Literacy, Equity, and Imagination: Researching With/In Communities

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Abstract

This article focuses on the meaning and practice of publicly engaged scholarship. The authors use examples of research in partnership with communities to demonstrate what it means to be *with* or *in* a community, how mutuality can be established, and how trust can be earned. The article addresses how university-based researchers can be fully present in shared work with communities and stand with community partners in an effort to answer questions together. The first author discusses the idea of teaching as a form of publicly engaged scholarship that is community-centric, collaborative, humanizing, and guided by equity and justice. The second author discusses what it means to "stand" with community in the fight for justice and argues that we need to rethink what counts as knowledge production when working authentically alongside community instead of *at* or *for* them. The third author considers what it means to take seriously *children's* ideas and perspectives as we imagine new possibilities for literacy, learning, equity, and diversity in local and global community spaces. The fourth author concludes with a discussion of issues raised and features of community-engaged literacy research evident across all examples.

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Why should community partners trust what has been an untrustworthy institution that has done harm to its children? Any university-based researcher working to engage in community partnerships needs to ask this question. The answer is different depending on our standpoints, as raced and gendered bodies, as English-dominant or multilingual speakers, as insiders and outsiders to various communities, and as literacy researchers who know that literacy can be a form of violence as well as an act of transformation. As authors of this article, we have asked ourselves tough questions essential to what it means to be *with* or *in* a community, how mutuality can be established, and how trust can be earned. We ask ourselves how we can be fully present in our shared work with communities, and we continue to stand with community partners in an effort to answer these questions together.

In an article that examined the meaning of the word "community," in community-engaged research, Kathleen Bortolin analyzed the use of the term in 25 of the most recent articles in the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*. Four themes emerged from this analysis: (1) community as a means by which the university enhances its academic work, (2) community as influenced by the university, (3) community as a place that the university makes better, and (4) community as a factor in the financial interests of the university (2011, pp. 52–54). This article is a trenchant critique of how universities have remained the knowledge producers and beneficiaries of research that claims to have a community-engaged focus, but we believe that the discussion and examples provided point to spaces of hope and meaningful partnership that can stand as counternarratives to Bartolin's sadly predictable results.

In this article, the first author, Valerie Kinloch, discusses the idea of teaching as a form of publicly engaged scholarship that is community-centric, collaborative, humanizing, and guided by equity and justice. The second author, Joanne Larson, discusses what it means to "stand" with community in the fight for justice and argues that we need to rethink what counts as knowledge production when working authentically alongside community instead of *at* or *for* them. The third author, Marjorie Faulstich Orellana, considers what it means to take seriously *children's* ideas and perspectives as we imagine new possibilities for literacy, learning, equity, and diversity in local and global community spaces. The fourth author, Cynthia Lewis, concludes with a discussion of issues raised and features of community-engaged literacy research evident across all examples.

Teaching as Publicly Engaged Scholarship

Valerie's Story

> I think that there is nothing more admirable, more worthy of praise than teaching. Nothing! There isn't. Because whatever it is … I don't care if it's nursing or if it's the

> CEO of some company, if you're doing the right thing, if you're teaching, that's what it's all about … It's the truth. I mean it's just the truth. If people could just realize that part. What am I teaching today? What am I teaching right now? You know? That's what's really important. (C. Rebecca, Community Activist, Interview, 2013)

The above sentiments are from C. Rebecca, a community activist who works in the U.S. Midwest for a nonprofit center that collaborates with residents to "build community, self-sufficiency, and individual well-being" through a variety of educational, social, economic, and health initiatives. During an interview session, I asked Rebecca to talk about what motivates her to do the work she does at the center and in the community. Without hesitation, she discussed teaching as the most "important" and "admirable" work one could do. Then, she associated teaching with public engagement by insisting that

> to engage in the community means you're teaching and being taught, right? Because how could you be committed to *being* in community in any way without that part? What you do in the community, the teaching is always there. It makes us aware, more committed.

Over the course of three separate interview sessions, Rebecca reiterated her belief in the interconnection between teaching and engagement: "I can't say it enough. Teaching is important. It's what I hope I'm doing and getting from my own engagement work. We learn a lot about things needing to be changed to make the world better."

I open this article with the above words from C. Rebecca because they inform my approach to teaching as publicly engaged scholarship. Along with Rebecca, I have talked with various community organizers, elders, and activists as well as students, teachers, teacher researchers, and district administrators about the critical need to teach in and to learn with communities. A recurring message from our conversations is the value of aligning teaching with engagement—the type of engagement that addresses community-identified concerns (e.g., water contamination in Flint, MI; state-sanctioned violence against Black youth; homelessness; access to fresh fruits and vegetables in historically disenfranchised urban communities) and that values calls for freedom, justice, and humanity (e.g., University of Missouri protests; Black Lives Matter Movement). Because of these concerns and many others, I think it is necessary for literacy scholars, specifically, to inquire into connections between teaching and engagement and to examine the implications of these connections for urban communities, for literacy teaching, and for publicly engaged scholarship.

Additionally, Rebecca's sentiments encourage me to consider the whys of connecting teaching to engagement. I believe the whys frame publicly engaged scholarship as relevant for working against racism, injustice, and violence in schools and communities and as necessary in the work of educational equity. Research on the school-to-prison pipeline and the increasing drop-out and push-out rates geared toward high school–aged Black males (Majors & Billson, 1992; Noguera, 2008) reveals the reality of an educational system that continues to perpetuate violence,

exclusion, and structural inequalities. So, too, do the overrepresentation of Black males in special education classes (Kearns, Ford, & Linney, 2005) and the widening achievement gap and high school graduation rates between Black and White male students in the United States (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Schott Foundation, 2015). When we connect teaching to public engagement, we are able to work across contexts (e.g., schools and community spaces) and with multiple people (e.g., students, teachers, families, activists, community groups). Doing so can serve as a powerful response to the racist and classist public criticisms that position, or, to be more pointed, that blame, poor people, urban communities, and underfunded schools as responsible for creating and not eradicating the plethora of inequalities, inequities, and injustices that have always existed in the U.S. educational system and its communities. Teaching as public engagement should be community-centric, inclusive, collaborative, intentional, transformative, humanizing, multiperspectival, and justice oriented. Thus, the connection between teaching and public engagement, much like the overall purpose of literacy studies, I would contend, should provide "a grounds for potential exploitation, injustice, and struggle" (Brandt, 2001, p. 2). In other words, teaching as engagement is *resistance work* that encourages people who are *in* and *with* community, to

- "talk back" to acts of violence, and to the erasure of historical practices, cultural traditions, and bodies of knowledge from historically disenfranchised people, or those positioned on the margins (see Hooks, 1999);
- examine connections among oppression, race, and place;
- value their own languages and write their ways of being into public discourse;
- interrupt, disrupt, and resist the hegemony of patriarchy by bringing to the center multiple and oft ignored voices, truths, and pains; and
- be committed, and not superficially, to experiential forms of teaching and learning.

My own movement toward teaching as public engagement is informed by a variety of scholars who conceptualize this work as collaborations that are defined within contexts "of partnership and reciprocity" (New England Resource Center, n.d.), that are communal and participatory (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998), and that represent "different forms of making knowledge about, for, and with diverse publics and communities through dialogue" (Ellison & Eatman, 2008, p. 17). I also see this work as "political *and* personal—an encounter with the lived reality of others . . . translated into a commitment to change" (Flower, 2008, p. 2, emphasis in original). On this latter point, Flower (2008) insists that there must be "an active engagement with difference [that] also requires a second step that resists easy consensus, confronts conflict, and accepts the necessity of civil dissensus" (pp. 2–3). This is particularly important if teaching as public engagement is resistance work that is committed to building and sustaining equity, justice, imagination, and liberation in the world.

Teaching as Engagement: A Brief Example

For me, teaching as public engagement represents intentional, meaning-filled collaborations (e.g., teaching and learning, protesting and demonstrating, writing and listening, talking and acting; being and doing) among various people who engage in critical problem-posing and problem-solving work as a way to address educational, sociopolitical, economic, and community concerns *because lives depend on it.* I think about the lives and literature of James Baldwin, Amiri Baraka, Mary McLeod Bethune, bell hooks, June Jordan, Martin Luther King Jr., Audre Lorde, Malcolm X, and many others who encourage us to engage in revolutionary, publicly engaged scholarship. Also, I think about the courageous young people and community activists such as Jonathon Butler, Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, Johnetta Elzie, and Opal Tometi who stand up for justice and against racism, who stand up for Black lives and against white supremacy, and who insist on freedom and not colonization.

As I think about these justice seekers, I also think about the local educators, students, and community representatives with whom I have worked in *Bringing Learning to Life* (BLTL). BLTL is a multiyear partnership among community organizations, an urban school district, a public university, a national teachers' association, and a local teachers' union. Through this partnership, approximately 83 K–12 teachers across all subject areas enrolled in a graduate-level course that met weekly at different community sites (e.g., settlement houses, community pride centers, an urban café and garden, Young Men's Christian Association [YMCA], United Way, community schools, historical societies, etc.). They participated in professional development experiences in the community and designed high-quality, community engaged, and critical service-learning projects alongside students and community partners. A primary focus of the partnership is to support a culture of teaching and learning as engagement throughout the school district and its local communities.

One example that particularly resonates with Rebecca's sentiments about the connections that exist between teaching and engagement is the initiative, "Stand Up/ Speak Out," which was facilitated by a public school teacher, Pam Reed, and her middle school students. In this initiative, students investigated the dangers of being a bully and/or a bystander to bullying from a global perspective. They made connections between the global atrocities of genocide as a massive act of bullying and the consequences of their own actions in schools, their local communities, and throughout the world. Additionally, they engaged in a call to action on a global scale by writing letters to their Congresswoman about the continuing murder and rape in Darfur, by examining the recent conflicts in Uganda, by reading texts about genocide, and by collaborating with representatives from a community center and settlement house to determine strategies for eradicating these sociopolitical ills.

In an essay about why this initiative is important, Pam wrote,

> Students are asking to learn about real-world events like large-scale bullying and bystander incidents and they want to make connections to their own lives. In this way, they

come to recognize their own power to transform themselves and help their peers end assaults and put-downs.

She continued,

> Middle school students in particular need to feel empowered in their own learning … [they] are driven by their need for fairness and justice in the world and beyond. This need can materialize in how we teach them and how they learn to participate in the world.

When I interviewed Pam, I asked her to elaborate on the connection between teaching students and encouraging them to participate in the world. Similar to Rebecca, Pam explained,

> At least my students, they tell you what they want to do and what they need. They already have a desire to engage in the world … they want to impact the world. When we open up opportunities for them to learn about the world and what's wrong in it, what needs to be changed, they want to know what they can do. And they're ready to do something. That's the connection with what I do in the classroom and what I hope we do in the community.

When I played Rebecca's audio recording to Pam, she said, "Yep, that's what I'm saying … that teaching and engagement connection. Not just 'how do you want to engage with me today,' but that 'how does teaching get us to engage in the world.'" Pam's focus on "what I do in the classroom" refers to how, what, and why to teach just as much as it reiterates Rebecca's belief, " … if you're teaching, that's what it's all about." Similarly, Pam's sentiment, "what I hope we do in the community," speaks to teaching as engagement, or what Rebecca describes as "to engage in the community means you're teaching and being taught, right? Because how could you be committed to *being* in community in any way without that part?" Both Rebecca and Pam are committed to "*being* in community" with others.

Moving Toward Engagement

"Stand Up/Speak Out" is an initiative that values teaching and learning as engaged acts within schools and in communities. It is inclusive of students, teachers, and community partners, and it poses questions (and seeks action) related to bullying as a global form of injustice. This initiative gets me to think about the long-lasting implications of teaching as publicly engaged scholarship: For whom? For what purposes? For what kinds of systemic changes? Against what types of racist-motivated resistances? And it gets me to consider the reasons to approach teaching as public engagement: Why not see people *in* communities as critical thinkers, teachers, learners, activists, collaborators, and ethnographers? Why not see the communities beyond academic institutions as resourceful, meaningful, political, personal, loving, and educational sites of resistance? As home? Why not teach as a form of public engagement?

Beyond the Tower: Building Meaning With Communities

Joanne's Story

I used to get irritated when people would say to me that I don't know what it's like "in the real world" or "out here in the trenches." I always reacted negatively. What makes you think the academy is fake or easy? I teach. Teacher education is the trenches! Teaching is difficult no matter where you do it. Teaching adults has challenges, just as does teaching in a K–12 classroom. You still have to value your students, build on strengths, plan carefully, and work toward collaboratively constructing knowledge. I have been in schools my entire research career. I taught preschool and spent a year substitute teaching in South Central Los Angeles elementary schools. How can you say I'm out of touch? I said all this before I engaged in collaborative action research with community and before I joined my university in partnering with a local school to turn it around. Before, that is, I left campus to work alongside people in ways that are useful to *them*. There's the rub—usefulness.

The question becomes, whose usefulness? Traditionally, *we* make these decisions. With honest intentions, we see inequities and injustice and we try to find something to do about it. More often than not, we pick something we see as a problem and come up with solutions without talking with the people whose lives are at stake. We write grants that offer what we think is help, but when the grant runs out, we leave. We take the data, publish academic articles, and build careers. Meanwhile, the community or school in which we worked wonders where we went. The *problems* we identified are still there, and they heard nothing about what we *found*. Recent moves toward engaged scholarship may offer some direction.

Increasingly visible arguments have emerged, encouraging the academy to move beyond narrow conceptions of engaged scholarship that are used to make universities look committed to the communities in which they are located. However, engaged scholarship in higher education is typically defined as service learning where students are provided opportunities to learn outside the classroom and become socially responsible students. This work usually comes with a kind of charity perspective in which the university *helps the needy* or executes what I have called a neoliberal rescue fantasy.

Doing research that matters isn't a new concern. Yet, it is common for the *helping the needy* phenomenon we see in experiential learning as engaged scholarship to enter into research. For researchers, engaged scholarship usually focuses on doing research in communities that constitutes getting the data and building careers that allow the university to say it is involved in community. Action-oriented research (action research, collaborative action research, participatory action research) lends itself more toward application of research to practice or to community, although this form of research is often not rewarded in the academy. It is sometimes actively used to deny tenure, claiming it is activism, not research, especially for scholars of color. The concept of researcher as public intellectual, or someone who expects her or his ideas

to form the basis of action in the public sphere (Goodson, 1999), is another way academics have typically thought of their role. However, there remains a unidirectional tendency implied by "applying" research to practice that is problematic when we value everybody's contributions.

In spite of these arguments about engagement, discourses about integrating theory with *real-life work* maintain an artificial boundary between theory and practice and about who produces knowledge. Moreover, the move to ground research in community or school problems positions the university academic as savior to those who don't know. The job of knowledge production is still claimed by academics. However, with the advent of Internet communication technologies in digital spaces such as Wikipedia, YouTube, and other networked communities, knowledge production is no longer limited to academics (Boyd, 2014; Bruns, 2008; Jenkins, 2006; Shirky, 2008). Everyday knowledge production is now more visible and available for use. What academics know is important and necessary, but not sufficient to make the kinds of changes we need to build justice and equity in the world. This need to change unidirectional *helping* patterns leads me to argue that we need to rethink the social relations of knowledge production.

I draw on two long-term collaborative ethnographies to talk about the process of learning to work alongside community, what questions arise, and how darn hard it is! One case is a long-term collaborative action research project with a community development agency now in its 5th year. The other is a "new" project that, depending on where you pick the start time, is either in its second year or 51/2 months in. This project is a unique partnership between a research university and an urban high school set to be closed by New York State (NYS). My argument is that to understand how to work alongside communities to fight inequities, we need to think equipotentially as we work together to collaboratively define problems, design research, and produce transformative and sustainable change.

How I See the World

I find an interdisciplinary theoretical framework to be most useful in thinking about how to reframe working alongside community rather than *at* or *for* them. Freire's (1970/1995) concept of radical human love in which justice workers come to see and love each other's humanity enables the shift from a *help the needy* stance to one in which people work together toward ends that liberate all parties. Understanding that all intelligence is equal (Rancière, 1991) positions all knowledge as equally valuable in working toward equity and justice. Everybody counts. By shifting conceptions of what counts as knowing and intelligence, each participant can then contribute equipotentially (Bruns, 2008) to the ongoing endeavor. Equipotentiality means that all parties have the potential to contribute, though not the same contribution, to solving an issue. All these lenses come together with a conception of power as a set of force relations (Foucault, 1978) that produces what we have called generative frictions (Larson, Moses, et al., under review). It is in the generation of friction that power

produces change. The research task becomes examining these sites of friction to understand what it means to work alongside community for liberation.

Freedom Market

> Community ... It is an intimate, insider term for the inner city, working class people often apply to themselves and those in their circle of solidarity. (Flower, 2008, p. 22)

The Freedom Market started as a community development project intended to address the problem of urban food deserts by transforming a typical urban corner store into a cornerstone of community health and education. The initial object of inquiry was on health and nutrition practices, but through a holistic and dialogic approach to data collection and analysis, broad conceptual categories surfaced encompassing a range of emergent and contested ways of knowing. We learned that this project was about much more than food. Researching ways of knowing in the context of participatory action research has to take account of the institutional discourses or knowledge regimes (Blommaert, 2013) that set the parameters for what constitutes knowledge and how is it valued and recognized. In other words, challenging the parameters set by the academic institutions needs to be part of the project (Nelson, London, & Strobel, 2015). As Flower (2008) recognizes, "'community' stands in sharp relief to the 'university' arriving with its vanload of white, middle-class, educated outsiders, short on savvy, long on good intentions, and comfortably invested in their own set of elite, academic, literate practices" (p. 23).

Dialogue and emancipatory practices that do not examine their own discursive biases are likely to reinscribe dominant regimes rather than make spaces for new voices—the sort of intersubjective, emergent knowledge that Bakhtin (1981) heralds as central to the authentic dialogic encounter (Larson, Hanny, et al., in press). As a research team, moments of authentic dialogic encounters produced what Rancière (2010) has termed dissensus, or the space of maintaining difference, that we have come to see as generative frictions. Within these processes, we have examined community-generated problems of urban food deserts and worked together to build community-defined evidence that we use in our work with policy makers. A key pathway to community transformation is working with schools.

University of Rochester (UR)/Educational Partnership Organization (EPO) Partnership

In 2014, in response to its designation as "persistently failing" by the NYS Department of Education, the Rochester City School Districts' East High School was offered five options: close, phase out, convert to charter, be subsumed by the state university system, or establish an EPO. It chose the latter and, in February 2015, was officially partnered with the UR, heralding an historic university-

community collaboration. By serving as EPO, UR's East High School becomes its own school district (a district within a district), reporting directly to the school board. Given unprecedented control over curriculum, instruction, assessment, budget, and policy, we changed everything. But, how do you research everything? A key focus of the research on this partnership is that the research be collaborative and useful to the school. As the project began, however, it became immediately clear this would be difficult to accomplish. How do you do collaborative research with extraordinarily busy administrators and teachers? What resources do I bring? How can we be useful to overwhelmed urban administrators and teachers? Who decides what counts as useful?

It became apparent immediately that my privilege as an academic came with challenges. Part of a stance of radical human love includes authentic acknowledgment of the privilege of my position as tenured faculty member on a yearlong paid sabbatical with grant support. This position is a key marker of privilege that impacts my role at East. That role is messy and complicated. I am a UR faculty member representing the University; a literacy researcher doing ethnography in the building; a parent of a senior at East; the chair of the Family and Community Engagement committee responsible for increasing family involvement; an ad hoc member of East's Executive Committee, Leadership Team, Governance Committee; and a member of the UR Oversight Committee. I am "all in, all the time"—the EPO's current motto. It is privilege that gives me the choice to be all in—or not, to enroll my son—or not.

Could it be that what academics offer as useful is that privilege? By this I mean that we let go of typical career trajectories in order to be used as resources.[1] We know so much about learning, about authentic knowledge production, and human interaction, but we don't see it in practice in communities and schools. I don't know how many times I've heard researchers complain that "they are doing it wrong, why don't they listen!" We complain to each other in research articles and at conferences. Nothing changes. Because change requires actually doing something. It requires being in communities and in schools doing the work alongside the people who live there, the people for whom the issues have life and death stakes. As many of us have come to find out, this is an incredibly difficult work. Not only is there a lot of it, it is emotionally and spiritually draining. There is a big difference between studying something and building meaningful relationships with people who live in high poverty neighborhoods (food insecurity, homelessness, drug and alcohol addictions, dangerous neighborhoods, police persecution, predatory nonprofits or business owners, inadequate schools), physical and sexual abuse, and a public that ignores them. On many days, your heart is broken. But that is not the only story. More often than not, there are moments of honest human connection that fill your soul—that fist bump in the cafeteria from a struggling youth, the light in a teacher's eye when her or his passion is reignited, or the warm hugs on a cold day from the Freedom Market folks. These profound human connections make doing something the only viable choice. Lives are at stake.

Animating Engagement, Manifesting Community Visions, and Valuing Children's Viewpoints

Marjorie's story

My remarks about engaged community literacies are framed within the larger conference theme of diversity, equity and imagination, and center on work I have been conducting since 2010: coordinating an after-school program at a school near the heart of Los Angeles, just a half mile from the school where I began my career as a teacher in 1983. This work involves several levels of community engagement: within the larger network of scholars of which this program is part; with and in the glocal (local and globalized) community in which this club and school are located; and in our own little space, called B-Club. I use the word "engagement" to refer to sustained, entwined, and mutually supportive connections, though I will also contrast a *forced* kind of engagement with a more *animated* one. I aim to show parallels between what happens in our own little club and in the larger network, and what we might imagine for the world, as we create conditions for growth, support others in manifesting their visions, and leave room for surprises to emerge. This includes new ideas about literacy, equity, and imagination.

Our after-school club brings together undergraduate students, teacher education candidates, researchers, and K–5 kids to imagine new worlds together and to create them through play. A direct descendent of a program run by Kris Gutiérrez at University of California, Los Angeles for many years (Gutiérrez, 2014); B-Club is a site for community-based research interwoven with teaching and service. When I took charge of the program in 2010, I inherited a well-established process that integrates undergraduate and teacher education with research and direct community engagement. I also walked into a network of scholars (University of California [UC] links) to learn with and from and to commiserate with when things get hard (as they often do in this multidimensional work).

There is a growing body of scholarship about the network of after-school programs of which B-Club is part, and the research conducted therein, as well as other resources available on the UC links website (http://uclinks.berkeley.edu/). In San Diego, there are now *five* programs, the newest one led by Angela Booker, called "Democracy Lab." There are community action research programs (Langhout & Fernández, 2014), digital literacy clubs (Durán, 2008; Hull & Greeno, 2006; Machado-Casas & Flores, 2014), a poetry writing group (Cronmiller, 2009), early childhood language development programs, and game-play centers (Stone & Gutiérrez, 2007). There are also new programs around the world (Gallego & Blanton, 2002; Gómez-Estern & Vásquez, 2014). New clubs have taken on a wide variety of forms but are united by a vision of working with and alongside young people and of linking universities with local communities in ways that facilitate layered learning for all involved. All of these have grown from the vision Mike Cole had some 30 years ago (Cole & the Distributed Literacy Consortium, 2006; see also Vásquez,

2003), and they have been sustained, against many odds, over time (Underwood, Welsh, Gauvain, & Duffy, 2000).

Importantly, even as UC links programs have moved out into the world, kids from around the world have moved into our sites. This makes ripe conditions for what Belinda Flores and colleagues term transworld pedagogy (Flores, Vásquez, & Clark, 2014), raising bigger questions about the nature of "community." At B-Club, most of our participants are the children of immigrants from diverse places around the globe—with both continuity and change in the migration streams over the 30 years I have worked here. As we create our own little space, we try to honor the connections participants have to places far away and recognize the history in our dynamic and changing corner of the world.

The club is based in a school located in a print-rich and multilingual urban center. The abundance of multilingual "word wealth" in the community bears underscoring, given recent attention to the supposed "word gap" in working class and immigrant homes (see Averini et al., 2015, for critiques). Of course, few of these signs are directed at children, and many are not particularly welcoming to children and families—even ostensibly welcoming signs that are posted at the front of the school, which prohibit guns, loitering, trespassing, parking of cars in the driveway, smoking, alcohol, and drugs. Thus, we might consider what messages about equity and diversity are conveyed through print in our communities, and how we might support more collaborative, relational, and welcoming literacies that help to build the kinds of communities we want to have.

In our club, we aim for a very different literacy environment. We have "acuerdos," not warnings—agreements to be nice, respectful, safe, say hi!, give advice, and have fun. We create spaces for kids to spell, utter, write, draw, speak, dance, and invent language in their own ways. We then study what happens. Our research within this context is framed by sociocultural perspectives on literacy (The New London Group, 1996), a community of learners' pedagogical model (Rogoff, 2003), and a "New Childhoods" framework that takes seriously children's actions, perceptions, experiences, and viewpoints (Thorne, 1993). We strive to actively counter the "adult ideological viewpoint" (Speier, 1976) and ask how we can learn to see in new ways as we build a learning space together.

In the first few years of our club, we (the adult research team who designed the space) set up a variety of centers, aiming to infuse literacy practices into our play, in authentic, natural, and relationship-driven ways. Inspired by literature on authentic literacies as well as by my own former teaching practices, and the ones I observed in dissertation research (Orellana, 1995), at a time when there was more freedom to forge vibrant, creative communities of learners in classroom settings, we established interactive dialogue journals (Díaz &Flores, 2001) where kids and undergraduates write to each other and record their experiences in our club. We created a scroll, or timeline, where we experimented with creative ways of "writing on the wall" and recording the history of our club. We offered laptops for exploring digital literacies—where kids can research things of interest to them ("not like in school where they tell us what to

research," as one child participant noted). A story center, inspired by Pat Enciso's story club in Ohio (Enciso, 2011), became a place for participants to create, swap, and build on each other's spoken and written stories in different ways. Kids wrote letters of friendship to each other and to the undergraduates and distributed them through a club mail system.

Here kids received letters from X: our club's equivalent of the mythical and gender-ambiguous creature el Maga, who writes to kids in other 5-D programs (see Vásquez, 2003). X was the key for our imaginative explorations of language and literacy, asking kids many questions in order to elicit their understandings and encourage them to imagine new possibilities. In other ways as well, we let words and ideas cross freely over borders that are more typically enforced in school (see Orellana, 2016, for more detail on our club practices and the philosophies that undergird them).

But even as we thought we were being so "free" with literacy, encouraging experimentation, imagination and play, and not trying to keep words or ideas within boxes or boundaries, we came to see that in certain ways, we *were* keeping things in their place. Or rather, the adults were the ones that were largely shaping and controlling the literacy environment. Just whose community was this, and what would it mean to take seriously children's ownership of the space? What changes would this entail for the adults? What might we learn about children, learning, and literacy, by encouraging children to step forward—or perhaps, by having the adults step out of their way?

Over the years, as kids have grown in their sense of ownership of our club, they have begun to ignore our centers and to create new ones of their own choosing. A whole series of new literacy practices have emerged as kids now take over the large multipurpose room, suiting it to their own purposes. For example, recently Baby Corazón (a club name and pseudonym for research purposes; see Rodríguez, forthcoming, for a discussion of naming practices at the Club) came into B-Club determined to set up a salon. She created display poster of color options for manicures, a sign-in sheet for the waiting room, hiring staff, negotiating payment (one paper dollar—but *free* if customers first went to her friends' scary story center). She then established a bank, where she distributed money and took applications for loans. Some of the younger kids watched her and then decided to start their own store, where everything is FREE (written in bold capital letters). Another group created an art center, with pieces that were priced based on how rare they were. Kids began putting things on the wall—in posters that were hung at their eye level, not where adults have tended to position them (higher up).

In short, the space has shifted from one where adults shaped the literacy environment, and then tried to "engage" children in it, to one where kids animated the space in their own way and form. In making this point, I trouble the term engagement that has such take-up in educational circles and that I have used in this article and in my own work. When we "engage" learners or communities, are we trying to capture them into our machinations, like cogs in a wheel? Are we hooking them into our agendas and keeping them captive there? We may be driven to "engage" others in the pursuit

of equity, and we may be convinced that we know what is in their interests, or what particular communities need. But can we be so sure?

We might contrast engagement with *animation,* a quality of participation that emerges from within. Rather than try to engage students and communities into our visions, what would it mean to spark animation—or just notice when it is sparked—and then help kindle it, fanning fires of excitement about learning and social transformation wherever we go (see Orellana, 2016, for further discussion of this point)? What would it mean to help children and communities to manifest their visions, more than train them in ours?

In both, the larger network established by Mike Cole, and in our own little club, an initial vision was created and has grown in surprising new ways because there was room for people to take that vision and run with it and to be supported in their dreams. As one child participant at B-Club puts it, "B-Club is a liben drem" (a living dream). It has become a place where we can all imagine new possibilities, expand our visions about learning and language, and kindle fires of transformation.

As members of Literacy Research Association enact the conference theme of diversity, equity, and imagination in our own work, I hope we will all participate in spirited and sustained engagement in local communities. I hope we will hold fast to our own dreams as we do so and help manifest our visions as well as those of the people with whom we work. This may help us to imagine new possibilities for literacy and learning, equity, and diversity. Perhaps we can take some lessons from the kids at B-Club and work in respectful, responsible, loving, and safe ways while having fun. We may be surprised by what could emerge, and what kind of club, community of scholars, and world we might create.

No Exit Strategy: Cynthia's Discussion

Contemplating literacy research with/in communities, Valerie, Joanne, and Marjorie each grapple with the idea of community. In Valerie's work, community means people teaching and learning together, connecting in struggle, and engaging in resistance. For Joanne, community is a space/place where people move toward radical human love that demands as well, what the community calls generative frictions. Community, in Marjorie's work, is a web of intergenerational relationships that are local and global, with children speaking and acting every moment from within and through multiple spaces and languages and communities. Inevitably heteroglossic and complex, all three enactments of community are also simple in the primacy of human relationship at the center. In each, people in communities have the power and responsibility to act, transform signs, and reimagine relationships. In each, the social actors modify contexts in ways that change the problem space and their positions as knowledge producers or meaning makers. In each, the emergence of meaning is developed through interactions of people, texts, ideas, and objects. Adults and children use all of their social, cultural, and linguistic resources to improvise and create something together.

Reading across these stories and examples, it is clear that relational community is formed through common rituals, narratives, artifacts, and ways of being. In Valerie's work, the way of being together is encapsulated in the title of the initiative "Stand Up/Speak Out." Teaching and learning—at the center of community-engaged research—involves talking back to systemic inequities and creating counternarratives for change. In Joanne's work, the motto "all in, all the time" stands for the primary expectation of the community partnership she discusses. And being "all in" includes an understanding of everyone's potential to participate. In Marjorie's work, ways of being together in B-Club are invented and enacted through signs such as those the children created to explain how to treat one another respectfully and through the multilingual signs within and beyond B-Club that shaped the lives and languages of the children. Relational community in this work, and in all of the authors' communities, lives and moves, with imagination and nimbleness.

One notable absence in the examples of community-engaged research provided by the authors is the absence of what researchers sometimes call an "exit strategy." In all cases, the research takes place within or alongside community, with researchers as members of the community formed for a purpose that transcends the research. Whether it was formed for teaching and learning in resistance, establishing an equal partnership school, or creating together a transworld pedagogy, the researchers in all three cases are "all in" as Joanne put it. The question of sustainability—an important challenge for many community-engaged researchers—is less of a dilemma, perhaps, if university and community-based partners are truly researching alongside or within community. The project at the heart of the partnership lives for as long as the community it serves believes it is needed. There is no exit strategy because—as these researchers make so clear—lives are in the balance. With radical human love, the worlds we inhabit, the communities we create, can be and are reimagined—as the child in Marjorie's study put it—"the living dream."

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Note

1. I also recognize the privilege of tenure that affords this question. Junior faculty have more difficult choices to make. Perhaps the work of privilege at the academy is to transform the reward system, so that justice work is legitimized.

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