

side of the classroom, and thus might have escaped some of the intra-school hierarchies experienced by young people. Flower and Low both focus on asset-driven approaches that view young people as capable of manifesting agency for social change, but acknowledge that the circumstances that youth might recognize as exigent vary, and as such invite different remediating possibilities.

Late in *Slam School*, Low suggests that community organizations could learn from the pedagogy and curriculum developed at schools, and vice-versa. Her suggestions would interest those scholars invested in creating equitable exchanges between community organizations and schools. However, since Low's book is not focused on working with community organizations, suggestions relating to community-school partnerships seem to serve mostly as a typical way to wrap up an academic book, rather than a concrete delineation of partnership possibilities. Still, the subject of hip-hop pedagogy is a clear bridge across many contexts of community literacy studies, in particular as it makes students legible as knowledge-seekers authentically engaged in an education process that comprises culturally relevant curricula.

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## *Valuing Youth Voices and Differences through Community Literacy Projects: Review of Detroit Future Youth Curriculum Mixtape and Freeing Ourselves: A Guide to Health and Self-Love for Brown Bois*

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When viewed together, the two community-based publications reviewed here—*Detroit Future Youth Curriculum Mixtape* and *Freeing Ourselves: A Guide to Health and Self Love for Brown Bois*—offer practitioners working within contexts that bridge academic and local community locations invaluable pedagogical materials and resources for imagining and practicing community literacy partnerships. These new forms of partnership complicate understandings of racialized, classed, sexualized, and gendered differences by valuing youth and working to make them legible as holders and creators of knowledge—as the experts on their own lived experiences.

In *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement* (2008), Linda Flower defines community literacy as “a rhetorical practice for inquiry and social change.” She asserts a vision of community engagement through which practitioners—across academic and local community contexts—work to practice ways of knowing that challenge and reimagine lived experiences of difference and inequality as they articulate with multiple ways of performing identities (Flower 221). In her work, Flower understands community literacy as a space for practicing community (broadly defined) as “public dialogue across differences of culture, class, discourse, race, gender, and power shaped by the explicit goals of discovery and change” (261-65). Yet, I want to extend Flower's articulation of community, literacy, and difference by acknowledging that working *across* difference



is sometimes less transformative than working *with* difference; in these cases, the goal is not to elide or smooth over difference, but to engage with difference as a necessary and radical component of grassroots social transformation. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues in *Epistemology of the Closet*, “People are different from each other” (22); working to recognize and understand difference as necessary and valuable should be central to the goals of radical and sustainable community literacy projects, like those reviewed here.

Conceived as a collaborative, social justice venture among youth and adult allies working with community organizations in Detroit, *Detroit Future Youth Curriculum Mixtape* is an assemblage of community-authored literacy workshops rooted in a place-based understanding of youth who encounter daily not only Detroit’s social inequalities, but also the stereotypical narratives that circulate about Detroit youth and their particular urban location. Detroit Future Youth, an organization that works to build and strengthen youth coalition in Detroit, advocates multimedia literacy and production as particularly effective ways for youth and adult allies to challenge and revision the larger, deficit-driven narratives of youth—particularly youth of color—that circulate through dominant media channels. As such, the *Detroit Future Youth Curriculum Mixtape* print curriculum is accompanied by a flash drive compilation of lesson-plan resources and youth-produced media. In light of a recent report from the Pew Research Center showing that youth living in lower socioeconomic conditions are outpacing their economically wealthier counterparts in terms of mobile access to Internet and social media, it is apparent that media literacy and production hold the potential for youth-driven social change at the grassroots level (2).

Across the *Detroit Future Youth Curriculum Mixtape*, the editors identify three relational “layers of impact”: “Personal impact,” in which youth and adult allies take the materials offered in the curriculum and modify them within the context-specific locations of their communities; “Community impact,” in which the curriculum practiced within and across communities facilitates and sustains conversation and coalition; and “Social change impact,” in which youth and adult allies engage the curriculum as a way of performing a more just and equitable future within the experience of present realities (8). While detailing the 13 workshop lesson plans offered within the *Curriculum Mixtape* is beyond the scope of this review, a snapshot of the kinds of pedagogical activities offered in the collected materials illustrates their potential for use in a variety of community literacy contexts. For example, Young Nation, a grassroots youth organization in south Detroit, describes a workshop focused on identifying topics of interest to youth, connecting these topics to place-specific lived realities, and working with youth to transform or produce new spaces of youth community that reimagine the present. In another chapter, Freeing a Mind Everywhere (FAME, a youth-driven project of Vanguard Community Development Corporation) offers a workshop designed to introduce youth to blogging and vlogging as practices for sharing counterstories.

Combined with the photography workshop offered by the Urban Neighborhood Initiative’s Real Media program and the creative writing exercises offered by the Detroit Asian Youth Project, the resources for interview practice and social media exploration sustained throughout the *Detroit Future Youth Curriculum Mixtape* come alive; the curriculum is an inventive resource for youth and adult allies interested in

multimodal ways of crafting social-media-ready counterstories that are grounded in community-based research. Moreover, a particular strength of the *Detroit Future Youth Curriculum Mixtape* is its incorporation of play as a method of critical inquiry and knowledge production. For example, Young Nation offers the “Hopes + Worries Relay Race” as a fun way to explore obstacles and opportunities emerging from lived experiences of oppression, and the organization offers practitioners ways to move from the “hopes and worries” identified through play to brainstorming programmatic values, guidelines, and courses of action.

While the *Detroit Future Youth Curriculum Mixtape* offers youth and adult allies many opportunities to reflect on and transform the experiences of social inequality that emerge from differences of race and class, there are fewer opportunities to think through experiences of difference that emerge from understandings of sexuality and gender expression. For example, in the *Detroit Future Youth Curriculum Mixtape*, curriculum chapters on the Michigan Roundtable and the Ruth Ellis Center are the only places where sexuality and gender expression are explicitly identified as sites of inquiry and transformation. To build on the explorations of sexual and gender literacy present in these two chapters, community practitioners will need to consult other, perhaps more radical, materials.

Here, *Freeing Ourselves: A Guide to Health and Self Love for Brown Bois* stands as a critical resource for community practitioners interested in weaving a more complex engagement with diverse experiences of sexuality and gender expression into their community literacy projects. A publication of the Brown Boi Project—defined in the text as “a community of masculine of center womyn, men, two-spirit people, transmen, and ... allies ... committed to transforming our privilege of masculinity, gender, and race into tools for achieving Racial and Gender Justice”—*Freeing Ourselves* is a community-based literacy text that broadly addresses health and well-being (4). From their focus on justice—broadly and inclusively defined—the Brown Boi Project frames *Freeing Ourselves* as a community resource for challenging the dominant narratives that reduce gender nonconforming and masculine of center people of color to problems in need of fixing (8).

Chapter One of *Freeing Ourselves*, “Rooted in Spirit: Addressing Mental, Emotional and Spiritual Health,” challenges dominant and oppressive understandings of masculinity that discourage and pathologize emotional vulnerability. Grounded in an understanding of European colonization as a process through which indigenous and other ways of understanding and expressing “spiritual, emotional, and psychological health” (14) are marginalized or erased, the chapter focuses on ways to develop the “strong sense of self” (16-17) needed to engage in, and challenge, dominant practices of Western healthcare. To this end, the chapter offers first-person accounts of people’s experiences on the path to self-care and a strong sense of self, demonstrating the storytelling practice that the *Detroit Future Youth Curriculum Mixtape* asserts as a powerful tool for transforming injustice and sustaining youth coalition.

Chapter Two, “Free Yourself ... Finding Healthcare Allies,” posits that trips to healthcare providers can be an important part of holistic wellness, and acknowledges the often invisible or devalued experiences with healthcare, including inequality with respect to access, that can emerge for gender nonconforming and masculine of center people of color. Chapter Two thus offers full-color tables and illustrations to help

people practice a broad and more inclusive understanding of physical wellbeing and develop more effective strategies for practicing a strong sense of self in healthcare contexts.

Chapter Three, “Body Taboo: Getting Down about Sex, Pregnancy, and Menstruation,” begins with a frank discussion of sexually transmitted infections and provides full-color tables of terms and definitions as a way of practicing and circulating community-based sexual literacies. The chapter offers this information in a sex-positive light that encourages sexual exploration and pleasure in the context of consenting, communicative encounters. Sexual and gender literacies, in this book, are about both protection and pleasure, and the book acknowledges the body—in addition to resources that emerge from more radical community literacy projects—as an important site of, and tool for, expressing and accessing knowledges of healthy sexuality, broadly and radically defined.

Chapter Four, “Holistic Care through Gender Transition,” and Chapter Five, “Energy, Diet, and Physical Practice,” offer holistic paths through which gender nonconforming and masculine of center people of color can explore options for maintaining healthy well-being and a strong sense of self during and after gender transition. Across these chapters, the authors encourage readers to take a broader view of health and well-being—one that not only incorporates sexual and gender literacies, but also includes storytelling and resource-sharing as necessary and radical community literacy practices.

In the final, brief chapter, “Brown Boi Manifesto,” the authors assert the value of the body in the face of dominant narratives and practices that marginalize gender nonconforming and masculine of center people of color through “one-dimensional representations” (118). Against these flat and flattening representations, the Brown Boi Project asserts the following:

As individuals and communities existing at the cross-section of multiple oppressions, we first reclaim our true selves from internalized stories of inferiority or gender superiority and celebrate the immeasurable value of all our lives. We will work to take back our decision making power from those who do not hold our best interests at heart. And through these excavations, will carve out in ourselves the capacity for greater choices and love. (118-19)

Here, the Brown Boi Project underscores the harmful ways in which dominant narratives work to discipline and fix bodies, punishing those who defy legibility according to heteronormative alignments of race, gender, sex, and sexuality. Against these restrictive and reductive understandings of identities in motion, the Brown Boi Project asserts the power in locating, recognizing, and circulating—through community literacy projects like *Freeing Ourselves*—the “greater choices” that emerge when truths are told, stories are shared, and community literacies are made known.

The *Detroit Future Youth Curriculum Mixtape* shares these commitments to the transformative potential of storytelling as a community-based literacy practice. Where the *Curriculum Mixtape* leaves room for a more thorough consideration of sexuality and gender expression, *Freeing Ourselves* offers an example of community-

based storytelling that reclaims historically devalued knowledges and produces new ones. And where *Freeing Ourselves* leaves room for a more thorough consideration of community-based activism through multimedia and creative expressions via social media, the *Curriculum Mixtape* offers a wealth of examples for engaging youth and adult allies in workshops focused on the multimodal exploration and transformation of dominant stereotypes emerging from reductive and oppressive understandings of difference.

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