This bibliography was developed out of 1) references submitted by the members of the GYCO SIG; and 2) a search for the terms “community organizing” and “youth organizing” in Google Scholar and the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database (only doctoral dissertations are included).

The bibliography does not purport to reference all of the work published during 2013-2014, but seeks to give a sense of the dialogue that has been going on in the field and to recognize important research that has been done during that time.

The selection of non-submitted references was made fairly quickly and likely missed some relevant work. Some submitted references that did not seem to clearly fit within the purview of the GYCO SIG were not included.

Unmarked references were submitted by members of the GYCO SIG. References marked with a star (*) were developed out of a search that included: 1) the first 100 citations returned from a search on google scholar of “community organizing” and “youth organizing; 2) the first 200 citations of the “community organizing” in ProQuest Dissertations and Theses; 3) all citations of “youth organizing” in ProQuest; and 4) a small number of references from Google Books.

General selection criteria to ensure relevance and reduce length included, for various reasons: a U.S. focus, a focus on youth or education. After the first analysis, it was decided to add historical scholarship to the review, and so a second narrower search was conducted. This second analysis created challenges in deciding between “social movement” and “organizing” efforts. Also, potentially relevant historical analyses often do not use the term “community organizing” and thus more relevant documents may have been missed. Abstracts were sometimes edited for length and are included if they were available online or furnished by the author.

Andino, M. S. *The influence of a community organizing project on resident assistant’s understanding of leadership, gender inequalities, and long term career development* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Rutgers, New Brunswick, NJ.

Community organizing RAs are arguably the most important set of student leaders on a college campus. The RA establishes the tone for the residential building, enforces university policy, and acts as a counselor, mentor, and friend. For many first year students the RA is the first person they meet when they move in and the person who will most likely influence their decision making during their first few weeks on campus. This phenomenological case study explored the experiences of resident assistants at Mid-Atlantic Private University who participated in the community organizing Pilot Project…. Study results indicated RAs experienced their leadership role by understanding and experiencing the influence that using Community organizing practices had on their
residential community and university community in regards to relationship building and enhanced communication. RAs used community organizing tenets to build strong relationships with and amongst their residents. These strong relationships led to increasing the social capital of some of the residents. The utilization of community organizing tenets gave quieter students and concerned students a voice and a medium by which to speak their thoughts, and the safe space and positive foundation to speak with the RA if concerns arose. Additionally, RAs who approach their current profession from a community organizer lens are finding that the techniques learned are applicable to their current profession and personal life. The community organizing skills, specifically the one-to-one meetings and concept of building a community of shared interest, permeated these young professionals’ career development and interconnection of their own network.…


Almost nothing is known about how [organizing] groups grapple with, make sense of, and ultimately take action around English learner issues. This study begins to fill this gap. Relying on a blended conceptual framework, which draws from studies of equity reform in education, scholarship on education organizing and social movement theory and employing a comparative case study design, this study documents how activist groups use a variety of tools to advocate for English learners and hold the system accountable for their learning opportunities and outcomes. Specifically, the study examines how a coalition focused on equity education policy for English learners, and three of its constituent groups, define problems and their sources; the types of strategies used by these groups aimed at remedying problems identified; and the extent to which organizational factors influence both the problem identification process and the kinds of campaigns and tactics utilized in moving equity agendas forward.


This chapter discusses the recent findings of the Drop Knowledge Project in New York City (DKPNYC). The DKPNYC is a cultural studies research project designed to excavate the discourses of urban youth activism and organizing in relation to critical literacy learning. In this chapter, the authors look at the work of the DKPNYC youth activists around issues related to immigrant rights and educational justice in out-of-school spaces. Amongst the interconnected issues surrounding this work, the youth participants in the DKPNYC all organize around issues related to the struggle of undocumented youth
to access quality education in the United States. Data collected from the study is
decidedly cross-cultural, with participants articulating visions of themselves and their
future in relation to their cultural heritage and their inter-subjective ethical learning.
Implications from the study provide insight to educators, researchers, and community-
based organizations about educating immigrant youth and others on pressing issues
around immigrant learning.


This research study explores the critical literacy praxis of five urban youth organizers. As
a literacy study, this research answers two central questions: How do urban youth
organizers engage in critical literacy praxis as they become activists? How do urban
youth organizers articulate a vision of themselves as activists? Critical literacy praxis is a
kind of literacy about structures, structural violence, and power systems that involves
engaging in cycles of action and reflection around social and political issues in the lives
of learners. The research design takes a hybrid approach to critical discourse analysis
through a taxonomy of critical literacy, answering the questions through qualitative
interviews that explore polyvocality. Findings from this study offer practical implications
for youth activists, literacy educators, social science researchers and community
organizers alike. Youth organizing programming, like the Human Rights Activist Project,
can offer a generative, safe space within community-based organizations from which to
engage young people in critical reflection upon their social and political contexts, to
collectively envision and take action for positive change. As a space not congested by
external measures of formal education, organizing projects provide an informal youth
development platform through which critical literacy learning is more fully realized. The
participants of this study all call for further creation of such safe spaces for ethical,
intersubjective, social justice youth activism.


This paper focuses on social knowledge production during a community organizing effort
at a working class, mainly Latino elementary school in Texas. Emerging from a LatCrit
perspective, this paper describes the perceptions and actions of working class Latina
family leaders as they promoted their epistemological values during the community
organizing of a huerta (vegetable garden). It focuses on how their racial counternarratives
are embedded in the intersected oppression of their local context and how these
counternarratives narrate value for their epistemological perspectives, visions, and
actions.

Booker, A., Vossoughi, S., Hooper, P. K. (2014). Tensions and possibilities for political work in
the learning sciences. In Polman, J. L., Kyza, E. A., O'Neill, D. K., Tabak, I., Penuel, W. R.,

How can the learning sciences engage more directly with the political dimensions of defining and studying learning? What might this engagement offer for democratizing learning? This paper delineates a tension between deep studies of learning and explicit attention to issues of power, inequality and human dignity. We frame this as a productive tension that will generate new insights, as well as conceptual and methodological tools that contribute to the democratization of learning. We identify a history of ideas inside and outside the learning sciences that inform this objective, including the political dimensions of the field’s founding theorists. We then offer examples of ways these tensions manifest in our own empirical work, and conclude by considering how explicit attention to political dimensions of learning can advance our theories about what learning is, about what it is for, and about the conditions that give rise to deep forms of learning for all.

*Cabrera, N. (2013). “If there is no struggle, there is no progress”: Transformative youth activism and the School of Ethnic Studies. The Urban Review, 45(1), pp 7-22*

In the wake of the Tucson Unified School District dismantling its highly successful Mexican American Studies (MAS) program, students staged walkouts across the district to demonstrate their opposition. Student-led walkouts were portrayed as merely “ditching,” and students were described as not really understanding why they were protesting. After these events, a group of student activists called UNIDOS organized and led the School of Ethnic Studies. This was a community school dedicated to teaching the forbidden MAS curriculum. In this article we present counternarratives from organizers, presenters, and participants in the School of Ethnic Studies. These narratives demonstrate the transformative resistance of students who created their own form of liberatory education. Our analysis highlights how student organizers led the creation of an autonomous, community-based educational space to allowed young people to engage in political analysis, self-reflection, and strategic organizing. We conclude with the implications for Ethnic Studies, urban education, and counternarrative.


This thesis explores findings from two years of ethnography and portraiture with a group of linguistically diverse immigrant mothers in a public housing project in Somerville, MA. The group organized with a local community based organization called The Welcome Project to advance interpretation and translation and intercultural education in a school that faced inequity in parent engagement and student learning. Participant observation, formal and informal interviews, document analysis, and grounded coding produced findings important to understanding how panethnic organizing can improve equity in parent engagement in schools and civic incorporation in diverse, immigrant communities…. The Welcome Project used a theme-based adult English class; structured
opportunities to exchange stories, values, and resources; a common identity as immigrants; and a focus on "language justice" to help a diverse group of women form an organization called The International Parents Group that engaged in decision making at their children's school. Organizing helped the group overcome isolation, language dominance, and fear of civic participation. This study guides organizers, educators, and activists to build panethnic organizations through structured interactions across linguistic and cultural differences. It examines the structural contexts in which panethnic organizing may be successful. It provides an in-depth case study of civic engagement and organizing for educational opportunity among the fastest growing demographic group in the United States: immigrants and their children.


The purpose of this study was to examine how grassroots groups coalesce and attempt to influence decision-making in an urban School District in California. The research design utilized an exploratory qualitative case study of the development of two high schools. This case study focused on the efforts of four grassroots groups, four power brokers and nine members from the School District—2 parent groups, 1 teacher group, and 1 property owners’ group…. Six themes were derived from [the] analysis: relationship building within groups and across groups; communication/miscommunication between groups and the district personnel; seeking change by the groups; support given to groups; empowerment within the groups; and shared leadership within the groups. Findings suggest that grassroots groups had different stated objectives and indicated that they had success despite facing challenges and frustration by the School District. One group resorted to legal action. Major conclusions revealed that the power of any grassroots group appeared to be dependent on the shared leadership within the grassroots group, building relationships within the district and elected politicians, as well as the number of active group members.


Chicago has long been one of the national epicenters for public school reform. In many ways the reform efforts of the past decade in the Windy City have served as the blueprint for the current focus of federal education priorities. In particular, federal policy for school turnaround and transformation takes clear cues from the efforts that current Secretary of Education Arne Duncan oversaw in Chicago when he was CEO of Chicago Public Schools from 2001 to 2009. Shuttering low-performing schools (as measured by test scores), facilitating the restructuring of schools (often resulting in major shifts in personnel and student population), and promoting the growth of charter schools have all been strategies for Chicago reform and are now centerpieces of federal school turnaround guidelines. However, for such technical approaches to school turnaround to be successful, they must be accompanied by close consideration of the social, political, and cultural dimensions of school change. Without attending to these other dimensions, Chicago has experienced the alienation of its professional teacher corps and the
disillusionment of many parents and grassroots community leaders with regard to public school reform, outcomes that undermine the social capital and trust that ensure broad local support for public school systems.


At a time when many young Americans have reduced their civic engagement, and public schools have de-emphasized their civic mission, some youth are taking initiative at the community level, and some community-based organizations are establishing educational programs to promote their participation. These programs originate in economically disinvested and racially segregated areas whose young people require and receive “education for democracy” appropriate for their situation. This article provides perspectives on these programs, including their social purpose, curricular content, pedagogical methods, and implications for a new civics that contrasts with traditional approaches. It draws on analysis of educational efforts by organizations affiliated with a national project designed to increase youth participation in the South Bronx, Mississippi Delta, Albuquerque, East Oakland, and other areas.


Which form or forms of civic engagement have the most potential to involve young people in a socially-just diverse democracy? At a time when civic engagement will benefit from conceptual clarification, this paper addresses this question and some of the issues it raises. It analyzes four forms of youth civic engagement for a socially-just diverse democracy. It examines each one according to analytic categories, compares their similarities and differences, and raises questions for future work. It draws upon research in psychology, sociology, and other academic disciplines; and on intergroup relations, multicultural education, social work, and other professional fields. The expectation is that systematic analysis of these phenomena as a subject of study will contribute to the quality of their practice, and move discussion of civic engagement to the next level.


Although research demonstrating the effectiveness of youth organizing for educational reform has expanded rapidly in the last two decades, the field remains substantially under-theorized. This article outlines a theoretical framework, based on 30 interviews with leading figures in education reform, which illuminates how a youth organizing group has achieved significant influence in the Philadelphia School District. The framework identifies three broad dimensions of effective youth organizing work and highlights eleven sets of paired strategies that have been useful in building the group’s power and efficacy. The framework showcases the complexity and artistry of sustained, successful youth organizing.


As the gulfs between low-income and more affluent youth continue to widen, researchers and practitioners continue to search for effective means of closing the gaps in academic achievement, digital participation and civic engagement. This article examines how youth organizing offers a bridge across these divides. We consider how one youth organizing group integrated new media into its core functions and how the members experience these tools. We argue that when situated within an organizing framework, new media tools can help to promote the digital literacy, academic achievement, and civic engagement of low-income youth of color, who have otherwise limited opportunities to contribute to the civic life of their communities.


Nationally, youth organizing groups have been gaining traction in their push for education reform; however, little research has considered how policymakers view their efforts. This study examines how 30 civic leaders in one under-resourced urban school district perceive the influence of a youth organizing group on educational policy decision-making over a 15 year period. Results indicate that the group is widely recognized for having accomplished significant policy changes at school and district levels, including influencing the policy process in four key ways: insisting on accountability, elevating the role of student voice, shaping the agenda, and asserting themselves as powerful political actors.


Philadelphia’s students have long been a major force in the battle for public education, and for the past decade and a half they have fought valiantly against the encroachment of neoliberalism. In this commentary, we examine the ways that student organizers in Philadelphia have responded to and altered attempts to dismantle public education, enervate local decision-making and accountability structures, and privatize Philadelphia

This study explores the lessons that stay with former youth organizers as they transition to young adulthood and the factors they believe facilitated this lasting learning. Results show the learning outcomes and the features of the learning environment that the participants identify reflect key tenets of Freirean critical pedagogy. As young adults, the participants indicate that they continue to draw on the critical thinking, introspection, communication, and interpersonal skills they developed as youth organizers, and they highlight the value of relevant content, an open atmosphere for discussion and debate, and peer education in promoting such durable learning.


This chapter follows the diverse paths people take as they become politicized, connect to others, and make their way into social movement worlds. The chapter explores the case of DREAMers: undocumented youth who were brought to the U.S. as young children and who are increasingly stepping to the forefront of the immigrant rights movement. The term comes from the proposed Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which offers a streamlined path to citizenship for youth brought to the United States by their parents. Among other pathways to participation, the chapter finds that making media often builds social movement identity; in many cases, media-making projects have a long-term impact on activists’ lives. DREAM activists, often young queer people of color, have developed innovative transmedia tactics as they battle anti-immigrant forces, the political establishment, and sometimes mainstream immigrant rights nonprofit organizations in their struggle to be heard, to be taken seriously, and to win concrete policy victories at both the state and federal levels.


Since the passage of the first parent trigger law in California in 2010, three parent petition campaigns have forced a turnaround in school governance. The purpose of this study was to provide a baseline of understanding for the ways in which parent trigger legislation intersected educational policy and to investigate the extent to which the law supported the needs, values, and interests of local parent stakeholders…. A cross case comparison of the two school sites revealed that the needs and core beliefs of parent leaders aligned with the intent of the parent trigger law. However, an intermediary organization was required to help the parent stakeholders attain the resources, socio-political learning, and
community building strategies necessary to effectively exercise their parental legal right. Moreover, factors within the local context affected the parent leaders' implementation of the law. Levels of relational trust either mitigated or exacerbated the process. Finally, the use of the law was experienced by parent leaders as both personally and collectively empowering in shifting their role to decision maker. This study has implications for researchers, policy makers, and practitioners considering parent trigger legislation and parent empowerment as a solution for failing schools.


This study explores the phenomena of burnout as a social construct with youth engaged in social change movements. Using a dialogic narrative methodology I interviewed seven youth engaged within environmental and/or social justice advocacy to explore whether burnout exists for these young change makers. The interviews provide narrative accounts exploring how and why the youth engage with their chosen advocacy vocations and what feelings are associated with their reasons for engagement. The relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, self-determination, and the emotional dimensions of social change offer an insight to the way youth construct meaning of their advocacy work, particularly in relation to their sense of agency. The exploration of experiences through open dialogue suggests that youth may be pressured by societal factors into undertaking isolating roles of leadership within contemporary social change movements. The research also points to a socially defined representation of burnout within the youth cohort.


[This dissertation] builds on a recent historiographic trend challenging narratives of the 1970s as a period of conservative retrenchment, and demonstrates that the multiracial, anti-imperialist visions fueling the radical dreams of the 1960s continued to inform local struggle in what me might call the "long 1970s." … The artistic and aesthetic principles shaping hip hop during its early years, based in a commitment to collaborative competition, unexpected reformulations of everyday material, and the elevation of innovation as part of a strategy for survival constituted a "freestyle politics." Hip hop culture and radical politics of the 1970s more broadly articulated and elaborated a freestyle politics that were multiracial, anti-imperialist, and deeply invested in struggles over race and space. Local efforts to transform social and spatial relations drew on a longer history of anti-racist and anti-imperialist organizing. By the late 1970s, activists combined the two threads into a powerful critique of the resurgent frontier discourse used to justify neglect or destruction of the city's minority communities. From the multiracial Black Theatre of Urban Arts Corps to the largely Puerto Rican United Bronx Parents' fight for community control of education, from the tenuous alliances of Columbia students and Harlem activists to South Bronx youth partnering with avant-garde art
gallery Fashion Moda, communities in struggle worked to develop a range of approaches for survival and self-determination. I conclude by analyzing how these practices came together in 1980-81 protests against the anti-Black and anti-Puerto Rican film *Fort Apache: The Bronx*, when hip hop culture was first explicitly deployed as a political organizing tool.…


Social action projects provide opportunities for students to practice civic skills by learning about pressing social issues and taking action to address them. So to explore the texture of such projects, this paper illustrates how the pedagogy guiding them can support students to experience their agency as individuals, develop their knowledge of their broader social contexts, and provide opportunities for action. While the value of a relationship between individual agency, social knowledge, and action are richly described in theoretical texts, this paper shows how such principles are extended in one social action project that unfolded in an eighth grade class. Through the use of qualitative methods, I documented and analyzed the project. I share my analysis so to bring teachers and students' lived experiences with social action projects to light. The paper concludes with recommendations for educators when envisioning and enacting social action projects.


In this research, I analyze the roles of teachers and youth workers from a community-based organization in the context of two high school social action projects. Both the teachers and the youth workers assumed distinct roles while working together during the civic project enactments. The teachers were largely positioned as responsible for structure and accountability, as they prioritized monitoring student behavior toward clear expectations. The youth workers assumed a different responsibility of promoting student voice by encouraging students to be social and pursue questions that were important to them. I identified these roles, explored at the heart of this article, through a study of teachers and youth workers’ interview transcripts, observations of their practice, and document analysis. The qualitative data contained numerous examples of their defined roles that enforced narrow scripts for themselves and each other. The teachers and youth workers’ role distinctions illustrate a type of roadblock that can hinder them from assuming multifaceted and flexible teaching roles. I draw attention to the division to raise questions of how teachers and youth workers’ roles can be expanded and how educators might take up varying responsibilities so to promote youth civic engagement.

For youth who are the most vulnerable to challenging community conditions, more limited opportunities, and poor health, educational and economic trajectories derive especially strong benefits from engagement in community youth development efforts. Although communities can benefit in powerful ways from the knowledge and insight of these youth populations, the experiences of vulnerable youth are often underrepresented in planning and decision making. This article draws on lessons learned from two communities that successfully engaged such youth in a community change initiative over four years. Key elements in creating the types of safe, supportive, and meaningful settings that promote young people’s ongoing participation and leadership were intentionality and commitment; local knowledge of vulnerable populations; adult allies with key capacities; meaningful focus; resources for intensive outreach, relationship building, and youth support; and continuity of key adults. Each of these elements is described, identifying the ways they build on often underrecognized forms of social capital and offering lessons learned about engaging underserved youth populations in community youth development.


New social media provide access to knowledge through the creation of social networks and serve as a means to foster collaboration, enhance communication, and coordinate collective action. Among community-based organizations working on education issues there is a growing social media presence, with many groups now using popular social media like Twitter or Facebook to connect with organization members and the public. This article focuses on one youth organization’s creation of a social media network using Twitter. The author uses social network analysis to identify the actors who constitute the egocentric Twitter connections of Youth Organizing Today (YOT) and the structural properties of this network. By identifying key actors within social media networks youth organizers will be better prepared to maximize the benefits of social media and enhance their ability to influence education policymaking.


Miss Virginia Randolph was a historic pioneer in teaching and community mobilizing for African American children and community in early twentieth-century Henrico County, Virginia. She created a viable educational and vocational training institution called the Old Mountain Road School, and used her skills to galvanize support from white and African American communities, a major feat that many African-American female teachers and organizers performed everyday in segregation. Her model of coupling public education with community mobilization is still relevant today, given national concerns about the futility of public education's success and failure rates with African American children.


Through the lens of the Youth Art & Self-empowerment Project (YASP), this article explores the impact that the adult criminal justice system has on young people and how young men and women in Philadelphia are organizing to challenge that system. YASP has developed an innovative model for supporting and training young people in Philadelphia's adult jails and recently released from the adult jails to build a youth-led movement to repeal adult transfer laws in Pennsylvania. Through stories of personal experience and collective struggle, this chapter illustrates the power of young people taking back control of their city, their state, and their own destinies.


This article explores the process and impact of women organizing for educational justice in Northern California by documenting the efforts of a committed group of mothers who sought to address the disproportionate underachievement of Latino and African American students within their city's high school. Using a combined methodology of ethnography and participatory action research, this article illustrates the power of converting racial and social identities into a political strategy while constructing new narratives of self.


Based on both research from a diverse collection of archives and interviews with youth activists, advocates, and grassroots organizers, this book examines popular mobilization among the generation of activists – principally black students, youth, and young adults – who came of age after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Franklin argues that the political environment in the post-Civil Rights era, along with constraints on social activism, made it particularly difficult for young black activists to start and sustain popular mobilization campaigns. Building on case studies from around the country—including New York, the Carolinas, California, Louisiana, and Baltimore—*After the Rebellion* explores the inner workings and end results of activist groups such as the Southern Negro Youth Congress, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Student Organization for Black Unity, the Free South Africa Campaign, the New Haven Youth Movement, the Black Student Leadership Network, the Juvenile Justice Reform Movement, and the AFL-CIO’s Union Summer campaign. Franklin demonstrates how youth-based movements and intergenerational campaigns have attempted to circumvent modern constraints, providing insight into how the very inner workings of these organizations have and have not been effective in creating change and involving youth.
Students in urban under-resourced schools are often disengaged from the curriculum. Distributing voice (agency) to them would seem an obvious counter to their alienation, allowing them to be co-constructors rather than objects of their education. Beyond being pragmatically sound, student agency is, arguably, a psychological and moral imperative. However, what is imperative is not necessarily doable as we illustrate in two student agency high school projects. We analyze the outcomes using four previously identified factors: school context, project scope, personal gratification, and assumption of genuine authority (rather than teacher delegated power). In conclusion, we raise two issues requiring more reflection and investigation: what is the role of a teacher who is an employee of the school yet wants to help her students protest against injustice? How can agency be developmentally staged so that students become skilled in assuming responsible leadership in their schools?

Gordon, H. R. (2014). ‘We can’t let them fail for one more day’: School reform urgency and the politics of reformer-community alliances. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*.

This article provides a critical examination of neoliberal urgency in education reform. While critics of neoliberal reform policies have argued that these reforms exclude low-income community participation almost entirely, I argue that in practice this exclusion is not as total or as overt as macro-analyses would suggest. These macro analyses do not explain the complicated alliances that reformers have with some community organizations, nor do they specifically and critically examine the role that urgency plays in determining the value of community voice in school reform decisions. On the ground, elite school reformers forge tenuous alliances with select low-income community groups, while disregarding and marginalizing others. In this article, I posit that ‘urgency,’ a cherished ideal and guiding principle of the neoliberal school reform movement, becomes the mechanism for elite school reformers to distinguish ‘good’ and valuable community allies from ‘backwards’ and ignorant community voices. A critical examination of school reform narratives in particular reveals that the discourse and practice of school reform urgency both legitimates and hides a more profound exclusion of low-income African American voices from the school reform process.


Guided by constructs from social capital theory, this study analyzes one multi-sector, urban, educational opportunity coalition to understand how relationships among higher education and neighborhood partners generated resources and structured resource
allocation. The coalition, called the Sunnydale Jobs and Education Network (SJEN), included representatives from community-based organizations, higher education institutions, private foundations, a charter school, and faith-based organizations. SJEN partners collaborated for six years beginning in 2006. This analysis focuses on the initial four years of problem defining and finding external resources. I employ archival and participatory observation methods on secondary data sources, such as interviews, meeting notes, and grant applications. The findings from this analysis inform higher education community engagement for coalition-based change and educational opportunity by drawing attention to the structure of resource development in coalition partnership.


In this ethnographic case study, Ann M. Ishimaru examines how a collaboration emerged and evolved between a low-income Latino parent organizing group and the leadership of a rapidly changing school district. Using civic capacity and community organizing theories, Ishimaru seeks to understand the role of parents, goals, strategies, and change processes that characterize a school district's collaboration with a community-based organization. Her findings suggest an emergent model of collaboration that engages parents as educational leaders, focuses on shared systemic goals, strategically builds capacity and relationships, and addresses educational change as political process. This emergent model stands in contrast to traditional partnerships between communities and school or district leadership that often reflect deficit conceptions of marginalized parents and families. By rewriting the rules of engagement, parents, families, and community members can contribute critical resources to enable districts and schools to educate all students more equitably.


The aim of this study was to examine whether district-level organizing efforts might be associated with improved parent-school relations in schools and how such efforts to build a new relationship may be enacted and negotiated at the school level within the context of a district-organizing group collaboration in a “new immigrant” destination…. Findings/Results: Schools with high organizing had greater structural social capital than schools with little or no organizing, but high organizing schools did not have greater functional social capital in the form of teacher-parent trust. The case study findings suggested that the dominant institutional scripts about the role of parents were simultaneously rewritten and reinforced even as organizing approaches worked to foster a new relationship between parents and educators. Conclusions/Recommendations: Districts and schools that collaborate with community organizing groups can augment their social resources and expertise, particularly in reaching out to low-income Latino parents and effectively educating their children. Yet, the dominant institutional scripts in schools – about the role of parents, professional authority, and control – suggest the complexity of efforts to improve parent-school relations. Those seeking to build
meaningful parent and community participation in schools would do well to move beyond traditional forms of parent involvement in the journey toward deeper engagement and collaboration.


This article describes the conditions and experiences that enabled principals to share leadership with teachers and low-income Latino parents to improve student learning. Methods: This study used interviews, observations, and documents to examine the perceptions and experiences of the principals of three small autonomous schools initiated by a community organizing group in California. Findings illuminate how a design team process initiated principals into a model of shared leadership with teachers and empowered parents that focused on deep relationships and capacity building. Principals enacted this model of the “principal as organizer” in the newly-opened schools, but they struggled to navigate conflicting leadership role expectations from district administration. Implications: Organizing approaches to education reform can cultivate shared leadership in principals and the capacity to partner with empowered, low-income Latino parents. District expectations and principals’ broader social networks may be critical in navigating and sustaining such leadership. Further research on districts that collaborate with community organizing groups may provide promising insights into the development of a new generation of educational leaders.


Artistic and cultural practices have long been central to movements for social change. In this article, Paul Kuttner explores this intersection of arts and organizing through a biographical portrait of Mariama White-Hammond, Executive Director of the Boston-based youth organizing group Project HIP-HOP. Tracing Mariama’s development in the realms of artistic practice and social justice, the article focuses on both synergy and tension between the two trajectories. The resulting portrait highlights the important role of cultural context in shaping the relationship between organizing and the arts, and uncovers the multiple influences that lead an individual to engage in this kind of work.

*Kuttner, P. (2014). *Youth cultural organizing at project hip-hop: "Because stories have to be told"* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Over the last few decades, movement activists and scholars have increasingly recognized the importance of art and culture in social change efforts. But when it comes to the day-to-day work of developing youth as active, justice-oriented citizens, talk of art and
culture remains marginalized. How can we develop in young people the kind of imaginative, creative, cultural leadership we need in our communities? The most innovative answers to this question are coming from the margins of mainstream arts education and civic engagement. In non-profit and community-based organizations across the country, artists, organizers, educators, and cultural workers are creating youth-centered spaces dedicated to a blend of artistic expression and social activism. In this dissertation, Paul Kuttner offers an in-depth look at this work through a portrait of the Boston-based youth organization, Project HIP-HOP (PHH), which practices youth cultural organizing. Working at the intersection of community-based youth arts and youth-led community organizing HH trains young artists as cultural organizers who can use their art to catalyze individual and collective action for social justice. Based on this portrait, Kuttner presents a theoretical framework outlining the organization's cultural organizing model: how PHH works to raise consciousness through artistic practice, develop unity through history and ritual, and catalyze action through public performance, all rooted in an asset-based approach to youth and communities of color. This hybrid form of youth work has the potential to teach us much about fostering a new generation of justice-oriented cultural leaders.


In Uncivil Youth, Soo Ah Kwon explores youth of color activism as linked to the making of democratic citizen-subjects. Focusing attention on the relations of power that inform the social and political practices of youth of color, Kwon examines how after-school and community-based programs are often mobilized to prevent potentially "at-risk" youth from turning to "juvenile delinquency" and crime. These sorts of strategic interventions seek to mold young people to become self-empowered and responsible citizens. Theorizing this mode of youth governance as "affirmative governmentality," Kwon investigates the political conditions that both enable youth of color to achieve meaningful change and limit their ability to do so given the entrenchment of nonprofits in the logic of a neoliberal state. She draws on several years of ethnographic research with an Oakland-based, panethnic youth organization that promotes grassroots activism among its second-generation Asian and Pacific Islander members (ages fourteen to eighteen). While analyzing the contradictions of the youth organizing movement, Kwon documents the genuine contributions to social change made by the young people with whom she worked in an era of increased youth criminalization and anti-immigrant legislation.


Who cares about Afro-Diasporic children from poor families in the United States? What kind of responsibility is there for people in community to work? What is the relationship between work, faith, and activism among Afro-Diasporic women? In order to answer these questions, this dissertation takes an interdisciplinary approach, combining ethnographic participant observation at FUREE, a Brooklyn organization engaged in a vibrant childcare provider activism campaign, with interviews of childcare providers and
activist organizers, policy analysis, feminist and womanist theory, and religious ethics. This dissertation asks childcare providers and organizers about their work, faith, and activism—and how these three aspects of their lives intersected—with special attention given to the ways these intersected during the childcare campaign in New York City. Finally, this dissertation engages in syncretistic social ethics to provide new frameworks for acknowledging the exclusion of United States based Afro-Diasporic women from government aid through legislative and interpersonal policies, deploying languages of virtue as justice, tracing and reclaiming paradoxes of normative ethics of care, reconceiving particular "work" as moral insofar as it brings macroscopic and micropersonal realizations of justice, conjuring a working faith, imagining a contemporary approach to social activism, and "quaring" views on Afro-Diasporic sexuality and reproductive politics. Make A Difference examines the unique and intersecting experiences of work, faith, and activism in the lives of Afro-Diasporic women in the United States modern era.


Social work students are expected to develop competency in and be able to use macro practice concepts in communities. One common area of macro practice involves organizing communities to improve socioeconomic environments. This article compares 2 prevailing models of community organization— Alinsky's conflict and Eichler's consensus models— from a postmodernist perspective. The goal is to guide educators and students in determining the appropriate use of each model based on the conditions influencing the need to organize. A case study is included to provide an opportunity to engage in a critical thinking exercise aimed at further honing practitioners’ skills.


Immigrant and undocumented high school students are becoming more active in the struggle for educational and human rights for immigrants. This study examined the social and political activism of a group of undocumented immigrant youth in Southern California as they organized in order to gain access to higher education and advocate for immigration reform. This ethnographic study explored the learning processes and outcomes for immigrant youth as they developed their leadership skills and participated in organizing and activism in their schools and communities. The immigrant youth were part of a community-based youth organization called, Youth United for Immigrant Rights. Youth United students helped their classmates understand the social, political, and economic context of immigrant rights, and participated in marches, rallies, phone banking, and direct actions to inform their peers and community members about issues facing immigrants. Data collection included participant observations of the youth group's weekly organizing meetings as well as semi-structured interviews with 15 youth and 10 previous youth activists over the course of sixteen months. Findings suggest that these immigrant high school students developed critical youth development outcomes through
their organizing efforts, particularly related to their development of leadership skills and qualities, their identity as undocumented or immigrant youth, and their understanding of social and political inequities affecting the immigrant community. These processes prepared them to take direct action in their school and community and contributed to their


Based on the diverse experiences of LGBTQ students and their allies, this essential volume brings together in one resource the major issues that schools must address to improve the educational outcomes for gender and sexual minority students—as well as all students. Many of these issues involve negative school-based experiences that teachers and administrators need to be aware of as they interact with students on a daily basis, including those that encourage dropping out, substance abuse, and disproportionate thoughts of suicide. This insightful work not only examines the challenges of discrimination, harassment, and alienation that LGBTQ youth face, but it also captures students’ resilience and creativity in organizing against those challenges. The text includes teaching strategies, innovative projects, curricular revisions, and policy initiatives that have had positive effects on LGBTQ learning, aspirations, and school climate.


This dissertation examines the effects of participation in grassroots organizing on the capacity and commitment of public school parents and community members to engage in future activism... Drawing on social capital, resource and learning theories, I develop a conceptual model explaining how and why involvement in grassroots organizing increases the propensity for future activism among participants. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to test this model. Results indicate that participation in organizing is significantly and positively related to: (1) beliefs in collective action; (2) sense of self-efficacy; and (3) feelings of community attachment and engagement. The relationship between participation and the propensity for activism was influenced by organizational learning practices, specifically, the extent to which members were helped to develop democratic leadership skills, understanding of systems and advocacy knowledge, and awareness of their capacity to generate change. Organizational strategies that supported this development include: (a) apprenticeship and mentoring; (b) a focus on engaging members through participatory deliberation and action; and (c) the cultivation
of members' understanding of power dynamics and their critical consciousness. Learning strategies appeared most influential on newer members, suggesting a need to develop higher-order learning opportunities for more experienced members.


This article explores civic learning, civic participation, and the development of civic agency within the Council of Youth Research (the Council), a program that engages high school students in youth participatory action research projects that challenge school inequalities and mobilize others in pursuit of educational justice. We critique the neoliberal view of democracy that dominates in the existing research, policy, and practice around urban school reform and civic education and instead turn to evidence from social movements and critical social theory as a foundation for a reimagined, more robust vision of critical democracy. Through our analysis of the activities that the Council students engaged in during and after a five-week summer seminar, we offer findings about the kinds of learning and pedagogy that characterize a critical democratic space. We discuss how students and teachers learn through dialogue that characterizes them as public intellectuals; we explore how students develop new forms of civic participation through their engagement with digital, participatory media and interactive presentations to community stakeholders; and we document the developing sense of agency that students experience as a result of these authentic civic learning opportunities. We conclude by highlighting the impacts of this program and its potential to create a new paradigm for civic life and civic education.


This thesis explores civil right educationas practiced by civil rights activists from the 1960s to the present day using the city of Milwaukee as a geographical focus. The first part of the thesis focuses on the civil rights historical narratives employed throughout the second half of the twentieth century, with a focus on activists in Milwaukee. The first chapter describes the various social realms in which activists employed civil rights education including law, religious organizations, and schools. The second chapter uses 1964 Milwaukee Freedom School curricula as a case study to analyze a historically significant form of civil rights education. The second part of this thesis analyzes the more recent creation of a digital collection as an effective and increasingly relevant educational tool. The final chapter uses the March on Milwaukee Civil Rights Project collection as a case study to consider how digital archival collections can become effective educational tools in academic institutions and beyond. The final chapter contributes to existing literature by modeling assessment methods specific to a digital archival collection. The thesis argues that the March on Milwaukee digital collection is distinctive because of its community outreach initiatives, which have extended a target audience beyond the confines of higher education to at-risk high school students. This thesis finds that local
activists, teachers, and scholars have used civil rights narratives to educate and motivate people residing in cities such as Milwaukee, WI, to actively reflect on the causes of racial inequality as well as possible solutions. The case studies involving the 1964 Milwaukee freedom school curricula and the current March on Milwaukee digital collection provide specific evidence of community-driven education that have successfully engaged people who have traditionally been underserved by academic libraries and archives….The thesis concludes that the success of future digital archival collections will depend not merely on making information available to site visitors but also on the ability of librarians and archives to reach out to communities through partnerships and collaborations similar to those associated with the March on Milwaukee Civil Rights Project….


Classroom discipline is one of teachers’ greatest concerns and why many leave the profession. But discipline is rarely brought to the forefront of discussion. Thus, public discourse does not get into what actually happens during disciplinary moments. Yet these moments ultimately lead to the disproportional tracking of particular students into exclusionary tracks, funneling an underclass of students into the school-to-prison pipeline. This book is a scholarly study, readable story, and practical guide that walks teachers, administrators, and teacher education programs through the process of transforming traditional ways of thinking about classroom discipline and teaching. It lays out how to create student-centered, creative, non-punitive classrooms that authentically engage the most alienated and oppressed students in our schools and society.


In this theoretical article, I argue for a relational stance on learning as a way of reckoning with educational research as part of the settler colonial structure of the United States. Because of my geopolitical location to the United States as a settler colony, I begin by contrasting the stances of anticolonial and decolonial research. I then analyze the ways in which educational research is animated by settler colonialism in its constant pursuit of property and ownership. Through examples of research, I make visible how the physical practices of settler colonialism are echoed through material and figurative practices of education and perpetuate colonial relationships. I close with a call for educational research to become answerable to knowledge about learning through learning as being-in-relation that recognizes education and educators investments in settler colonialism.


In this era of high-stakes testing, learning objectives, and grade-level standards, interventions are all tightly prescribed from the state down, with little room for
mobilization of on-the-ground-knowledge. In this chapter, we discuss how learning may be possible through imaging and reimaging the common school-based requirement of an internship in a professional setting. We provide glimpses into an internship project designed for critical consciousness and cultural transformation rather than assimilation. Our findings address how existing structures can be modified to manifest opportunities for cultural transformation.


Between 2008 and 2012, undocumented immigrants who entered the United States as children acquired a new sense of collective self and status as they pushed for the passage of the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. In so doing, they became a new political group known as "DREAMers." To assess how and why undocumented immigrant students were constituted as political actors, I draw on in-depth ethnographic observations with one undocumented immigrant student social movement organization in Massachusetts, which went from a struggling group of young people to an established social movement organization in a period of two years. Defining actor constitution as a combination of collective identity and legitimacy, I argue that undocumented immigrant students became political actors as a result of: (1) biographical resources based in their life experiences of being partially incorporated and partially expelled from society; (2) the construction of public narratives from these life experiences; (3) the acquisition of material and cultural resources in organizations; (4) opportunities and threats within the national and Massachusetts immigration policy arenas, and (5) innovative strategies and tactics that deployed identity in these political arenas. As a result, this group constructed a collective identity centered on the name "DREAMers," and gained standing in both state and national political arenas. By bringing theories from contentious politics to the study of undocumented immigrant students, this work advances understanding of the dynamic processes that explain how this group established a collective identity and gained standing in policy-making arenas.


A transformative youth program is an approach to youth development that is focused on engaging youth in understanding and changing unjust conditions in their lives, thereby transforming themselves and the communities in which they live. The purpose of this research is threefold: (1) to explore the role of a transformative youth program in catalyzing youth organizing and activism; (2) to investigate how a neighborhood’s social and spatial conditions shape the civic education and actions of low-income, urban ethnic youth who are engaged in a transformative program; and (3) to understand how the participants such a program perceive themselves as change agents. The research centers around youth (ages 15 to 18) attending a community-based youth program in the South Bronx that engages participants in addressing social and environmental injustices in their neighborhood of Hunts Point....The research found that (1) raising youth participants'
critical consciousness, encouraging their contributions to local knowledge production and exchange, and empowering their sense of civic efficacy are key to yielding transformative outcomes; (2) youth define their neighborhoods in terms of positive and supportive social bonds fostered in the struggle against spatial inequities; and (3) youth distinguish youth activism from activism in general, which they perceive to be what adults do, and conceptualize the former as the collective response by youth and their adult allies to community-based struggles.


Context shapes how we come to understand activities, possibilities and constraints in youth organizing. Although there is increasing interest in youth organizing, little attention has been paid to the practice of youth organizing within socially conservative contexts, or to how such contexts shape the roles, perspectives, and actions of young people and of adults. Drawing on case examples of youth organizing work in Mississippi and Fresno, California, this article explores the importance of context as a core element in understanding youth activism and considers how a broader framework for understanding youth organizing through diverse contextual lenses can benefit the field.


This study looks at how the introduction of collective bargaining transformed the National Education Association (NEA), the largest teachers union in the country. Previous scholarship has highlighted the NEA's slow pace of transformation from professional association to teachers union but few studies have looked at how state affiliates of the NEA made this same transition. This study uses the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) as its primary case study to illustrate that a far quicker transition occurred at the state and local levels. MTA sources also highlight how independent local associations often were in setting their own agenda. Ultimately, it was the local associations that played a decisive role in transforming the national organization, complicating existing narratives on the NEA’s hesitant transformation.


Youth organizing work benefits young people in myriad ways, equipping them with the skills and dispositions to organize around the systemic inequities and policy decisions that threaten their communities. The findings from this life histories study in the Philadelphia Student Union (PSU) reveal that the organization’s collectivist leadership model engaged young people in developing leadership capacity among the PSU membership, participating in consensus-based decision-making and embodying positive representations of PSU in their daily lives. Together, these activities allowed them to
define and redefine the group’s internal and externalized organizational identity. In this cyclical process, young people came together to support a context that sustained individuals’ identity work through an inclusive and mutually empowering model of leadership development.


Coming out of the shadows is a powerful strategy of the undocumented youth movement, yet there has been little analysis of the ways that young immigrants have adapted lesbian and gay speech. This article examines three key language developments of this movement that intersect with LGBTQ language: (1) coming out of the shadows; (2) coming out as both undocumented and LGBTQ; and (3) use of the term “undocuqueer.” This analysis is based on observation and discourse analysis of coming out rallies and other activities of Mexican origin members of Chicago’s Immigrant Youth Justice League (IYJL) and other immigrant youth organizations in Illinois between 2010 and 2013. These linguistic innovations reflect the leadership of women and queer people in undocumented youth organizing. Armed with language, activists are developing a confrontational queer youth politics of immigration that challenges both “homonormativity” (Duggan 2002) and citizenship orthodoxies. Queer Latina/o immigrant youth use the language of sexuality for self-realization, political mobilization, and coalition-building. As more LGBTQ youth of color publicly embrace their non-normative sexualities, they may creatively use language for social justice centered in their intersectional experiences.


The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) shows a civic knowledge gap similar to the achievement gap, showing urban youth struggling in particular. However, research has shown that urban youth can be civically engaged when they are involved in projects or organizing intended to improve community conditions, not simply absorbing civic knowledge. This article shares findings from case studies of two Bronx-based community organizations that have successful models of civic engagement with urban youth. The findings reveal the practices that the adults use in the organizations to get urban youth civically engaged and to develop a “civic identity.”


Over the past ten years, the analytic formation of the school to prison pipeline has come to dominate the lexicon and general common sense with respect to the relationship between schools and prisons in the United States. The concept and theorization that undergirds its meaning and function do not address the root causes that are central to complex dynamics between public education and prisons. This paper argues that in place of the articulation of the school to prison pipeline, what is needed is a nuanced and historicized understanding of the racialized politics pertaining to the centrality of education to Black liberation struggles. The result of such work indicates that the enclosure of public education foregrounds the expansion of the prison system and consequently, schools are not a training ground for prisons, but are the key site at which technologies of control that govern Black oppression are deemed normal and necessary.


Childcare collectives have been organizing around the country in most major cities for the past several years. Their most immediate goal is to provide childcare for local social justice organizations. They are volunteer-based collectives organizing at the local level; however, many are part of a national group, the Intergalactic Conspiracy of Childcare Collectives (ICCC). Through participant-observation of an ICCC annual meeting and interviews with childcare collective members and childcare collective stakeholders, this thesis seeks to understand how and why childcare collectives organize. The research indicates that by performing carework at political meetings, events, and protests, childcare collectives build more inclusive and sustainable social movements. This thesis explores how the practices, policies, and principals of childcare collectives turn carework from an exploited and devalued labor, into a form of political organizing that confronts and challenges patriarchy, neoliberalism, and capitalism.


Structural inequalities in American public education are inextricably tied to deep-seated patterns of racial and economic segregation. In response, a growing number of organizations have launched initiatives to simultaneously revitalize neighborhoods and improve public education, emphasizing youth participation as an essential component in their efforts. We draw upon ethnographic data from two such organizations to examine their practice of place-based critical pedagogy in community development. We focus on how they engage marginalized, “hard-to-reach” youth via (1) experiential learning, to counter high-stakes testing models and cultivate a sense of ownership in the local community, and (2) empowered deliberative action, in contextualized ways.


Recent attention to youth activism for school reform reveals positive student outcomes. Yet educators may object to the use of social actions in schools, diminishing
opportunities for these benefits to accrue. This paper analyzes educators’ conceptions about the proper exercise of student voice within schools and how these coincide with activists’ tactics for school reform. The qualitative investigation rests on interviews with principals, teachers, community organizers, and students—all touched by a community-based program that encourages urban youth to organize and transform their schools. The paper seeks to bridge the perspectives of educators and activists in ways that enhance acceptance of a more robust role for students in school life.


This article attempts to build a more robust theory of the relationship between education and social change by drawing on the conceptual tools offered in the critical pedagogy and social movement literatures. Tarlau argues that while critical pedagogy has been largely disconnected from its roots in political organizing, social movement literature has shifted away from a theory of educational processes within movement building. Specifically, she suggests that the currently dominant “framing perspective” in the social movement literature is incredibly limited in its ability to analyze the pedagogical aspects of organizing. Conversely, while scholars of critical pedagogy are extremely convincing when critiquing U.S. schooling, the field is weaker when theorizing about how teachers using critical pedagogy can link to larger movements for social transformation. Critical pedagogues need more organizational thinking and social movement scholars need a more pedagogical focus. Tarlau suggests three conceptual frameworks for moving forward in this direction: the notion of social movements as pedagogical spaces, the role of informal educational projects in facilitating the emergence and strength of social movements, and the role of public schools as terrains of contestation that hold the possibility of linking to larger struggles for social justice.


Youth resistance has become a pressing global phenomenon, to which many educators and researchers have looked for inspiration and/or with chagrin. Although the topic of much discussion and debate, it remains dramatically under-theorized, particularly in terms of theories of change. Resistance has been a prominent concern of educational research for several decades, yet understandings of youth resistance frequently lack complexity, often seize upon convenient examples to confirm entrenched ideas about social change, and overly regulate what "counts" as progress. As this comprehensive
volume illustrates, understanding and researching youth resistance requires much more than a one-dimensional theory. *Youth Resistance Research and Theories of Change* provides readers with new ways to see and engage youth resistance to educational injustices. This volume features interviews with prominent theorists, including Signithia Fordham, James C. Scott, Michelle Fine, Robin D.G. Kelley, Gerald Vizenor, and Pedro Noguer, reflecting on their own work in light of contemporary uprisings, neoliberal crises, and the impact of new technologies globally. Chapters presenting new studies in youth resistance exemplify approaches which move beyond calcified theories of resistance. Essays on needed interventions to youth resistance research provide guidance for further study.


In the K–12 system, the urban school crisis affects African American males unlike any other ethnic or gender group. Consistent with national trends, Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) has faced major challenges with successfully educating African Americans. In 2010, OUSD examined longitudinal data and came to a jarring conclusion: past initiatives had done little to transform the experiences, access, or educational attainment of African American male students. Generation after generation, Black families were sending their children to school, but the ideals of an oasis of learning were met with the realities of institutionalized racism, low expectations, and marginalization. Given this calamity of underachievement, Oakland made a bold and courageous effort to no longer leave Black children behind. In 2010, the Office of African American Male Achievement (AAMA) was formed. Soon thereafter the Executive Director, Christopher P. Chatmon, launched the Manhood Development Program (MDP), an elective course offered five days a week to students during the school day. My research examines the MDP, giving particular focus on the culture, conditions, and capacities that are improving the educational experiences of students. To ascertain these elements of empowerment, I use Portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) to unearth answers. Altogether, Oakland dared to name institutionalized racism—and not the children—as the problem. Consequently, all aspects of the MDP are predicated on helping students not just survive in a racist world, but also thrive with the tools to advocate for themselves and their communities. This study provides grounded examples of a pedagogy of brotherhood that transformed the schooling experience for African American males in OUSD.


The lack of strong literacy skills and practices among students is perhaps the clearest indicator that the education system continues to leave millions of children behind. To
advance the reading, writing, and speaking skills of middle and high school students, this study examines a professional development model that brought trained community-based poets into the classroom to conduct weekly writing workshops. Over the course of two years, poet-mentor educators worked alongside 30 English Language Arts and Special Education teachers, reaching over 800 students. When the literacy program entered its second year, issues of propriety and language usages unveiled deep rifts between who students were as individuals and who educators wanted them to be as learners. The literature on multiple literacies and cultural relevancy helped frame the professional development within a larger movement to bring student voices and experiences into the curriculum, but even this scholarship does not address the contentious interplay between student self-expression, conformity, and academic achievement. So what happens when students’ poetry embodies inner-city street vernacular and volatile subject matter that offends teachers? To address this concern, my research analyzes how to use spoken word poetry as a form of critical literacy development and empowerment within the confines of school.


Nearly fifteen years after the passage of No Child Left Behind, the failures of our educational system with regard to low-income children of color remain profound. Traditional reform efforts have sought improvements solely within the confines of the school system, failing to realize how deeply educational failure is part of and linked to broader structures of poverty and racism. A social movement that creates political and cultural change is necessary to transform the racial inequities in public education itself and to connect this transformational effort to a larger movement to combat poverty and racism. The seeds of a new educational justice movement can be found in the rise of community and youth organizing efforts, in the development of teacher activism, and in the recent creation of new alliances at local, state, and national levels like those combating the school-to-prison pipeline. Many activists and educators have begun to offer a program for school transformation that connects to a broad agenda to combat racial segregation and economic insecurity, to improve housing, public health, and safety, and to reform immigration laws.


Though the titles and acronyms of policies differ from one country to another, throughout the world a political project has taken root with the assumption that to reduce poverty and inequality, governments should privatize school systems, alter teaching from a career to contract labor, use standardized tests to make students and teachers accountable, and curtail the power and legal rights of teachers unions. This article explores how teacher activists might help reverse neoliberal educational politics by developing mutually-respectful collaborations among teachers, parents and youth in poor communities, in school-based and system-wide partnerships that involve teachers unions. Analyzing
events as they were experienced and influenced by a New York City-based NGO of teachers committed to educational justice, the author examines the landscape of educational reform politics and the creation of new spaces and organizational forms not confined by collective bargaining jurisdictions and traditional bargaining demands. The study suggests that development of a social movement of teachers that might edge teachers unions in the direction of social movement teacher unionism may not occur in a linear fashion. Rather, a complex push-pull dynamic occurs with each change, opening and retracting space, remaking networks and influencing longstanding personal ties among activists.


This auto/ethnographic study narrates how members of the Association of Raza Educators (ARE), a grassroots teacher-led organization, came together in undertaking action-research within what eventually became a stalled campaign to defend South Los Angeles Elementary from corporate takeover. Most of the work within the campaign involved action-research, including what I term organic popular education. In this paper I analyze the ways in which action-research functions as public pedagogy, further arguing for studies conducted from the vantage point of people immersed in grassroots organizations.

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