



URBAN special edition

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URBAN special edition

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ABSTRACT

Currently, neoliberalism serves as the foundation for the majority of educational reform efforts. Neoliberal approaches repeatedly privilege the value of 'expert' knowledge in framing policy and practice, resulting in limited opportunities for the impact of local community knowledge and experience on teaching and learning. While the neoliberal context narrows what counts as learning, participatory action research (PAR), youth-led participatory action research (YPAR), and engaged scholarship emphasize collaborative problem-solving among community organizations and schools that can expose the dangers of neoliberal trends in education. The articles in this special edition, titled 'Challenging Neoliberal Reforms through Collaborative, Community Engaged Research,' illuminate diverse approaches to collaborative research aimed at fostering a more inclusive, productive dialogue regarding the impact and possibilities for educational reforms in K-16 schools. The authors identify the specific neoliberal reforms that shape their contexts, the nature of their collaborative research partnerships and methods, and the kinds of inroads their coalitions are making in altering harmful neoliberal policy implementations. Individually and collectively, the authors speak about new ways of framing the impact of neoliberalism on local communities. They provide alternative designs for educational policies.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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At the 2012 American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, a room full of scholars at the Grassroots Community Youth Organizing (GCYO) Special Interest Group business meeting began a discussion about how AERA members and conference participants could unite to support educational activism in future conference cities by connecting with local activist projects. For about a year before the educational node began, in an effort to honor the memory and advance the legacy of legendary scholar-activist Marilyn Gittell,¹ the Urban Research-Based Action Network had been in place to support the community-engaged scholarship of urban planners and sociologists. To carry out the vision from the GCYO conversation, Mark Warren², Ron Glass,³ and a group of education researchers in and around the GCYO SIG helped interested members link with URBAN to create a node in education. Many of the six members of the internal review team for this Special Edition were a part of that meeting. As a result of that conversation, they have been integral in contributing to the planning team for the educational node of URBAN whose aim is to carry out this vision that is

now in full swing at AERA. They serve under the National URBAN leadership of Celina Su, the inaugural Marilyn J. Gittell Chair at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

Over the past five years, this planning team, chaired first by Mark Warren, then by Ron Glass, and later by Jerusha Conner,⁴ has worked together to organize and co-sponsor, with a number of Special Interest Groups, a broad range of sessions at AERA: including presidential, symposia, paper, on and off-site sessions. These sessions support the work of local community activist organizations (1) by building community-engaged research networks across towns and cities, (2) by grappling with ethical tensions in university community-engaged scholarship, (3) by providing mentorship opportunities among senior, junior, and graduate student activist-scholars, and (4) by establishing national solidarities on behalf of pushing back unjust neoliberal reforms impacting schools, cities, and rural, urban, and suburban communities. The educational node founded a page on the national URBAN website to invite community-engaged scholars to share their community initiatives, learn from one another, and build solidarities. Most recently, Ron served on the conference planning team, and Mark and Michelle Fine⁵ earned grants to host three interdisciplinary URBAN conferences in 2015 and 2016 which have helped build momentum by connecting networks of activists and activist-scholars across the country. The first grant was an AERA conference grant; grants from the Spencer Foundation and the WT Grant Foundation funded the second and third conferences.

The following description aims to convey the work of URBAN. We invite you to go to our website and to sign up and connect to this expanding network.

The Urban Research-Based Action Network aspires to create a community of scholars and change-makers who engage and explore big questions now emerging in cities – the future of governance and democracy, the role of markets, stewardship of nature and the environment and the role of race and identity in constructing communities, to name a few – and break through the barriers that have stymied collaborative problem-solving. (<http://urbanresearchnetwork.org>)

Jim Scheurich, the editor of the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* attended an URBAN-sponsored AERA session in 2014 and invited URBAN to organize this Special Edition. URBAN is grateful to Jim, and to Jasmine Haywood for her guidance, to the external reviewers for their excellent support, and to the following educational node planning team members, who have contributed their scholarship and review of the manuscripts included with this special edition journal: Sarah Hobson,⁶ Samara Foster,⁷ Dana Wright,⁸ Joy Howard,⁹ Bernadette Doykos,¹⁰ and Elizabeth Hudson.¹¹

Introduction

Educational policy in the United States is inextricably linked to the larger global context. Currently, neoliberalism serves as the foundation for the majority of educational reform efforts (Apple, 2000; Hursh, 2007; Wells, Slayton, & Scott, 2002). Unlike classical economic liberalism, neoliberalism holds a positive conception of state power to provide policies, institutions, and management systems to facilitate the pursuit of individual self-interests, consumer choice, and competition. Neoliberal approaches repeatedly privilege the value of 'expert' knowledge in framing policy and practice, resulting in limited opportunities for the impact of local community knowledge and experience on teaching and learning (Weis & Fine, 2004). Furthermore, neoliberal policies include high-stakes testing, the proliferation of which, over the course of the last decade, has led to the narrowing of instruction across K-16 and the devaluing of higher education, historically intended to serve the public good (Ravitch, 2011).

While the neoliberal context narrows what counts as learning (Apple, 2006; Hill, 2009; Hursh, 2007), as well as our recognition of what influences inequity, collaborative research reveals the complexity of context and power dynamics (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Kirshner, 2015; Wehlage, Smith, & Lipman, 1992). Participatory action research, youth participatory action research (YPAR), and engaged scholarship emphasize collaborative problem-solving among community organizations and schools that can expose the dangers of neoliberal trends in education (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Ginwright, 2004; Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006; Wehlage et al., 1992). Alternative models of research support relational approaches in which outcomes are accountable to and negotiated by diverse stakeholders,

including community partners, teachers, parents, school leaders, and youth (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Wehlage et al., 1992). When community residents partner with university scholars in all phases of the research process, rather than merely as subjects of study, research yields more warranted findings and also more responsive and equitable policy solutions (Cammarota & Fine, 2008).

The articles in this special edition, titled 'Challenging Neoliberal Reforms through Collaborative, Community Engaged Research,' illuminate diverse approaches to collaborative research aimed at fostering a more inclusive, productive dialogue regarding the impact and possibilities for educational reforms in K-16 schools. The authors identify the specific neoliberal reforms that shape their contexts, the nature of their collaborative research partnerships, and the kinds of inroads their coalitions are making in altering harmful neoliberal policy implementations. Individually and collectively, the authors speak of new ways of framing the impact of neoliberalism on local communities and alternative designs for educational policies.

Across the stories authors tell about the formation of innovative spaces for community scholarship, several themes regarding the nature of university activist scholarship become apparent. First, the knowledge and experiences of parents, teachers, communities, and youth drive the research and activism. Second, utilizing university resources, teacher research communities, and pedagogical approaches – including digital, dramatic, and place-based resources – the authors work with communities to aggregate the perspectives of parents, grass-roots activists, and youth in the service of political change. Third, all of the authors work to return universities to their original public missions, centered in knowledge construction with the public for the public good. Fourth, instead of climbing the ladder of self-promotion, a common outcome of neoliberal policies in university hierarchies, these scholars align their scholarship with the goals and desires of community activists, expediting the quantity and force of activist voices (Gutierrez & Lipman).

In the first article, Rhoda Rae Gutierrez and Pauline Lipman wrestle with the possibilities and dilemmas of activist scholarship in the struggle for education justice in Chicago. Drawing on Saltman (2012), they name education as 'a key site of racialized neoliberalism through systems of top-down accountability, privatization of public schools, school choice, "corporate management" and "attacks on teacher unions"' (p. 1242). They again draw on Saltman (2012) to explain that these systems lead to the 'exacerbation of inequality, destabilization of low-income communities of color, decline of teaching and learning' (p. 1242). Charles Hale's work (2008) energizes their definition of activist scholarship as the responsibility of universities: 'scholarship that is *aligned* with an organized group in struggle.' They explain that 'We are activists and scholars, and the fusion of these identities shapes our work as social movement praxis.' Social movement praxis means that they are both researchers and activists at the same time; these are not separate roles. Their activist scholarship focuses on education struggles in which they are engaged. It is aligned with social movements and community organizing in Chicago to build political power to contest state and neoliberal policies. Their activist scholarship lifts up community knowledge, expertise, and desires. They detail how they support parent, teacher, student, and local organizing communities with policy analyses, economic analyses, interviews, surveys, and quantitative data of community perspectives. They conceptualize 'organizing as everyday life' and as 'fundamental to social change' and navigate accusations of the lack of credibility in their research by claiming that their proximity to local communities makes their research more credible and that adherence to strict social science standards is integral in illuminating social struggles.

The research of Nicole Mirra and John Rogers also reaffirms the historical mission of universities to advance the public good. They document and analyze the work of scholars who engage in youth participatory action research (YPAR), which is often marginalized in university spaces. Youth participatory action research privileges the local experiences of marginalized communities in the service of pursuing equity and justice. Mirra and Rogers compiled 26 interviews with university scholars from across the country who, despite the pressures to conform to individualized and self-promoting forms of research en route to tenure, have transformed their teaching and scholarship by working inside and outside of the university to implement YPAR. These scholars of many different gender, racial, and cultural backgrounds forge a variety of university, K-12 school and community partnerships that engage all youth,

especially youth of color, in community scholarship. Mirra and Rogers illustrate the many tensions of working through YPAR to challenge university epistemologies that are too often co-opted by corporate neoliberal policies that privilege the commodification of knowledge for private interests, competition, and standardization. These epistemologies often silence the study of the causes and solutions for racial, class, sexual orientation, and ethnic inequalities. The analytic typology of participatory research that Mirra and Rogers develop points to the need for youth to both gain academic skills that grant them college access and simultaneously seek to remedy the racial and economic inequalities perpetuated by universities. Finally, the authors speak to the potential dilemma of youth research being co-opted by universities for neoliberal purposes.

Central to community-engaged scholarship is the leadership of local communities. The leadership of youth of color is integral for re-shaping racial inequalities youth of color encounter in K-12 schools that are underfunded and/or that silence the experiences, cultures, languages, and struggles people of color face (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Kandaswamy, 2007). Furthermore, due to years of the depletion of city resources for people of color, economic access to higher education can be an issue for youth of color (Brock, 2010). Without proper attention to these academic, racial, and economic inequalities in universities, the retention rates for youth of color in higher education remain low (Brock, 2010). Each of the next three pieces conveys how the authors utilized media production or YPAR to engage youth in transforming the oppressive systems in which they live. These three articles demonstrate the unique student research products that youth created in the service of both gaining academic literacies and using their findings to transform racial, economic, and ethnic inequalities.

Korina M. Jocson engaged in participatory ethnographic methodologies and collaborated with a high school multimedia communications teacher in Career and Technical Education to investigate place-based media production. She conceptualizes place in the CTE program as constructed by intersecting local and translocal networks of power and privilege and marginalization (Massey, 2005; Nesper, 2008). Drawing on content and visual analysis (Rose, 2007), she researched how each student in the multimedia communications class had the opportunity to critically interrogate their personal relationship with messages from local and translocal media and the dominant narratives for identities others ascribed to them. She found that students utilized a broad array of informational and broadcasting technologies to write back to these dominant narratives and to design new spaces for themselves. Not only did youth gain more access to technical career options, but they also gained the ability to read and rewrite their identity formation processes in their local communities. Furthermore, they learned how to disrupt dominant narratives with their media production, integrating personal and social transformation into their production choices. They accessed the ways that places had shaped them, and they formed new relationships with places, exercising new awareness and agency in determining their own goals for their lives.

Antwi Akom et al. also draw on digital technologies to engage youth in what they name as YPAR 2.0. Co-founder of the Institute for Sustainable Economic, Educational, and Environmental Design, Akom connected youth GIS mapping and scholarship to a local neighborhood that was facing food inequalities in San Francisco. Akom et al. explain a community-based research plan which ensured scientific rigor of its work by subjecting research results to peer review by community, youth researchers and scientific colleagues. Using paper maps and their cell phones, youth played a pivotal role in physically and digitally mapping the locations of food stores and in qualitative data collection regarding the quality and cost of healthy food in these stores. Similar to the other YPAR studies in this edition, through such collaborative scholarship partnerships, youth used their research to help communities understand, validate, and act upon their interpretations of digital data and visual maps of inequities in their communities. Through such partnerships, Akom et al. note the actual economic and policy changes that youth have helped secure. They also note the unique nature of technology and GIS mapping in catalyzing democratic community data analysis and problem-solving regarding the unequal distribution of social goods across localities. Youth of color not only enacted rigorous research, but using their own physical and digitized data collection and analysis, they had the opportunity to interrogate the validity of an

organization's initial research. Through such university, organization, and community partnerships, they became leaders in community-research that directly impacted their neighborhoods.

Pin@y Educational Partnerships (PEP) also connects students of color, Filipina/o-American students, through YPAR to university resources, community organizations, and to Filipina/o and Filipina/o-American communities. PEP Directors Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales and Arlene Daus-Magbual, along with PEP teachers Maharaj Desai, Aldrich Sabac and Maynard Von Torres draw upon a wide range of music, media, and dramatic performance in PEP. PEP is

an Ethnic Studies educational pipeline connecting schools with universities and community organizations to provide culturally and community responsive education from kindergarten to college with a focus on Filipina/o American Studies. As part of PEP's transformative curriculum, they employ critical performance pedagogy and put students in the position to 'act' in the classroom, in their communities, and on stage.

Students in the classrooms of over 60 volunteer teachers and 300 students from kindergartners to doctoral students across the Unified School District participate in credited courses focused on histories of colonization and oppression that continue to affect Filipina/o and Filipina/o-American communities. In order to expand their background knowledge, teachers and students perform their understandings and current experiences of this oppression, before deciding upon a variety of YPAR projects. Upon completion of their YPAR, they then integrate their findings into a community show, that unites youth research from every PEP classroom from kindergarten to college.

Drawing on interviews with teachers and students, the authors research 'the impact critical performance pedagogy has on student knowledge, agency, and their sense of belonging.' They explain the power of youth critical consciousness as they access parallels in past and present oppression, as they gain tools to unpack oppression and to work toward healing, and as they become agents in sharing their research and their solutions for social ills, all while encountering a broader community network, ready to pursue collective action with them. The authors explain that this broad PEP community, which has served over 3000 students for the last 15 years, becomes a home where they can begin to heal from the neoliberal traumas encountered in their schools. They access a collective consciousness focused on deeper community connection and collective action.

Finally, Christine Brigid Malsbary captures the same emotional trauma immigrant students experience when forced to take standardized exams that determine their futures. Drawing on Dumas (2014), she situates teachers as using their lived experience to engage in everyday policy-making amidst external policies for high-stakes tests that produce suffering by restricting cultural and linguistic diversity. She researched the meanings NYC teacher activists formed about their strategic collective organizing around policy resistance that led three dozen Brooklyn High School teachers to opt out of administering a high-stakes standardized test. Their actions included educating parents about the tests and their impact on youth. Malsbary served as a witness to teachers' community-engaged work, documenting how the teachers organized themselves and decided not only to opt out of standardized testing, but also to opt into their own policy-making in the service of regaining time for meaningful learning and for joy, play, creativity, and imagination. They came to argue their position on the grounds that refusing to administer the tests was a matter of conscience, harmful to the trust and belonging students of color and immigrant students needed in order to overcome daily obstacles and traumas.

The courage of these teachers emphasizes the pertinent role these teachers played in educating the public and inspiring a movement. Not only did their collective action likely help remove this test, but also the following year, Malsbary notes that 20% of parents opted their third through eighth-grade children out of high-stakes testing (Harris, 2015). Malsbary's study re-emphasizes the support teachers need from university professors to join with them in their advocacy for all people, especially the most vulnerable: immigrant youth, economically disenfranchised youth, and youth of color.

We, the editorial team of this special edition hope this issue engages readers with these questions introduced by the scholar-activists in this edition: What does it mean to be a scholar in this world? What is the purpose of scholarship? How is activism a central tenet of scholarship? What is the nature of neoliberal reform in our institutions, and how are we working with communities to expose and challenge the implications of these reforms for all people of every background and need? The authors

of this edition challenge us to use our scholarship to work with the communities that we serve, rather than succumb to the neoliberal tendency to benefit from community knowledge for academic gain. The editorial team stands with these authors in the belief that we are not only here to create room for the voices, desires, and needs of marginalized communities. In order to advocate for disenfranchised communities, we must work with our colleagues, communities, and all students to identify and research the impact of neoliberal reforms on our institutions and on us. We too must innovate or join with those who are innovating methods of research, teaching, and service to push back against neoliberal policies and practices embedded in institutions that so often define us and our work and that too often diminish equal access and support for all youth (Allen, 1992; Flores, 2014; Tinto, 2006).

Notes

1. Marilyn Gittell, 1931–2010, was an avid scholar-activist in NYC, dedicated to justice for racial, economic, and gender inequalities. She is particularly well known for her 1960s activism in Ocean-Hill Brownsville, which returned public school control to the local communities of color the schools served. (The Marilyn Gittell Archives. The Public Science Project. <http://publicscienceproject.org/the-marilyn-gittell-archives/>).
2. Mark Warren is an Associate Professor for the Department of Public Policy and Public Affairs at the McCormack Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts, Boston.
3. Ronald Glass is a Professor of Philosophy of Education at the University of California Santa Cruz and the Principal Investigator and Director of the U.C. Center for Collaborative Research for an Equitable California (CCREC).
4. Jerusha Conner is an Associate Professor in the Department of Education and Counseling at Villanova University, Villanova, PA. She has been integral in many dimensions of the URBAN educational node and served as chair for the planning team from 2015 to 2016.
5. Michelle Fine is Professor in the Ph.D. Program in Psychology at the CUNY Graduate Center. Her leadership and scholarship have been invaluable to the many different facets of URBAN, including URBAN National Meetings, AERA presentations, fundraising, and planning and chairing URBAN conferences.
6. Sarah Hobson, Lead Editor for the Special Edition has served a variety of roles on the planning team, including heading the Publication Committee by reviewing all special edition manuscripts and coordinating the organization of internal and external reviewers, contributing to the educational node since 2012, helping organize sessions for AERA, attending URBAN conferences, and contributing to the design of the URBAN website. She now serves as co-chair for the educational node leadership team. Sarah Hobson is an Assistant Professor of Adolescence English Education at SUNY Cortland and President of Community Allies, LLC.
7. Samara Foster is the Managing Director of the Student Success Evaluation & Research Center at the University of California at Santa Cruz, where her work focuses on practices and policies that promote student retention and persistence to degree, particularly for underrepresented students. She was previously the Assistant Director of the University of California CCREC through which from 2012 to 2014, she coordinated the Education Node meetings. She reviewed manuscripts for this special edition.
8. Dana Wright is Associate Professor of Education and Co-Chair of the Education Department at Connecticut College. For this edition, she provided internal reviews and helped locate authors and external reviewers. She has also served on the planning team. She recently published *Active Learning: Social Justice Education and Participatory Action Research*.
9. Joy Howard, Internal Reviewer for the special edition, has served on the planning team since 2013, took part in internal reviews and securing external reviewers, and has organized and participated in URBAN node-sponsored AERA sessions. She now serves as a co-chair for the Educational node Leadership team. Joy is an Assistant Professor in the Teacher Education Department at the University of Southern Indiana.
10. Bernadette Doykos is a Ph.D. candidate in Community Research and Action at Peabody College at Vanderbilt University and a Research Associate at CEPARE at the University of Southern Maine. For this edition, she provided internal reviews.
11. Elizabeth Hudson is an Honors Faculty member at the Irvin D. Reid Honors College at Wayne State University. She has been a member of the URBAN Educational node planning team and contributed internal reviews for this edition.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Sarah R. Hobson, Lead Editor for the Special Edition has served a variety of roles on the Planning Team, including heading the Publication Committee by reviewing all special edition manuscripts and coordinating the organization of internal and external reviewers, contributing to the educational node since 2012, helping organize sessions for AERA, attending URBAN conferences, and contributing to the design of the URBAN website. She now serves as co-chair for the educational node Leadership team. Sarah Hobson is an Assistant Professor of Adolescence English Education at SUNY Cortland and President of Community Allies, LLC. She researches how ethnodrama can be used to facilitate participatory action research and critical collaborative inquiry. Two recent publications include 'There is enough time: Accounting for each student's learning trajectory and identity needs with proleptic-ethnodrama,' *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* (2015) and 'The power and possibilities for understanding teaching in these times with ethnodramatic inquiries into teacher stories: Two reviews' (2016).

Samara Foster is the Managing Director of the Student Success Evaluation & Research Center at the University of California at Santa Cruz, where her work focuses on practices and policies that promote student retention and persistence to degree, particularly for underrepresented students. She was previously the Assistant Director of the University of California CCRC through which from 2012 to 2014, she coordinated the Education Node meetings. She reviewed manuscripts for this special edition. She also researches gender issues in education policy and practice. A forthcoming publication is *Ethical Issues in Equity-Oriented Collaborative Community-Based Research* (Palgrave International Handbook on Action Research).

Dana Wright is Associate Professor of Education and Co-Chair of the Education Department at Connecticut College. For this edition, she provided internal reviews and helped locate authors and external reviewers. She has also served on the Planning Team. She recently published *Active Learning: Social Justice Education and Participatory Action Research*. Her research interests include Curriculum Theory and Pedagogy, Participatory Action Research, and Urban Education and the Contexts of Teaching and Learning. Active Learning examines a participatory action research (PAR) project led by young people as a teaching and learning approach with implications for pedagogy, schools, educational policy and education reform and transformation.

Joy Howard, Internal Reviewer for the special edition, has served on the planning team since 2013, took part in internal reviews and securing external reviewers, and has organized and participated in URBAN node-sponsored AERA sessions. She now serves as a co-chair for the Educational node Leadership team. Joy is an Assistant Professor in the Teacher Education Department at the University of Southern Indiana. Her research interests include racial socialization, teacher identity, and mixed race youth. Two of her recent publications include: 'Missing stories: The messy processes, multifaceted risks, and multiple roles of critical ethnographers in 3rd Annual Special Theme Issue for Critical Questions in Education' (2016) and 'Unbecoming. . . responding to colorblindness: An autoethnography,' *Becoming critical: Oppression, resistance, and the emergence of a critical educator/researcher* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 2015).

Bernadette Doykos is a Ph.D. candidate in Community Research and Action at Peabody College at Vanderbilt University and a Research Associate at CEPARE at the University of Southern Maine. For this edition, she provided internal reviews. She examines how youth's multiple environments (e.g., home, school, and community) combine to impact their access to and uptake of educational opportunities and, subsequently, influence outcomes throughout the lifespan. Two recent publications include: 'Paving the pathway: Exploring student engagement and satisfaction with professional development resources in doctoral education,' *Research in Higher Education* (2016) and *Academics in action! A model for community-engaged research, teaching, and service* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2016).

Elizabeth Hudson is an Honors Faculty member at the Irvin D. Reid Honors College at Wayne State University. She has been a member of the URBAN Educational node Planning Team and contributed internal reviews for this edition. She works in Detroit to build collaborative research projects with partners who aim to improve educational access. She also studies deliberative problem solving in communities and cultivating civic mindedness in college students. She has two articles in press: 'Communicative Politics: The role that deliberation moderator trainings play in college student civic development,' *College Students and Politics* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press) and 'Conflating community means and organizational ends: Reciprocity in a multi-sector higher education access partnership,' *Engaged Research and Practice: Higher Education and the Pursuit of the Public Good* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing).

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