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COMMUNITY AND CONNECTEDNESS THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING:

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MARATHON

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HOPE, STRENGTH, AND PERSEVERANCE
COMMUNITY AND CONNECTEDNESS THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING:
ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE OKLAHOMA CITY
MEMORIAL KIDS' MARATHON

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP
AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

BY

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ABSTRACT

Many complex problems affect the lives of our citizens, including our children. A particularly important problem is a lack of a sense of community and connectedness (Belenky, et. al, 1986; Bellah, et. al, 1985; Dewey, 1938; Houser & Kuzmic, 2001; Palmer, 1998). There is a feeling among many that we are no longer connected to something larger than ourselves, and that we need to develop a better sense of community if we are to flourish as a society. In light of these concerns, this study investigated service-learning as a possible means of helping promote a sense of community among teachers, students, and citizens in general. Specifically, I asked: *What can be learned about educating for community and connectedness from a study of service-learning involving the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon?*

The study used Parker Palmer's ideas about teaching and learning in community as a theoretical lens to examine the educational value of participating in a service-learning experience related to the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon. A qualitative approach was used, drawing on narrative inquiry to gather the data and thematic analysis to organize the findings. Like other qualitative studies, this investigation was based on constructivist epistemological assumptions. Constructivists assume that meaning is not universal or absolute. Rather, it is constructed differently by people in different situations. Therefore, instead of trying to present absolute truths, I will simply present the perspectives of the four elementary teachers whose students were involved in the project and offer my own interpretations of these perspectives. My hope is that these views will be useful to others.

The data suggest that service-learning projects such as the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon provide valuable opportunities for teaching and learning about community and connectedness as well as opportunities for growth and development of those who teach. However, such outcomes are certainly not guaranteed. These results required personal courage, an understanding of connected teaching, and a willingness to work for social stability and change. The study concludes that service-learning can be an important means of promoting community and connectedness in conjunction with the academic curriculum. Although service-learning is not a panacea and should not be used to replace other disciplines, it is possible that it can play a significant role in the development of critical, caring, and connected citizens.

Preface

At 9:01 a.m. on April 19, 1995, the State of Oklahoma was changed forever. One hundred and sixty-eight men, women, and children perished in an unthinkable act of terrorism when the Oklahoma City Murrah Federal Building was bombed. I was a freshman at the University of Oklahoma at the time. I remember sitting in my dorm room watching the horror unfold as every television channel switched to this event. Reporters scrambled to try and make sense of what was unfolding, and the community immediately struggled with how to respond. I desperately wondered what I could do.

Although the answer to this question took years to materialize, the initial steps were taken in those beginning moments in what would eventually become one of the longest and most meaningful marathons of my life. Further steps were added six years later when, as a first grade teacher, I was exposed to the innocent wisdom of my students. Together, we decided to participate in an event that would impact ourselves and our society. Could young children think productively about difficult issues such as the Oklahoma City bombing? Could they work together for peace? Their insights were unique and surprising. However, I was still early in the process. The journey continued two years later as I began my doctoral studies, and my teaching expanded to the collegiate level. At this point I was exposed to ideas that helped me make further sense of my experiences in teaching and learning. Eventually, my efforts to understand my relationships, my passions, and my purposes led me to pull together the various aspects of my life. In this process, I developed insights and relationships that continue to impact my life today.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Teacher Self

We teach who we are. I am a runner. I am a teacher. I am a daughter, a sister, a friend. I am a runner. Because of running, I am a better teacher, daughter, sister, and friend. When I run, I experience many feelings, including excitement, happiness, joy, and an overall sense of peace. When I run, I feel the air on my face and the wind in my hair. I smell the scents of each special season. Sometimes I wonder if I will be able to complete the miles I have set out for that particular day. Other times I feel as if there is no end to how far I could run. This is my special time to think about what the day will bring, what I hope to achieve, and a time to remember those who I love. Whatever I may be worrying about seems to be put to rest when I run as I think through many of life's troubles, struggles, and dreams. Running, for me, is more than a hobby, a form of exercise; rather it is a passion for which I am truly thankful.

I was not always a runner. As a child, like many children and adolescents, I experienced insecurities and low self-esteem. I did not believe I had much potential to succeed, especially in sports. I was slightly overweight and awkward around any sort of ball. I was unable to see connections between my life and the things I was learning in school. My family moved quite often, so I was frequently seen as the "new kid", attending nine different schools in 13 years, which made it difficult to form and develop lasting friendships or to find stability in my

relationships. Furthermore, I have severe scoliosis and, at the age of 11, was put in a back brace to stop the progression of the curvature of my spine. Even though I could remove the brace at any time, I was told to keep it on as much as possible. Therefore, I constantly saw my limitations, how I differed from other children, and I was often frustrated. As a result, I focused on what I was unable to do, often comparing myself to others, and I became extremely insecure. Many times I wanted to seclude myself, ignore my friends and family, and completely withdraw from life's opportunities. I thought it would be easier to be alone and quiet than to try and fail.

As time progressed, these feelings began to change. Encouraged by my parents, many teachers, and a few close friends, I gradually became involved in physical activities, including tennis, drill team, band, and flag twirling during the few hours each day that I was allowed to remove my back brace. Through these experiences in middle and high school, I started to realize what I *could* do rather than what I could *not* achieve. In time, the impact of this physical movement led me to set personal goals in activities and academics. As I began feeling better about myself, I also felt a growing desire to succeed in school and eventually to help others who experienced difficulties. A growing motivation to try new things, seek understanding in everyday situations, and make new friends led to greater awareness of the importance of education and suggested that I, too, may be able to make a difference in my world.

I eventually graduated from high school as salutatorian and began attending the University of Oklahoma, studying to become a teacher. I wanted to be the kind of

teacher I had had, who motivated and helped me believe in myself. I wanted to be a teacher who encouraged her students to do things that were good for them, but even better for others and the community. The experiences I would eventually have as an elementary teacher, as well as the lessons my students would teach me, far exceeded these hopes.

My point is not simply to describe the different aspects of my identity, but to acknowledge that through a process of physical and mental activities and social relationships, I have gradually come to *know* who I am, and that this knowing is essential to the process of teaching. Parker Palmer (1998) says we teach who we are. Whether or not we are aware of this fact, our identities profoundly influence our teaching activities and relationships. According to Palmer, our sense of self is comprised of our identity and integrity. Our identity consists of the various aspects of who we are, while our integrity refers to the integration of these various aspects into a unified whole. Like other teachers, my identity includes my genetic makeup, how I was raised, and the various experiences of my childhood and adulthood that have created the internal and external totality of who I am. My integrity lies in the choices I make and what I do with these competing forces in trying to "re-form the pattern of my life" (Palmer, 1998, p. 13). Ideally, the self who teaches should be an undivided self, conscious and comfortable with the various aspects of his or her identity. This is vital since, for better or worse, the act of teaching is ultimately an extension of the teacher's inner being.

Problems arise when we, as teachers, do not really know who we are. We may struggle in our teaching and lives because we have lost a sense of self, or because we

have never really found it to begin with. Many times we may try to emulate what we believe others want us to be rather than recognizing and appreciating who we are at our core. This constant internal friction, pain, and frustration can manifest itself in external behaviors, affecting our relationships both professionally and personally. This does not mean wholeness, what Palmer (1998) calls an undivided self, is without imperfection or room for change. What it means is that the processes of growth and development are ever evolving.

According to Palmer, the landscape of the self is comprised of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual paths. By "intellectual" he does not necessarily mean an actual teaching technique or skill. Rather, the intellectual aspect of teaching refers to the ways we think about teaching and learning, how we believe we and our students learn. "Emotion" involves the feelings experienced by ourselves and our students when we teach and learn, and the feelings that develop between us during this educational relationship through dialogue and shared experiences in the classroom. Finally, the "spiritual" path is the connection between the heart and mind and how we use this connection with others, through love, service, and appreciation. Palmer does not limit the term spiritual to formal religion. Rather, he refers to the spiritual as the search for "connection with the largeness of life" (1998, p. 58). Rather than viewing these three paths separately, their complexities intertwine to form a potential for the continual growth of the self who teaches.

Students and Society

Although it is important to be aware of the teacher identity, students are equally vital to the educational relationship (Dewey, 1902; Palmer, 1998; Piaget, 1950; Rousseau, 1979), and they need to know that we, as teachers, have a sincere interest in their individual lives. As Poplau states, "Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care" (2004, p.1). While our students' challenges may not be identical to our own, one thing we have in common is a need for community and connection in an increasingly individualistic culture (Bellah, et. al, 1985; Glasser, 1967; Storm, 1972). The assumption that children need to know we care is consistent with my own experiences in which my students have responded positively to the interest I have taken in their lives and well-being. Doing so has allowed me to build relationships with my students based on care, trust, and understanding.

> The need for care is tangible in society today (Noddings, 2006). Children face many challenges that contribute to or result in exclusion, isolation and withdrawal. Such problems include racism and intolerance, greed and corruption, excessive competition, low self-esteem, feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy, violence and crime, and a lack of civic participation within one's community. As educators, our purpose is not only to address these problems by discussing or bringing them to our students' attention, but also to seek ways in which these problems may be lessened, minimized, or even solved (Aronson, 1996; Banks, 1989; McIntosh, 1988; Nieto, 2004; Sleeter and Grant, 1994).
>
> Many argue that our society has improved in terms of equal opportunity for all members. Voting rights, job opportunities, and daily freedoms are just a few

examples of ways in which our society appears to have become more just and democratic. Schools can be looked at in the same manner. Many improvements in the treatment of minority children and children with disabilities have come about as a result of actions taken against injustices in the public settings. Children of varying ethnicities can be seen playing and eating lunch together and developing relationships that would not have occurred as frequently 50 years ago. Many teachers treat children of varying ethnicities as fairly as they can, welcoming differing cultures into the curriculum. Similarly, children with disabilities are frequently given greater opportunities to succeed in school and society than they were in the past.

However "just as a few improvements in society may give an incomplete or inaccurate view of progress in reducing racism, sexism, class bias, and bias against disabilities, a few improvements in our schools are similarly misleading" (Sleeter and Grant, 1994, p. 20). It is important to remain conscious not only of what can be seen but also of that which cannot be seen (Anyon, 1980; McIntosh, 1988). While it is important to recognize the progress that has occurred, this recognition should not be used as a means of ignoring or excusing the intolerance and disconnection many children continue to experience even today.

Another challenge is low self-esteem, which has been linked to a variety of factors, including poor academic performance, socio-economic status, physical appearance, and physical and mental disabilities (Barrett et al., 1999; Dalgas-Pelish, 2006; Greenberg, 2008). Children can experience a lack of self-esteem from a very young age. Feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy can cause

children to dread the academic experience of school, resist physical and intellectual challenges, and become extremely sensitive to criticism, and teachers may unknowingly ignore certain children because they do not feel a connection with them. These children may be withdrawn and isolate themselves from the curriculum, peers, teachers, and even their parents.

Video games, television, movies, and life itself give children first-hand experience of violence, which is another factor that can contribute to disconnection from society. Terrorism and school shootings have increased dramatically in recent years (Muschert, 2007). Children now have "safety drills" in schools preparing them for such horrific instances because fear is now a main feeling of teachers, students, and parents. Yet, we continue to hear horrifying stories of violence between groups of adolescents associated with power, racism, and greed. Crime, powerlessness, inadequacy, low self-esteem, and racism can be looked at as being interconnected. One often leads to or is the cause of another. We can only assume that these problems will remain or worsen unless citizens, including children, learn that they can make a change in their lives, their schools, and their futures.

Many of these problems can be traced to isolation and intense competition. A "me versus we" or "us versus them" mentality persists among individuals and groups who seem to be more concerned with themselves than with others. Community service has come to be seen by many as a punishment, a sentence handed down by judges when one commits a crime. Like the adults who serve as their models, children frequently fail to see the importance of acting selflessly in their

communities. Instead, they expect external rewards such as prizes, awards, and recognition for their contributions.

This relates to another aspect of Palmer's (1998) thesis, which involves the concept of community. According to Palmer, knowing oneself as a teacher and establishing meaningful relationships with students in shared exploration of academic subjects requires and reinforces a greater sense of community. Biologically, a community is a group of interacting species sharing an environment. In sociology, a community can be defined as a group of people living and interacting in a common geographical location, organized around common interests or values, and experiencing social cohesion. Community in this sense generally refers to social units that are larger than a single household. It can apply to a classroom or school, a village or town, or an even larger group. In fact, the term is often used to refer to the national or global community. A key point is that community involves social cohesiveness. It is not simply a collection of people living side by side with no social or emotional connections. Within human communities, various factors can affect the participants and their degree of cohesiveness.

Based on these various ideas and concerns, I decided to explore the possibilities of promoting a greater sense of community and connectedness among children through service-learning. In order to do this, I chose to study the efforts and perspectives of four teachers who chose to involve their students in the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon, a service-learning project in which I became personally involved during the spring of my final year as an elementary teacher.

The Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon

On April 19, 1995, the Alfred P. Murrah Federal building in Oklahoma City was bombed in an act of domestic terrorism. 168 women, men, and children lost their lives, and hundreds more were injured. As the reality of this horror became more apparent, the community of Oklahoma City began to join together in peace, hope, love, and compassion. Three years later a beautiful Memorial and Museum were completed to honor those who were lost and those who survived, and to serve as an ongoing reminder of the effects of violence. The outdoor symbolic Memorial is a place of quiet reflection. It honors the victims, survivors, rescuers, and all who were changed forever. It encompasses the now sacred soil where the Murrah building once stood, as well as the surrounding area devastated during the attack. Each part of the Memorial was carefully designed. For example, one area, located on the footprint of the Murrah building, are the 168 chairs that represent the lives taken on April 19, 1995. They stand in nine rows representing each floor of the building, and each chair bears the name of someone killed on that floor. Nineteen smaller chairs stand for the children. Another area holds the Survivor Tree. It withstood the full forces of the attack and years later, continues to stand as a living symbol of resilience.

Shortly after the completion of the Oklahoma City Memorial, the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon was created by two friends of mine, Thomas Hill and Chet Collier, fathers, husbands, businessmen, and runners. One day in the spring of 1999, while running through downtown Oklahoma City, they discussed the fact that the city did not have a marathon. In fact, only one other marathon existed in the state, drawing

just over 300 participants. Thomas and Chet saw the need for an event of this kind in Oklahoma that could raise money for an important cause, influence fellow citizens to set and achieve an important goal, and unite their community in a collaborative effort. They promised each other that if a marathon was created, the focus would be on the Oklahoma City National Memorial.

This discussion between two friends became a reality as the first Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon took place in April of 2000, hosting over 6,000 participants and raising $50,000 in proceeds for the Memorial! The entire event, including a Kids' Marathon, Five-Person relay, Five Kilometer Walk, and Half Marathon in addition to the Full Marathon, was organized to "honor the memory, celebrate life, reach for the future, and unite the world in hope". One hundred sixty-eight banners are presented along the course on each year at the race, honoring each of the victims. It is also possible for participants to sign up to run in honor of a particular victim. Every year each name is carried by at least one, but often several, runners. Runners have also been seen memorializing and honoring others not connected with the Oklahoma City Memorial. This shared experience continues to provide healing and comfort, as well as hope and compassion for the future of Oklahoma and our society at large.

The race start program was developed to combine celebration with remembrance. A sunrise service begins at the *Survivor's Tree* followed by 168 seconds of silence. During this time, emotions can bring tears as one contemplates the tragedy and loss the Memorial represents. Each person carries personal memories of pain and loss that combine with the common experience, and the result can be overwhelming. However, the Memorial is not intended as an anchor that binds

participants to some tragic past; rather, it is considered a springboard that propels the Oklahoma City community to a promising future. Also, several of the surviving children, who are now young adults, officially start the Kids' Marathon by blowing bull horns, after welcoming all who come to participate. Each year as the crowds begin to grow, music and cheers build in anticipation of the start of the race. When the horns sound, each participant is carried forward not only in body, but in mind and spirit as well. The Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon was named by *Runner's World Magazine* as one of the "12 Must Run Marathons" in the entire world. In 2010 there were over 20,000 participants and $750,000 in proceeds given to the Memorial.

Although Thomas Hill and Chet Collier first envisioned the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon, many others have been vital in helping make it a success. The Marathon was organized by a diverse group of chairmen and coordinators, each working full-time jobs, who volunteered their thoughts, ideas, and love of their community. Hill, now president and co-founder of the Marathon, said the difference between this race and other races is the cause and purpose behind it. He explains: "The outcome (of a marathon) is that you're a stronger, better, different person, and it's a great analogy for life in general, but it also works in our lives when we go through tragedy."

In addition to benefitting the entire community, there can also be personal benefits for each participant in this important event. For example, like me, Thomas was not always a runner. He, too, struggled with his weight and self-esteem into adulthood. He began running with Chet in order to exercise and live a healthier lifestyle. Yet, since personal and social lives are inevitably intertwined, what began as

a means of promoting physical well-being, became an opportunity to contribute to society. Thus, for many, the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon has become a way to meet both personal and community needs related to various aspects of self and society.

My own involvement with the Memorial Marathon began in 2001. I had just completed my first marathon in another state, and already, mentally and physically, running and teaching had become connected. I wanted to share my experience with my first grade students. I showed them my medal, told them about the crowds and excitement, and explained where the race took place. I shared my passion for running, explaining that it was an important part of my life. Just as each of them had hobbies, interests and passions, I explained that running was one of my own. After telling my students about my experience, I asked if they might be interested in participating in the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon. The children realized that I would be training with them, that this was something we would do as a class, mostly at school, and they were ecstatic to begin.

As we began to prepare, I explained to the class that the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon is an event where children walk or jog, logging 25 miles over the few months prior to the marathon, and then run the final 1.2 miles on the morning and at the location of the actual event, thus completing a full marathon of 26.2 miles. Additionally, each child typically pays a 5 dollar entrance fee and receives a tee-shirt and medal to commemorate his or her efforts. The money is donated to the general operating fund for the Oklahoma City Memorial, which does not receive government funding. After gathering the entry fee and completing the forms, my

students and I began to log miles both together and independently, averaging approximately one or two miles per week.

One day as we were discussing the marathon as a fund-raiser, the children discovered a problem. They realized that very little of the five dollars they sent as an entry fee actually went to the Memorial itself, due to the cost of medals, tee-shirts, and other expenses. Most of the money raised by the Marathon event comes from the larger entry fees for the adult races. They questioned the importance of providing money for the Memorial itself, including the need for constant maintenance. My students were clearly concerned, and they wanted to address this important matter. During a class discussion, the children and I decided to take action. Choosing to inform others about the problem at hand, they began writing letters to local businesses, parents, and other teachers. After writing several drafts of our letters, we addressed the envelopes and mailed them. Soon we began receiving feedback from the community expressing interest in our cause. We received letters of encouragement, personal visits, phone calls, and more than 150 dollars in donations. A special visitor arrived in person. It was Mr. Thomas Hill, co-founder of the Memorial Marathon! The class wrote thank-you letters to all who supported us with their gifts and gestures, and our energy was doubled for the upcoming Marathon.

There were many opportunities to discuss the underlying meanings and purposes of the Marathon as we logged miles together at school and individually on the weekends. My students wondered about the Memorial. Not all had even been born when the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah building occurred in 1995. In order to learn more about the situation, we contacted a survivor. We asked him to visit our

classroom, to speak to us, and, if possible, to bring pictures of the Memorial. One day after running and walking together outside, we welcomed our visitor to help open our eyes about what had occurred in 1995. After learning a daycare had been located in the Murrah building where nineteen children perished and more were injured, my students decided our class motto: "We run for the children". This motto provided inspiration and determination for us to keep running, training, and focusing on our goal.

> I interviewed my students about what this experience meant to them after the miles were recorded on the logs and the day of the Marathon approached. I recorded responses such as: "It's pretty cool that first graders can do this too", "It's sort of like being a hero…the heroes in the bombing were firefighters", and "We've worked so hard". The lessons my students learned that year could not be found in a textbook, nor assessed on a worksheet. These were lessons they created themselves by finding a problem, seeking to solve it, and taking action as citizens in their community. Although I sensed at the time that this was a powerful experience for my students and me, I had not yet considered that it might be a form of service-learning.
>
> Soon thereafter I assumed the role of Race Director for Kid's Marathon and began promoting its importance in elementary schools throughout the nation. These events coincided with the completion of my coursework and the development of my dissertation prospectus, and an interest in service-learning as an agent for citizenship education gradually became the focus of my study.

Service-Learning and Citizenship Education

Educators continue to search for effective ways to prepare students to address the challenges of today. One area of the curriculum specifically concerned with the development of critical, caring, and capable citizens is the social studies (Barr, Barth and Shermis, 1977; Barth, 1984; Parker, 1996). According to Parker (1996), a major goal of the social studies is to prepare students to become part of a "participatory and multicultural democracy rather than a nominal or homogenizing one" (p. 183). The aim is to prepare them to make decisions based not only on personal needs but also on

empathy, understanding, and a genuine interest in promoting the greater good of society at large. These decisions should be informed, educated, and come from processing new information in a critical and evaluative manner.

Discussing democracy, Parker asks, "How can people live together justly, in ways that are mutually satisfying, and that leave our differences, both individual and group, intact and our multiple identities recognized?" (1996, p. 189). This is a complex process. Children need to acquire the skills necessary to process new information presented to them in order to make educated decisions surrounding issues and problems at hand. They should also develop values that guide them to feel empathy, care, and concern for others. Citizenship education requires improvements in self and society. It is not only an individual or collaborative process. Rather, it is a complex intersection of personal and group development and growth.

Another purpose of citizenship education is to encourage students to take action in classrooms, schools, and communities to improve their own lives and the lives of others. According to Claus and Ogden (1999), "Citizenship in a democratic community requires more than kindness and decency; it requires engagement in complex social and institutional endeavors" (p. 34). This suggests that students must feel empowered to identify factors that perpetuate unfairness and inequality within their communities and to take an active role in challenging and changing those factors. In this way, children and citizens in general can begin to recognize and evaluate problems and work for improvement on behalf of their diverse communities.

One way to help children develop empathy and understanding is through service to the community (Claus and Ogden, 1999; Medhus, 2001; Wade, 1999). The National Community Service Act of 1990 states that service provides:

> Greater connection to the community, an easier transition to work from school, improved reliability, punctuality, and perseverance, development of self-esteem and sense of personal worth, stronger basic skills and ability to work with others, and critical thinking. (Claus and Ogden, 1999, p. 53)

Although this statement seems to offer a "laundry list" of benefits that could also be gained through part-time work, many aspects are worth noting. Connection to community, self-esteem, perseverance, the ability to work with others, and the ability to think critically are important factors that can contribute to the development of moral, social, and civic awareness (Claus and Ogden, 1999).

One way to promote service in society is through service-learning in education. Service-learning can be defined as "an educational method which engages young people in service to their communities as a means of enriching their academic learning, promoting personal growth, and helping them to develop the skills needed for productive citizenship" (Wade, 1997, p. 79). In service-learning, students act within their communities to bring about positive change. The individual student feels important, and the community is strengthened as well (Poplau, 2004). Emphasis on external and material rewards are minimized while maximizing intrinsic satisfaction related to care and connectedness with others. In giving, the "doer of good, becomes good" (Poplau, 2004, p. 17).

Advocates of service-learning cite many potential benefits. For example, Claus and Ogden (1999) argue that service-learning can help children recognize that in addition to personal rights, they also have social responsibilities. Parsons (1996) concurs, suggesting that service-learning "is a strong antidote to greed, selfishness, and fragmentation in our public institutions" (p. 9). Acceptance may be learned and prejudices and stereotypes may be lessened as students develop relationships with people of varying ethnicities, ages, and socio-economic statuses with whom they might not otherwise come in contact (Poplau, 2004). With guidance, caring for others can increase social critique and critical reflection, and feelings of self-worth resulting from satisfaction with a job well done can providing inner strength that can be drawn upon to solve personal and societal problems throughout one's life (Giles, 1999).

In addition to personal and social benefits, there may also be significant advantages for academic learning. For example, Wade argues that student "motivation to learn skills and content in school subjects increases when they realize that they will need to use their knowledge to help others or to improve the environment" (1997, p. 22). Others add that any subject can be integrated into a service-learning project (Dunlap, 2000; Eyler and Giles, 1999; Parsons, 1996; Wade, 1997). For example, children might write and illustrate books to be donated to public libraries or Head Start programs, or collect and deliver canned and boxed foods to families in need and homeless shelters. Mathematics could be incorporated as students estimate how many books might be needed and how much time would be required to write them, or as they calculate travel time (considering distance and rate) to deliver food to a shelter. Similarly, researching local environmental problems and solutions could precede a

service-learning project involving applied science and social studies, while the arts could be studied and applied as children create holiday or birthday cards for the elderly. Thus, rather than detracting from formal educational aims, service-learning can work with existing curricula to actually enhance the curriculum by placing it within a real-life context.

Service-learning projects can be as simple as writing friendly letters to residents at a local nursing home or as complex as planning and planting a vegetable garden and giving the food to a homeless shelter. However, regardless of the level of simplicity or complexity, the emotional power of service-learning can help students connect intellectually with what they are doing in the classroom and emotionally with the world outside the classroom.

Rahima Wade (1997) offers what she considers six "essential components" of quality service-learning. These include preparation, collaboration, service, curriculum integration, reflection, and celebration. The first component, preparation, includes the initial planning stage. Goals, tasks, estimated time or schedule, budget, and responsibilities are considered, and brainstorming occurs among the students and their teachers. An orientation session may also be included at this time in which to review rules of the worksite, encourage additional student input and so forth.

The second component is collaboration. Collaboration involves diverse populations, including students, teachers, school personnel, and members of the community. "While youth empowerment is a goal in any quality youth service program; adult guidance, supervision, monitoring, and support are essential" (Wade, 1997, p. 21). The role of administrators and members of the community may entail

establishing or cutting budgets, serving as stakeholders, or setting management procedures.

The third essential component of quality service-learning, according to Wade, is service. "True service is not the same as charity; service involves working *with* rather just *for* others" (Wade, 1997, p. 22). Those who are served should be given the opportunity to give input as to their needs and the structure of the project. This can create partnerships between students and community members based upon responsibility and care.

Wade's fourth component is curriculum integration. Curriculum integration is what makes a project service-*learning* rather than simply community service. Many initial attempts at service-learning may be viewed as community service rather than actual learning because the connections between the curriculum and service activity are not made explicit. Thus, it is important for teachers (and students) to recognize the deep connections between the school curriculum and the outside world (Dewey, 1902). Seeing these connections enables students, teachers, administrators, and policy makers to justify service-learning as a legitimate and essential aspect of the overall curriculum.

The fifth component, and what I believe to be the most important of the six, is reflection. During the reflection component of a service-learning experience, students name what they have learned. They construct their own meanings of the situation based both on their prior experiences and on authentic interpersonal relationships with those in the communities they have served. "Reflecting on their views of the role of service in the life of a democratic citizen, students can learn valuable lessons about

themselves, others, and the act of serving" (Wade, 1997, p. 22). With guidance from the teacher, students can reflect on questions such as the following: "How did the experience make you feel? What did you learn? How have your beliefs about [a certain group of people or event] been challenged or changed? How does this relate to something we have studied in the classroom? What could have been done differently?"

Although children, like adults, reflect daily on a variety of experiences, this reflection is not always critical. Critical reflection involves the questioning of personal views and actions in light of larger issues of fairness and justice. Thus, students, like other members of society who engage in critical reflection, might ask themselves: "Were my actions fair? Was that a just thing to do? Are there ways in which my thoughts or actions might unconsciously reinforce larger social inequalities? What can I do in the future to help create a more just and equitable society?" Ideally, reflection upon service-learning activities should not only be personal and meaningful, but they should be critical as well.

Wade's sixth essential component is celebration. At the conclusion of a service-learning experience, after students have engaged in critical reflection, it is time for celebration. This is a time where appreciation for students' efforts and care can be shown. This is especially important because it can help create a shift in the basis of the reward system underlying citizens' actions, moving from extrinsic material rewards to intrinsic feelings of satisfaction associated with acts of empathy and kindness. Just as importantly, this last component can also be a time to encourage new participants and supporters to become involved in future service-learning activities by seeing the

impact of completed projects. In this way, service-learning can become cyclical and historical, building upon and extending the momentum of change. Although Wade's six components could be viewed as somewhat limited and linear, they incorporate many important aspects of service-learning. As we will see, these components are compatible with the processes of social change described by Palmer (1998) and others.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that service-learning is not a panacea. Like every approach, it has limitations. For example, service-learning can require time, funding, and support that are not always readily available. Teachers can experience frustration when time outside the classroom and beyond the normal school day is required. Another problem is that service-learning often relies on parents for funding, support, and transportation (Parsons, 1996). The cost alone can become a burden to many families. Although these are important challenges, many of them can be addressed. For example, careful planning, communication, collaboration, and fund-raising can go a long way toward resolving problems related to money, time, and location.

A more difficult issue involves the authenticity of service-learning projects. The idea of social involvement as an aspect of authenticity is essential in relating to service-learning. Criticisms of a project's authenticity include the following questions about the motives behind the project as well as the students' involvement. Are they intrinsically motivated or are they participating to win an award, material prize, or contest reward? Are the teachers participating out of a feeling of obligation or pressure from other colleagues or administration?

It is true, someone could involve themselves in the community in a completely selfish way, focusing on their own gain and benefit, but this is often not the case. Charles Guignon writes, "meaningful human life must be seen as embedded in a tradition, where this word refers to a vital, ongoing conversation about how things count and about what is really important for a community" (2004, p. 135). Bettering the lives of others through service and action can lead to an enhanced sense of self that is achieved only through a connection with others. I believe deeper meaning, authenticity, is found when students give, in some way, to the community. Their individual actions, directed toward the greater good of the community, give service-learning meaning and authenticity.

In spite of the possible benefits of service-learning, concerns like these also had to be considered as part of this study. In light of the possibilities as well as the limitations, I chose to investigate the following question: *What can be learned about educating for community and connectedness from a study of service-learning involving the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon?*

In this chapter I have argued that many members of society today experience a lack of community and connection as a result of individualism, intense competition, and various other problematic factors. Since the literature suggests service-learning may be one way for teachers to promote a sense of community and connectedness needed in schools and society, I decided to conduct a study to discover what can be learned from an analysis of service-learning involving the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon.

In Chapter Two I will present a theoretical lens, based mainly on Parker Palmer's (1998) *The Courage to Teach*, which will later be used to interpret my findings. Chapter Three will explain the research methodology, including the participants and setting, the methods used to gather and analyze the data, and the actual plan of my investigation. In Chapter Four I will describe the findings, organized thematically around the participants' perspectives and the opportunities that occurred for meaningful learning, the development of personal attributes, and the development of social and historical consciousness. Finally, in Chapter Five I will analyze the findings and present implications for others to consider. I will suggest that service-learning can serve not only as a means of promoting community and connectedness, but also as an avenue of broader societal change.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Lenses

There are many possible ways to look at teaching in general and service-learning in particular. After considering multiple alternatives, I eventually decided to analyze the data through the lens of Parker Palmer's (1998) *The Courage to Teach*. The more I thought about what he was saying, the clearer his theories became in relation to my findings. Although he does not explicitly address service-learning, his frameworks of self-identity, community relations, and social change fit remarkably well with the outcomes of my study and the implications I envisioned for myself and others. Palmer's work made sense because my primary concern is with the lack of community and connectedness that leads to many social and personal problems, and Palmer's work focuses on the relationships between self, community, connectedness, and change. Three aspects of Palmer's work are particularly relevant to this study, including his claims that good teaching: (1) requires courage; (2) is relational in nature, and (3) can promote positive change (and stability). In this chapter I will summarize each of these ideas. Later, these ideas will be used to interpret the findings and to discuss the implications of the study for others.

The Courage to Teach

In Palmer's (1998) *The Courage to Teach,* the author suggests that teaching—real *teaching*—requires courage. He writes that although teachers are often exposed to the "what" and the "how" of teaching, true teaching also requires knowing "who" we

are as individuals as well as teachers (Palmer, 1998). Knowing who we are as teachers is not always easy. Palmer says it requires courage to allow ourselves to really connect with our students through care, compassion, and reflection as we help them connect with each other as well as the subjects of study. True teaching requires courage because we must question ourselves, our identities, and learn who we are. As we learn to integrate all of the aspects of our identity into a comprehensive whole, we begin to fully know ourselves. True teaching also requires courage because acknowledging all the parts of our identity can be difficult, as we learn to reconcile parts of our past and become comfortable with our present selves and how the two are intertwined. Courage means not denying parts of ourselves, but truly knowing our complete selves, our integrity. This courage leads us to being true to ourselves involving our emotions, feelings, and matters of the heart. It requires us to become personally engaged in knowing ourselves, the subjects we teach, and the lives of our students, allowing ourselves to become vulnerable yet connected in meaningful ways.

Palmer argues that the root of our fear is having a "live encounter with alien otherness" and that identity is not a "scrap of turf" to be fought over but a "capacity to be enlarged" (Palmer, 1988, p. 37). By this, he means that as true teachers, who know ourselves, we must not forget who we are. We must not "dis-member" ourselves by forgetting or ignoring pieces of ourselves, our identities, and the parts that make us feel whole as educators and individuals. We must "re-member" ourselves, put ourselves back together and embrace how we have evolved. This may mean reflecting on mentors who influenced us, those relationships, and why we were able to allow quality mentoring to occur at those stages in our lives. We also must be careful not to

imitate these mentors, for their journeys are unique to their identities. Therefore, re-membering ourselves also means that we "use techniques to manifest more fully the gift of self from which our best teaching comes" (Palmer, 1998, p. 24).

Palmer argues that there are three basic sources of what he calls the "tangles" of teaching. These include the teacher, the students, and the subjects. According to Palmer, a *teacher's* self consists of her identity and integrity. The teacher's identity involves the various social, psychological, and biological aspects of her past and present self. It includes roles that can shift daily from leader and educator to member of community, mother, daughter, employee, sister, wife, and many more. It can sometimes be difficult to acknowledge all aspects of our identities.

In addition to recognizing our identity, which includes all the factors that have made us who we are, the self also consists of its integrity. By this Palmer means the integration or wholeness of ourselves, and of our identity. This integration requires the courage to acknowledge, understand and become critically aware of all of the facets of our being. The true self's integrity requires us to be authentic, not fraudulent, in our teaching or personal lives. This often happens when we are trying to fit into someone else's image of who we should be or how we should teach. Becoming an integrated self means taking risks and really looking at ourselves in a deep search for understanding, and this can be very uncomfortable.

I personally have fought with my own internal pain of my past. At times, I have avoided thinking about painful experiences because I thought I should not dwell on the past or focus on negative thoughts. However, I realize that those experiences of the past have influenced who I am today, how I react to certain situations, and how I

interpret present experiences. Rather than avoiding or ignoring the fabric of my life, I have grown to see them not as excuses but as explanations for who I am. I have struggled in my career to stay connected with my identity and to follow the path of my integrity. At times I have remained in positions or careers that I knew were not right for me personally when I really desired to expand my teaching to other audiences and demographics, integrating other areas of my life, my passions, and my interests. During these times I felt almost as if I had internal emotional termites slowly eating away at my heart for teaching. Rather than continuing to engage in inner emotional warfare, I finally began to integrate myself authentically and pursue a different path in teaching.

For teachers, the various roles and aspects of the self often overlap, which can create either harmony or internal conflict, depending on whether or not we are teaching from heart—from an integrated self. What makes teaching difficult is when internal struggle becomes toxic as we try to find balance between our passions, knowledge, hopes, and feelings. Teaching can become extremely difficult when our fears become paralyzing. These fears can be related to our students' reactions to our teaching, our peers' or supervisors' perspectives of our teaching success, and many other areas. Since it requires courage to acknowledge and integrate the various aspects of our identity, Palmer argues that the teacher's search for identity and integrity is one of the "tangles of teaching" we encounter.

In addition to searching for our own identity and integrity, *students* can be another source of the tangles of teaching. According to Palmer, students can be a source of difficulty when they are not engaged with the subject, one another, or the

learning process. Students, too, struggle with their own identity and integrity, which can make it difficult to see themselves as connected members of the classroom community. Students' fears may create negative emotions in the classroom when they challenge their teachers and peers. Like teachers, they may lack confidence and a clear sense of self which can make it difficult to embrace the vulnerability (in making mistakes) that can be part of the learning process. Rather than exposing their mistakes and uncertainties for others to see, students can withdraw from the process or engage in verbal conflicts with their teachers and peers, thus removing themselves from the community of learning and contributing to the challenges of teaching and learning.

Another way students can contribute to the tangles of teaching involves their reactions when they believe their views are not truly valued in the classroom. When students perceive that their views are not seen as worthwhile, they may withdraw from the process, leaving the teacher with one more student to try to "motivate" to learn. Part of the problem involves the traditional "objectivist" model of learning in which teachers are seen as experts with access to true knowledge and students are seen as amateurs who must be enlightened by the experts. Palmer rejects this model, arguing that students' views must also be recognized as vital to the processes of learning. The point is that students must also go through their own processes of discovering who they are, of learning their identities and increasing their integrity. During this process, they are better able to connect with one another as well as their teachers. As trusting relationships are built between teachers and students, understanding becomes more complex and meaningful, thus opening doors for change and growth.

Finally, Palmer argues that *subjects* also create tangles that can impact true teaching. Many of us are called to teach not only because of a teacher we admired and were influenced by, but also because of a body of knowledge which "shed light on our identity and to the world" (Palmer, 1998, p. 25). Examples might include certain subjects or topics, but often they are more complex than this. Palmer gives examples of foreign language and sociology and how these subjects influenced him. He became immersed in the dramaturgical metaphor for understanding social interactions and was fascinated by C. Wright Mills' view of the "sociological imagination" (Mills, 1959). Led by a true teacher, a mentor, he began to look not only at sociology but at his own life and world through these exciting new lenses. Based on his own educational experiences, Palmer insists that looking through different lenses allows us to see things differently, to reflect on our lives in new ways, and to see new relationships between ourselves and our world. Good teachers possess the ability to connect with themselves, their subjects, and their students, weaving a complex web so that their students can learn to do the same.

When we try to connect with our subjects and our students, we make ourselves vulnerable. To reduce this vulnerability we may disconnect from our "subjects" and even "ourselves." Palmer says we build a wall between inner truth and outer performance, and we play act the teacher's part like a balloon speech seen in cartoons (Palmer, 1998). Since academic subjects are deep and complex, it is difficult for anyone to truly understand everything there is to know. Yet, there are academic standards within our society that expect teachers to "know" things with absolute

certainty and accuracy. This can cause fear of being exposed as a teacher who lacks full understanding of the subjects she teaches.

The fear of being exposed as lacking full understanding can lead teachers to hide behind a "mask of objectivity" which we may think helps us look the part and walk the walk. Objectivity portrays truth as "something we can achieve only by disconnecting ourselves, physically and emotionally, from the thing we want to know" (Palmer, 1998, p. 51). Because the information is something we believe it is possible to "know", it is assumed that there is an absolute right and wrong answer. This way of knowing does not involve relationships between the teacher and subject, the teacher and students, or the students and subject. The academic subject can be seen as an object, something to be looked at and studied, not as something to be felt, questioned, or experienced. Unless it is looked at subjectively, the process of knowing leaves little room for engagement, change, or questioning. It does not encourage us to go beyond what we already believe to be true or to try to understand what is unfamiliar. Thus, looking objectively does not lead students to challenge dominant assumptions, think freely, or consider social change. For this reason, Palmer calls objectivity "a fearful way of knowing" (Palmer, 1998, p. 47).

Relational and Connected Teaching

Palmer also argues that good teaching is relational. He starts out by demonstrating that much teaching is objective in nature. Objective teaching assumes that there is an object that exists that represents truth and that this object cannot be changed or influenced in the process of knowing. Objective teaching assumes there

are experts who can know the object and teach its truth to amateurs. However, the expert cannot change or influence the object, and the amateurs cannot change or influence the expert. So information about the object always flows from the top down (from the object to the expert to the novice), but never from bottom up (from the novice to the expert to the object). Also, within the objective model, it is important not to let feelings influence one's thinking. In other words, it is not okay to be in relation to the thing we wish to know, even if those things are people, or even if those things are feeling themselves! Palmer calls this a "fearful way of knowing" because it is unwilling to take the risk of being corrected through checks and balances with other knowers (p. 50).

Instead of either placing the teacher or the student at the center of teaching, Palmer supports what he calls subject-centered teaching. This involves putting the subject at the center of teaching. Both the teacher and students look at the subject as the center of focus in the classroom. For Palmer, a "subject" is not simply a school discipline like "mathematics" or "science", nor is it an inert object that passively sits while it is studied. For him, the things many people consider objects, like great literature or gravity or historical relationships or genetics, are actually "subjects" that can "speak for themselves" if we can hear them. As he says, "a subject is available for relationship; an object is not" (Palmer, 1998, p. 102).

Subject-centered teaching is neither teacher-centered nor student-centered. Rather, it engages students in the dynamics of the "community of truth" as students and teachers together interact with a "third thing", a "great thing", in a complex and interactive manner (Palmer, 1998, p. 115). This approach involves relationship, and

the relationships are reciprocal. Palmer does not call the subject an "object" because true community involves dialogue and openness and give and take in the learning and understanding process. In a dialogical community, all have voices. In subject-centered teaching, there is no absolute expert or amateur. Rather, teachers and students are equally accountable in the learning and teaching process. He believes this is a valuable way to teach because competition does not exist and egos are set aside in a collaborative effort to understand the subject at hand. Students and teachers are engaged in the subject because they have a personal connection to it. In Palmer's view, even the subject of study has a "voice" and can challenge our views of it, if we are able to hear. Thus, both the subject and the learners (including teachers as well as learners) have voices, with equal opportunities for questioning, learning, and relationships with one another.

Although Palmer's ideas about the subject's involvement are unique, others have also advocated relational teaching. For example, in a study about the way women think, Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Tarule conducted and analyzed 135 in-depth interviews with college women, which asked about their gender, relationships, ways of knowing and moral dilemmas (1997). From their research, they formulated a theory consisting of five types of knowing from which women perceive themselves and approach the world. They saw that the way that women think about education and learning also affects their self-perception, self-esteem, and their role in society.

The first of these ways of knowing is silence, where one blindly follows authority, sticks with stereotypes, and has a very hard time defining oneself. Words

are viewed as weapons and a woman could be punished for using them. Being obedient to authority is of utmost importance (Belenky, et al., 1997). Next is received knowledge, where one listens to the voices of others, but feels confused when required to do original work or think for herself. She has little confidence in her own voice and trusts authorities and friends as sources of truth (Belenky, et al., 1997). The third way of knowing according to Belenky and her fellow researchers, is subjective knowledge, where one listens to oneself and severs their sense of obligation to follow others' views. The next category is procedural knowledge, consisting of connected knowing and separate knowing. Connected knowers believe that truth is "personal, particular, and grounded in firsthand experience" (Belenky, et al., 1997, p. 113). They attempt to find truth through listening, empathizing, and taking personal stances to information, whereas separate knowers completely exclude their feelings from making meaning and strictly rely on reason. The last way of knowing that Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule define is constructed knowledge, where one integrates their own opinions and sense of self with reason and the outside world around them (1997).

The researchers conclude that the women they studied tended to respond well to what they called "connected teaching". Connected teaching is teaching in which the feminine principle is brought into the educational learning relationship. "It is time for the voice of the mother to be heard in education" (Noddings, in Belenky, et al., 1997, p. 214). This is a clear reference to the maternal voice, the caring voice of the mother. Belenky and her fellow researchers invoked the metaphor of teacher as midwife (1997). They mean that the teacher helps the students draw out and give birth to their own ideas. Many of the women in the study report occasions for developmental and

cognitive growth where a midwife model of teaching and learning had been employed (Belenky, et al., 1997). The authors further describe connected teachers as "believers who trust their students' thinking and encourage them to expand it" rather than seeing themselves, as teachers, as those with the only correct answers or ideas (Belenky, et al., 1997, p. 227). Connected teaching involves dialogue and relationships between students, teachers, and the world around them, both in the classroom and beyond.

This is similar, in many ways, to Palmer's views on relational teaching. Others, too, have advocated relational rather than distant or objective teaching approaches (e.g., Dewey, 1902, 1938; Whitehead, 1929), suggesting that connected teaching is valuable not just for women but for students in general. An important subject of citizenship education is the idea of community and connectedness. Palmer would advocate a relational, subject-centered, way of studying these ideas as they involve students and teachers and their connections within the classroom as well as their larger communities. To help students become involved in citizenship education, teachers can provide meaningful opportunities to look at issues and problems and to address these situations through reflection and action, and service-learning may be one way of doing this.

The Process of Social Change

Finally, Palmer also argues that good teaching can lead to social change (1998). In his final chapter, Palmer describes a four-part process of social change, relating this process to the realm of education. The process begins with a decision to live from an undivided heart, a heart of integrity and hope, and ends with collaboration

and the experience of a new reward system designed to bring about lasting social change. In order to bring about positive change in our lives, the lives of our students, and society at large, he believes we must engage in the processes of social movement and educational reform.

The first part of Palmer's process of social change is the decision to live "divided no more" (1998, p.166). Palmer gives the example of Rosa Parks when, in 1955, she refused to give up her spot to a white man on the bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Palmer says Parks had reached a point in her life where she refused to live divided against herself. Previously, like numerous others, she lived in conflict with herself every time she complied with this unjust law. This time was different. In Palmer's terms, she made a decision to live "divided no more." This was the vital beginning of a process that gradually led to widespread social change and reform.

The second part of Palmer's process of social change involves forming "communities of congruence" (1998, p. 172). After Rosa Parks made her decision, she needed the support of knowing she was not alone. A community of congruence provides this kind of "mutual reassurance" so that those who desire to live an undivided life no longer feel alone, spiritually and physically (Palmer, 1998, p. 172). Palmer explains that many times communities of congruence may require "structural support" (1998, p. 174). Regarding Rosa Parks and the Civil Rights Movement, communities of congruence were often found in black churches where individuals felt emotionally and physically safe. They were able to express their thoughts, feelings and motivations for action among others who knew what they were going through. Communities of congruence "help to develop the language which can represent the

movement's vision" without the fear of society or those who disagree (Palmer, 1998, p. 172), and they can help provide the skills necessary for bringing about lasting, institutional, social change.

The third aspect of Palmer's process of enacting social change involves going public with ideas for social reform. He cautions that in doing so, people will not always be supported, encouraged, or agreed with. However, "as we link arms, we will find ourselves tugged in dangerous directions, but because our arms are linked, we will have the chance to do some tugging of our own" (Palmer, 1998, p. 179). By this he means that the paradox of movement can actually swing us in a pendulum fashion, where resistance can actually empower the changes we were striving to bring about.

Last, a system of alternative rewards can begin to emerge as a movement occurs. Although these rewards may be material, it is the ideal rewards that can greatly influence the existing institution. Once a movement grows, the rewards felt and experienced by those involved who are leading an undivided life exceed the standard rewards society can typically place on what is seen as success. The sense of being involved in something greater than oneself provides opportunity to enhance the integrity of one's soul, coming full-circle in knowing the self who teaches.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

The purpose of this study was to investigate the possible value of service-learning as a way of promoting a sense community and connectedness among teachers, students, and citizens in general. Since the literature suggests service-learning may be one way for teachers to promote a sense of community and connectedness needed in schools and society, I decided to conduct a study to discover what could be learned from an analysis of service-learning involving the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon. Specifically, I asked: *What can be learned about educating for community and connectedness from a study of service-learning involving the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon?*

General Research Approach

In order to learn about how service-learning might be used to promote community and connectedness, I decided to focus on the experiences and perspectives of four elementary teachers who had engaged their students in service-learning projects involving the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon. Although not all of the teachers explicitly saw their activities as "service-learning", each of them viewed the activity as a way to serve others and each related the Marathon experience to formal areas of the school curriculum such as social studies, reading and language arts, and mathematics. Therefore, I include these teachers' activities within the general area of what can be considered "service-learning".

I approached the research design, data collection, and analysis of this study from an interpretivist epistemological viewpoint. This is a philosophical orientation

that views human meanings as being socially constructed, context specific, and dynamic and evolving (Glasersfeld, 1995). The "reality" that I looked at included the perspectives both of the teachers in the study and myself. As an interpretivist, I, the researcher, interpreted the outcomes of my findings, made meaning of the circumstances, interviews, questionnaires, and observations, and thus reached conclusions based on the data. Also included in my role as interpretivist, I relied on my intuition to remain attuned to the fact that this type of research is based on researcher-subject interaction (Wilson, 1977). However, interpretivists also know that they are not the only ones who are interpreting and constructing meaning. The participants they study are also meaning-makers. They have interpreted their own experiences. As an interpretivist researcher I am interpreting the actions and meanings of others who have already interpreted their own meanings and actions. Not only that but the teachers I studied also interpreted the actions and meanings of their students, who had previously interpreted their own actions and situations. Therefore, interpretivist researchers are involved in complicated webs of interpretations.

> The study was also qualitative because it studied particular participants to better understand their qualitative experiences and views related to service-learning. I was not really trying to test or prove anything. Instead, I wanted to understand the participants' views and to share the insights with others who might be able to use them in their own teaching. I believe teachers (and students) give meaning to their own experiences, and my job was to try to understand these meanings and to communicate them to my readers. Yet, I also produce my own meanings, and I wanted to communicate these with my readers. Therefore, I looked at the varying experiences and views of the participants, considered the circumstances within each of their particular situations, and thought about how these views could be interpreted through the literature on education, communities, and service-learning. Therefore, conclusions were based on a web of interpretations involving the teachers, myself, and the literature in the field.

Research Setting and Participants

I interviewed four Oklahoma public elementary school teachers, seeking to understand what happens when teachers and students engage in service-learning, specifically their participation in the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon. Questions about the connections to the existing curriculum, diverse experiences, feelings, emotions, thoughts, and reflections were included in my interviews. Participants for this study ranged from 23 to 55 years in age while their years of experience in the classroom ranged from one to 15 years. The teachers I selected were chosen based on their school settings, the grade levels in which they taught, and on the basis of convenience—specifically, their willingness to participate in this study. I chose teachers from diverse school settings, grade levels, and years of experience in the classroom. I wanted to include teachers who worked in demographically diverse settings in order to grasp the many experiences involved in this particular service-learning project. However, the primary criterion for selection was that their students were training for and participating in the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon.

In addition to the four teachers, I also considered myself a participant in the study. Since I was intimately involved in the project as the Director of the Kids' Marathon and a teacher of and personal friend of two of the participants, I felt it was necessary to include myself as a participant. In fact, I could not see how the study could be effectively done in any other way. Therefore, my own experiences and perspectives are also included as part of the data. The autobiographical aspects are not simply intended to retell part of the story; rather they also include a critical exploration

of self. Part of the purpose of the study was to question my own experiences and perspectives in hopes of improving my development as an educator and my ongoing work with the Memorial Kids' Marathon.

Therefore, in addition to conducting and analyzing the interviews with the four teachers, I also recorded memos of my own experiences, questioning what I did not or do not understand about the potential value of this service-learning experience as a way of promoting community and connectedness. I took detailed notes about my memories of working with my former first grade students and analyzed these notes in relation to Wade's (1997) six essential components of service-learning. In this way I was able to continue reflecting on my own practices as an educator, constantly seeking self-improvement and continued growth in the future.

The first participant, Becky, was a fourth grade teacher in a large suburban school in a middle- to upper-class area of Oklahoma City, in which the majority of students were Caucasian. She had 15 years experience in the elementary classroom and was also a runner.

Stacy, the next teacher in the study, was in her seventh year of teaching third grade in a Title I school. The school population was just over 400 students, where more than 50 percent of the students were on free or reduced lunches. Her class was ethnically diverse with the majority being Hispanic children.

The third teacher, Ann, had also taught in the public school system for over 15 years. At the time of the study she was a first grade teacher in a large urban school district. Her classroom make-up was multi-ethnic, including Hispanic, African

American, and Caucasian students. She had 22 students in her classroom, including one child who was multi-handicapped.

Next was Jennifer, a first-year teacher at a small suburban school in a middle- to low-socioeconomic area of town. Sixty-three percent of the students at this Title I school receive free or reduced lunches. Jennifer taught second grade to 23 children, 19 of whom were male. With the exception of one Native-American and one Japanese student, her students were Caucasian.

Finally, I had taught first grade in a predominately upper-class area of a suburban school district, where most of the children were Caucasian. I was in my third year of teaching at the elementary school level during the year that my students and I participated in the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon. As a fairly new teacher at the time, I tried to make sure that I was covering the necessary material required for first grade. To my knowledge, this project had previously not been done in my school, nor had any of the other teachers heard about this event. Later, I would discover that very few other teachers in the state had participated in the Kids' Marathon.

One similarity among all of the participants involved our connection to the Oklahoma City Murrah Federal building bombing. All four teachers in my study were native Oklahomans, and we all remembered exactly where we were on the morning of April 19, 1995. At the time of the bombing, Stacy and Becky were elementary teachers with only a few years of classroom experience, Ann was a stay-at-home mother with her two young children, and Jennifer was still in middle school in Oklahoma City. I was a freshman at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, less than 30 miles from the site of the bombing.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Each participant consented to two taped interviews in a convenient location for them. Their participation was voluntary and no foreseen risks were present. Each teacher was contacted by phone and email prior to our interviews. Once I obtained permission from the teacher as well as her principal, we decided upon a meeting time and place. After gathering some general demographic information, I asked broad, open-ended questions in each of the two interviews that allowed each teacher to express herself freely without feeling she needed to provide a "right" answer. We had interactive conversations during both interviews, as I asked more questions that evolved from answers to the pre-set questions.

By studying several elementary teachers' responses, including my own, I was able to compare the differences and similarities in the data from the interviews as well as my autobiographical notes, thus generating categories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). I then analyzed and reported findings from these interviews and my own autobiographical account. Open-ended interviews with the teachers gave me insights into how they felt and what they thought during the service-learning project with their students. Specific attention was given to exact quotations; I tape-recorded all of my interviews to ensure validity and accuracy, allowing the teachers to express themselves honestly as to their beliefs surrounding the service-learning project of the Memorial Kids' Marathon.

During this time, a focus on categories was important, as well as attentiveness to background conditions that may have influenced outcomes (Glaser and Strauss,

1967). During data gathering, keeping an open mind was of utmost importance in order to recognize the complexity of each teacher's experience. This method of analysis was ongoing and evolving during the study. Following the analysis and interpretation of data, I began the formal written report of my findings and implications for action.

Finally, it is important to try to ensure trustworthiness. One way I tried to do this was to carefully maintain disciplined subjectivity (Wilson, 1977). This means subjectivity is my, as the researcher, rigorous self-monitoring, continuous self-questioning, and reevaluation of all phases of my research process. I was subjective, yet disciplined and engaged in a relationship with my participants during our interviews. For example, I did not assume that my thoughts were always seen as right nor did I assume everyone agreed with me. I remained open to opinions, perspectives, and unique experiences. I sought to avoid distortions in my understanding not by building a wall between myself and my participants, but by observing myself and them, "bringing personal issues into consciousness" (Bateson in Belenky, 1986, p. 226). As a researcher, I was also aware that human actions have more meaning than just the "concrete facts of who, what, where, and when" (Wilson, 1977, p. 230).

Other ways of ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research such as mine include member checking and triangulation. Member checking is carried out verbally throughout the interviewing process and provides an opportunity to understand and assess what the participant intended by her words or actions. It also gives participants the opportunity to correct errors and

challenge what are perceived as wrong interpretations, thus reducing the risk of participants reporting at a later date that the researcher misunderstood what was told (Tanggaard, 2008). I, as the researcher, constantly checked my understanding and interpretation of what the teachers said by paraphrasing and summarizing for clarification during our discussions. I also asked the participants for permission to interview them more than once so that they could validate the accuracy of my findings.

Another way I ensured trustworthiness in my study was through triangulation. Triangulation is the use of more than one approach in an investigation or research project in order to enhance confidence in the findings. The purpose of triangulation in qualitative research is to increase the credibility and validity of the results. It is an attempt to "map out or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint" (Cohen and Manion, 1986, p. 254). I cross-checked my data from multiple sources in order to search for regularities, which ultimately led to my findings detailed in chapter four.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate the possible value of service-learning as a way of promoting a sense of community and connectedness among teachers, students, and citizens in general. Since the literature suggests service-learning may be one way for teachers to promote a sense of community and connectedness needed in schools and society, I decided to conduct a study to discover what could be learned from an analysis of service-learning involving the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon. Specifically, I chose to study the experiences and perspectives of four public school teachers who included their classes in the Kids' Marathon experience. Each teacher had somewhat different reasons for participating in the service-learning project, and each was motivated by a somewhat different background with the 1995 Alfred P. Murrah building bombing and by her own interests in the Marathon project.

The data suggest that service-learning projects involving the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon provided valuable opportunities for integrated teaching and learning about community and connectedness as well as opportunities for growth and development among those who teach. However, such outcomes are certainly not guaranteed. The participants' efforts required personal courage, an understanding of teaching as a relationship, and a willingness to work for stability and change. In this chapter I will present a more complete description of the four teachers' unique experiences and perspectives. Then I will discuss the two major findings involving

opportunities for teaching and learning about community and connectedness and opportunities for growth and development among students and teachers.

The Participants' Experiences and Perspectives

Becky was a runner who had completed several local 5k races that supported a variety of charities and causes and therefore, registered for the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon event in the 5k distance. For several years, she created the habit of running a few miles in the early morning hours before arriving at school, noting how this exercise gave her energy to teach and "keep up" with her students. She felt her moods were lifted, stress was eased, and her focus was clearer because of these times spent running.

At the time of the Oklahoma City bombing, she was a second grade teacher at a rural school district and remembered vividly the shock and fear she experienced that day. Two of her own children attended the school where she taught, and having them close to her provided some relief. She and the other teachers in her school immediately met in the large auditorium to comfort their students while waiting for more information and hope.

While registering herself for the 5k event, she discovered the Kids' Marathon link and became excited thinking how this would be an ideal way for her fourth grade students to train with her, focus on something larger than themselves, and learn about a historical event, too. No other teachers in her school participated in the Kids' Marathon this year, so she often felt alone in her efforts, although her principal gave

her support by allowing information in newsletters to be sent home as well as providing time during recess to train and log miles together.

Becky's overall views on the project she engaged in with her children were positive and motivating. She felt positive because she shared her personal goals and training almost daily with her students, allowing them to learn about her personally. She enjoyed sharing the activities, discussions, and information about the event with parents and guardians as well. Her weekly communication through newsletters to them often led to conversations between families and herself which she said she felt may not have happened otherwise. Becky also viewed the project as motivating because she looked to her students as a source of encouragement and strength in her personal training. Many cold mornings in the beginning of her training for the 5k event proved to be difficult in her self-discipline to run before school. She told me that those mornings she focused on her students and the purpose and journey of the service-learning event they were training for together. This focus gave her the motivation she needed to run for a greater cause as well as having gratitude for the ability to do so.

Stacy's perceptions of the experiences from this service-learning project were somewhat different. Stacy was not a runner, nor had she participated in any event of this kind. I was introduced to her through Kristine, a parent of a student in her school. Kristine read about the "Mayor's Challenge" on the website and contacted me, as Director of the Kids' Marathon, to express her interest in getting her child's school involved in the project. I worked with Kristine in scheduling an all-school assembly in which I spoke about the Kids' Marathon, its significance, and how the students could become involved and support their community. After speaking at this assembly,

Kristine introduced me to Stacy, who was very interested in involving her classroom of third graders. (See Addendum A for a transcript of this talk.)

Stacy later explained that she was a new teacher at the time the Murrah building bombing occurred. She still remembered struggling with how to explain the aftermath to her students. She was thankful that an event was taking place that would serve as a bridge between the past and present and resources, both on the Marathon website and from other teachers in Oklahoma, were available to assist her in her efforts.

Since Stacy was not a runner, she enlisted the help of the physical education teachers and asked them if they would be willing to help the students in her school train for the Kids' Marathon. During a faculty meeting, Stacy presented her idea to the rest of the staff, and the other teachers agreed this would be a fantastic goal in their physical education classes. So, with Stacy's guidance in the beginning stages, each child who wished to participate received a log which was downloaded from the official Kids' Marathon website, and began working to accumulate the 25 miles over the next few months in physical education. Stacy's assistance in this process was important since many children and parents at her school expressed having difficulty logging miles at home due to hectic schedules and the fact that many parents worked outside the home in the evenings.

Stacy also addressed the connections between the Kids' Marathon and the Oklahoma City bombing in her classroom by incorporating meaningful lessons and discussions each week. Although she had struggled talking about the bombing with her students in 1995, she gradually gained confidence in addressing the experience

with her students at the time of the study. Still, these lessons and discussions were often an emotional time for Stacy**,** which led her to journal about her experiences and perceptions during that school year. These journal entries formed part of the data presented in this study because she was able to remember and reflect upon details of her experiences during my interviews with her.

The next teacher, Ann, became a close friend of mine as we completed our graduate studies together at the University of Oklahoma. We shared many views on education, learning, and classroom community, and we therefore collaborated on several projects during our academic careers. These collaborations taught us much about one another and about our individual experiences as elementary teachers. I shared with Ann my love of running and how it had helped me overcome many feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem while giving me emotional strength throughout my adult life. Ann expressed genuine interest in running, and soon she was training for a distance event that year. She began to pursue the ambitious goal of completing a full marathon of 26.2 miles. We encouraged each other inside and outside the classroom to exercise, engage in healthy living, and balance the stresses of work and school. Among other things, I told Ann about my service-learning efforts involving the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon and how I felt it had helped build a better sense of community between my students and myself as well as between my students and the community.

Although Ann had taught elementary school in the early 1990s, at the time of the bombing in 1995 she was working at home with her two young children. She remembers feeling tremendous helplessness at that time, wanting to help those in the

bombing as well as teachers in her local schools cope with the anger, fear, and confusion that was so evident all around. Later, when she returned to the classroom, these feelings contributed to her emotional connection with the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon, which affected not only her own life but also the lives of her children and students. This connection to the past event of the bombing helped provide the motivation and strength Ann needed when faced with difficulties and obstacles during the months ahead.

Having returned to the classroom, Ann decided to use a service-learning approach to the Oklahoma Memorial Kids' Marathon. Initially, she adopted the framework I had used with my students in developing her plan of action for her first grade classroom. However, as we will see, Ann soon began to add other innovations that fit well with the whole concept of the Memorial Marathon.

The last participant was Jennifer. Her involvement with the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon developed differently. Jennifer was a student in an elementary social studies education course I was teaching at the University of Oklahoma. As part of the course I shared my experiences with my own first grade students. I explained how participating in the event had helped in our development as a classroom community and how it had provided life-long lessons in citizenship. As Director of the Kids' Marathon, I encouraged my college students to serve as volunteers on race day, to witness the many children who come to the Oklahoma City National Memorial site to finish the physical marathon but also to experience the symbolism of the Memorial and how the day can encompass an emotional and spiritual marathon as well.

Jennifer recalls wondering at the time how she could help students connect social studies to their own lives. She ended up volunteering that year and later told me that what she witnessed, felt, and heard that day changed her as an educator and citizen of Oklahoma City. She realized that children have the ability to help others in truly meaningful ways and that, as educators, we are responsible for providing opportunities for children to realize this potential.

After graduation, Jennifer began her first year as an elementary teacher, and the Kids' Marathon was at the forefront of her mind. Although she had many responsibilities as a wife and a first year teacher, she knew this event was something she wanted and needed to include in her curriculum. With this in mind, Jennifer met with her principal, explained her previous experiences, and shared her ideas for her classroom and school. Her principal was supportive and encouraging and served as a strong foundation as Jennifer sought to generate enthusiasm among her students and peers. Jennifer created a second grade curriculum unit based on the National Week of Hope, which commemorated the tenth anniversary of the Oklahoma City Bombing, and invited her students and peers to participate in the Memorial Kids' Marathon as a culminating event.

The impact of this unit helped persuade Jennifer's principal to make the Memorial Kids' Marathon and the National Week of Hope a school-wide curriculum focus for the next year. Jennifer was asked to modify her unit so teachers at various grade-levels could incorporate her lessons into their own classrooms and involve their students in the event. In just her second year of teaching, Jennifer formally introduced the Kids' Marathon to her school. She accepted responsibility for creating letters to

parents and calendars with the official deadlines, and she openly shared her lesson plans with the faculty. Many other teachers, students, parents, and her principal embraced Jennifer's ideas and enthusiasm. When I saw Jennifer's passion and understanding of the deeper meanings underlying the Memorial Kids' Marathon and her tireless efforts in helping others become involved, I invited Jennifer to become one of my co-coordinators, working directly with me to promote the Memorial Marathon throughout the state and the nation.

Each participant in the study came to the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon project in a different way, and each came away with a different set of experiences and perspectives. However, taken together, their words and actions indicate that their service-learning projects provided real opportunities for teaching and learning about community and connectedness and for the growth and development of those who teach.

Teaching and Learning about Community and Connectedness

Although there were differences among the participants, each found meaningful opportunities for teaching and learning about community and connectedness. These opportunities took a variety of forms. One thing several of us did was to invite guest speakers such as survivors and heroes from the Federal building bombing to talk with our students. More than one of our guests indicated that speaking about the tragedy and the Memorial, specifically with children, helped in their healing. Our guests brought pictures and models of the Memorial and Museum to

explain their symbolism and purposes, and the children were encouraged to ask questions. These were special and influential moments in our classrooms.

A specific example involved Becky, who invited a firefighter to speak to her class about survivors and heroes involved with the bombing. Becky's guest allowed the children to ask questions while touching parts of his uniform. He patiently explained how his special gear helped him help others during the bombing, how difficult the experience had been for him, and that telling others about his experience helped him honor those who were hurt or perished. The class discussed with the fireman what it means to be a hero, shared who they considered heroes, and talked about the characteristics heroes have. After the visit many of Becky's students referred to their guest as "a hero", and heroes became an important topic of discussion among the children in the days that followed. Becky remembers that her students began asking many questions about heroes and that some even changed their minds as to who they admired. Many of her students agreed that a hero is someone who is strong, kind, and compassionate and who cares for others.

Another approach used to teach about community and connectedness involved field trips to the National Memorial and Museum. This approach, used by Becky as well as other participants, brought many classrooms together into the broader community. Becky's students toured the grounds and Museum, discussed the symbolism of the Memorial, and had a first-hand look at how the money raised from the marathon was used. Becky's class took time to visit the Survivor's tree and listened carefully as the guides explain the symbolism of the various parts of the Memorial. Once inside the Museum, the class took a guided tour, including a visit to

the specially designed children's area which focuses on hope, choice, and peace. At the end of the visit they saw golden cranes hanging from the ceiling and learned about their significance.

Yet another way of promoting an understanding of community and connectedness involved research projects. Becky's fourth grade students, who were the oldest in my study, were encouraged to research information on the subject of the Murrah building bombing. Becky scheduled specific time in the school's computer lab to assist students in becoming familiar with the National Memorial and Museum's website online. With the guidance of Becky, and often in pairs, her students also used the classroom computers to research the Memorial website in addition to searching for books written for children about the Oklahoma City Murrah building bombing. A particular book they found during their search, *One April Morning*, was not in her school's library at the time, so Becky brought in the book from a local library to share with her students (Lamb, 1996). In this book, Nancy Lamb interviewed 50 Oklahoma City children in order to create a verbal collage of their thoughts and feelings following the April 1995 bombing. Becky said she felt her students connected to this book because of the compassion in the carefully chosen quotes and warm illustrations depicting hugs and grace of the human touch.

Finally, Becky used her service-learning project as a way of focusing on health and exercise in her classroom. This involved brainstorming with her students about ideas for their snacks and lunches as well as help in planning spring classroom parties. She discovered that many of her students were not eating well-balanced meals and missing breakfast. She said she thought this was affecting not only their running and

training, but also their learning and focus. Because her fourth grade students were fairly independent, she asked them to help include ideas about quick and healthy meals and snacks in her newsletter to be read by their parents or guardians. She felt they enjoyed this because they felt they were making positive changes in their health and well-being, and felt better physically too. Therefore, Becky saw this particular service-learning project as a mental, emotional, and physical journey.

Becky noted that through constant dialogue and interaction surrounding the project, her students learned about each others' needs and struggles. She used their comments as teachable moments, instructing her class on topics such as the meanings and differences between physical strength and mental strength, and related these ideas to the bombing and its aftermath. Because she set aside time in her classroom, her students were able to better understand the importance of her lessons. Among other things, they learned the Kids' Marathon was not a race to see who could "win" but rather a race in which all could "win".

Becky recalled many positive outcomes related to the project. She noted that her students began relying on one another for support and showed greater compassion toward their peers. She recalled comments specific like "I'll walk a little with you" and "Just keep going, we're almost there!" She remembers that the students began asking more frequently if they could "log a half mile" at school with their teacher and classmates, and that they began looking forward to training together and running as a class. Becky was convinced that her students remembered how it felt, physically and emotionally, at the beginning of their training when the distance was hard, their legs would tire, and they struggled to finish. Becky believed their compassion towards each

other helped ease their fears of being alone during the race or being without a friend. She believes they began to trust their peers to help and encourage them to finish the event together.

Like Becky, Stacy also found many ways in which her service-learning project could be used to promote a better understanding of community and connectedness. One basic but important approach involved engaging her students in meaningful dialogue. On several occasions Stacy asked her students to write a personal question or concern related to the Murrah bombing or the Memorial Kids' marathon in general. She asked them to spend some quiet time, to really think about what they were questioning or wondering about. She allowed them time to write these questions or comments anonymously on small pieces of paper, fold them, and place them in a closed box with a small slit on top. She then shook the box, mixed the papers, and pulled one at a time during her afternoon class meeting. She planned to address several questions or comments each day. By reading aloud what her students wrote, she opened the door for communication and created an emotionally safe environment. This encouraged her students to listen to each other and think more deeply about the event in which they were learning about and participating, and feel empathy and compassion for those involved in the bombing.

Another way Stacy used this service-learning project to promote a better understanding of community and connectedness was through the organization of a class presentation to the school community during a morning assembly. Since I had already spoken to the students at her school about the Murrah building bombing and the Kids' Marathon, many teachers had begun to try to involve their students in the

event by sending letters home in Thursday folders and talking with their students about the details.

Stacy wanted her students to speak to their peers and share what they were learning about the Memorial and Memorial Kids' Marathon. She hoped they could tell about what they were doing together in her classroom to help encourage each other and make connections outside of her immediate classroom with other students. With the cooperation of her principal, Stacy's class was allowed a longer amount of time at a spring assembly to share with their school some of the information they learned. They made posters with large print and pictures to hold during the assembly and were asked to share either a quick sentence with information about the Memorial or Kids' Marathon or a personal feeling they had during this learning process. Stacy said she had many conversations with parents, teachers, and students following this assembly about how they felt her students' statements and shared feelings were encouraging, sincere, and powerful.

The physical education teachers at the school where Stacy teaches also helped promote a better understanding of community and connectedness. They were fantastic in keeping the April event a central focus for their classes, helping students to log miles each week and focusing on the importance of stretching to keep their bodies safe. Stacy was the central contact person in her school for other teachers by giving updates at faculty meetings and frequently meeting with the physical education teachers to track the progress and participation of the school community at large. Regarding her own students, she worked with the physical education teachers to allow

her students to visit the other physical education classes once a month to share tips for training, answer questions, and log a mile with the other students.

Like Becky and Stacy, Ann, too, used her service-learning project to promote a better understanding of community and connectedness. Ann, who was training for the full marathon, discussed the dedication and commitment it took to complete an event like this with her students. During class meetings she discussed the importance of self-worth, confidence, and self-esteem. Ann also facilitated discussions on the power of our words and actions in school and society and related these ideas to the purpose of the Marathon.

Ann also introduced the idea of using a peace table to help students talk through interpersonal issues and resolve classroom conflicts (Starting Small, 1997). This peace table was located in a private, yet easily accessible corner area of her classroom. She placed two stuffed animal puppets, two chairs, and a few posters displaying words and pictures depicting various feelings and emotions at the peace table. She demonstrated with several students how to dialogue and share concerns or feelings here, as well as telling them how this area would serve as a neutral area for resolving conflict. The peace table gave her students a place to join their classmates for discussion and expression in a private, non-confrontational setting, as well as a place for them to share their feelings about what they were learning about the bombing, Memorial, and marathon.

Ann also used this service-learning project to promote a better understanding of community and connectedness through her teaching by incorporating spring parent and teacher conferences. First, she discussed her ideas about and reasons for having

student-led conferences with her principal. After receiving permission from her principal to change from the traditional conferences involving only the classroom teacher and parent or guardian, she explained what these would entail in her newsletter to be sent home. She would be conducting the conferences differently than she did in the fall of this school year because her students would take a critical lead and she would facilitate. In preparation for the student-led conferences, she helped her students prepare works of art and written summaries about what they learned about the Oklahoma City Memorial, Museum, and Kids' Marathon. She also helped them share their writing and artwork with one another in pairs as well as small groups in the classroom.

During each conference, Ann's students shared their emotions and knowledge about the Memorial and Marathon through their artwork and written words. They also had the opportunity to tell about what they learned about speaking, sharing, and explaining with their parents and guardians. Ann visited with each family during those conferences to answer questions, prompt students who needed help, and serve as a connection between the classroom and outside community. The students who were not able to attend these student-led conferences had special time set aside during the school day to meet with other teachers, the principal, or other students to share their work. Ann believed the open communication and sense of community created by processes such as class meetings, the peace table, preparation for student-led conferences, and the conferences themselves, relieved many fears her students previously had in the learning process.

Finally, like each of the other participants, Jennifer also used service-learning to promote a better understanding of community and connectedness. As previously mentioned, Jennifer became extensively involved in the Kids' Marathon, eventually becoming a co-coordinator. One of the ways Jennifer integrated her service-learning with the school curriculum was through the development of a "Character Course" which was used in her school's physical education classes. Thus, as students throughout the school logged their miles they also learned about the importance of character traits such as strength, empathy, kindness, and perseverance. Such traits are important not only to individuals but also to members of a community.

Another activity designed to help children think about community and connectedness involved the song "The Change" by Garth Brooks. While listening to the music Jennifer asked her students to choose a medium through which to express how the song made them feel and what it made them think about. They could write, draw, sculpt with play dough, paint, or engage in any other creative response they chose while the song played. After the song finished, Jennifer's students shared their creations and explained how the song made them feel, what they thought about while listening to it, and what the message might have been.

At this point, Jennifer reintroduced the Oklahoma City Murrah building bombing, focusing on the idea that a man who was angry made a choice that negatively affected the lives of many. She also reminded her students that there were survivors and the state of Oklahoma as well as the nation pulled together to heal, as people came from many places to help. She made the message of choice very clear to her students, that they have the power to make positive choices and those choices help

themselves and others. Jennifer found ways to integrate the Oklahoma City bombing, the Memorial and Museum, and the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon into her classroom curriculum in deep and powerful ways.

A third example occurred on the morning of race day. After her class finished the last 1.2 miles of their marathon, she took them on a walk around the Memorial grounds and explained why it was such a sacred and peaceful place. She noted where certain areas of the Memorial were located, for example, the chairs, the Survivors' Tree, and the two hundred foot metal fence. This fence was first installed to protect the site of the Murrah building. Immediately after the bombing, people began to leave tokens of love and hope on the fence, which were eventually collected and preserved in the Memorial's archives. Now, the metal fence serves as a place for all to come and leave personal items and gifts. One boy in her class walked to the fence and placed his medal on it, saying "this is for those who lost their lives." Jennifer explains that that moment encompassed the months of dialogue, teaching, and learning about a terrible tragedy, empowering her students to become involved in something good, thus giving back to their community.

Jennifer knew how excited her students were to receive and wear their tee-shirts, racing bibs, and medals, which were rewards for their hard work. Therefore, when this instance occurred, she used it to begin a discussion with her other students who were around this particular child. After hearing his reasoning for leaving his medal on the fence, the other children could see and hear first-hand from their peer that this event was about more than running. It was about leaving something tangible,

which had symbolic meaning, for others who come to visit the fence at the Memorial to see, and feel hope and remembrance.

Finally, Jennifer recounted a remarkable lesson involving the reading of *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* by Eleanor Coerr, a true story about a girl named Sadako Sasaki who lived in Japan during World War II and became a heroine to the children of her country. Jennifer's goal was to expose her students to a difficult time in history when others, including children, were able to eventually find hope out of tragedy, fear, and struggle. Jennifer wanted to teach her students that hope and peace can sometimes be found in spite of difficult situations by working together for support and strength.

Jennifer introduced the story by telling her students that although the book was quite sad, it had a message of hope. She encouraged them to listen critically, to try to find the messages of hope, and to be prepared to retell the message in their own words. Several times while reading the book, she asked them to whisper to one another their perspectives on the messages of hope in the book as well as thinking about the actions of the children in the book. After finishing reading, Jennifer asked her students to journal about how they felt they could be activists or motivators in their lives and the lives of others.

However, the lesson did not end here. Jennifer then gave her students a piece of scrap paper and instructed them to write two to three words that described how they saw themselves. Then, they turned their paper 90 degrees and wrote two to three words to describe how they thought others saw them. The children then made a line and walked to each of their peers' desks and wrote one word on each student's paper

describing how they viewed each other. She discussed with them beforehand that these adjectives needed to be positive and uplifting. Once each child read his or her paper, they folded it into a paper crane, which Jennifer hung from the ceiling in the classroom to serve as a reminder of perspective taking, hope, and inspiration.

Connections between this lesson and the Oklahoma City bombing were made clear to Jennifer's students during a follow-up discussion. Jennifer told them that there are golden paper cranes hanging in the Oklahoma City National Memorial Museum to serve as reminders of hope and peace, as well. In addition, the class discussed heroes, what makes someone a hero and critically examining definitions of such. She wanted her students to look beyond societal or famous people, instead considering heroes in the Oklahoma City bombing. She allowed her students to brainstorm qualities and characteristics of who a hero is, someone who is strong, courageous, caring, and compassionate. Therefore, in a variety of ways, each of the participants used their service- learning projects as a way of helping their students learn about the importance of community and connectedness.

Growth and Development among Students and Teachers

In addition to providing opportunities to teach and learn about community and connectedness, involvement with the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon also provided means of growth and development that affected the students as well as the teachers. One area of growth involved the development of confidence and feelings of self-worth. As Becky, Jennifer, Ann and I began training for our running events in April, we set personal goals that were both physical and spiritual in nature. As we

learned more about training for ourselves, we also learned about what the children's training would entail. We thought it was important to remember that everyone, our students as well as ourselves, begins training exactly where they are. We wanted to remember that children cannot be expected to do what adults can do since their endurance is much different. We knew many of our students could not run a full mile when we began. We remembered ourselves what it was like in our training to add a little more at a time, a little more distance each week, and what seemed difficult in the beginning would get easier in time.

Our confidence grew both individually and collectively. From January to April our students logged miles both independently and with us at school. As our students "ran closer" to their goals, logging more miles, it was clear that they felt a sense of accomplishment. We could see their increasing self-confidence and a growing willingness to help others as well. Part of the reason these things were evident to us is that we were experiencing them as well. Even as our students were developing important personal and social attributes such as confidence and self-worth, strength and perseverance, and empathy and compassion for others, we too felt ourselves growing in these important areas as we worked to achieve personal and shared goals, learned about and from each other, and learned from our students as well.

As teachers, it is our connections with our students and peers that allow us to grow as well. For me, at first, setting and working on achieving this shared goal, seemed like a fun way to exercise with my students and share my passion for running with them during the school day. It also seemed that as the students gained strength, I grew excited as I saw the connection between running and my students' behavior and

learning. I witnessed an increase in their attention span in the classroom, an eagerness to learn, and the development of closer relationships between the children, as a result of the cooperation of training together. Our classroom community was strengthened because we supported and encouraged one another both physically and mentally during the months preceding the event. Those who played sports outside of school tended to be more competitive in the beginning of our journey than those who did not. Many other students did not actually run much on a daily basis, not even at recess. We were able to discuss the importance of teamwork, pacing, and that they had a shared goal, not "who came in first".

Another area of growth for both teachers and students involved the development of empathy and compassion. By participating in the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon, we were able to see and feel how completing shared goals led to an individual accomplishment to be proud of as well as accomplishing something for our community. The marathon served as a visual example to our students of what they had done and, most importantly, *why* they had done it.

Yet another area of growth involved the development of a greater sense of social and historical consciousness. Social and historical consciousness involves an awareness that we are connected to each other and to the past, that what we choose to do in the present can be in response to the past, but that it can also affect the future. This is a critical awareness that we are connected to others in space and time, and that although we may not be able to physically touch others we can "touch" them mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. A common concern among elementary teachers is that it is difficult to teach about the importance of historical events because students often do

not see the relevance of learning about the past. They have difficulty understanding how past events affect them, and are puzzled about what they can do to change their communities since they are sometimes labeled as "only children". Therefore, developing a sense of social and historical consciousness may be a necessary and deeply powerful way of thinking and relating to others and society.

Our involvement in the Memorial project helped promote a sense of historical consciousness by teaching students many lessons in life which connected them to their past, in this case the historical tragedy of the bombing of the Oklahoma City Murrah Federal building. By exploring the effects of this event as well as the reactions of Oklahomans and the Nation, both we and our students developed a greater sense of social and historical consciousness. This consciousness increased our awareness of the effects both negative and positive actions can have upon others. What we learned about the months and years following the 1995 bombing helped us understand that participation in this event, in some way, helped those who were killed as well as those who survived.

Therefore, in addition to providing opportunities for teaching and learning about community and connectedness, service-learning projects related to the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon also provided important opportunities for personal growth and development among students and teachers alike.

Chapter Five

Analysis and Implications for Teaching

As discussed in chapter two, there are many possible ways to interpret the efforts of teachers and students involved in service-learning projects. However, since I am especially concerned with what appears to be a lack of community and connectedness in local, national, and global societies, I chose to use Parker Palmer's (1998) *The Courage to Teach* to interpret this study of service-learning related to the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon. The analysis of the findings suggests that service-learning may be valuable in at least two ways. First, it may fulfill one of its primary purposes, which is to help students learn academic information while providing authentic service to others. In this case students learned about community and connectedness through various disciplines such as history, music, and reading. Second, service-learning may also help contribute to the personal growth and development of teachers and students. This was certainly the case for many involved in this particular study.

However, such outcomes are by no means guaranteed. Different results could have easily occurred. This leads to the question, "What is it that led to *these* particular results? What were the teachers' and students' roles in promoting learning and development conducive to community and connectedness, and how did their actions contribute to their own growth and development?" To analyze these findings I will return to Parker Palmer's ideas about teaching and learning.

Courage, Connection, and Change

I believe many of the results of the participants' actions can be attributed to factors described by Palmer (1998) in *The Courage to Teach*. What these teachers (and students) did required courage, an understanding of connected teaching and learning, and a willingness to work for social stability and change. First, the outcomes observed in this study took courage. Although many teachers throughout the state were encouraged to participate in the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon, and although many took up the challenge, those who chose to participate were actually a small minority. There are many reasons for this. Teachers are busy, underpaid, and often unappreciated. They also have their hands full with mandated testing, increasing class sizes, and problems stemming from a social unrest, a floundering economy, and a breakdown of a sense of community and connectedness to others. Therefore, simply agreeing to take the time to add a service-learning project to one's existing obligations can be viewed as an act of courage.

However, much more than this was involved in the courage exhibited by the teachers in this study. Because of our connections to Oklahoma and the Murrah building bombing, we believed our students should learn about a significant historical event even though it was not part of the required information mandated by the State of Oklahoma and very little mention of it, only a few pages, was contained in some of the textbooks in our schools. We were also very aware that it can be touchy to address powerful events in the earlier grades. For example, in order to participate in the project, Becky first had to gain permission from her principal. She then had to seek the permission of her students' parents and guardians and post pertinent information in her

weekly newsletters. Therefore, not only did the decision to engage in service-learning require courage, but the choice to participate in *this* particular project required courage as well.

Yet another example of the need for courage involved Stacy who had no prior experience in a running event. She understood that this event was about more than just running and the physical aspect of the Kids' Marathon. Stacy felt that the lessons to be learned and the emotional journey she and her students could have together far exceeded the fear of the unknown of a physical event.

For me, I feel I needed courage many times. First, to begin running at all took a great amount of courage since I have never felt like I was an athlete or athletic at all. I have had to try many times over the past ten years to quiet the voices I hear which tell me I can not finish a race, I can not complete the miles, or that I simply am not good enough. Running, for me, has always been more than physical. It is a quiet time I have with my thoughts, emotions, and feelings. I find it mentally cleanses me and helps me believe in my abilities, that I can accomplish goals and tasks, not related to running, that seemed too much the day before. I have found myself running both to and running from many things in my life which has given me great strength and peace.

I also felt I needed courage to agree to become the Director of the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon because of the hours needed to dedicate to the event and the mission behind the National Memorial. Would I be good enough? Would I serve the bombing victims, survivors, and families well? Would I be able to convey my hopes, dreams, and vision for the Kids' Marathon to others and see it develop? I have learned that fear can paralyze us. I chose to take a leap of faith and share my

vision with others who would assist, encourage, and work tirelessly with me in the years ahead to create an honorable event for children and their community. Over the past eight years, I have witnessed and been a part of such an incredible learning experience. The Kids' Marathon has surpassed my initial goal of 2,000 children with over 3,000 and growing every year. Teachers have implemented the mission and message behind the Memorial and Marathon in many powerful and remarkable ways with their students.

In addition to courage, many of the outcomes observed in this study also required an understanding of the relational or connected nature of teaching. For example, Ann understood the importance of relationships both inside and outside of her classroom. She connected her teaching to her students' personal lives by providing physical and emotional space for her students to peacefully gather together in dialogue at their peace table. She further employed the relational and connected nature of teaching in her decision to host student-led conferences. These gave her and her students a profound way of helping her students' parents and guardians become a part of her teaching and their children's learning experience.

Another example of awareness that teaching is connected and relational involved Stacy and her school. She wanted to involve as many students and teachers in the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon as possible, therefore she took it upon herself to serve as the lead in her school. With the assistance and cooperation of the physical education teachers, she involved many teachers and students in the event who may not have participated otherwise. Stacy also spoke at several faculty meetings

about the importance of the event and how to make it something meaningful they could do as individual classrooms and as a school community.

Yet another example of awareness that teaching is relational and connected was my desire to share with students and teachers about the Kids' Marathon and its purpose. I was not asked to speak at school assemblies by the marathon staff, nor was I told what to say once I mentioned that this was my plan. After receiving permission from Thomas, Chet and the other fellow Memorial Marathon chairmen, I created a speech that would tell the story of the unthinkable act of violence in April 1995, the aftermath, and what has happened in Oklahoma City since then. I realized what I said needed to be age appropriate for children to understand and also to explain without giving graphic details and creating fear. I wanted them to be able to relate in some way to what happened, that they *were* and *are* connected to the families, victims, and their community. I feel that by giving the background and reason for the event at the beginning of each of my speaking engagements at school assemblies, I could speak with honor, integrity, and passion about the joy of the event itself.

Finally, full realization of the potential of the participants' efforts in this study requires understanding and commitment to the processes of lasting social change. Many movements have been seen as violent, hateful, or self-righteous. Yet, there is still a legitimate need to engage in positive and peaceful social change. Palmer advocates embarking on the journey of social improvement in a "slow, steady, responsible" manner (Palmer, 1998, p. 170).

An understanding of the need for social change was demonstrated by Ann who insisted on incorporating a peace table in her classroom curriculum. This demonstrated

an understanding of the need for social change because no other teachers in her school, to her knowledge, incorporated this idea in their classrooms and only a few engaged in class meetings with their students. Ann saw the need for social change in her classroom curriculum because she found herself trying to solve her students' problems, disagreements, or conflicts on a daily basis. She did not feel they had the language or understanding to do this on their own, so rather than continue with a system of conflict resolution that was not successful, she brought in the idea of a peace table. Because she also guided her students in meaningful dialogue and using their words in a constructive and kind manner, she provided opportunity for change in the way problem solving occurred in her classroom.

Another participant who recognized the need for lasting social change was Jennifer, who fought to help her students gain the symbolic understanding that would help assure continued remembrance of the past and of the possibility of recovering hope out of tragedy. Seeing connections between their choices and actions was powerful for Jennifer's students. This enabled them to recognize that what they do *can* matter. Jennifer realized that children are often belittled and disregarded in our society, but she believed giving them an opportunity to serve something bigger than themselves allows them to feel important and purposeful in their communities. She hoped that by immersing them in an environment in which they were expected to make responsible choices, students would begin to take a more active role in their classroom community. This, in turn, would prepare them for active membership later in their adult communities. Thus, Jennifer seemed to understand not only the need but also the process of lasting social change.

Another example of a teacher in my study who recognized the need for lasting social change involved me and my teaching experiences at the University of Oklahoma. I was given a blessing in my mentor because he allowed and encouraged me to adapt and modify his existing curriculum for the courses I taught to include personal stories, lessons, and ideas. He knew that the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon was an integral part of my personal life, my teaching, and my heart. I wanted my current students at the University of Oklahoma, who would be elementary teachers in the near future, to feel empowered to seek out ways to involve their students in experiences that raise their self-esteem, give them purpose in their world, and help others for a greater cause, larger than themselves.

However, even a clear understanding of the need for lasting social change may not be enough to ensure the full realization of what at least some of the participants seemed to want. In order to promote lasting social change we also need to understand the *processes* of lasting change which, according to Palmer, include: (1) deciding to live divided no more, (2) the development of communities of congruence, (3) deciding to go public and to accept support as well as criticism, and (4) continuing the process by receiving the heart's reward.

Each of these aspects can be seen in our efforts. As already noted, simply choosing to participate in the project required a certain amount of courage. In the second phase communities of congruence provide "mutual reassurance" so that those who desire to live an undivided life no longer feel alone (Palmer, 1998, p. 172). Communities of congruence provide "structural support" (p. 174) in which participants can "develop the language which can represent the movement's vision"

(p. 172). Our collaboration among ourselves and our students provided communities of congruence which reassured us that we were not alone. These communities also gave us power to verbally share our thoughts, goals, and ideas with one another.

In the third phase the movement goes public. This happened when Thomas and Chet first decided to implement their plan for the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon, and it has remained public ever since. Finally, in the fourth phase, we are instructed to enjoy the heart's reward so a new *system* will eventually replace the old one, thus leading to lasting *institutional* change. Once a movement grows, the rewards experienced by those involved who are leading an undivided life exceed the standard rewards society can typically place on what is seen as success. The sense of being involved in something greater than oneself provides opportunity to enhance the integrity of one's soul, coming full-circle in knowing the self who teaches. Again there is evidence that this has already begun to occur.

I believe we have made good progress. Yet there is always room for improvement. Although each aspect of the process of change can be seen in our efforts, there are still important questions about how many people really understand the process of institutional change well enough to consciously and systematically apply it to their actions. In fact, it is only through reflecting and writing about my own experiences that I am beginning to understand the process myself. Therefore, in order to fully realize the potential of service-learning as a means of promoting lasting social improvement, it may be essential to make the *process* itself an explicit part of our teaching about service-learning.

Service-Learning for Students, Society and the Self Who Teaches

Based on the evidence provided in this study, it appears that service-learning projects *may* be one way of helping students, society, and the self who teaches. By this I mean that service-learning may be useful in helping students learn academic information they will need in order to succeed in today's society, in promoting a sense of community and connectedness that are necessary for the stability and improvement of society, and in helping teachers continue to grow as persons and professionals. I say that service-learning "may" be useful in achieving these outcomes because such results are by no means guaranteed.

First, in order for service-learning to be useful in helping students gain academic understanding, it needs to be linked to the curriculum. The Oklahoma National Memorial was naturally related to academic disciplines like history and social studies. It was included as part of the academic curriculum as Becky linked it to the study of survivors and heroes, which is certainly related to the social studies. The service-learning projects were also linked to literacy and the arts in Jennifer's lessons involving *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* and Garth Brooks' *The Change*.

Second, in order for service-learning to be a useful way of helping students learn about community and connectedness, these goals may need to be an explicit part of the curriculum. There were differences between what each of the participants took from this experience, and some of these differences were related to their own particular goals and focuses. For service-learning projects to contribute to a greater understanding of community and connectedness, promoting community and connection may need to be an intentional part of the plan.

Finally, in order for service-learning to be a useful way of helping students and teachers continue to grow personally and professionally, it will need to focus on issues that truly matter to the individuals who participate. The Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon truly mattered to the teachers and students who chose to participate, but it may not have been the best choice for other teachers or students. As important as this event was for us, the point is not that teachers or students need to participate in *this* particular event. In fact, participating in events deemed important by others may actually be counterproductive in the sense of being in an inauthentic form of service. Instead of advocating *this* form of service, the larger point is to encourage participants to consider volunteering in *some* form of service that truly relates to their own interests and concerns.

Involvement with the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon was meaningful to the teachers who participated because it was something they *chose* to do. Their choice to participate suggests that it was personally meaningful—that it mattered to them—for whatever the reason. If people are encouraged to and supported for participating in service projects that matter to them, there may be a greater chance that those events will contribute to their personal growth and development.

It seems clear that the teachers who participated in this study experienced significant growth and development. For example, Jennifer experienced personal growth as she connected the emotional and spiritual symbolism of the marathon with her teaching. And Ann experienced growth as she learned from her young students and all that they are capable of sharing, feeling, and expressing through their own unique language. Stacy also experienced growth in her confidence as a leader in her

school. She believed in an event, an idea, and demonstrated great skill in guiding her own students as well as the other students and teachers in her school. Last, Becky's personal growth came when she became more grateful for her ability to run, the connection this interest had with her teaching, and that she was a better teacher and runner because of this connection.

A major contributor to our personal growth involved the relationships we developed with one another. Ann and I became close friends in graduate school, as running partners, and as collaborators on this project. Similarly, Jennifer and I developed deep connections to one another. Beginning with the college course, we shared thoughts and ideas which eventually led to her involvement in her school, her co-chairing of the Kids' Marathon, and a close friendship that continues to this day.

I also believe our students experienced growth and development. Many teachers view students as one of the primary "tangles" of teaching. However, Palmer points out that students also experience fear and alienation in school. Many times students are seen as deficient and are taught in a very linear manner. However, in service-learning, students can be highly involved not only in learning but also in teaching. In this study the students and teachers each embarked on journeys of understanding, compassion, and hope in the months leading to the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon.

According to the teachers who participated in this study, the students saw themselves as integral parts of their respective classroom communities who asked questions, made mistakes, and learned together. The teachers also reported that conflicts decreased and confidence increased as a result of student dialogue,

communication, and understanding surrounding preparation for the Marathon. For example, Stacy's involvement of her students and peers from the beginning stages of the planning through the months of learning and training allowed the subject to remain a central focus within her school. Relationships between teachers and students were made more meaningful as they continually reflected on what they were learning, experiencing together, and looking forward to in the weeks ahead.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe my personal journey as an educator, runner, and person is only beginning. As I finish this study and dissertation, I hope I have put into written words the uniqueness of each teacher I discussed and how truly special their experiences with their students have been. I also hope I have served the Alfred P. Murrah building bombing survivors, victims, and families as well as the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon staff and volunteers well. It has been my greatest honor to be the Race Director for the Kids' Marathon and to serve in my community.

I noticed a poster held by a spectator at a marathon recently which read, "When your legs get tired, you run with your heart." This statement is true in relation to many things in our lives. What drives us, what keeps us going, what motivates us? The idea of the self who teaches and the heart of a teacher carry many of us, as educators, to continue what we believe is our calling, in a compassionate and tireless way.

In a sense, the completion of this study is the completion of the most complex and heartfelt marathons of my life thus far. There are many more marathons to "run"

in my future as I seek to continue helping others and serving my community. It is my desire to help impact positive social change, build a better sense of community, and connect with others through meaningful and dynamic relationships.

"Our running shoes are really erasers. Every step erases a memory of a past failure. Each foot-strike rubs away a word, a look, an event, which led us to believe that success was beyond our grasp." -John Bingham, Runner's World Magazine

Addendum A

"Good Morning boys and girls, teachers, parents, and friends! Thank you for having me in your school today. My name is Jaime Parker and I am the Race Director for the Oklahoma City Memorial Kids' Marathon. Does anyone know how long a marathon is? Yes! That is correct, 26.2 miles. In a moment I am going to tell each of you how you can run your very own marathon with your classmates and friends. First, I would like to tell you about why we have this event. So, please be good listeners.

On April 19, 1995, a terrible tragedy occurred. The Oklahoma City Murrah building was bombed and many wonderful, innocent people lost their lives; even more were hurt and injured. To honor those whose lives were lost, as well as those who survived, a beautiful Memorial and Museum were built. Like many things, it takes a lot of money to keep them looking so beautiful. This is where I need your help. Who wants to help me?

Between now and the last Sunday in April you will need to jog, walk, skip or jump 25 miles. You can keep track of these miles on an official log form online. Your teacher or another adult at home can help you. Then, on race day, you will join many other children in front of the Memorial and finish your last 1.2 miles! To reward you for your hard work you will receive a medal, tee-shirt, and finish line entertainment and fun. This is a fantastic way to set and achieve a personal goal as well as help your community.

Who would like to participate? On the count of three, please yell the word, 'RUN'! One, two, three! Thank you everyone, have a wonderful day and I will see you in April.

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