

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Sophia Rodriguez
University of Maryland

Gilberto Q. Conchas
University of California, Irvine

To illustrate the commitment of the Center for Leadership, Equity and Research, we came together to develop a theme for this special issue of the *Journal for Leadership, Equity, and Research (JLER)*. In some ways, this project reflects the broader issues of educational equity and social justice within our own scholarship and through this collaboration. Conchas (2001; 2006; 2012) has spent a better part of academia centralizing the experiences of minoritized communities and urban youth, and shepherding scholars along in academic spaces that are far from emancipatory or liberating—the central theme of the collection—to develop positive relationships as both a scholar and activist. Additionally, Rodriguez’s (2017a; 2017b; 2018; 2019a; 2019b) scholarship and community-based research centralizes undocumented and transnational migrant youth and seeks to explore how schools and society and be more welcoming and promote positive identity development.

The intersections of our scholarship and as producers of knowledge with and about minoritized groups is evident in relation to themes of access, relationships and social capital, equity, and belonging (Stanton-Salazar, 1997; 2001). Rodriguez (2012) wrote, “Instead of talking about our ethical role as education researchers let’s live by an ethic of promoting justice through engaged, transformative research” in her research about how community-schools promote belonging for Latinx immigrant youth and witnessing activism of teachers and minoritized youth in Chicago Public Schools when the Mayor was threatening to close (and ultimately did close) several public schools in 2012. Similarly, back in 2006, Conchas stated in his first book on race and high-achieving urban Black, Latinx and Vietnamese high school students:

I cannot hide the fact that I was less sympathetic to individuals that maintained the status quo. As a racial minority researcher, I strongly believe that schools should be places of fairness and equal participation. My critical stance, I hope, has allowed me to illuminate agents, those individual and group behaviors, involved in seeking to improve the quality of schooling for urban youth.

These moments, when we struggle as researchers and human beings in our communities to advance equitable processes, continue to be a site of struggle and transformation. And, we often turn to scholars in this communal effort like Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa instructed us to seek allies and, together, begin building spiritual/political bridges and communities that struggle for personal growth and social justice.

As social justice-oriented researchers, we often feel like we “straddle the worlds, walking a precarious and somewhat invisible line,” between the knowledge production of academic labor and relational community-building with our participants (Rodriguez, 2012). It is from these spaces—what St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) call the “ruins”—of social justice and emancipatory

hopes that we envisioned, as editors, how we could focus on how scholars are engaging in emancipatory methodologies and being reflexive about such processes.

The special issue is a collection of theoretical, empirical, and practice/policy-based social justice studies in education and community-based settings from Andean college students in Cusco, Peru, high school *pushouts* students in a school district in southern California, a public PK-12 school district in the Midwest United States, and the impact of mayoral-controlled policies on Black and Latinx communities in a Northeastern school district. This internationally focused special issue offers insight through social justice conscious inquiry and methods that highlight the structures of inequality and/or enhance those that increase opportunity in distinct contexts through critical scholarship and reflexivity that pushes the boundaries of being and knowing in the world. We argue that “critical reflexivity” in research is especially powerful when we advance social justice and equity with and for minoritized communities and think about our shared desires and differences rather than what divides us (Rodriguez, 2019). Authors in this volume expand socially-justice approaches to educational research in order to give voice to minoritized communities and to hold researchers “answerable” to the communities we serve (Patel, 2016) and sustain a more humane and just world through unpacking the ethics and politics of research (Fine, 2018).

Finally, we are delighted to have Dr. Ricardo Stanton-Salazar, a highly cited author and scholar, alongside us for this special issue and his “Distinguished Scholar Commentary.”

As Gloria Anzaldúa (2002) echoes: “We are ready for change. Let us link hands and hearts together find a path through the dark woods step through the doorways between worlds leaving *huellas* (footprints) for others to follow . . . *si se puede* (yes we can).” We hope this special issue contributes to the much-needed change in education research to give voice to the most marginalized in communities and educational institutions and advance social justice approaches.

REFERENCES

- Anzaldúa, G. (2002). Now Let us Shift . . . The Path of Conocimiento . . . Inner Work, Public Acts, In *This bridge we call home: Radical visions for transformation*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating. New York: Routledge.
- Conchas, G. Q., & Vigil, J. D. (2012). *Streetsmart schoolsmart: urban poverty and the education of adolescent boys*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Conchas, G. Q. (2001). Structuring failure and success: understanding the variability in Latino school engagement. *Harvard Educational Review*, 71(3), 475–504.
- Conchas, G. Q. (2006). *The color of success: race and high-achieving urban youth*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Fine, M. (2018). *Just research in contentious times: Widening the methodological imagination*. New York, New York: Teachers College Press.
- Patel, L. (2016). *Decolonizing educational research: From ownership to answerability*. New York: Routledge
- Rodriguez, S. (2019). You’re a sociologist, I am too: Theorizing disruption in fieldwork with undocumented youth. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241619882075>.

- Rodriguez, S. (2019b). We're building the community; it's a hub for democracy: Lessons learned from a library-based program for newcomer immigrant and refugee youth. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 102, 135-144.
- Rodriguez, S. (2017a). People hide, but I'm here. I count: Examining undocumented youth identity formation in an urban community-school, *Educational Studies*, 53(5), 468-491.
- Rodriguez, S. (2017b). My eyes were opened to the lack of diversity in our best schools: Re-conceptualizing competitive school choice policy as a racial formation. *The Urban Review*, 49(4), 529-550.
- Rodriguez, S. (2012). An invisible divide: Challenges of doing social justice research in academia." Retrieved:
<https://issuu.com/broadmagazine/docs/activismandacademia>
- Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (1997). A social capital framework for understanding the socialization of racial minority children and youths. *Harvard Educational Review*, 67(1), 1-40.
- Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (2001). *Manufacturing hope and despair: the school and kin support networks of U.S.-Mexican youth*. New York: Teachers College Press.