

My commitment to social justice and anti-oppression work in my teaching and research has been deeply informed by my personal and professional practice experience. I focus on building capacity for transformative change within organizations/institutions, centering issues of power and oppression in youth development, and democratizing research and practice.

Personal Experience

For over ten years, I was an organizer with grassroots organizations. Most of my organizing experience has been most closely linked to the theories and approaches of mutual aid and direct action. I have worked as part of a solidarity network to support undocumented worker and tenant rights, have organized with abolitionist organizations against police brutality and have been facilitating organizer trainings for youth and adults for over eight years. My organizing experience informed my direct practice in youth work and youth development. In fact, it is this experience that has most directly motivates my dissertation research on the role of social media in youth sociopolitical development.

Professional Practice Experience

In my professional practice, I recognized that youth development programs can play a critical part in redressing racial and other social disparities. However, in my 12 years of direct service and in administrative work, I also saw the way those programs could reflect white supremacist values and damaging, deficit-based narratives of minoritized youth. To redress some of these issues I aimed to center social justice and democratize youth work practice. I designed and facilitated multiple youth participatory evaluation projects, conducted community-based youth participatory action research (YPAR) on issues ranging from teaching consent in sexual education to disrupting gentrification in a historically Black neighborhood in Seattle. I have also facilitated trainings, workshops, and consortiums with adults in youth-serving institutions (public community centers, non-profits, and schools). For example, for two years I facilitated a county-wide peer learning community (PLC) of youth workers, where we would collectively share knowledge and experience with integrating anti-oppression work into practice. Additionally, I worked within my institutions to increase their readiness for power-sharing with youth by critically examining their data collection and management systems, professional development, and decision-making processes/policies.

Teaching & Research Experience

My commitment to transforming the institutions that impact minoritized youth motivates my teaching and research. In the classroom I focus on building capacity for analyzing power and oppression in organizations and communities and developing a radical imagination for alternative systems. This includes an analysis of course readings and content, but also an analysis and careful reflection of how power is playing out in our learning community. A critical analysis of power is central to my research agenda as well. My youth development and social-emotional learning work seeks to identify and undermine the white supremacist values and practices that undergird in-school and out-of-school learning spaces. This is demonstrated through my four publications that position youth of color as experts through community-based participatory projects aimed at shifting climate, culture, policy and evaluation practice in school and youth program spaces. Two first-author publications are currently under review titled

‘Autoethnography as a Tool for Research-Practice Partnerships: Facilitating Self and School Transformation’ and ‘Re-defining Positive Youth Development: Perspectives of Racially, Ethnically, and Gender Diverse Adults and Youth’.

Epistemological diversity is represented in my classrooms and in my qualitative and participatory research with youth and adults. I proactively incorporate a diversity of learning styles, approaches, and sources of knowledge. As described in my teaching statement and teaching evaluations, I center accessibility and focus on removing barriers to participation in the classroom. My participatory research approach is rooted in a commitment to epistemic justice and repositions young people as thought partners and decision-makers in both process and content. When collecting data, I have integrated arts-based approaches, photography, storytelling to better incorporate non-dominant ways of knowing. In a community-based participatory evaluation project with Best Starts for Kids, I design and facilitate a committee where university researchers, public health officials, youth workers and young people work together to make decisions about survey design, testing, and implementation.

Looking Forward

My dissertation research aims to directly support social justice work by better understanding how social media is impacting youth critical consciousness and organizing. For example, one aspect of this work is a YPAR photovoice project. I am facilitating young people through a critical examination of their use of social media for critical consciousness of their communities and youth organizing. We are committed to putting this research into action and are translating those results into a youth-led organizer training after the project is complete.

As a whole, my dissertation research combats the sociopolitical marginalization of youth by recognizing their power, autonomy and role as leaders for social change. It also supports the transformation of environments that impact young people’s lives (virtual community spaces) in a way that supports and facilitates their organizing, rather than controlling or appropriating youth-led movements. In the coming years I will continue to critically examine virtual social and emotional spaces in young people’s lives and look at ways of increasing youth empowerment and anti-oppressive practice with adolescents across contexts. I will continue this work using research methods that are epistemologically aligned with these goals, including YPAR and community-based participatory approaches.