

# Community Literacy Journal

---

Volume 8  
Issue 1 Fall, Special Issue: Youth, Sexuality,  
Health, and Rights Guest Edited by Adela C.  
Licona and Stephen T. Russell

Article 3

---

Fall 2013

## Education/Connection/Action: Community Literacies and Shared Knowledges as Creative Productions for Social Justice

Adela C. Licona  
*University of Arizona*, [aclicona@email.arizona.edu](mailto:aclicona@email.arizona.edu)

J. Sarah Gonzales  
*Truth Sarita, LLC; Spoken Futures, Inc.*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/communityliteracy>

---

### Recommended Citation

Licona, Adela C., and J. Gonzales. "Education/Connection/Action: Community Literacies and Shared Knowledges as Creative Productions for Social Justice." *Community Literacy Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2013, pp. 9–20, doi:10.25148/clj.8.1.009321.

This work is brought to you for free and open access by FIU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Community Literacy Journal* by an authorized administrator of FIU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [dcc@fiu.edu](mailto:dcc@fiu.edu).

## Education/Connection/Action: Community Literacies and Shared Knowledges as Creative Productions for Social Justice

Adela C. Licona and J. Sarah Gonzales

This article highlights Education/Connection/Action (ECA), a locally developed community pedagogy deployed at a youth activism summer camp that served as a site for a community/academic teaching and research collaboration. Youth considered connections between a set of issues, including a local ban on Ethnic Studies, the School-to-Prison Pipeline, and Youth Sexuality, Health, and Rights. They drew from lived and learned literacies to inform participatory media projects that critically and creatively address restrictions on access to local knowledges and information with particular relevance to youth sexuality, health, and rights (broadly defined). In highlighting youth voices, desires, and needs across distinct youth communities, their collaborative productions demonstrate coalitional potential and a collective call for change.

*We, the youth, believe abstinence-only is not acceptable.  
Comprehensive sex education is not promoting sex, but knowledge.  
It's better to be aware, informed, and prepared instead of ignorant and fearful of change.  
We are a new generation.  
We are change, tolerance, and understanding.  
No longer streets gathered of polychromatic lowriders and the competition of Macho  
Men stuck through cities and cries of "no homo."  
We need purified love, acceptance, forgiveness, understanding, and bravery for change.  
We, the youth, want love, no more ignorant love.*

– Alexia Vazquez & Enrique Garcia, TYPS Poets &  
Nuestra Voz Racial Justice Summer Camp Participants, 2011

The poem above, titled “No More Ignorant Love,” instantiates the powerful, and powerfully creative, work written and performed at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Nuestra Voz: Youth, Art and Activism Summer Camp. It reflects the arts-based approach engaged throughout the camp, while also elucidating the potential of using art to discuss and act on civic and social justice issues. Alexia, a high school senior, and Enrique, a high school junior, co-wrote this poem at the end of a series of roundtables that introduced participants to youth-identified themes of interest including the Ethnic Studies Ban (Arizona state laws ARS §§ 15-111 and ARS §§ 15-112), the School-to-Prison Pipeline, and Youth, Sexuality, Health, and Rights. In these roundtables, youth used their own lived experiences, interests, and desires to inform the discussions, and collab-

orated on action projects. The poem is an expression of an emergent consciousness about the interlocking relationship between sex, gender, race, and class and, thus, it served a pedagogical purpose in the camp by positioning poets as peer educators.

In this report we intend to explore both the pedagogical strategies that enable young people, such as Alexia and Enrique, to emerge as poets and peer educators, and the collaborative approaches that support such strategies. We introduce a framework developed by community literacy practitioner J. Sarah Gonzales, the *Education / Connection / Action* (ECA) approach, and describe the ways that our collaboration around arts-based inquiry informed a number of youth-led productions. Youth were supported in their desire to speak back to the authoritative discourses pathologizing activist youth and to speak up regarding constraints on their pursuits of knowledge, interests, needs, and dreams. First, however, we will provide some background about the development of our particular collaboration, along with the contexts that framed the summer camp.

### **Creative Space for Youth under Fire: Background and Context**

We (J. Sarah Gonzales and Adela C. Licona) came together initially around our shared interest in racial justice.<sup>1</sup> Gonzales served as Director of the Racial Justice Program, including the *Nuestra Voz Latin@ Youth Initiative* summer camp, at the YWCA Tucson. Licona is Co-Director of the Crossroads Collaborative at the University of Arizona, a project funded by the Ford Foundation to foster action-oriented research collaborations that seek to understand the constraints and possibilities around what youth know, what they want and need to know, and how they learn about sexuality, health, and rights. We both believe in the need for critical community education, and we each work on issues of social justice from our distinct locations in a community-serving organization and at a public university. We were interested in collaborating on issues of racial justice, sexual and gender justice, as well as immigrant/immigration, economic, and reproductive justice. We each positioned ourselves as adult allies to local youth, and to the youth movements that were emerging in Tucson as a response to regressive legislation in the state of Arizona.

We started our collaboration in the midst of a political climate that fueled, and was fueled by, social panic expressed in particularly regressive legislation with dramatic implications for youth participants (see Herdt, 2009, on moral and sexual panics). It was a time marked by the passage of such legislation as SB 1070, officially named the “Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act” but popularly referred to as the anti-immigrant, anti-immigration, “papers please” legislation. This act was considered among the most restrictive pieces of anti-immigrant legislation in the U.S. when it initially passed through the Arizona state legislature in 2010. Many youth participants felt threatened by this legislation because of its sanctioning of racial profiling, and because either they or their family members held differing immigration statuses.

Arizona House Bill (HB) 2281 (which later became state laws ARS §§ 15-111 and ARS §§ 15-112), popularly known as the ban on Ethnic Studies, was also a part of the suite of panic-inflected legislation. This bill prohibits public and charter schools

in Arizona from promoting either the “overthrow of the U.S. government” or “resentment toward a particular race or class of people” and from advocating ethnic solidarity or curriculum designed for a “particular ethnic group.” It was passed to ban the teaching of Mexican American Studies in the Tucson Unified School District, the largest district in the city; the law threatened other Ethnic Studies programs in the state as well (Basu; Planas). Youth experienced the ban as a restriction on their right to learn from and access culturally relevant material in their classroom contexts. The legislation fueled a youth movement that itself also fed into the panic that defined the Arizona legislature at this time. Several camp participants were active in protesting the Ethnic Studies ban at the local and state levels.

Finally, a bill that received far less media attention, but was nonetheless a part of the panic-inflected legislation, was Senate Bill (SB) 1309, known as the Parent’s Bill of Rights. This bill, like HB 2281, functioned to restrict students’ access to knowledge and rights regarding their own health and sexual education by granting parents the right to opt students out of classes with any sexual content. The fervor in the local community was heightened by the intensity of national and global media in the city, and by the regularly occurring youth-organized protests.

In response to this local context, we planned a social justice summer camp focused on art as activist expression, using youth-created multimodal productions to move their voices into public spaces where decisions were being made. Licona joined the weekly planning meetings in anticipation of the camp, and participated as a volunteer and teacher-researcher at the weeklong summer camp directed by Gonzales. As community workers, activists, and researchers, we came to know, and opened ourselves to learn from, one another. Our roles in our collaborations became that of action-oriented teacher-researcher with one another as well as with the youth (see Licona and Russell, in preparation), as we sought to develop guiding principles and strategies for facilitating community education, connection, reflection, and action explicitly with and for youth participants (see Mitchell on action research and new social movement mobilization).

### **The *Education / Connection / Action* (ECA) Approach: Applied Principles of Community Literacy and Action-Oriented Collaborations**

It was in the context of YWCA Tucson’s Racial Justice Program that Gonzales actively developed and began to implement the Education/Connection/Action (ECA) approach, which aims to build pedagogical practices that honor spaces and practices of community education. ECA begins with a commitment to engaging local histories with an understanding of youth as knowledgeable and as interested in learning.<sup>2</sup> Each element of ECA identifies and informs youth-centered practices to prepare participants for an arts-based approach to learning, teaching, and performing. ECA was specifically designed as a critical community pedagogy to work in community contexts and was, in fact, developed by a community activist and literacy practitioner outside of formal educational institutions (see Anzaldúa; Boggs; Freire; hooks). In the *Nuestra Voz* camp, ECA worked to foster youth voice and promote collaborative learning and action. While the elements of ECA praxis elaborated upon in what fol-

lows are discussed as distinct, the framework is not linear. In other words, the categories that comprise this approach are related and not always neatly distinguishable.

### Education

The first element of ECA, “Education,” refers to the discussion of locally meaningful and culturally relevant topics and goals, determined in collaboration with youth and adult allies. This approach assumes youth have both something to say and to learn from each other and from their adult allies. Such an approach allows youth to participate in shaping the agenda for conversation, share distinct and even contradictory perspectives, and critically examine relevant topics.

Our camp planning committee comprised youth from the Nuestra Voz Youth Advisory Committee, members of the Crossroads Collaborative at the University of Arizona, and adult-ally directors from local youth-serving programs. Members of the committee brought ideas and research from their areas of interest and expertise to develop activities that facilitated participant engagement in the goals of the Nuestra Voz Camp. Together, we decided on three camp themes: the Ethnic Studies Ban; the School-to-Prison Pipeline; and Youth, Sexuality, Health and Rights.

The second key element of the ECA’s “Education” principle is creating space for youth to be recognized as holders and producers of knowledge about these topics through their personal experiences and various ways of knowing. Because we intentionally recruited youth from several different activist organizations, the youth were able to share from their broad and distinct experiences, social locations, and perspectives. The youth participants from Kore Press’s Grrls Literary Activism workshops, for instance, arrived at camp already trained to use their individual and collective voices to speak up in the public realm about injustices, including gender oppressions. The youth participants from the Eon Youth Program at Wingspan, Southern Arizona’s LGBT Community Center, arrived at camp well-versed in sexual health and sexual justice.

Finally, returning Nuestra Voz program participants arrived at the summer camp with a keen understanding of race, racism, racial trauma, and racial healing due to their participation throughout the year in the racial justice programs of YWCA Tucson. In other words, each of the youth groups arrived with lived and learned knowledges and forms of expertise that helped inform and enhance a cross-perspectival approach to the work emerging from the summer camp. We encouraged participants to share through a roundtable format that promoted group discussion.

We also collaborated with Crossroads Collaborative scholar Londie Martin and various teacher-researchers to develop a multimodal literacy activity called “I’m on the Map,” which highlights the place-based, lived knowledges of youth and their spatialized practices. On this digital interactive map, youth located themselves, identified the places meaningful to them in their everyday lives, and highlighted the places in which they were involved in change-oriented projects. It offered an opportunity for the development of relational literacies, or those practices that can make youth visible, knowable, and understandable to one another, and allowed participants to realize that youth from across multiple community contexts were involved in related change-oriented activities. Through the “I’m on the Map” activity, partici-

pants co-developed a critical awareness of other places and practices across the Tucson community.

### Connection

“Connection,” the second element of ECA, refers to the opportunities youth participants are given to explore how the youth-identified and -developed camp topics are connected to one another across distinctions in race, class, gender, sexuality, education, and immigrant status. Participants worked through activities designed to challenge them to creatively identify connections between the topics, themselves, and their communities. It is through the “Connection” component that participants began to see themselves and their individual and community histories as meaningful and relevant. They began to identify not only as agents of local histories, but of social change as well.<sup>3</sup>

For example, to encourage youths’ analytical connections between personal stories and broader histories of the topics, we created an “historic timeline” for youth to help populate, a practice we learned at the Gay-Straight Alliance Advocacy and Youth Leadership Academy held in Sacramento, CA. We used butcher paper along a wall to map out the international, national, local, and personal timeline of a topic, inviting consideration of the multiple relationships between events along these temporal and geographic axes. This timeline included major events in the world, in the United States, in the state of Arizona, and in the lives of youth participants that we discussed as a whole group. Youth were encouraged to identify and reflect on how their experiences correlated with broader historic events. This exercise not only helped youth to connect their individual lives to world events, it made them legible as social and historic actors in a local context.

To foster awareness of connections between overlapping systems of injustice, exclusion, and oppression, we additionally provided a tool to youth participants that was informed by the work of Critical Race theorist, Mari Matsuda, and moved them to consider “asking the other question.” Participants used the “other question” approach throughout the camp to first identify racism in a given context and then to see if, through critical inquiry (asking different questions about the same contexts), participants could also identify sexism, classism, and/or heterosexism. In this way, participants were encouraged to consider multiple perspectives and actively relate across differences to collaborate in projects for social justice. They also learned the importance of carefully constructing questions from multiple perspectives within the practice of critical inquiry.

### Action

ECA’s final component, “Action,” refers to understanding the unique power of young people to address social justice issues in their communities. “Action” provides a space for youth to interpret their work as activism, to brainstorm and create art that uses their talents to support change, and to develop a perspective about “Action” that conveys both short- and long-term goals. Numerous examples of youth- and adult-ally created art activism served to inspire, encourage and model “Action.” At the camp, participants developed groups around a focus topic and worked intensively on creat-

ing a project that was presented to a community audience of other youth, adults, family members, invited city officials, and supporters of the YWCA.

Participants chose to center our “Action” efforts on media literacy and civic and arts activism in the context of social marketing (see Duncan-Andrade). Youth were presented with definitions and examples of social and corporate marketing to consider the various ways in which marketing techniques are used to persuade, educate, and encourage change.<sup>4</sup> In small groups, youth viewed specific social marketing campaigns and discussed questions such as: What behavior is the ad targeting? What change are they asking the viewer to make? Who is their target audience? Who created the ad? Print media, DIY videos, and guerilla media styles were examined to show a wide range of possibilities, and to address the ways in which community-based social marketing can be utilized—particularly when access to technology is limited.

The social marketing approach was intended to teach youth about the rhetorical framing of media messages: Participants learned about the context within which a message is created, the role of the author/s, and the idea of “audience.” Three groups formed around the camp themes of Ethnic Studies, the School-to-Prison Pipeline, and Youth, Sexuality, Health, and Rights. In whole-group discussions, youth explored how these topic areas were similar and dissimilar. We recognized that one commonality across the three topics was the restriction youth experienced in terms of access to knowledge and resources, and action projects addressed this restriction. Youth produced media from their own perspectives and social locations (see Henry Jenkins, 2007, on participatory culture and media education), through art forms including writing, spoken word, video production, and photography.

### Group One: A Focus on Ethnic Studies

The group focusing on Ethnic Studies decided to address the violent and often racist language used in online comments (see Baym)<sup>5</sup> in response to local newspaper stories referencing Ethnic Studies debates in Tucson. They discussed the different ways in which they and their peers had experienced the efforts to ban Ethnic Studies, and noted their frustration at receiving negative messages and threats, in addition to being dismissed or ignored by adults in decision-making roles and other seats of power. Youth found that anonymous commenters expressed more discursive violence online, particularly when discussing issues of immigration and race.

Building on what they had learned about community-based social marketing, the group launched a mini-campaign around the slogan, “Online Comments Don’t Stay Online.” With this video, the group hoped to inform the community about the negative effects of violent language used to frame the debate and its possible correlation to verbal and physical threats made against youth in their efforts to save Ethnic Studies. Their video short highlighted the hostile online media climate that was created around the Ethnic Studies debates, and how it permeated their lives as students and as family and community members.

### Group Two: A Focus on the School-to-Prison Pipeline

The second group addressed the school-to-prison pipeline and zero-tolerance sentencing policies, using the media of stop motion photography and animation to create a short video. They worked to intervene in the predominant rhetorical framing of youth as disinterested in their education, unmotivated, criminal, and as predestined failures. Together with adult allies, youth researched statistics about bullying and the various forms of discrimination youth from diverse backgrounds experience in school. They also considered the consequences of being educated in schools with a police presence and harsh consequences for minor infractions. They found creative ways to educate one another on the statistics and labels that negatively affect young people. The video calls for youth, adults, and the greater community to reimagine youth as interested, motivated, and capable. Ultimately, their creative work calls on community members to take action to make schools safer, more productive, and a meaningful learning environment for all young people.

### Group Three: A Focus on Sex Ed

The third group focused on the *de facto* practice of abstinence-only education in Arizona schools. They discussed the consequences of abridged access to information on sexual health and healthy sexualities. They learned about recent legislation, termed the Parents’ Bill of Rights, that required parental permission for students’ participation in sexual education courses, and simultaneously established the right for parents to opt their students out of any class with sexual content. They expressed the need, as did youth in the Ethnic Studies group, for curriculum to be relevant to their lives, and for a broad youth population to be represented in their curricula.

These youth expressed the desire to learn more about how to have healthy interpersonal relationships. They confronted the harsh realities of not having access to the knowledge that they knew they needed to be sexually and relationally healthy. Informed by the principles of community-based social marketing, this group decided to create a public service announcement for viewing by other camp participants and a public audience at the end of the camp, and for use by the Crossroads Collaborative. They interviewed one another about their experiences in sex education classes: some students had not had sex education; some had had abstinence-only health classes. Others had received comprehensive sexuality education at the Eon Youth Lounge.

Their conversations strategically employed the toolbox the planning committee had prepared, which included information about safe sex, as well as local and national statistics concerning youth sexual health. Youth drew damaging statistics on their bodies and added storytelling pieces from the interviews they conducted with one another to illustrate diverse perspectives and damaging consequences of youth experience with abstinence-only education. This creative approach served as a strategy to disrupt deficit-driven (limited and limiting) understandings of youth and their needs (see Solórzano & Yosso); to focus on the ill effects of abstinence-only education; and to intervene in practices that rendered all LGBTQ students, and any sexually active students, invisible in abstinence-only educational contexts. Additionally, and as an act we’ve come to understand as a literacy remix, they re-distributed speaking parts that

situated them outside their own identities throughout the video (see Jenkins et al. on participatory culture and remixed media). For example, one student might speak on behalf of a transgender participant but not necessarily identify as transgender. This accomplished a kind of coalitional approach to the making of their PSA. By remixing stories, youth effectively disconnected bodies from their particular narratives to challenge dominant cultural logics (and their regulating powers) in order to produce images of youth as subjects who desire knowledge/s and claim the right to access them, produce them, and teach them (see Butler).<sup>6</sup>

The critical and creative work that youth generated at camp functioned rhetorically to intervene in deficit-driven stories and statistics that produce misunderstandings of youth and their lived contexts. Camp participants chose to produce slam poetry and video performances to address the intersections of their identities, experiences, and social locations. Through these productions, youth expressed an understanding that they were being kept from pursuing particular knowledges and resources. They believed that many adults in the community had low estimations of their abilities and potentials. They collectively questioned how it is possible to move through a system of formal education and still lack the knowledge needed to make informed and healthy choices about their lives.

Evidence of the successful integration of the “action” component of ECA included youths’ self-presentation as holders and producers of knowledge; their coalitional efforts; their expanded understanding of connections across types of oppression; and their ultimate actions to change something in the world. Youth creatively and confidently integrated their lived knowledges and experiences with new knowledges, and spoke with confidence and conviction about their needs. Spoken word and slam poetry have become sites and practices for youth from diverse locations in Tucson to continue to express and to take action on their shared needs, dreams, and desires.

### **ECA for Community / Academic Collaborations: Possibilities, Limitations, and Implications**

In creating a space in which youth experienced themselves and their communities as important and informative, and in facilitating youth voice and advocating for the rights of youth to engage in social issues that impact them and their communities, the *Nuestra Voz* summer camp succeeded in meeting its objectives. Youth participated in a practice of relational and remixed literacies when they made themselves legible to one another by sharing life stories and deeply held interests. In learning from one another, and allowing that learning to inform broader inquiry, all participants—youth and adult allies alike—engaged in a generative reciprocity of teaching and of research. Adults learned, or were reminded, that youth care about themselves, one another, their schools, homes, and communities.

Pre-surveys and post-surveys, designed and developed by youth and adult participants and members of the Crossroads Collaborative, also suggest the effectiveness of the ECA approach we engaged at the camp. Pre-surveys revealed that youth arrived feeling “sad,” “frustrated,” and “angry,” as well as with a clear desire to better understand both passed and pending legislation in Arizona. They also wanted to

learn about how to respond to issues they considered relevant to their lives in a way that was meaningful, effective, and that would be heard and seriously considered—especially by those in positions to facilitate change. Post-surveys indicated that participants learned that the broad issues the camp addressed were connected and mutually relevant; that they had a right to use their voices and visions to express needs, interests, dreams, and desires; and that art can serve as a tool for education and activism. They reported feeling “passionate” about change and “determined” to participate in their schools and communities—particularly around the right to comprehensive knowledge and information.

While these camp successes were significant, there were also challenges to implementing and collaborating within the ECA framework—particularly in the camp’s one-week timeframe. One challenge that we had not anticipated was the arrival of already-formed groups of young people. It was a challenge to encourage participants out of the groups they were first affiliated with—even though the work that was ultimately produced expressed strong coalitional potential. With more time, and perhaps better-developed strategies, we can imagine a more robust mixing of youth participants across creative productions and performances.

While we understand that there are elements of the camp that cannot be replicated across distinct contexts, we do believe there is much here that can inform related efforts. Literacy practitioners in many situations may be able to draw from ECA principles to create effective learning and action communities. ECA’s first principle of “Education” calls for the participation of learners in the selection of content, and the honoring of learners as holders and producers of knowledge, concepts that can be implemented through practices such as advisory councils. The concept of “Connection” draws attention to the need for coalitional work. Collaborations can be designed to explicitly encourage participants to connect across social spaces and identifications, learning how to organize themselves toward critical inquiry and creative collaborations. ECA’s final principle, “Action,” allows participants the space to empower each other to co-present their projects and knowledges about social justice to one another and to the greater community.

When Alexia Vazquez’ and Enrique Garcia’s poem, “No More Ignorant Love,” was performed at the community event concluding the camp, youth voice was made audible. The performance served as a reminder that there is much to learn from youth whose own lives are expressions of lived knowledges and lived desires. The production and performance of the poem became a form of youth community action. When youth are supported to bring their lived and learned knowledges together, they learn to use their voices to tell about their lives (and so their histories), to teach, and to call for needed change as an expression of informed action.

Camp youth emerged as critical and creative peer educators and collaborators fully capable of participating in the civic realm and of making themselves legible and recognizable to one another as allies in broad-based social justice work. Youth called on their formal and experiential literacies—including academic, community, and family literacies—to craft creative participatory media productions addressing injustices and inequities in Tucson and beyond.

## Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank Tucson youth for their work and collaborations to plan, facilitate, and create the productions and performances we consider here. We thank Stephen T. Russell and Brenda O. Daly for their helpful reviews and comments on early drafts of our manuscript and Leah Stauber for her editorial assistance. We offer special thanks to Rachael Wendler for her support, wisdom, and insightful suggestions. Finally, we would like to thank the Ford Foundation for their generous support.

## Endnotes

1. Prior to the collaboration, Gonzales worked with local middle and high school students in Tucson for a three-year focus on race, racism, racial trauma, and racial healing through performance. Licona had just finished work on her book on zines, or self-published magazines: *Zines in Third Space: Radical Cooperation and Borderlands Rhetorics*. In the book, Licona explores the counter-cultural productions and coalitional potentials and practices of queer and queer-of-color zinesters or zine authors.

2. Licona's work as a critical feminist pedagogue is further informed by a Funds of Knowledge approach to learning contexts, the principles of place-based pedagogy, and the concept of critical localism (see Stephen Goldzwig; Norma Gonzáles, Luis Moll, and Cathy Amanti). In terms of community literacies, these concepts are connected to Goldblatt's belief that we should be actively aware of the real problems faced by everyday members of the communities in which we live (see Eli Goldblatt).

3. Principles of radical and feminist pedagogies together with LatCrit and Critical Race Theory (CRT), as well as literatures in youth action research, inform our understanding of participants as agents of local histories and social change. On radical pedagogy, see Elizabeth Ellsworth; Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren; and Carmen Luke. On youth action research, especially relevant to our local context, see Julio Cammarota and Michelle Fine.

4. Gonzales draws from the work of Doug McKenzie-Mohr and William Smith in *Fostering Sustainable Behavior: An Introduction to Community-based Social Marketing* (2011) to inform her approach to social marketing as a practice that puts broad notions of societal benefit over profit.

5. The process and practice of "extremely argumentative communication," understood as "messages that include swearing, insults, name calling, negative affect, and typographic energy," is also called flaming, and is highlighted in the work of Nancy Baym, who focuses her attentions on social networking sites, SNS, and other social media (*Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 57).

6. Licona is at work developing and connecting concepts of remixed and relational knowledges and literacies to community practice, participatory media production, and subcultural contexts. She is interested in the potential of such remixes to disrupt notions of the exceptional or "deserving" youth and sees such a strategy as potentially coalitional (see Karma Chávez' forthcoming work on coalitional possibilities). Relational literacies, related to Licona's work on community literacies and relational knowledges, is a concept named and taken up explicitly in Londie Martin's

2013 dissertation titled "The Spatiality of Queer Youth Activism: Sexuality and the Performance of Relational Literacies through Multimodal Play."

## Works Cited

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. Ed. *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1990. Print.
- Basu, Kaustuv. "The Next Target?" *Inside Higher Ed*, April 17, 2012. Web. 1 July 2013.
- Boggs, Grace Lee. *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012. Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge Classics, 2006. Print.
- Cammarota, Julio. "A Social Justice Approach to Achievement: Guiding Latina/o Students toward Educational Attainment with a Challenging, Socially Relevant Curriculum." *Equity & Excellence in Education* 40 (2007): 87-96. Print.
- Cammarota, Julio, and Michelle Fine. *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research*. New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.
- Chávez, Karma R., "Counter-Public Enclaves and Understanding the Function of Rhetoric in Social Movement Coalition-Building." *Communication Quarterly* 59.1 (2011):1-18. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, (in press).
- Delgado Bernal, Dolores. "Critical Race Theory, Latino Critical Theory, and Critical Raced-Gendered Epistemologies: Recognizing Students of Color as Holders and Creators of knowledge." *Qualitative Inquiry* 8 (2002):105-26. Print.
- Duncan-Andrade, Jeff. "Urban Youth, Media Literacy, and Increased Critical Civic Participation." *Beyond Resistance! Youth Activism and Community Change: New Democratic Possibilities for Practice and Policy for America's Youth*. Ed. Shawn Ginwright. Pedro Noguera, and Julio Cammarota. New York, Routledge, 2006. 149-170. Print.
- Ellsworth, Elizabeth. "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy." *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy*. Ed. Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore. New York: Routledge, 1992. 90-119. Print.
- Finley, Susan. "Critical Arts-Based Inquiry: The Pedagogy and Performance of a Radical Ethical Aesthetic." *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. Los Angeles: Sage, 2011. 435-450. Print.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Continuum Books, 1993. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004. Print.
- Giroux, Henry and McLaren Peter. "Radical Pedagogy as Cultural Politics: Beyond the Discourse of Critique and Anti-Utopianism." *Theory/Pedagogy/Politics: Texts for Change*. Ed. Donald Morton and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991. 152-186. Print.
- Goldblatt, Eli. *Because We Live Here: Sponsoring Literacy Beyond the College Curriculum*. Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2007. Print.

- González, Norma, Luis Moll, and Cathy Amanti. *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005. Print.
- Herdt, Gilbert. *Moral Panics, Sex Panics: Fear and the Fight over Sexual Rights*. New York: New York University Press, 2009. Print.
- hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Jenkins, Henry, Ravi Purushotma, Margaret Weigel, Katie Clinton and Alice J. Robison. "Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture - Media Education for the 21st Century (Part Two)." *Digital Kompetanse: Nordic Journal of Digital Literacy* 2 (2007): 97-113. Web. 1 July 2013.
- Licona, Adela C. *Zines in Third Space: Radical Cooperation and Borderlands Rhetoric*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012. Print.
- Licona, Adela C., Stephen T. Russell, and the Crossroads Collaboration. "Teachers-Researchers in Engaged Transdisciplinary Public Scholarship: The Mixed and Messy Practices of Critical and Creative Inquiry." Manuscript in preparation. 2013.
- Luke, Carmen. "Feminist Politics in Radical Pedagogy." *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy*. Ed. Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore. New York: Routledge, 1992. 25-53. Print.
- Martin, Londie. *The Spatiality of Queer Youth Activism: Sexuality and the Performance of Relational Literacies through Multimodal Play*. Unpublished dissertation. University of Arizona, 2013. Print.
- Matsuda, Mari J. "Beside My Sister, Facing the Enemy: Legal Theory Out of Coalition." *Stanford Law Review* 43.6 (1991): 1183-92. Print.
- McKenzie-Mohr, Doug, and William Smith. *Fostering Sustainable Behavior: An Introduction to Community-based Social Marketing*. New Society Publishers, 2011. Print.
- Mitchell, Gordon R. "Public Argument Action Research and the Learning Curve of New Social Movements." *Argumentation and Advocacy* 40 (2004): 209-225. Print.
- Planas, Roque. "Arizona Official Considers Targeting Mexican American Studies in University." *Fox News Latino*, March 28, 2012. Web. 1 July 2013.
- Solórzano, Daniel G., and Tara J. Yosso. "From Racial Stereotyping and Deficit Discourse Toward a Critical Race Theory in Teacher Education." *Multicultural Education* 9 (2001): 2-8. Print.

---

Adela C. Licona, Ph.D., is associate professor in Rhetoric, Composition, and the Teaching of English and co-director of the Crossroads Collaborative at the University of Arizona (alicona@email.arizona.edu).

J. Sarah Gonzales is founder of national social justice consulting company TruthSarita, LLC and co-director of Spoken Futures, Inc. (sarah@truthsarita.com).

## Empower Latino Youth (ELAYO): Leveraging Youth Voice to Inform the Public Debate on Pregnancy, Parenting and Education

*Elodia Villaseñor, Miguel Alcalá, Ena Suseth Valladares, Miguel A. Torres, Vanessa Mercado, and Cynthia A. Gómez*

---

Youth perspectives are routinely absent from research and policy initiatives. This article presents a project that infuses youth participation, training and mentorship into the research process and teaches youth how to become policy advocates. Empower Latino Youth (ELAYO) studies the individual and systemic factors impacting sexuality and childbearing among Latino youth and seeks to reduce negative stereotypes and elevate the social standing of Latino youth. As a team-in-training, ELAYO provides adolescents, undergraduate and graduate students the opportunity to develop research skills while learning the importance of linking science to policy. This paper was developed in collaboration with Latino youth.

---

*We're searching for new ways to discover and change identities imposed on us and illustrating our strengths and capabilities.*

—ELAYO Youth Advisory Group Member

### The Issue

Latino<sup>1</sup> youth are the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States and are disproportionately impacted by unplanned pregnancies, HIV and other sexually transmitted infection (STI) rates, as compared to their European-American counterparts (California Adolescent Sexual Health Work Group; California Department of Public Health; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2). Prior research has attributed these disparities to factors such as earlier onset of sexual activity, lack of family communication around sexuality, inconsistent use of condoms or contraception, gender inequality in sexual relationships and cultural/ religious beliefs (Afable-Munsuz and Brindis; Cox; Guilamo-Ramos et al.). The dominant discourse in addressing sexuality, reproductive health, and adolescent childbearing among the Latino community approaches these issues from a deficit perspective. In so doing, Latino youth and their families are blamed, as individuals, for their "choices" and "conditions." Discourse from a deficit perspective has led to the continued vilification of youth, with labels of "hyper-sexuality" and "irresponsibility." This unfounded criticism often leads to punitive measures for pregnant and parenting youth, including systemic discrimination within educational institutions, such as pressure to transfer out of comprehensive high schools into alternative programs, and being subjected to substandard education