



An On-line Journal
for Teacher Research

Inspiring a Revolution: A review of Julio Cammarota and Michelle Fine's *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion*

A book review by Alison E. Leonard

Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion. Julio Cammarota and Michelle Fine (Eds.). New York: Routledge, 2008. 256 pp., \$36.95 (paper). ISBN: 978-0-415-95616-1

Multigenerational, diverse voices can be heard throughout Julio Cammarota and Michelle Fine's *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion*, an edited collection of chapters presenting provocative, transformative participatory action research (PAR)—focusing on youth participatory action research (YPAR). Challenging conventional notions of inquiry, these YPAR projects illustrate “research conducted “with” as opposed to “on” youth,” (p. vii) surrounding issues of injustice, inequality, and struggles in the lives and education of youth and their communities, giving voice to those often silenced due to age, race, ethnicity, sexuality, economic status, gender, language, and abled/disabled identities. Although of interest and targeting action researchers and scholarly audiences in education, *Revolutionizing Education* also speaks to administrators, youth researchers, documentarians, and teachers, particularly since the work involves co-constructed projects involving adults and youth. It, thus, lends itself to broadening the possibilities of teacher research.

Revolutionizing Education follows in the critical pedagogic footsteps of Paulo Freire (1970) and exemplifies the decolonizing research methodologies of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999). In the book, YPAR builds upon

the idea that everyone has “the right to the tools through which any citizen can systematically increase that stock of knowledge which they consider most vital to their survival as human beings and to their claims as citizens” (p. vii, as cited in Appadurai, 2006, p. 168). Therefore, conducting research is not limited to a select group. Specifically, youth can participate within this form of inquiry, reclaiming, recovering, and reimaging their social and political power, in the hopes of promoting and creating social justice and revolutionizing learning. Both Cammarota and Fine, widely published scholars who focus on social justice and critical pedagogy in education, actively work on social justice PAR and YPAR projects with youth in schools, prisons, and communities.

Cammarota and Fine compellingly combine theory, research, images, narratives, adult and youth voices, and reflective descriptions in nine chapters that include an introduction by *Critical Youth Studies* series editor, Greg Dimitriadis, an introduction by the editors, thoughts by Shawn Ginwright, a closing overview by Chiara M. Cannella, “An Epilogue, of Sorts” by Fine, and five case studies with responses to each case by noted scholars. After Dimitriadis sets the tone, Cammarota and Fine lay the groundwork of

PAR as a pedagogy of resistance and introduce YPAR, and Ginwright provides inspiration, relating his YPAR work to creating a collective imagination among youth. The five multi-authored chapters illustrating YPAR case studies then follow.

The first three chapters examine projects sponsored by City University of New York (CUNY) PAR Collective. The first (Torre and Fine, et al.) discusses The Opportunity Gap Research Project. This project brings together diverse youth from urban and suburban high schools to study youth perspectives on race, class, and injustice, culminating in a collaborative performance—*Echoes of Brown: Youth Documenting and Performing the Legacy of Brown v. Board of Education*. Maxine Greene provides an inspiring response, advocating for more deliberate questioning by youth. Next, The Collective of Researchers on Educational Disappointment and Desire explores both the inequality and opportunity related to the General Education Development Test (GED). Sandy Grande responds, calling for future collective YPAR work with local populations. The final CUNY project looks at the lives of women of color on the Lower East Side of NY (Cahill, Rios-Moore, and Threatts). Pauline Lipman provides a response challenging readers to identify spaces of future resistance.

The next two chapters involve YPAR projects in schools. The first examines the Social Justice Educational Project (SJEP) and PAR in high schools in the Tucson Unified School District where high school students receive high school credit to examine and interrogate their own socio-historical contexts (Romero et al). In response, Luis C. Moll addresses the impact of hearing about SJEP at a conference. The final study (Morrell) presents the YPAR of the Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access in Los Angeles where 30+ high school seniors take a summer seminar for university credit and learn to engage in PAR projects within their own communities. In a final response, John Rogers reminds readers of the power of student engagement as learners *and* as teachers.

As a compilation, the multiplicity of voices from adults and youth inspires future YPAR and action research in classrooms and communities, providing examples of PAR frameworks and strategies to guide future work. However, at times the specifics of these examples get blurred in the narratives of the multiple-authored chapters. For example, several of the chapters begin with poetic accounts and seemingly begin in the middle of the research. Therefore, getting to the structure of the studies sometimes takes awhile. However, to the authors' credit, these studies seek to disrupt conventional notions of research. Thus, the manner in which this YPAR is communicated utilizes non-chronological narratives, steering away from rigid structures of research. While this structure may appear disjointed or jolting to academics, in many ways, it reflects the constructed nature and diversity of voices in YPAR.

Similarly, while the final two chapters seem to speak only to an academic audience, they do so in a way that parallels the aims and strategies of YPAR and hints at applications for K-12 classrooms. First, Cannella reflects on the negative impacts of *No Child Left Behind* legislation on education as a rallying call for YPAR. Finally, Fine closes the volume with a fictional letter to a tenure committee defending a tenure candidate who conducts PAR. While the context relates to academics, the manner in which Fine presents her argument could inspire youth and teacher action. Intelligently, she recounts PAR history and places emphasis on its reframing of research inquiry. In addition, she writes that due to the nature of PAR, one should not question the importance of co-authoring work, dismissing hypothetical critiques by the committee that co-authorship lacks rigor, exclaiming, “[As] if writing collectively and democratically were easier than writing alone.” In a way, it is a shame that this bold letter paralleling the PAR mission is fictional. Standing as a testament to the power of PAR, especially YPAR, Fine’s epilogue, along with the engaging and inspiring research recounted in *Revolutionizing Education*

paves the way for the further legitimizing of action research and serves as a call to action for future collaboratively-constructed work by researchers, teachers, and youth.

References

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