qualities that will well serve them, their families and neighborhoods in many ways. Some of the qualities members have developed are summarized below:

Self-esteem	Understanding how beliefs affect how a person feels and acts; listening and identifying irrational or harmful beliefs one may
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	hold and understanding how to change them when they occur.
Self-management	Assessing own knowledge and skills accurately; setting specific, realistic personal goals; monitoring progress toward goals.
Responsibility	Working hard to reach goals, even if task is unpleasant; doing quality work; displaying high standard of attendance, honesty, energy, and optimism.

Appreciation of Diversity



*Katrina: “I find myself constantly asking, ‘How do you say such and such in Spanish?’ I just find it interesting learning about another language other than the language I speak.”*

Community-based service-learning programs in communities such as Gadsden County offer unique opportunities for broadening citizens’ perspectives as diverse groups of people work together in culturally and socially diverse teams toward concrete shared goals. Specific activities are designed to help participants to correct misinformation and stereotypes and to help them reflect upon their own attitudes. Some of the components of this dimension follow here:

Values clarification	Developing insight into one’s meaning and purpose in
----------------------	--

	life.
Reciprocity	Engaging in acts of collaboration with diverse others in society.
Reflection	Learning to see and understand the world from multiple perspectives.

Competence to Participate in Democratic Society

*Tracy: “If it hadn’t been for this program I might not have known what my goals in life were.”*

Practitioners and researchers involved in international development strategies have long



recognized that local participation is a necessary condition for rural people to manage their affairs, control their environment, and enhance their own well-being. Four principles summarize the significance of participation in the development process: 1) people organize best around problems they consider most important; 2) local people make rational policy decisions in the context of their own environment and circumstances; 3) local commitment of labor, time and resources to a project is a necessary condition for breaking patterns of development paternalism which reinforce local passivity and dependence; and 4) local control over the amount, quality and distribution of benefits from development activities is directly related to those benefits becoming self-sustaining. These principles reflect the fact that participation means much more than an occasional meeting in which project staff discuss their plans for local residents in the usual benefactor-to-beneficiary manner. Meaningful participation implies a systematic local autonomy, in which communities discover the possibilities of exercising choice and thereby becoming capable of managing their own development.

Learning, change and growth in AmeriCorps participants are promoted by the service and learning processes that begin with lived experience, followed by reflection, and finally analyzed and used to adapt behavior and choose new experiences. Some of the democratic skills acquired by these members follow here:

Conflict resolution	Understanding the dynamics of dialogue and its foundational role in meaning making.
Critical thinking and creative problem solving	Developing a responsive and responsible moral imagination, capable of responding to diverse views.
Vision, goal setting and action planning	Envisioning alternatives to current but inadequate beliefs and practices.
Rational decision making	Creating policies and practices that support the common good.

Communication Skills

*Iris: “In order for us to succeed, we have to work together. In order for us to even keep going we have to communicate. We give input to each other and it all comes together . . .”*



The AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads participants hear and see community issues through the eyes of other community members. Learning to understand issues from multiple perspectives and engaging in caring relationships enhances members’ ability to function in today’s increasingly complex world (Noddings, 1984, 1992). Some of the program members’ communication skills include:

Listening/questioning skills	Bringing a range of different points of view into dialogue with one another.
Dialogue	Understanding that meaning is constructed through ongoing interaction between self and others.
Moderating group discussion	Broadening the group's range of potential responses and understanding.
Problem framing	Examining barriers and obstacles to progress from all angles.

Finding the Linkages between Service, Community and Family

Through engagement in ongoing reflection, participants in programs such as AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads encounter points of connection between the service-learning experience and their various roles in the community. This serves to strengthen families, neighborhoods and a number of local organizations.

Reflection

Reflective practice is a process that occurs throughout the service experience, in which thought is linked integrally with action. Schön describes it as a “dialogue of thinking and doing” (1987, p. 31). Experience provides the basis for learning: a problem or event prompts an inner sense of discomfort and perplexity. If this event is to create change or to stimulate growth, the person must make meaning of that event,

examine it and appraise the activity. Out of this process of observation and reflection comes new meaning, alternative perspectives and new views about how things work.

*Cathy's journal entry: "Today is the last day of the semester. Everyone is sad and shedding a few tears. Well, for me, it's another year of instead of 'Getting Things Done', I'd say we 'Got Things Done'. Goals have been accomplished. The members had their ups and downs, and thanks to the*



*trainings we have overcome it all successfully. . . . The students have increased their reading levels and are looking forward to another year in the AmeriCorps Program. They are all happy and proud of themselves for increasing their reading levels. Just looking at the smiles on their faces you can see the joy in their eyes. The students have touched all our hearts in more ways than we can say. All the students have a special place in my heart, but there is one student that really touched my heart and made me really stay . . . Billy was a student that has really increased in his reading. Just to hear him read better than he did before is a blessing, and that was what made me want to push harder with my other students."*

*Ms. Lucy: "They've done a lot of self-evaluation – looking back at themselves and finding out what qualities they have and what interests they have in terms of going forward with their careers. . . . Usually one thing I do is take the quarterly report and ask each one of them to write about one of the topics, and we'll talk about it. It's very good, it's something I'd like to do more."*

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

A couple of decades ago, many adult education/training programs prepared learners for the workplace by stressing the importance of high dexterity and a good work ethic. Preparing Americans for a life of committed citizenship for the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires a broader array of qualities and skills than was needed in the past. Researchers and practitioners in several fields (Halliburton, 1997; Moore, 1996; Seigel & Rockwood, 1993) argue that to strengthen the connection between civil society and individual citizens, educational programs must also change the societal and educational paradigm from a strategy of competitiveness to one of collaboration, helping learners develop good communication skills, problem-solving skills, the ability to work constructively in a team, and an active democratic life of engagement and collaboration.

The service-learning encounter provides unique opportunities for these adult learners to cooperate with others in working together toward a set of common goals. This experiential method contrasts sharply with the traditional classroom and its methods of testing, grading, and instruction based on the traditional pedagogical technique: the lecture. Several authors (e.g., Griffin et al., 1993; Howard, 1998; Theobald & Howley, 1997) have criticized this traditional method of instruction on the grounds that it assigns students too passive a role, thereby inhibiting the learning process. Furthermore, it leads students to view learning as a solitary and competitive process. The grading system used in many school systems assigns grades on a curve – that is, one student’s success signifies failure for another student.

The implementation of service-learning techniques in community-based programs such as AmeriCorps operate at several levels, providing much needed support in local schools, while assisting adult participants to learn and develop the capacity for “commitment in a tentative world” (Daloz et al., p. 12). Community members are learning “to bridge the racial and other divides in this country” (Clinton,

1998, January 20) in service with diverse others, helping to recreate communities based on freedom and mutual respect.

*Katrina: “The program has taught me to be organized . . . I mean knowing what I’ve got to do every day, knowing what papers I have to use and having them ready for the next day . . . and that helps me with school too . . . You have to type sometimes and use computers.”*

*Violet: “I’m one of the tutors [at an adult education class]. We were doing capitalization, and I know there had to be a teacher that taught me, but I forgot! . . . [I]t brought back a lot that I had forgotten. . . . If somebody can refresh my memory . . . it makes a difference!”*

*Cathy: “I’ve been finished school for about 8 years now. And between that time it’s kind of like ‘dragged’ from your mind. It’s kind of like I’m relearning everything all over again, you know, refreshing my memory.”*

*Katrina: “Before I came into this program I didn’t have any thoughts of going back to school. Now that I do have the chance I’m taking advantage of it.”*

When we look at educational backgrounds of adults in the AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads program, we find the following characteristics:

High School Graduate	GED Diploma	Some College/Vocational Institute Courses before AmeriCorps
95%	5%	62%

Many of these members indicated that they had had little interaction with their teachers back in school and had little family support (in terms of role models and development of life goals). Burdened at a young age with heavy family responsibilities such as children and extended family members to care for, along with the stress of spouses who are unemployed and sometimes abusive, their lives have been further burdened by a lack of support and encouragement from their local community. Yet when adults can overcome some of these barriers and find the courage to begin a journey of learning and personal development through opportunities like AmeriCorps, enhancing their sense of self-efficacy, they acquire a strong sense of accomplishment and self worth.

One of the unique features of the AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads project is the opportunities it provides for supportive, caring mentors to play a role in these people's lives; and for all to enroll in beginning college courses (see page 95). To understand the nature of the relationship and the impacts it had on the participants in this program, I asked program staff, teachers, community partners and other key individuals to join in the dialogue that characterizes the experience of working with these tutors/reading coaches.

*Cathy: "I like [the program] – especially when I see [the classroom teacher] teaching. I feel like I'm going to be a teacher too one day. I'll learn to do all of this."*

*Ms. King: "I thought that [for] the ones that I did refer . . . the AmeriCorps [program] would provide something of a cradle or a cushion. . . . Every day there's that one-on-one, or that two-on-one. [Other programs are unable to do that] and not all of them do that well."*

Some of the basic skills members have the chance to learn and re-learn include:

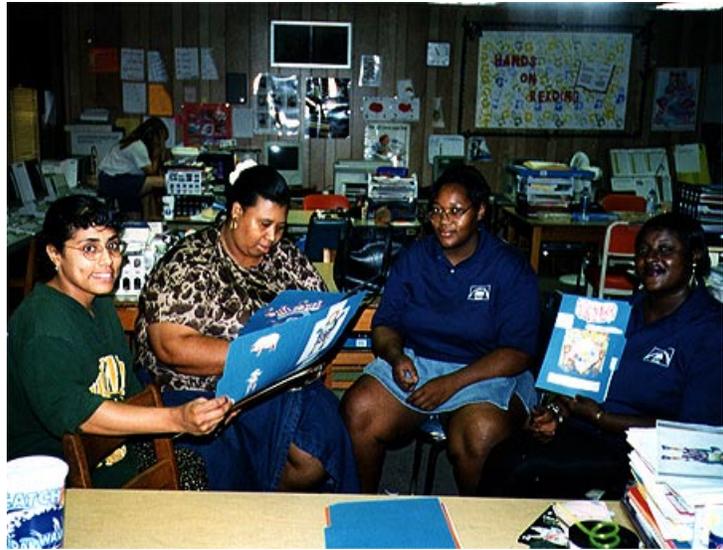
Reading	Identifying relevant facts, searching out meanings of unknown words; using computers to find information.
Writing	Expressing ideas completely and accurately in letters and reports with proper grammar, spelling and punctuation; using computers to communicate information.
Mathematics	Using numbers, fractions and percentages to solve problems; using computers to enter, retrieve, change and communicate numerical information.
Speaking	Speaking clearly; selecting language, tone of voice and gestures appropriate to audience.
Listening	Listening carefully to what other persons say; responding in a way that shows understanding of what is said.

While at first glance, this list of reading and basic skills instruction seems as neutral as can be, we might remember that reading requires a text, and texts are about something and are written for specific purposes. One of the characteristics of the terms “literate” and “literacy” is that they are ever changing. Critical educators (i.e., Fingeret, 1991; Giroux, 1988a; Jurmo, 1985) argue that while some societies may choose to use literacy differently, one fact is always constant and that is literacy is always connected with power.

Literacy, then must be viewed as much more than mechanical skill in reading and writing. It is a potent form of consciousness. For Freire, the notion of critical consciousness involves the ability to analyze and ask questions which affect lives. He believes that “praxis” and “dialogue” are central to the struggle for the process of transformative learning to take place. Education, in his writings, becomes the praxis or the practice, of freedom and dialogue is the essential application of the problem-posing

model of education. It is through dialogue that people can break the spell of silence and find their voice. All of these features – the materials, the literacy practices, the context for the program – make teaching and learning literacy and basic skills value-laden and ideological. Learning to read and write involves more than acquiring decontextualized decoding, comprehension, and production skills and is directly related to the development of critical awareness.

*Joyce: “We’ve been through the conflict resolution training and we’ve been through the cultural diversity training. We’ve been through financial planning courses and we’ve been through career development courses . . .*



*When you take those things and you use them, it causes you to learn in a whole different way.”*

Critical thinking is developed in a variety of contexts. Some of these are summarized below:

Creative thinking	Using imagination freely, combining ideas or information in new ways; making connections between ideas.
Problem solving	Recognizing problems; identifying why it is a problem; creating and implementing solutions; carefully observing to see how well solution works; revising as needed.
Decision making	Identifying goals; generating alternatives and gathering information about them; weighing pros and cons; choosing best alternative; planning how to carry out choice.
Visualization	Imagining new systems.

Members' Children

*"I had a mother who read to me  
Sagas of pirates who sailed the seas . . .*

*You may have tangible wealth untold  
Caskets of jewels and coffins of gold.  
But richer than I you can never be -  
I had a mother who read to me."*

Author unknown



The impacts on the sons and daughters of these members provide one powerful example of the many unanticipated outcomes of this program on the Gadsden County community. As these young parents learn to analyze, to articulate, to organize their own and others' learning tasks, their own children benefit as well. The nature and quality of their interactions with their sons and daughters is an area of potential interest for future research and study.

*Tracy: "Before I started here, I didn't have not one book for my own kid. So, after coming here, reading to these children and seeing the difference. . . . You know, I'm thinking, 'Well, he's just a baby'. But now I have a set of books and I read to [my son]. At first, if he saw a book he would want to tear the pages out of it, but now he won't do that . . . I can see that I'm getting him interested in reading. I didn't know that you could start that young."*

*Cathy: "We read a lot [at home] now. We try to read every day. When I go into stores and I look for what to get my children, well, AmeriCorps has helped me for one thing buy them more books. We read a lot at home now, we read much more."*

*Camille: "It's giving me more patience with my own children too. I've learned a lot about patience, because there are some children who will want to participate sometimes . . . I have more patience with my own children and it's also showing me that I need to work with my children."*

*Ms. King: "It's so clear to me that as the mother's self-esteem improves, the kids get better. The kids get focused. The kids become motivated. . . . So I think it's a very powerful thing to empower parents, because it goes to more than just one generation. If you look at it, a lot of these ladies are coming from parents who were not empowered, who are themselves coming from a whole lifetime of extreme poverty, and not being able to know or to do anything different."*

The statistics, even when made available, provide little help in understanding the full scope of the dynamics of these programs because it is not the quantity so much as the quality that paints the picture. Of course, we can cite the many women who no longer stay home all day doing unpaid labor, interacting minimally with the larger community, and growing increasingly reliant on outside help. Who can doubt that the fewer the dependent adults in society, the better things will be? Yet the real advance consists in having made some people feel more human. How do you measure that? How do you measure the amount of dignity that people accumulate? How do you quantify the disappearance of apathy? With what test do you evaluate someone's rediscovered identity, the power that they now feel to set their own goals and not merely take what others are willing to hand down? With what graphs would you chart the curves of increased self-reliance, increased group solidarity, increased critical awareness? This research attempts to make a first stab at enumerating some of these important yet intangible outcomes, while making clear that many of the transformative dimensions cannot be expressed in simply quantifiable terms.

Involvement in the AmeriCorps program has helped some of these members transform the meaning of “home” as part of their developmental journey from one stage of life to the next. That is, boundaries for the home as constituted by the immediate family and neighborhood are not left behind, but become part of a larger pattern of belonging to one’s environment, community, society, and ultimately, the world. Commitment to the common good rests, in part, in an anchored sense of “home” within the wider life of the larger community.

#### A Plan for Life

*Camille: “I went [to school] up to eighth grade and I stopped in eighth grade. I got pregnant [with] my first baby and I just stopped going to school completely. [Later] I decided I didn’t want that for my kids – after I had two kids I decided that’s not what I wanted. So, I decided I had to do something better with myself.”*

*Tracy: “It has given me a boost on my life, given me an idea of what I want to do . . . . I want to go on into Early Childhood Education because of AmeriCorps. It has done a good thing for me!!”*

*Katrina: “[B]efore I came into this program I didn’t have any thoughts of going back to school. Now that I do have the chance, I’m taking advantage of it!”*

*Violet: “I know when I was sitting home and I was receiving government help, I wasn’t so proud of myself. I wasn’t made to fall on that program. I could have did something. . . . And I try to think back, what is it I could have done? I’m just not intending to fall back on that program. . . . My parents [were] on welfare, and I’m their second generation, and I was on it. I have a few sisters who [were] on it, and I think a*

*brother. I don't want the third generation (which is our kids) to come up falling on that."*

*Ms. Lucy: "Because [this] is a program with the focus on members from public assistance, the members did not have a lot employment experience. So, a lot of the skills came from just the basics . . . they have definitely learned that certain skills, especially when it comes to interacting with others, benefit them most in a working environment. They know what would benefit them. Now, if they choose to use it, that's up to them."*

#### AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads and Welfare Reform

During the 1992 Presidential campaign Bill Clinton responded to the widespread disapproval of federal welfare policy by vowing to "end welfare as we know it." His call to transform welfare into a transitional cash assistance program signaled the onset of a number of significant changes that are now known as welfare reform. The effects of welfare reform have had direct and indirect impacts on AmeriCorps programs, particularly in low-income communities like Gadsden where large percentages of the population are or have been public assistance clients. The implications for programs such as AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads to play a role in supporting community members' transition from dependency to autonomy is an aspect which leaves much for future study.

## AmeriCorps Members and the Local Community College

Furthermore, the Gadsden AmeriCorps program has collaborated with the Florida Commission on Community Service on piloting a Community College/AmeriCorps initiative. This project aims to assist AmeriCorps members take full advantage of the



education award that is one of the unique features of this national service program. The educational award is worth \$4,725 for full-time members and \$2362.20 for part-time members and may be used for two purposes: 1) to repay an existing education loan (i.e., Stafford) or 2) to apply the award towards the cost of attendance at a qualified institution of higher education or School-to-Work program. While in many sites college graduates or college students who are currently enrolled make immediate use of their educational awards to repay existing loans or to pay their tuition, in programs like AmeriCorps Gadsden most members never thought enrollment in a college or university would become a reality for them.

Members who have been public assistance clients for all or most of their lives, most often assumed they never would have the money, time, talent, or ability to further their education beyond secondary school. Some of these members are from families who never encouraged their children to strive for a higher education. Others were teen parents who elected to drop out of school or discontinue their education after high school due to family responsibilities. Furthermore, most of these members report that their elementary or secondary school experience was far from positive. Needless to

say, the thought of using the AmeriCorps education award evokes a plethora of feelings within member that range from trepidation to high anxiety.

The primary focus of this initiative is to assure that AmeriCorps members who have a desire to further their education are ready to enroll in college at the completion of their AmeriCorps term of service. The goal of the pilot project is to facilitate the successful transition of AmeriCorps participants from “community-minded, active AmeriCorps members” to “career-minded, active college students.” The primary objectives are:

1. to assess AmeriCorps members’ readiness and academic credentials to enter a college program;
2. to provide the necessary guidance to select and complete an academic program best suited for the individual based on aptitude and professional interest;
3. to provide support services as needed to assure a successful entry and completion of the academic goals of the members; and
4. to develop an individualized career development plan.

Some of the curricular topics explored in the community college classes have included:

- Time Management Techniques
- Test-Taking Strategies
- Stress Management
- Memory Techniques
- Self-Esteem
- Individual Learning Styles
- Personal Health
- Resume Writing

As part of the community college experience, each AmeriCorps member creates an individualized “Life Development Plan.” A sample follows here:

<b>Title of Activity or Assignment</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
1) Discovery Wheel	1) Learn my academic strengths and weaknesses.
2) Community College Tour	2) Learn how to utilize technology in the library.
3) Consumer Credit Counseling	3) Learn about budgeting and managing money.
4) Be Here Now (video)	4) Learn how to focus on the present.
5) Find a Bigger Problem	5) There are problems bigger than the problem at hand – putting things in perspective.
6) I Create it All	6) I can make it happen. I create it all.
7) Myers-Briggs Test	7) Career Interest Inventory.
8) Gadsden Library Orientation	8) Tour library and learn how to use its computer resources.
9) Time Management Techniques	9) Learn how to manage time for top priority activities.
10) Financial Aid Workshop	10) Do's and Don'ts of financial aid and how to fill out the forms.
11) Love Your Problems (video) And Experience Your Barriers	11) Face your problems head on and learn from them.
12) Memory and note-taking techniques	12) Learn how to effectively take notes to be successful in test-taking.
13) Managing stress and controlling test	13) Learn how to prepare myself physically,

anxiety	mentally, and academically for tests.
14) True Colors	14) Personality profile.
15) Resume Writing	15) Learn to be successful in interviewing and getting a job.
16) Employment Interviewing	16) Learn what to expect from an interviewer and how to answer questions.
17) Chronicle Career Quest	17) Find out which career fits best with my personality.
18) Writing Workshop	18) Learn how to be a great writer, author.
19) Diversity Training	19) Learned how to deal with cultures different from my own.
20) Red Cross Trainings	20) Learn how to help save lives.
21) Bringing Books to Life	21) Learn how to express myself and make reading fun.
22) Mission Statement**	22) Reflection on why I am here – my purpose.

### The Mission Statements

While the Gadsden AmeriCorps program has an overall mission, “. . . to increase the reading comprehension levels of the students at Greensboro Elementary School and to create an infrastructure that sustains reading for pleasure while promoting literacy in Greensboro and in the surrounding Gadsden County area,” adopted by all of its members, each individual has also reflectively articulated her/his own personal mission statement. These statements are designed and framed in a most attractive

manner, and become part of that person's daily workstation. (See "Sample Mission Statements" in Appendix C.)

While much is left to explore in this section on outcomes, time and circumstances call us on to continue our journey to its final stages. In the final sections we will look back at what we've learned and pose some of the many questions that yet remain.

## CHAPTER 7

### Tips From The Trenches: Lessons Learned

When I first set out on this journey of exploration and discovery, I was prepared to see and hear a world of experiences that might help illuminate the path for myself and fellow travelers on this road. I knew that my own personal experience as a service-learning participant in previous years, both in the USA and in Latin America, had enriched and broadened my own learning and development, and in working side by side with many others over the years, realized that many of us shared this perspective. Now that the reader has traveled along with us, seen the panorama and taken part in the conversation of a small group of AmeriCorps participants, it's time to look back on where we've been and what we've heard to try to begin to explicate more fully the words of the speakers through filling in some of the contextual detail that may not have been stated clearly. The goal of this chapter, then, is to shed some new light on the framework created by these co-researchers by examining it from yet another perspective.

This initial attempt to re-vision some of the themes and unpack some of the implications of the participants' words is only one traveler's interpretation of the real meaning of the unfinished journey. I invite the reader to join me on this voyage, realizing that the reflective process is as subjective as each individual's experience.

### Diversity Redefined

Working as a team with members of diverse backgrounds has enabled program participants to become more open to a variety of perspectives and to imagine a variety of contexts for understanding. If we are to equip citizens for effective participation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world, then our definitions and understanding of diversity must be expanded. Legal definitions of diversity have been created largely to promote opportunities for those who have been historically underrepresented in the workforce (e.g., African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, women and others). Yet, these categories have their limitations, and one should not confuse these narrow definitions with the need for programs to address diversity in a much broader sense. Diversity is much more than the mixing of different races. It's everyone's responsibility to learn from and about each other's ideas. That is, in addition to the more traditional gender and ethnic definitions of diversity, we would encourage educators and program staff to consider age, religion, culture, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability or disability, language differences, and individual learning styles.

Furthermore, in the context of a low-income community such as rural Gadsden County in North Florida, lessons from international development programs are instructive in looking once again at "diversity" as it is commonly defined. International development workers have long found that the most effective and sustainable projects are those that engage local community residents in identifying common problems, setting priorities, designing strategies and programs, and in carrying out project activities and evaluations. Some of these programs are integrated, but some are not. Self-determination and development of local leadership are guiding principles for these programs. This participatory approach to development is often

called “bottom-up,” since potential beneficiaries themselves take the initiative to identify problems and possible solutions. Because the bottom-up approach is typically grounded in the cultural traditions of people in the lower strata of society, it often produces solutions that are imaginative, unconventional, and highly innovative.

When people whose lives have been largely defined in terms of needs and deficiencies, such as single mothers who are or have been welfare recipients, are given the opportunity to exercise their unique talents and strengths, something very powerful happens. Such programs bring us one step closer to a service ethic that redefines the role of the disenfranchised members of society, providing them opportunities to serve, not just to be served.

Often these programs envision community development as being built upon a solid social and cultural foundation, and thus may include among their goals relevant elements such as building collective confidence, self-determination, or fostering a positive group identity. Within this strategy, empowerment and democratization replace charity and the treatment of the symptoms of poverty. As one marginalized woman in a similar program said, *“Before I came here, I thought I was supposed to be poor. Now I realize that is not so, and I will not let it be so for my children.”*

Finding and making meaning through relationships with others from one’s own community has further encouraged the development of new modes of understanding for members like Tracy and Katrina, who spoke about how valuable it was to have direct contact with Hispanic children and their families through this program. Interactions with people who live in close proximity, and yet live lives contrasting in many ways from their own allows people to clarify beliefs and dispel preconceptions.

Acquiring knowledge through intense human experience adds personal and ethical dimensions to the learning experience. Members found that acquiring knowledge through coming to know diverse others from their own home town or

locality helped them think through issues relating to their role in society and their potential for effecting change in their world.

### Expanding the Learning Environment

Adult learners participating in these programs acquire a range of organizational and technical skills, improve oral and written communication skills, and develop an increased motivation to engage in self-directed learning. Combining service and learning in the context of one's own home community helps to expand notions of the boundaries of education which are traditionally limited to classrooms and textbooks. Learners' vision changes as their interactions in the field of service allow them to see other people's realities through new lenses. The entire community with all its resources and people becomes part of a collective educational enterprise. As Cathy points out, many also develop a new appreciation of their own gifts and talents. Her recognition that she has a real ability to make a difference in the lives of people from diverse backgrounds was a key element in her re-visioning of her own role in society.

*"It's helped all of us . . . . It's changed me. It's made me more responsible . . . to work with the kids."*

*"About 10 months ago, I was kind of lost. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. . . . But being in this program and being an AmeriCorps members has changed my life a lot. . . [T]eaching a child to learn how to read . . . I know reading's important but I never really focused on reading until I entered this program . . ."*

### The Crucial Role of Design

As demographics change in rapid and dramatic ways in communities throughout the nation, service programs need to design opportunities to learn with and about others

who are different. Mutual involvement in active service to the community is one highly effective option. Sharing a purpose or meaningful project with those who are different from oneself has a particular power to expand boundaries for young people. The additional benefits of this program which not only provides financial assistance for postsecondary education, but actually links members with instructors, advisors, mentors and classroom experiences in a community college are noteworthy examples of the importance of the design in preparing participants for lifelong learning and service to others.

Joyce spoke about the learning from this program that is “*stuck in our brains.*” That is, by participating in seminars, tutoring sessions, actual college classes, small group advisory sessions, and a plethora of other teaching/learning experiences in their own home community, these AmeriCorps members are acquiring new knowledge and experience that has enduring value for their lives. The motivation to participate in postsecondary education is an example of one such activity. Violet underscored the impact the multidimensional program and its design has had on her:

*“I think I look at life more carefully now. I look back over my life, at mistakes I could have made in the past. I wasn’t willing to make them then, but . . . I’m willing to try hard not to make them again. Even new mistakes may come along, and that’s good . . . because I know now I can learn from them too . . . .”*

### The Key Link: Connecting the Learning to Meaningful Service

Discovering and developing one's own ability to give back to society is the most important link for many of the study participants. Thinking about ways in which we might be able to serve others can strengthen and develop qualities in each one of us – creative skills, the ability to be compassionate, respect for others, and genuine empathy.

Participation in AmeriCorps has provided an opportunity for entry or re-entry into community life for many of the program members by taking on the responsibility of helping to solve one of the community's most urgent problems. Many disadvantaged families have not found it easy to become integrated into the social networks of the towns in which they reside, finding few opportunities to interact with neighbors and other community members. This program has provided a sense of belonging, a feeling of self-worth and a mutual support system for many of its participants. As Joyce stated:

*“ . . . I think these programs like Peace Corps and AmeriCorps give something to you. The purpose is for you to give something to somebody else, but while you do that it's giving something to you. It's making you feel better. It's making you learn things about yourself that you didn't even know were there . . . ”*

### Communities as Partners

Programs that work in communities with urgent and pressing needs like Gadsden County help to create a synergetic learning community, which benefits multiple stakeholders. Not only do children improve in reading and academics, but also many adults and families develop a commitment to service to others as a result of ongoing participation in service-learning activities. Furthermore, the high visibility of AmeriCorps members in a variety of service activities has the potential to mobilize other community residents to offer their time and talents to serve in areas of need.

### A Lifelong Commitment to Service and Learning

Knowing that one is among neighbors and friends who share a common purpose, and that the group's collective efforts can make a difference, renews people's commitments to civic responsibility and helps to create a kind of synergy that both gives and receives new strength and reorders one's perspectives. In a supportive community such as AmeriCorps, people can feel safe to let down their guard and talk about their setbacks as well as their successes. The crossfire of perspectives in a vibrant community can imitate the larger world and enable people to deal more creatively with complex challenges we all confront in our daily lives. Iris put it this way:

*"We give input to each other and it all comes together. . . If you're a short-tempered person, you have to learn how to deal with problems on a day to day basis. You learn how to give, how to work your problems out. . ."*

### Strengthening the Family Household as the Ground of Commitment

Through realizing that one can make a positive difference in others' lives, participants are strengthened in the conviction that everyone counts, through practices of dialogue, perspective-taking, recognition, and storytelling that encourage the

development of positive family dynamics. These practices counter the alienation that increasingly dictates family life in modern times (i.e., TV replacing presence and conversation; minimal care for others' physical and emotional well-being; and unresolved hostility or isolation).

Ms. King, a community partner who works extensively with single parents brought out this dimension:

*“That’s where my biggest concern is – we are not raising people who will be ready to take over. It’s clear to me that as the mother’s self-esteem improves, the kids get better. The kids get focused. The kids become motivated . . . So, through this program [AmeriCorps] they have a new set of role models . . .”*

#### Recognizing That “Home” Extends Beyond the Domicile.

Participants discover and cultivate connections with individuals and institutions that strengthen and enlarge the family circle. Reading clearly enriches one’s awareness of the world beyond the home, and it encourages identification with those different from oneself. These AmeriCorps participants have been empowered to teach neighbors, family and other community members that commitments to the common good are part of their legacy and identity. The family and the neighborhood each provide a place of reflection and encouragement in which all members’ perspectives are valued.

#### Participatory Research Processes

This study has sought a narrative construction that allows the participants in the research to speak their meanings in ways that encourage them to recognize themselves and their own perspectives as valid sources of knowledge generation. The research

process was conversational, connected, collaborative and symmetrical rather than an “objective” distancing of the researcher from the researched in an asymmetrical power relation (Lather, 1986). Through speaking their own stories these individuals move from the numbers and statistics of the dominant research paradigm into fully three-dimensional people with whom we can identify

### The Need for Further Research

Studies describing changes in personal, social and intellectual outcomes of individuals involve repeated observation, measurement and/or self-assessment of informants over a period of time. These longitudinal studies, however, are expensive and may encounter confounding effects that interfere with the research design (i.e., keeping a panel intact over time, selection and reactivity). Future studies will continue the processes of discovery and exploration on the emerging road map for this journey into new territory.

## CHAPTER 8

### “Oh, The Places We’ve Been!”

#### Conclusion

Looking back on this journey into the world of national service, a number of suggestions for how to best program these efforts in low-income American communities may be gleaned from the map of this unfinished voyage. It clearly takes planning, preparation and strong community support to effectively facilitate, organize and structure effective service programs in towns and cities where the need is greatest. Incorporating community members in the entire process and empowering them to make key decisions are challenges for service providers who have often identified such localities and their residents in terms of needs and deficiencies.

In this study, the personal narratives and lived experience of the participants are seen as valuable primary sources rather than as subjectively flawed information. It is my contention that this demystification of the research process can assist each one search for different ways of making sense of human life. However, due to numerous external constraints I found it necessary to edit out large portions of the narrative of each of the co-researchers. Much of the story then has been left untold. I had to cut away at the stories people have told me in order to shape them into the categories, sections and chapters of this document. I have, however, tried as much as possible to keep the narratives of these speakers at the center of the text, while also showing my own efforts to hear and understand the stories as they were told.

The interviews were unstructured and nondirective. That is, rather than beginning an interview by telling the respondent what areas interest me, I waited for material to emerge naturally as the respondent talked. I assumed no knowledge about the topic and deliberately set aside, as much as possible, any previous hypothesized

understanding of the topic of research. The data resulting from these techniques can be very helpful in questionnaire development in very specific ways. They often identify unanticipated areas of importance, as well as strengthen our understanding of familiar issues. Thanks to their use of authentic language, they may provide ideas for questions and item wording. A few of the categories that emerged from transcribing the many hours of interviews with respondents in this study follow:

- intercultural learning
- member characteristics
- the challenges of seeing those who have been considered recipients of service as valuable service providers
- the AmeriCorps setting
- mentoring
- welfare reform
- members' children
- empowerment
- developing creativity
- peer tutoring
- future careers
- workplace skills
- transformation
- Hispanic children and families
- alienation reducing effects
- the team concept

- lifelong learning
- inclusion of members' families
- developing a lifelong commitment to service
- civic awareness
- making a difference
- higher education
- self esteem
- experiential learning
- value added
- recognition
- combining service with learning
- team building
- reflection
- ethic of service
- emergent meanings have yet to be discovered . . .

While some philosophers of social science and some social scientists have argued that the purposes of the quantitative and qualitative paradigms are so different that using them together is not possible or desirable, it is my contention that complex phenomena such as national service programs require multiple methodologies in order to properly understand or evaluate them. Several theorists (i.e., Datta, 1994; Hedrick, 1994; House, 1994) have discussed the potential for integrating qualitative and quantitative findings. Using a grounded theory approach, the conceptual framework, the research questions, the hypotheses and the sample, for example, may be modified in response to patterns which the qualitative researcher discovers in the interview process. Findings

from this and future qualitative studies may provide further data for developing appropriate and comprehensive structured questionnaires.

However, the results of this 10-month ethnographic study of one unique AmeriCorps program leave us with more than items for future questionnaires. They also present us with some new puzzles that are yet unsolved. We made discoveries that are simply isolated insights, and not yet part of any larger picture. Interpretations of these informants' words have yielded insights that cannot be adequately validated in the structured format of a quantitative interview study. In short, many questions remain that are worthy of longitudinal ethnographic research. We hope that future researchers can build on the materials in these ethnographic interviews to help us better understand conceptions of national service, community-based service-learning and experiential learning.

Some of the questions that merit further attention include:

- How can national service programs become more collaborative, avoiding the orientation of many volunteer programs in which goods or services move in a unidirectional flow? What does it mean to take into account the strengths and assets of a low-income community and its residents?
- How can service programs best meet the challenges of incorporating those who have been previously considered recipients of service as valuable service providers in current project activities?
- How can national service participants help to identify the local community's strengths and values as well as its needs?

- How can we ensure that national service programs respond to the educational needs of members as well as getting things done in the community?
- What can be done to continue building upon the foundation of the members' initial term of service, enabling them to continue strengthening their ethic of service as a lifelong commitment?
- Longitudinal studies of national service participants and community partners will help us understand more clearly the effects of this connected adult learning technique in developing critical thinking skills. Learning to think critically involves awareness of the multiple perspectives found in today's complex world. It recognizes that there are several ways to perceive an issue or solve a problem.

The research process has sought understandings that have meaningfulness to scholarly, practitioner and policymaking communities. Future travelers, however, are left with the challenge of shedding new light on this venture into the inner life of AmeriCorps programs and their participants in America today.

## **APPENDIX A**

**CONSENT RELEASE AND STATEMENT  
FOR  
GADSDEN AMERICORPS MEMBERS**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, as an AmeriCorps Member in the Gadsden AmeriCorps Program, grant the Corporation for National Service (CNS) and the National Service Fellow, Judith H. Munter, to release biographical information, use photographs, film, video tape footage and/or recordings in which I am represented. I understand that the use of biographical information and/or my likeness will be used in, but will not be limited to, news stories, publications, public service announcements or other outreach products available to the public at large.

I fully understand that in the case of interviews, that all or portions of the interview may be quoted and/or aired both locally and nationally. I understand that neither I, CNS, nor the National Service Fellow shall have editorial input regarding the distribution of the product, once the product has been delivered. I understand that the video or film footage is the property of the National Service Fellow.

I understand that at the time of final submission, the National Service Fellow will provide a draft of the document for the approval of the Members who are enrolled at that time. Furthermore, throughout the duration of the research project, Members will be encouraged to read and review the notes, photos and videotapes which will be used in the final document.

I understand that no time limitations shall apply to the Corporation's or National Service Fellow's use of my likeness or biographical information.

My decision to participate is voluntary and will not affect my status as an AmeriCorps Member with the Gadsden AmeriCorps Program.

My signature acknowledges that I have read the above statements and I fully understand these statements. By signing this statement, I release the Corporation for National Service, the Gadsden AmeriCorps Program and the National Service Fellow of any present or future liability that may occur as a result of an interview, publication or presentation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**CONSENT RELEASE AND STATEMENT  
FOR  
GADSDEN AMERICORPS STUDENTS' PARENTS**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, as the parent of a student in the Gadsden AmeriCorps Program, grant the Corporation for National Service (CNS) and the National Service Fellow, Judith H. Munter, to release biographical information, use photographs, film, video tape footage and/or recordings in which my child is represented. I understand that the use of my child's likeness may be used in, but will not be limited to, news stories, publications, public service announcements or other outreach products available to the public at large.

I fully understand that neither I, CNS nor the National Service Fellow shall have editorial input regarding the distribution of the product, once the product has been delivered. I understand that the video, photographs and film footage are the property of the National Service Fellow.

I understand that no time limitations shall apply to the Corporation's or National Service Fellow's use of my child's likeness or image.

My decision to participate is voluntary and will not affect my child's status as an AmeriCorps student with the Gadsden AmeriCorps Program.

My signature acknowledges that I have read the above statements and I fully understand these statements. By signing this statement, I release the Corporation for National Service, the Gadsden AmeriCorps Program and the National Service Fellow of any present or future liability that may occur as a result of a publication or presentation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature/Firma de padre de familia

DATE/FECHA: \_\_\_\_\_

**DOY PERMISO PARA QUE TOMEN FOTOS, VIDEOS, U OTRAS GRABACIONES DE MI HIJO ESTUDIANDO EN EL PROGRAMA DE AMERICORPS GADSDEN. PUEDEN USAR LAS FOTOS/VIDEOS EN DOCUMENTOS Y PRESENTACIONES PARA EL PUBLICO.**

## **APPENDIX B**

**Sample interview questions to be asked of  
AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads volunteers:**

1. How did you come to the decision to participate in the AmeriCorps Gadsden program? Have you been involved in similar activities previously? If so, please describe those experiences.
  
2. Could you describe a typical day as an AmeriCorps Gadsden volunteer? What exactly do you do in the field?
  
3. What are some of the opportunities for your own learning structured into the program? How is this kind of learning different from other learning experiences you've been involved in?
  
4. What elements of the AmeriCorps Gadsden program have had the greatest impact on you (i.e., direct tutoring with children, college courses, public speaking)?
  
5. What kinds of people have you interacted with through the AmeriCorps experience? Has this affected you in any way?
  
6. Has the AmeriCorps experience changed your career plans or goals in any way? If so, how?
  
7. Have any of the children you have worked with stood out in any way? Can you recall any incident(s) which have been especially memorable?

**Sample Interview Questions to be asked of Gadsden County Partners  
(i.e., schoolteachers, principals, supervisors)**

1. For how long have you had Gadsden AmeriCorps volunteers assisting in your school program? How did you establish this connection with AmeriCorps?
  
2. What kinds of activities/projects do these volunteers do typically? What role do the volunteers take in working with you in designing and directing their own projects?
  
3. How is your program affected by including AmeriCorps volunteers as helpers in the program? What have been some of the major benefits? Problems?
  
4. How much contact have you had with the AmeriCorps staff or Florida Commission on Community Service? How effective has this association been?
  
5. Have other volunteers been involved in working with your school? If so, has there been any qualitative difference in the volunteer activities of these others and AmeriCorps volunteers?
  
6. Have any of these volunteers stood out in any way? Can you recall any incident(s) which have been especially memorable?

## **Sample Interview Questions to be asked of Gadsden AmeriCorps Staff/Teachers**

1. For how long have you been involved in Gadsden AmeriCorps? How did you originally become involved?
  
2. What kinds of AmeriCorps activities/projects do you typically supervise? What roles do the members take in designing and directing their own activities?
  
3. How are your teaching/supervising strategies and procedures affected by this work with national service participants? Describe some of the specific methods you use with these individuals.
  
4. How have members responded to service activities? Do you have any evidence that this type of activity affects their personal development? Their motivation? Their attitudes? How would you characterize the major benefits and problems of this type of activity for active participants?
  
5. Specifically, what kinds of support has the Florida Commission on Community Service provided for the development of your project? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?
  
6. What kinds of contacts have you had with the school principal and other staff? Please describe. If none, do you feel that this is needed? If so, how might it be most effectively brought about?

## APPENDIX C

THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD

Puff, puff, chug, chug, jump aboard

"I think I can—I think I can."

By: Vira McSwain

**SUMMARY**  
In this story a happy little train, doing something wonderful for the boys and girls, stops with a jerk. Her wheels would not turn. Who do you think will help her to save the day for the boys and girls on the other side of the mountain. The Little Blue Engine thinks she can.

**VOCABULARY**  
engine  
passenger  
mountain  
freight  
train

"I thought I could. I thought I could. I thought I could. I thought I could."

I thought I could.

I thought I could.

I thought I could."

Reading Level: 2.9  
Author: Watty Piper  
Illustrator: George and Doris Hauman  
Reference No: E PIF  
ISBN: Not Available

## APPENDIX D

## **Sample Vision Activity for AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads Members**

Directions:

In your groups you will create a completed written and pictorial vision statement for a specific time period (each group will be assigned a specific time period). The steps are as follows:

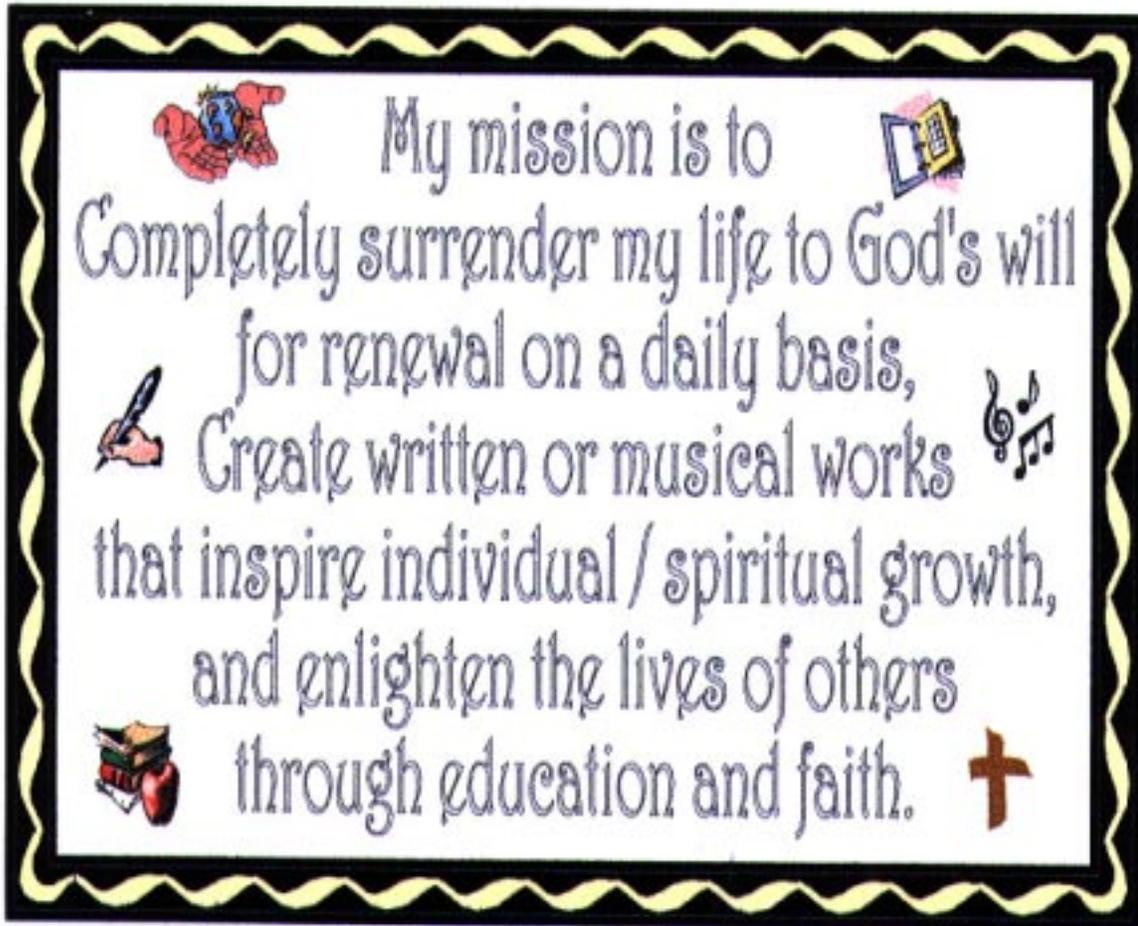
1. Read over all of the vision statements for your specific time period (these will come from the last week's vision activity).
2. Discuss these statements. Next, consolidate and recreate them into one complete vision statement. This statement does not need to include everything that has been read. Furthermore, you can use your own ideas but it must be a vision statement that contains all of the following criteria:
  - Is a very challenging yet reachable goal
  - Is unique to AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads
  - Shows our future accomplishments
  - Creates a picture in our mind
  - Is a vision that we can see, feel, and experience
  - Exhibits unity and describes what's valuable to all of us

**\*\*Note:** The definition of a vision statement is an image of the mission accomplished, the ideal future state made concrete through words and pictures.

3. Create a pictorial vision statement on a scrap piece of paper.
4. Write the vision statement on a piece of posterboard and draw the pictorial vision statement on another piece of paper.
5. Share your final projects with the group.

## Sample Mission Statement

From AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads





## Our Vision

### 1 Month From Now (March 28)

New members trained, have gotten their own classes and things are going well.

Getting ready for Pay Day. Everyone has there own class. Getting ready to end our 3rd training for the year and enter into the 4th which is a big success.

1. Working with students in the class room and getting to know them.
2. New members will know how to make and use bookfolders.

By the end of the first month I see the members trained and pumped up getting ready to go into the classrooms. Everyone is confident about going.

### 3 Months from now (May 28)

1. Getting ready to volunteer for summer camp program
2. IWe miss students that have passed to next class.
3. It's hot weather

We are in Tampa at the AmeriCorps Association which by the way is ready for pay day.

1. All members will be assigned to their individual classroom.
2. Kids will be getting out for summer
3. We will be getting prepared for the fall.

The children will be preparing the leave for summer and we will be pr dents and long hours.



## Our Vision

1. Members from New Chapter are

2. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

3. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

4. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

5. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

6. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

7. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

8. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

9. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

10. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

11. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

12. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

13. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

14. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

15. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

16. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

17. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

18. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

19. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

20. We are preparing to work with our students and start off a new school year. It will be great!

## **APPENDIX E**

## **Assessing AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads Students' Reading Achievement Scores**

The Basic Reading Inventory is an individually administered informal reading test. Composed of a series of graded word lists and graded passages, the inventory is intended to help teachers gain insights about students' reading behavior. Five types of comprehension questions follow each reading passage: topic, fact, inference, evaluation, and vocabulary. On the basis of the student's performance on word lists and graded passages, the teacher can gain insights into the student's independent reading level, instructional reading level, frustration level, strategies for word identification, strengths and weaknesses in comprehension, and listening level. The numerical criteria for reading levels are not intended to be interpreted as absolute standards; they are guidelines to help teachers evaluate a student's reading. The test is administered in an area reasonably free from excessive noise and distractions. While the student reads, the teacher records the student's performance and makes notes on the graded word lists and the graded passages in a performance booklet.

The informal reading inventory, an individually administered reading test, is composed of a series of graded word lists and graded passages. During the student's oral reading of the passages, the test administrator notes reading miscues such as mispronunciations, omissions, insertions, and substitutions. After the oral reading, the test administrator asks the student comprehension questions. Currently informal reading inventories (IRIs) are used in classrooms, resource rooms, clinical situations, and teacher training. Teachers and aides report a variety of reasons for using IRIs with their students: determining reading levels to design a personalized program; screening for a possible referral; and facilitating communication with parents.

There are, however, a number of unresolved issues relating to IRIs. Perhaps the longest lasting and most perplexing issue concerns the appropriate criteria for the instructional level. Although a considerable amount of research has been done in this

area (Clinchy, 1997; Miramontes et al., 1997; Richek et al., 1996), there are still no generally accepted and empirically validated criteria for the independent, instructional, or frustrations levels. The question of appropriate criteria is apt to remain an area of controversy and debate. Furthermore, questions regarding the validity and reliability of IRIs continue to be raised (Kleisius & Homan, 1985; Pikulski & Shanahan, 1982).

Critics have identified concerns about possible gender or culture bias, the use of readability formulas, interrater reliability, and numerous areas relating to the administration of IRIs. However, in spite of the controversy and debate regarding IRIs, they continue to remain a valuable way for a diverse group of professionals to assess their students' reading and to study reading behavior, and have been used in the context of this program to assess the improvement in reading scores of the children in this program.

Student Outcomes – AmeriCorps Gadsden Reads Program  
Reading Achievement Levels ---- (5/97 - 1/98)

Pretest <b>May-97</b>	Posttest <b>Jan-98</b>	Improvement <b>Net Gains</b>
<b>1.2</b>	2.5	1.3
<b>0.1</b>	0.9	0.8
<b>0.1</b>	0.9	0.8
<b>0.5</b>	1	0.5
<b>Pp</b>	1	2
<b>0.1</b>	0.9	0.8
<b>Pp</b>	1.5	2.5
<b>Pp</b>	0.9	1.9
<b>Pp</b>	1	2
<b>Pp</b>	0.9	1.9

<b>Pp</b>	0.9	1.9
<b>Pp</b>	1	2
<b>Pp</b>	0.9	1.9
<b>Pp</b>	Ese	N/a
<b>0.3</b>	0.9	0.6
<b>Pp</b>	1	2
<b>0</b>	0	0
<b>Pp</b>	1	2
<b>Pp</b>	0.5	1.5
<b>Pp</b>	0.9	1.9
<b>Pp</b>	1.5	2.5
<b>Pp</b>	1	2
<b>Pp</b>	1	2
<b>Pp</b>	1.5	2.5
<b>Pp</b>	1.9	2.9
<b>1</b>	2.5	1.5
<b>1.5</b>	2.9	1.4
<b>0.9</b>	1.5	0.6
<b>P</b>	2.3	2.3
<b>1.2</b>	2.5	1.3
<b>Pp</b>	1.5	2.5
<b>Pp</b>	1.2	2.2
<b>Ese</b>	Ese	N/a
<b>1</b>	1.9	0.9
<b>P</b>	2.5	2.5
<b>P</b>	2.9	2.9
<b>0.1</b>	Ese	N/a
<b>P</b>	1.9	1.9
<b>P</b>	3	4
<b>Pp</b>	2.9	3.9
<b>1.9</b>	3.5	1.6
<b>1.9</b>	3.2	1.3
<b>1.9</b>	3	1.1
<b>1</b>	1.9	0.9
<b>Pp</b>	1	2
<b>1</b>	3	2
<b>1.9</b>	3.5	1.6
<b>1.9</b>	3.9	2
<b>1.9</b>	3.9	2
<b>1.9</b>	3.3	1.4
<b>1.9</b>	5	3.1
<b>1.9</b>	4.5	2.6
<b>1.9</b>	4.5	2.6
<b>1.9</b>	4	2.1
<b>2.9</b>	5	2.1
<b>3</b>	5	2
<b>3</b>	4.1	1.1
<b>3</b>	4	1
<b>2.9</b>	4.1	1.2

2.9	5	2.1
3	4.9	1.9
3	4.9	1.9
2	4.5	2.5
2.9	5.5	2.6
2.9	4.5	1.6
2	4.5	2.5
2.9	5.1	2.2
2	4.9	2.9
2.9	4.9	2
3	4.9	1.9
3.9	5.9	2
3.9	5.9	2
3.9	6	2.1
3.1	5.5	2.4
3.9	6.5	2.6
4	5.9	1.9
4	6	2
4	7.5	3.5
4.3	6.5	2.2
4	6.5	2.5
3.9	5.5	1.6
3.1	5.5	2.4
3.9	6.2	2.3
3.9	5.5	1.6
3.9	5.5	1.6
3.9	5.5	1.6
3.9	6.1	2.2
Pp	0.9	2.9
0.3	0.9	0.6
0.5	Ese	N/a
0.5	Ese	N/a
0.5	Ese	N/a
Pp	0.9	1.9

Average net gain = 1.93 years reading level gain over a period of 8 months

These preliminary data indicate that reading scores are improving in a steady and positive direction. The above method of analyzing students' progress, utilizing the one-group pretest-posttest design, shows the change in students by comparing them with themselves (that is, the students are being used as their own control group) at an earlier point in time. Longitudinal studies of these service recipients will help us learn something of the quantifiable effects of this instructional methodology on children as

learners as well as on their family members. We must be careful in interpreting these scores, however, to remember that a correlation does not necessarily imply a causal relationship. The relationship may be explained by a third variable or by a combination of other variables. That is, effects such as these often have more than one cause, resulting in complex causal patterns. For example, a rival hypothesis (maturation) that might be a threat to the validity of inferences drawn from these scores states that growth or change in individuals affects the measured effect. In an experimental study, a control group would provide protection from this threat to validity. The prediction of one variable from another is frequently discussed in terms of multiple regression studies. Multiple regression, however, is a more technical topic than we have had the resources to treat in this study. (See Pedhazur, 1982 for further discussion of regression studies and their application to educational research.)

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## **About the author**

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Judith Munter has been an active participant in community development and service-learning activities since the late 1970s, when she moved to Latin America to study, teach and serve in rural communities. For 12 years, she lived in towns and villages in Colombia and Brazil, teaching literacy, music and community development skills in a variety of settings. She holds a Master's Degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) from Florida International University and a Doctoral Degree in Educational Foundations and Policy Studies from Florida State University. She managed and supervised a large service-learning project at FSU and was co-instructor of an undergraduate course in service-learning theory and practice. She also coordinated and supervised ESL classes for Hispanic farm workers in rural Gadsden County.

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