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ISLS Annual Meeting 2024 June 10-14, 2024

Learning as a Cornerstone of Healing, Resilience, and
Community

18th International Conference
of the Learning Sciences (ICLS)

ICLS Proceedings

Edited by: Robb Lindgren, Tataleni Asino, Eleni A. Kyza, Chee-Kit
Looi, D. Teo Keifert & Enrique Suárez



**International Society of
the Learning Sciences**



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Graduate School of Education

ISLS Annual Meeting 2024
*Learning as a Cornerstone of Healing, Resilience, and
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Buffalo, USA, June 10-14
Workshops: June 8-9
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- ICLS Proceedings-

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International Society of the Learning Sciences (ISLS)

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Reclaiming Radical Healing: The Role of Youth Activism in Understanding Oppression and Building Resilience

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Abstract: The youth organizing field--and critical youth voice work in general--is embracing and adopting radical healing and healing justice in our work (Eagle Shield et al., 2020; Fernandez & Watts, 2021; Ginwright, 2015; Greene et al., 2021). Organizers in communities of color draw on ancestral traditions, including Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Chicana feminisms, and the Black African diaspora, to invite young people to anchor their activism in a healing framework. This means gaining insight into root causes of harms and developing strategies to address them. This welcome development calls for systematic inquiry about how to practice and sustain the many “both/ands” of healing justice, including individual/collective, healing/activism, self/other, ancestry/futurism, and acceptance/critique. This session will introduce theoretical and practical tools that foster critical healing praxis in community organizations and schools.

Symposium rationale

Our primary goal in this paper symposium is to invite critical reflection and dialogue about radical healing in youth activism and social justice education. We will discuss ancestral and cultural traditions that inform healing justice and dilemmas that emerge in practice. We want to generate implications for a research agenda that honors the liberatory aims of radical healing.

The youth organizing field--and critical youth voice work in general--is embracing and adopting radical healing and healing justice (Fernández & Watts, 2021; Greene et al., 2021; Valladares et al., 2021). According to Ginwright (2015):

Healing justice is an emerging movement that seeks both (a) collective healing and well-being, and also (b) transforming the institutions and relationships that are causing the harm...healing justice advocates view the practice of healing as political action. (p. 38)

Organizers and educators in communities of color draw on cultural traditions, including Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Chicana feminisms, and the Black African diaspora, to invite young people to anchor their activism in a healing framework (Anzaldúa, 1981; Eagle Shield et al., 2020; Greene et al., 2021; Mendoza, 2022b). This welcome development in social justice youth work calls for systematic inquiry about how to practice and sustain the many “both/ands” of healing justice, including individual/collective, healing/activism, self/other, ancestry/futurism, and hope/critique. How do multiracial spaces honor (and learn from) ancestral healing practices without appropriating them? What happens when the emphasis on well-being and self-care comes into tension with the slow grind of community organizing?

Theoretical perspective

Recent scholarship on healing justice includes important theoretical contributions (Ginwright, 2015), but studies of high-quality healing justice practices are needed, particularly examples that inform the design of learning environments (Mendoza et al., 2018; Trejo, 2023). As “healing” is popularized in the youth sector, it risks becoming a buzzword, packaged to appeal to funders but carrying the individualistic and depoliticized DNA of Eurocentric models of mental health. This session will provide a critical, hopeful space to examine tensions and dilemmas in radical healing with youth and open new directions for participatory and community-engaged scholarship about healing justice.

Symposium structure

This interactive session combines brief engaging presentations with group discussion. Presenters will each take 8-10 minutes to bring the audience into a core question or dilemma emerging from their work. The first paper examines how youth activism around transportation issues proved healing for youth and educators. The second paper examines the healing aspects that grad school can provide Latine/x students. The third paper details a sacred, communal pause in a youth activism project. The fourth paper draws on the lens of hummingbird medicine to examine healing spaces where youth activists create the conditions to learn from failures and setbacks. The final paper explores youth experiencing healing through looking at past school-based traumas through the lens of trust and distrust. Discussant Dr. Kalonji Nzinga (CU-Boulder) will then lead conversation after the paper presentations.

Paper 1: Healing through YPAR transportation projects

Dane Stickney, Milahd Makooi, Emilleo Morales, Ashera Adler-Eldridge, Caleb Burns and Dave McPartlan

Rationale

In Denver, Colorado, the streets aren’t safe and youth have been noticing and taking action in response. Eighth-grader Emilleo, for example, often spent his lunch meeting with his peers and even grilling city council members as part of a research project aimed at making a deadly local street safer. Ash, a high school senior, led her classmates in another transportation-related research project: an examination of the lack of school and city bus routes serving the growing school. In both cases, the transportation focus, emerging from youth participatory action research (YPAR) proved to be generative and healing for students. The more they understood how local transportation services oppressed them, the more they could devise solutions and actions that eventually proved empowering and healing.

Theoretical perspective

Unlike other papers in this symposium, these projects did not set out to explicitly implement healing practices. Instead, we focused on implementing YPAR, an emergent epistemological approach that positions youth to name problems, conduct their own research around them, develop equitable policy solutions, and work with adults to implement them (Ozer & Douglas, 2015; Fox & Fine, 2013). In this case, both youth teams implemented YPAR projects that dealt with transportation inequities. Emilleo’s class launched their YPAR project after their teacher’s friend was hit and killed by a car while crossing a notoriously dangerous street. Ash’s class explored their past negative lived experiences with transportation to and from school. Through later individual and collective reflection with university researchers—via writing, video testimonials, and online group discussions and presentations—youth described the YPAR work as healing.

Methods

After completing the projects, the youth met online with a group of university researchers to develop a reflection process. The intergenerational group, with members ranging from 13 to 64 years old in the US, United Kingdom, and Greece, developed two research questions. The first looked at what external changes the youth made. By external, we meant “outside of yourself,” like using YPAR to change school lunch offerings. The second examined internal changes or shifts occurring in students’ “heads or hearts.” Students, and one teacher, wrote and filmed video responses to those prompts, and the intergenerational group collectively analyzed the findings and engaged in regular online video discussions about their implications.

Findings

In terms of external changes, the young people noted the tangible things they had achieved. Emilleo’s group had worked with elected officials to reduce lanes of traffic on a street from four to three and pilot pedestrian-only hours. Ash’s group secured the promise of a city bus line to their school. Progress is underway but not complete. In terms of internal changes, intergenerational analysis revealed a pattern of healing outcomes. The youth felt

safer, more powerful, and able to use YPAR to mediate problems inside and outside of schools. Specifically, they described interactions with powerful adults as important. The young people in these cases interacted with adults ranging from school district administrators to the state's governor, who listened, gave feedback, and even enacted some level of change. The youth said this political progress helped alleviate the immediate anguish of the transportation problems they faced and actually induced pride. "It was so healing to have adults sit down and be like 'Wow, you're passionate and committed,'" Ash said.

Discussion

The two YPAR projects, while not explicitly designed with a healing justice framework, proved generative and reparative for young people. The transportation focus allowed young people to do the "both/and" work that Ginwright (2015) described: finding collective well-being in their school-based groups while also working to alleviate social oppression, in this case, the transformation of local transportation systems.

Paper 2: Latine/x healing in graduate school

Beatriz Salazar, Marlene Palomar and Carlos Hipolito-Delgado

Rationale

We often hear about the harm that is perpetrated on students of color during graduate school, but we rarely talk about the healing moments that accompany graduate study. In this paper, we seek to complicate this narrative and share our stories of *healing* in graduate school. Pursuing graduate school provides students of color access to theories of greatness, validation, and the opportunity to re-create the lens in which our communities are seen. We argue that access to knowledge and creation brings healing.

Framework

Through the centering of LatCrit we would like to nuance several of the conversations taking place regarding race, graduate school, and healing. LatCrit seeks to dismantle the Black-White dichotomy when addressing discussions on racism within different systems. Particularly, an examination of how Critical Race Theory (CRT) can extend its scope beyond what Iglesias (1997) describes as the constraints of the Black/White paradigm to intricately assess the cultural, political, and economic aspects of white supremacy in the experiences of Latine individuals in their personal and collective journey for healing and joy. In the realm of education, (Solorzano & Yosso, 2010) frames LatCrit as a framework that can be employed to conceptualize and understand how race and racism, both overtly and covertly, influence educational systems, procedures, and dialogues that have consequences for Latine individuals and communities. Given its emphasis on the experiences of Latines in educational settings and its dedication to the principles of scholarship, teaching, and interdisciplinary methods within the context of a social justice initiative, we opt to prioritize healing. We make this choice because our lived experiences have shown that various forms of subordination, such as sexism and ableism, operate in intricate ways. They have the potential to oppress and marginalize while simultaneously having the potential to emancipate and uplift, underscoring the significance to prioritize and also center and highlight healing and joy in the graduate schooling experience.

Methods and analysis

We are choosing to present our work through *testimonio*. Testimonios are "a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more human present and future" (Cervantes, 2020). Testimonio allows us to experience this healing journey collectively, being witness to the stories of our peers, their joys and sorrows, thus affording us the opportunity to remix the *remedios* that are helping others be our own. As we focus on the journey of healing, the utilization of testimonio anchors us in an ongoing process and commitment to reconstructive life stories that incorporate moments of adversity with an acknowledgement of the self and others as a whole, sustained hope and transformation of the hardships and grief into healing and possibility (Fernández, 2022). Together, the three Chicane/Latine authors share our *testimonios* of healing through the creation of knowledge as scholars and as researchers who co-create and also present the *testimonios* of youth activists.

Discussion

Graduate school allows us the experience to not simply transcend the suffering brought to our communities through systemic racism, but also to move our communities beyond those pain points and re-create our narratives. By sharing our *testimonios*, our stories, we hope to bring another narrative into the discussion of graduate students of color and youth activists. Through graduate school and activism, we are given access to mentors, theories and