

**Youth literacies and social justice**

Now more than ever, literacies are playing an integral role in understanding, navigating and mobilizing complex social words. Yet, what is different and what is the same in literacy research? In what ways, do we as educators and researchers view and theorize literacies in the current digital era? In what ways are youth engaging different forms of literacies in and beyond classrooms? How are literacies conceived as a social practice related to and serve as tools in combating social inequities and issues of social justice? In what ways are youth talking back and speaking truth to power? What educative processes are involved? What youth literacies have emerged as catalysts for social justice and activist work? Why do they matter in this particular historical moment? Our themed issue pulls together cutting edge scholarship that highlights artmaking, learning and teaching to incite further dialogue at the intersection of youth literacies and social justice.

With continuous flows of information encouraged by new technologies, many young people around the world are engaging literacies in ways that demonstrate sophisticated civic participation and creative production (Green, 2016; Jocson, 2015; Morrell *et al.*, 2013; Rogers *et al.*, 2015; Simon *et al.*, 2014; Soep and Chavez, 2010). Literacy practices at home, in school and in places in between have arguably become far more visible than ever, and many youths are contributing to broader discourses and forms of action in their respective contexts. These youths, with the support of peers, educators and other adults, are increasingly putting their mark on the world despite contradictions and challenges in politically austere times.

To try to capture the diverse ways that youths are mobilizing literacy practices toward social justice learning, teaching and activism, we have organized this themed issue into two sections. The first section offers more traditional academic articles by researchers in and out of university contexts, several of which were produced with youths and community partners. In the second section, we present the artistic creations and scholarship of youth working in collaboration with adult teachers and researchers.

In the article section, we feature six interdisciplinary perspectives on youth literacies inclusive of visual and dramatic arts, filmmaking and writing. Tamara Butler offers a portrayal of actionist work by young girls of color whose artmaking practices center on social justice in the context of a World Humanities classroom in South Carolina. Butler brings attention to black girlhood studies and interstitial scholarship to examine forms of critical and creative literacies. What emerged was a collective biography as a way to tackle difficult social issues such as human sex trafficking. Pat Enciso, Brian Edmiston, Allison Volz, Bridget Lee and Nithya Sivashankar theorize critical dramatic inquiry as an embodied social practice with the potential to transform how youth and teachers experience social justice issues in classrooms. They document how a group of middle school students and their teachers in a summer school drama project invented and enacted responses to the trauma that families experienced in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The authors present a powerful argument for the role of drama and imagination as forms of transformative action in critical literacy pedagogy. Cassandra Scharber, Kris Isaacson, Tracey Pyscher and Cynthia Lewis report on what happens when participatory culture meets critical practice in a summer internship program offered by

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a community-based media center called St. Paul Neighborhood Network. They focus on the intersection of documentary filmmaking combined with a social justice ethos to expand our understanding of technology-mediated literacies. The authors remind us the importance of asking “what is possible” and “how it comes to be possible” to create opportunities for youth in technology-mediated learning settings.

Shifting to writing as a form of artmaking, Logan Manning documents the retrospective reflections and experiences of youths who participated in a poetry course at a small public charter school in the San Francisco Bay Area for students who had struggled in more traditional schools. Youths in Manning’s study reflect on how poetry offered them a vehicle for “digging deep” into personal and social issues that mattered to them and provided touchstones for addressing concerns in their lives and communities. Bernard Hall describes the promises and challenges of using hip hop pedagogies in an after-school hip-hop-based spoken word poetry club for middle school students in a small, urban public school district. Hall, a black male teacher educator and cultural insider, highlights the instructive tensions experienced working with two white, female reading specialists and hip-hop cultural outsiders. Modeling the possibilities of a culturally sustaining English language arts classroom, students explore performance poetry as a tool to critically think and write about living and learning in their local and global communities. Finally, with a similar approach to exploring the potential of youth literacies, Edward Curammeng, Daisy Lopez and Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales argue for the use of ethnic studies as a framework for teaching and learning literacy in ways that both draw upon cultural resources in diverse communities and are simultaneously responsive to the needs of communities. They describe how ethnic studies informed critical literacy curriculum created by Pin@y Educational Partnerships. These partnerships connect undergraduate and graduate students interested in teaching with San Francisco public schools to support youths to take on more activist orientations to social problems that impact their lives and learning.

In the creative section, we feature visual art produced by youth themselves as a way to expand perspectives on youth literacies and social justice. This section is purposefully included to be explicit about recognizing young people not only as authors and artists but also as knowledge producers whose works directly shape discourses about youth. Rob Simon, Sarah Evis, Ty Walkland, Amir Kalan and Pamela Baer present artwork and artists’ statements created by middle school students who participated in a research collaboration called Addressing Injustices Project, which involved co-authoring social justice curriculum with teacher candidates from the University of Toronto. Students’ multimodal responses to Art Spiegelman’s Holocaust memoir *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* (1986) demonstrate the crucial role the arts can play in critical literacy as a means of interrogating and communicating complex social, historical and identity issues. Daniela Bascuñán presents the creative work of nearly two dozen third graders who use mixed media texts to convey their critical reflections on the Indian residential school experiences of thousands of children of indigenous descent. Through images and texts, these eight- and nine-year-olds display an awareness and understanding of displacement, power, racism, identity and assimilation. Readers are left recognizing young children as emerging “cultural citizens” capable of understanding complex histories and proposing ethical ways of living in community. Finally, Jenna Cushing-Leubner, Brian Lozenski, Erika Castra and Gabrielle Jackson use spoken word and graphic art

to navigate multiple intersectional identities and culture. The artworks of Latina and Black woman activist researchers offer a lens into participatory action research on language, colonization of black lives and educational justice in schools.

To close out this themed issue is a commentary by Korina Jocson, who presents an invitation to re-make cultural imaginaries. Jocson describes how writing as groundwork for expanding spaces of possibility brought about through new questions and key pauses for rethinking youth literacies, social justice and education.

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