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**SPECIAL ISSUE**  
**COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH FOR JUSTICE**

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**Collaborative Research for Justice and Multi-Issue  
Movement Building: Challenging Discriminatory Policing,  
School Closures, and Youth Unemployment**

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**Abstract:** This special issue engages ethical, epistemic, political, and institutional issues in projects of collaborative research for justice that were designed with movements contesting policing, school closures, and youth disinvestment and unemployment. Three of the articles were collaboratively written by activists and scholars who drew from movements that deployed research for community-driven progressive change. The movements and the research are thus situated at the intersection of struggles against a resurgent anti-immigrant white supremacy, gentrification, a punitive carceral state, low pay and lack of meaningful employment opportunities, and the privatization of the public sector. These articles build upon and are in conversation with a set of related articles

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published in the spring 2018 special issue of *Urban Education* (Warren et al, 2018) that also addressed ethical, epistemic, political, and institutional tensions in collaborative research for justice. This EPAA special issue aims to advance the discussion through deep reflection within the context of focal 'cases' and within efforts to open space within universities for modes of engaged scholarship that can respond to the challenges of the current moment, as described in the articles that bookend the cases. Taken all together, this special issue demonstrates how scholars, educators, teachers, activists, community leaders, and policy makers can use the production and mobilization of knowledge as a force for building, supporting, sustaining, and advancing multi-issue movements for justice not just in schools and the academy but also in communities of color and others aggrieved by current inequities.

**Keywords:** Collaborative research; research for justice; community-based research; participatory action research; scholar-activists

### **Investigación colaborativa para la construcción de la justicia y del movimiento: Desafiando la policía discriminatoria, el cierre de escuelas y el desempleo entre los jóvenes**

**Resumen:** Esta número especial involucra cuestiones éticas, epistémicas, políticas e institucionales en proyectos de investigación colaborativa para la justicia, concebidos con movimientos que impugnan el policiamiento, el cierre de escuelas, la desinversión de jóvenes y el desempleo. Tres de los artículos fueron escritos de forma colaborativa por activistas y académicos que implantaron investigaciones para cambios en la comunidad. Los movimientos y la investigación se sitúan, por lo tanto, en la intersección de las luchas contra la resurgente supremacía blanca anti-inmigración, la gentrificación, un Estado punitivo carcelario, bajos salarios y falta de oportunidades de empleo significativas, y la privatización del sector público. Estos artículos se basan en un conjunto de artículos relacionados publicados en una número especial de *Urban Education* (Warren et al, 2018), que también abordó las tensiones éticas, epistémicas, políticas e institucionales en la investigación colaborativa para la justicia. Esta número especial tiene como objetivo avanzar la discusión a través de profunda reflexión dentro del contexto de "casos" focales y dentro de los esfuerzos para abrir espacio dentro de las universidades para modos de estudios comprometidos que puedan responder a los desafíos actuales. Colectivamente, esta número especial demuestra como académicos, educadores, profesores, activistas, líderes comunitarios y formuladores de políticas pueden usar la producción y movilización de conocimiento como una fuerza para construir, apoyar, sostener y promover movimientos por la justicia, no sólo en las escuelas y en la escuela la sociedad. pero también en comunidades de color y otras que se sienten perjudicadas por las desigualdades actuales.

**Palabras-clave:** Investigación colaborativa; investigación para la justicia; investigación basada en la comunidad; investigación de acción participativa; académicos activistas

### **Pesquisa colaborativa para a construção da justiça e do movimento: Desafiando o policiamento discriminatório, o fechamento de escolas e o desemprego entre os jovens**

**Resumo:** Esta dossiê envolve questões éticas, epistêmicas, políticas e institucionais em projetos de pesquisa colaborativa para a justiça, concebidos com movimentos que contestam o policiamento, o fechamento de escolas, o desinvestimento de jovens e o

desemprego. Três dos artigos foram escritos de forma colaborativa por ativistas e acadêmicos que implantaram pesquisas para mudanças na comunidade. Os movimentos e a pesquisa situam-se, portanto, na interseção das lutas contra a ressurgente supremacia branca anti-imigração, a gentrificação, um Estado punitivo carcerário, baixos salários e falta de oportunidades de emprego significativas, e a privatização do setor público. Esses artigos baseiam-se em um conjunto de artigos relacionados publicados em uma dossiê da *Urban Education* (Warren et al, 2018), que também abordou as tensões éticas, epistêmicas, políticas e institucionais na pesquisa colaborativa para a justiça. Esta dossiê tem como objetivo avançar a discussão através de profunda reflexão dentro do contexto de "casos" focais e dentro dos esforços para abrir espaço dentro das universidades para modos de estudos engajados que possam responder aos desafios atuais. Coletivamente, esta dossiê demonstra como acadêmicos, educadores, professores, ativistas, líderes comunitários e formuladores de políticas podem usar a produção e mobilização de conhecimento como uma força para construir, apoiar, sustentar e promover movimentos pela justiça, não apenas nas escolas e na sociedade. academia, mas também em comunidades de cor e outras que se sentem prejudicadas pelas desigualdades atuais.

**Palavras-chave:** Pesquisa colaborativa; pesquisa para justiça; pesquisa baseada na comunidade; pesquisa de ação participativa; acadêmicos-ativistas

## Collaborative Research for Justice and Multi-Issue Movement Building

This special issue engages ethical, epistemic, political, and institutional issues in projects of collaborative research for justice that were designed with movements contesting policing, school closures, and youth disinvestment and unemployment. Three of the articles were collaboratively written by activists and scholars who drew from movements that deployed research for community-driven progressive change. The movements and the research are thus situated at the intersection of struggles against a resurgent anti-immigrant white supremacy, gentrification, a punitive carceral state, low pay and lack of meaningful employment opportunities, and the privatization of the public sector. These articles build upon and are in conversation with a set of related articles published in the spring 2018 special issue of *Urban Education* (Warren et al., 2018) that also addressed ethical, epistemic, political, and institutional tensions in collaborative research for justice. This special issue aims to advance the discussion through deep reflection within the context of focal 'cases' and within efforts to open space within universities for modes of engaged scholarship that can respond to the challenges of the current moment, as described in the articles that bookend the cases. Taken all together, this special issue demonstrates how scholars, educators, teachers, activists, community leaders, and policy makers can use the production and mobilization of knowledge as a force for building, supporting, sustaining, and advancing multi-issue movements for justice not just in schools and the academy but also in communities of color and others aggrieved by current inequities.

This special issue and the one published in *Urban Education* (Warren et al, 2018) were generated from three invitational conferences<sup>1</sup> convened by URBAN (Urban Research Based Action Network), a national network now comprised of some 1500 scholars, educators, and organizers who work with community groups to research and analyze the possibilities of community-driven change for progressive public schools and other institutions. The conferences

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<sup>1</sup> These conferences were supported by the American Educational Research Association, the WT Grant Foundation, and the Spencer Foundation and were held in 2015 and 2016.

enabled a cross-sector analysis of the disinvestment, privatization, and hyper-securitization of public schools and their links to national and global struggles. The [graphic visualizations](#), created in real time during the second conference by Paul Kuttner, are reproduced for this special issue, and they reveal the depth and range of these discussions. Readers can also link to a webcast discussion by Joyce E. King, Ronald David Glass, and Sheeva Sabati of the visualization of the ethical issues in collaborative research ([www.urbanresearchnetwork.org](http://www.urbanresearchnetwork.org)).

### **Collaborative Research for Justice**

The essays in this special issue resituate collaborative community based research for justice from a praxis perspective (Freire, 1970; Glass, 2001). The ‘cases’ demonstrate the power of inquiry directed towards liberatory possibilities when it is theoretically constructed in ongoing reflective and grounded actions. The ‘cases’ offer promising approaches to scholar responsibility and activism that can not only help build just schools but also just, democratic, and truth-based communities. While we label these accounts as ‘cases’ they emerge from different contexts and different forms of collaboration, ranging from the formation of a nation-wide network to the work of an individual organization in a local community, and from the coalition of multiple university and community actors across several cities to the partnership of one university and a local community group. Together they reveal the diversity of forms that research for justice can take when it is situated in the lived experience and grounded struggles of communities facing the most challenging problems of the present age.

The first article, “Collaborative Research and Movement Building: Lessons from the Urban Research Based Action Network” by Mark Warren, one of the founders of URBAN, reflects on the formation of URBAN as a national network prioritizing issues of racial justice and working to create a truly diverse space for activist scholars unlike typical white dominated academic spaces. Years of growing inequality, persistent poverty and racial inequities, increasing environmental challenges and attacks on immigrants demanded a response from academia that was largely missing. The rise of ‘evidence-based practice’ and ‘big data’ meant that research and data-based knowledge were more important than ever, yet aggrieved communities<sup>2</sup> typically lacked access to data relevant to advocating for their policy objectives. Meanwhile, a new generation of scholars, often led by scholars of color and women, came to graduate studies because of their deep passion to contribute to social justice, yet found the academy pushed them towards traditional, detached research agendas that seemed irrelevant to the pressing demands of low-income urban communities. Many scholars nevertheless pursued community-engaged research but they did so isolated in their own silos – in their institutions, disciplines, localities, or policy areas. Warren traces the 2010-2018 period of the formation of the network and its expansion from a small group of nationally prominent activist scholars to a nation-wide network of more than 1500 researchers, activists, educators, and community leaders working together in geographic and inter/disciplinary nodes on locally defined issues.

Although concerned with combating inequality and oppression in all its forms, URBAN placed a special emphasis on combating racism because it is a central form of oppression in urban communities and one that the academy is often unwilling to address explicitly or structurally. URBAN connects activist scholars across their silos and creates a space for an exchange of ideas, analyses and best practices. It supports early career and graduate student engaged scholars, and strives to open space in the academy for activist scholarship. URBAN

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<sup>2</sup> We use the phrase ‘aggrieved communities’ to signal those communities confronting the fiercest effects of racism, sexism, xenophobia, and class exploitation.

members challenge the hierarchy of knowledge production and power that places academics and experts above communities struggling for change.

URBAN secured funding to host field building national invitational conferences, develop a website and communication structure, support the development of three special issues of educational research journals<sup>3</sup>, and seed deeper discussions of collaborative community based action research within the national professional organizations of educational researchers, sociologists, urban planners, community psychologists, and others. With active local nodes now in Boston, New York City, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Hartford/Springfield, and Denver/Boulder, and nodes emerging in Minneapolis, Salt Lake City, Atlanta. and Santa Cruz, CA, URBAN's reach has become truly national.

URBAN's public university institutional home at the City University of New York Graduate Center demonstrates how research can be answerable to the well-being of aggrieved communities. Its hybrid organization works deeply and critically within, and widely and dynamically across, communities and disciplines. Its members' place-based research and activism is rooted in local struggles around charter school expansion, immigration rights and education, gentrification and school closings, youth justice, police violence and mass incarceration, and teacher activism and development, and also engages the contact zones of cross-city, cross-discipline provocations and discussions focused on the often fraught research dynamics between universities and communities, social policy, and organizing.

The second article, "Researching in Community-University Borderlands: Using Public Science to Study Policing in the South Bronx", by Brett Stoudt et al., is co-authored by 15 co-researchers who conducted a multi-year participatory action research (PAR) project in New York City that documented and analyzed the impact of aggressive policing in their South Bronx neighborhood. The case study details how the research collective engaged research-action strategies – that they called "sidewalk science" – to share back and make meaning of the findings with the broader community, while simultaneously igniting community dialogue and organizing. Expanding conventional ideas about "research products" the group experimented with multi-layered research actions aimed at deepening understandings of the violence imposed on communities by policing policies like 'stop and frisk' among those living the consequences of the policies and those 'benefiting' from them, as well as for advocates and lawyers attempting to dismantle them. The research demonstrates how research conducted in solidarity with an emerging police reform movement can effectively respond to aggressive pipeline-to-prison policing policies enforced on streets, in homes, and in schools, and disproportionately impacting poor communities and communities of color. The collaboratively written story, told across three sections, shares the genesis of the project, its commitments as a collective, and its powerful public science activities that aimed both to disrupt structural injustice and to transform traditional university practices.

The project emerged from a confluence of responses to long histories of violence in and outside the academy – the daily experiences of state violence enacted by racist policing and incarceration policies and practices (Alexander, 2012), and the violence enacted from university complicity in the racist and colonial exploitation and ongoing dispossession of marginalized communities (Smith, 1999). The praxis of contesting these *structural* acts of violence (Farmer, 1996) located certain university epistemic and professional restraints as *part of* that violence. The essay offers PAR as a counter-praxis, an ethical response to conventional research, that through closely attending to critical participatory practices, establishing ongoing accountability structures, and developing

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to this issue of *EPAA/AAPE* and the issue of *Urban Education*, the URBAN network also published a [special issue of the \*International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education\*](#).

grounded research-action strategies, can pry open new spaces of possibility both in communities and in the academy.

The essay tells a multi-vocal story particularly relevant to the growing numbers of people across cities, campuses, and coalitions who are taking action and considering the role the academy might play in challenging the pervasive state sanctioned violence against communities targeted by white supremacy, xenophobia, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy (i.e., people of color, LGBTQ-communities, those who are precariously housed, those who are formerly incarcerated, undocumented and other immigrants, people with psychiatric disabilities and mental health issues, Muslim practicing religious groups, political activists). Like all research, community-based research takes attention and care. Creating spaces that invite respectful participation and intentionally work to subvert traditional power relationships takes time and negotiation. Given these realities, the authors conclude with humility and uncertainty as well as a sense of pride and accomplishment. Their enlightening first-person account represents the best of public science – publicly oriented science by the public, with the public, for the public good – spanning from the streets of the South Bronx to the Obama White House, offering valuable lessons for justice-oriented researchers and activists alike.

The next essay in this special issue, “Community-Engaged Research through the Lens of School Closures: Opportunities, Challenges, Contributions, and Lingered Questions”, by Agard et al., is co-authored by a group of activists and scholar-activists in Baltimore, New York City, and Philadelphia. The article presents their critical reflections on what they term ‘community-engaged scholarship’ (CES) as it was integrated into their local contestations of school closures. They first crafted their CES framework at a gathering of activists, scholars, teachers, and parents that also included representation from school closure struggles in Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Newark, and Washington DC. This coalition building meeting was designed to examine the current state of research on school closures, develop a research agenda linked to community organizing, and build a regional scale network to collaborate on shared projects.

The authors stress that these kinds of research collaborations began forming in the 1960s (Stoecker, 2001) and continue under many names: *action research*, *community-based/ driven research*, *community-engaged scholarship*, *participatory action research*, among others. They frame CES in terms of its aims to “produc(e) knowledge that can be used by community partners to contribute to positive social change and the well-being of individuals, families, and communities” (Small and Uttal, 2005, p. 938), and its emphasis on social justice embedded in democratic ideals. Without discounting the variances in CES, the authors engage with the possible opportunities and challenges in this methodology and show that CES, when done well, benefits a range of stakeholders by enriching research, teaching, and community-based institutions and neighborhoods (Barge & Shockley-Zalabak, 2008; Peterson, 2009). They unpack key assumptions about the efficacy of research for addressing social problems, about the need to attend to issues of trust and power in collecting and analyzing data, about the need for flexible research designs, and about the need to value knowledge from community partners co-equally with that produced in the academy (Small & Uttal, 2005). They also show how these foundational elements shape the ethical and political commitments that can give stronger epistemic warrant to research conclusions.

The article highlights three distinctive forms of CES: *participatory action research*, in which university and community partners collaboratively engage in almost all aspects of the process *engaged learner research*, in which the researcher documents a community organizing campaign with the support of the organizers; and a *grassroots listening project* which was implemented without university partners. Through a comparison of these approaches, the authors address questions around power differentials, race and racism, and ownership and voice in the various projects. They argue that CES

is a necessary correction in the field of policy research, traditionally the terrain of technocratic experts with little or no input from aggrieved communities. This article demonstrates the potential of CES to build a knowledge and advocacy base through organized community and youth voices and offers promising new directions for activists and scholars alike to create powerful pushback. In particular, CES can provide a counter-weight to the imposition of public school closures that have displaced massive numbers of low-income black and Latino students despite scant research to support the policy and in the face of widespread opposition (Conner & Cosner, 2015; de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009; Kirshner, Gaertner, & Pozzoboni, 2010; Lipman & Person, 2007; Pappas, 2012, 2015; Shiller, Jordan, & New Lens, 2015).

The next article, “Amplifying Youth Voice and Cultivating Leadership through Participatory Action Research”, by Gardner et al., is written by community activists who created a youth-led action research intervention when they were frustrated by the lack of employment opportunities available in their Boston community. By combining participatory methods with youth organizing strategies they built local leadership and capacity to counteract the neighborhood’s increase in youth unemployment from 25% to 60% over a five-year period. Their vision was for all youth to have the resources, opportunities, and support to succeed, and the group worked to address the many barriers – underperforming schools, lack of employment and other opportunities for personal development, poverty, trauma, violence, and more – that stand in the way of well-being and fulfilling lives for low-income youth and youth of color. With a belief that the solutions must come from developing the power and voice of youth themselves, their youth-led model of participatory action research (YPAR) combined training and hands-on experience in community organizing, civic engagement, research, innovation methods, data analysis, career exploration, and soft skill development to equip young people for personal success as well as for leadership in transforming their communities.

This article demonstrates just how impactful YPAR projects can be. The youth leaders worked in collaboration with businesses, government, and other community stakeholders to identify and creatively address critical needs, using research and technology to inform businesses and government, create solutions to existing and emerging problems, and influence policy for sustained change on issues that affect youth in Boston’s low-income neighborhoods. The story of this powerful YPAR intervention is told from the perspective of the youth themselves as well as from the project leadership, and it is also told in relation to the shared ethical, epistemological, and political issues identified in dialogue with URBAN’s community engaged scholars. The project highlights how the amplification of youth voice and leadership can promote change both at the level of the individual youth who participate and also at the level of the social and economic structures that create and maintain barriers to a flourishing life for youth of color in our urban communities.

The article provides valuable lessons and analysis of the benefits and challenges of YPAR in relation to the need and initial conditions from which the project emerged, YPAR as an organizing strategy and knowledge production process, the policy and action agendas supported by the key research findings, and youth leadership and ownership. The authors’ conclusion takes a community leadership perspective to tie this analysis together and suggest ways that YPAR can be useful for building youth leadership more broadly into school and community change efforts. Even so, and although not referenced in the article itself, this project represents a cautionary tale about the fragility of such work since the project lost funding and closed down in 2017 after the essay was written.

Our special issue ends with Celina Su’s provocative reflections on the constraints and possibilities for research for justice as a lever of change for building a multi-issue social justice movement. Titled “Research, Action, Activism: Critical Solidarities & Multi-Scalar Powers,” this

essay constituted her opening remarks to the third of the invitational URBAN conferences that were the genesis of this special issue, along with a coda on the enduring legacies of those gatherings. This third gathering, held at the Graduate Center at New York University after two gatherings at the University of Massachusetts Boston, emphasized the arts and imagination in knowledge production and mobilization, and in movement building across issues and scales. Su draws out the possibilities of research for justice as a force for change, and in her essay, as in the others, we have provided links to a powerful group of short videos produced during our dialogues in which scholar-activists and activist-scholars describe how their work is publicly engaged and how they put research to work in their organizing. (See the About this Special Issue section at the end of each article). The activists and scholars featured in the videos reflect on turning points in their own life trajectories and careers, and provide advice for the next generation. Su closes with what remains with her: “a mode of research imbued with vulnerability, pain, joy, and resistance, and a sense of belonging in a community committed to healing justice.” This sense of belonging and community draws from a powerful history and tradition of education as a practice of freedom (Freire, 2018; Horton & Freire, 1990), and it sustains the critical hope that nurtures continuing struggles for justice (Glass, 2014).

The articles in this special issue are reminders of the power of putting truth seeking and knowledge production to work in the world. They show us ways of doing so that integrate the core values and practices of the university with the knowledge mobilization practices needed to build the political power required to actually embody the moral force of truth so that it transforms injustice at the historical scale required. Sadly, however, the compelling evidence and arguments provided are not uniformly recognized in many quarters in higher education and so this research remains under-resourced in the academy. Just as collaborative research for justice must be geared into the struggles of actual aggrieved communities, it must also be geared into the actual struggles of real professional and academic communities attempting to move universities toward transformative ends.

### **Situating Collaborative Research for Justice Within the University**

The praxis of studying across, with, and beside communities organizing for equity and justice as they interconnect struggles around education, policing and criminal justice, employment, immigration, and voting rights provides a way to make truth matter in the public sphere. This kind of research for justice can act as a fulcrum to leverage the power of struggles against structural violence, and by widening circles of critical knowledge, it can open up contested spaces across sectors for creative, democratic and even radical possibilities for a more just future. Single sector research and the academic disciplines that remain in silos betray the complexity of the “wicked” problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973) that confront our most vulnerable communities and populations. Thus they offer no chance of disrupting the interconnected circuits of dispossession at the root of the problems (Fine & Ruglis, 2009) nor do they offer any possibility of fully supporting the social policy and organizing campaigns needed to reclaim and reconfigure the public sphere. *At the same time, research for justice must more strategically engage the academy itself and its dominant modes of knowledge production and dissemination.* This engagement must grapple with academic access and reward structures for both students and faculty, the curriculum content, and, even more substantively, the very warrants of epistemic validity in the disciplines and the required modes of ethical responsibility and accountability for research involving human subjects (Newman & Glass, 2014).

As will be clear in the essays in this special issue, the extended network of community-engaged researchers in URBAN is actively working toward the reconstruction of academic communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) so that they can sustain public scholarship and the formation of activist-community-university coalitions to impact meaningful change not only in communities seeking justice but in the academy as well. Yet the effort to bring a democratic

and liberatory perspective to higher education in order to more effectively transform public schooling and marginalized communities is far from universally welcomed. In fact, research for justice actually runs counter to long-standing institutional commitments in U.S. higher education to ‘disinterested’ scholarship that remains neutral in the public sphere. These core principles were historically offered in exchange for noninterference from state and church authorities, and they remain central tenets meant to protect academic freedom in the academy, even as its tenets are challenged from both sides of the political spectrum (Bilgrami & Cole, 2015). In the now traditional view, legitimate scholars, it is presumed, stay out of the fray, remain objective, and let well-warranted facts more or less speak for themselves, and it is others who incorporate them into neutral, rational, and democratic deliberative political and policy processes; this in turn provides an arena for values and power to enter and be resolved so that competing interests peacefully work their way toward the best solution to social problems (Bateson, 1984; Byrne, 2011). In this framing of research, facts and values are separate and distinct, and it is politicians and citizens who add value to scholarly facts as they get taken up in the debates over the ends and means of policies (Durose & Richardson, 2016; Flyvbjerg, 2001).

Researchers who challenge these traditional views deeply unsettle the ethics of research and resituate disciplined inquiry (Baloy et al, 2016; Fine, 2007). Engaged scholars reject this clean separation of ethical and epistemic realms (Glass et al., 2018), drawing arguments from within the academic disciplines themselves (e.g., see Fricker, 2009) as well as from alternative perspectives, such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s critique from the perspective of indigenous methodologies (Smith, 1999). They argue that research that is consciously ‘interested’ and grounded in particular perspectives provides for a ‘strong objectivity’ that actually is a more precise description of all understanding, scientific included (Harding, 1991). In addition, as Fricker (2009) argues, uncovering the intersections of ethics and epistemology also reveals the systematic demeaning and exclusion of the knowledge of women, people of color, low-income people, and others long marginalized from the public sphere and academe. We argue for an alternative vision of research, tied to the active struggles to renew, heal, and transform aggrieved communities, and to the ongoing struggles to contest the epistemic injustices that plague the academy and deprive aggrieved communities of the critical knowledge they need to effectively intervene in and transform oppressive realities. We situate research for justice within possibilities for creating emergent scholarly communities of practice that can insure that knowledge production mobilizes the power to make change by mobilizing and organizing aggrieved communities, students, teachers, and others to make a more progressive school and community possible.

This vision of research for justice must contend with the fact that social science gains power, legitimacy, and influence when its outcomes are seen as detached (Sandoval, 2000), and it is certainly not the active norm for professional training for research doctorates today. Indeed, in the name of neutrality and independence, university communities of practice still often purposely distance themselves from and actively discourage grounded immersion in the most pressing and violent oppressive issues of the day (Chatterjee & Maira, 2014). Most social scientists are taught to value the pursuit of objectivity, even if ultimately unachievable; they are taught that their impartial intellect applied through systematic methods is the recipe for “truth” but their emotional and political selves are a source of contamination; they are taught that “original” scholarly insights are produced by exceptional researchers who build upon previous and contemporary exceptional researchers published in exceptional venues – an individual sport isolated and singular in focus, absent of direct intimacy and reciprocity with their “subjects” (Sprague, 2016). Researchers attempting to minimize bias or retain neutrality then often neglect to recognize the inherent values that inform theoretical, methodological, and interpretive

decisions, values that have traditionally been steeped in hegemonic sensibilities. This type of training thus marginalizes the iterative, relational, open-ended quality of theory building and knowledge production in favor of research as an exercise in confirming-through-extraction, that is, extracting information from, for example, communities of color to test the theoretical worldview of culturally privileged experts (Walter & Anderson, 2013). Once these resources are unearthed and they are no longer useful, traditional researchers retreat back to the university without further investment.

Research *for* justice complicates these commitments for universities. It exposes certain vulnerabilities since knowledge and power are always co-imbricated and research for justice foregrounds this very truth that the universities (and scholars themselves) benefit from having remain hidden. When value and power are revealed in knowledge claims, and when power is the ultimate decider rather than rationality in democratic processes (Mouffe, 2005), then collaborative research for justice insures that knowledge production is linked to knowledge mobilization. In this way, organizing and movement building establish a base of power along with truth so that change might more likely happen (Torre et al, 2012). This approach helps contest the epistemic injustices (Fricker, 2007) and epistemological violences (Teo, 2010) that plague the academy and devalue the critical knowledge aggrieved communities already hold or deprive those communities of the critical knowledge they need to effectively intervene in and transform the oppressive realities that prevent their full development and civic participation. Perhaps it is no surprise then that research for justice does not draw immediate wide acclaim within the privileged halls of the academy!

To complicate matters further, collaborative research for justice also disrupts central tenets of standard research ethics whose frameworks are based in biomedical and objectivist paradigms and whose principles and practices are articulated through Institutional Review Boards for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBs) (Newman & Glass, 2014). With traditional university separations between ethical and epistemological claims eroded, and with strategic university commitments to political neutrality and disinterested scholarship seemingly weakened, this additional challenge to the standards of academe presents obstacles not only to engaged scholars but also to many other scholars who use more traditional social sciences and humanities methodologies that run afoul of ethical frameworks. More specifically, consider some matters about 'informed consent' which is a bedrock of the IRB principal of respect (Glass & Newman, 2015). When a research design is collaboratively developed with aggrieved communities in the context of their struggles for justice, co-deciding every aspect from the questions to the methods, when research data is collaboratively gathered, interpreted, and analyzed, when the results are collaboratively published and disseminated, and when the conditions of life of that same community and those same collaborating research partners are the focus of the research, what happens to the consent process? To what would people be consenting? Where does the research begin and end, and other activities, such as organizing or policy development and advocacy, begin and end? Who consents and what happens to anonymity when 'researcher' and 'research subjects' are collaboratively studying themselves and their situation and community? Who consents when research will disrupt communities along predictable fault lines of race, class, gender, and language abilities? What happens to consent and anonymity when research is studying 'up' and 'sideways' and not reproducing forms of research that document, yet again, the damage long done and still occurring (Tuck, 2009)?

Collaborative, community-based research for justice not only brings out the inadequacies of the IRB process for addressing the ethical issues in research embedded in processes of social change, but more generally, it exposes the many contradictions of mainstream social science.

This kind of research, for example, challenges the assumption that knowledge production is an individual or small group process rather than one that is inherently social and collective amongst many people both inside and outside the university and utilizing multiple forms of knowing. Indeed, academic practices and the production of “legitimate” knowledge through research are elite and exclusionary in ways that reinforce the marginalization and discounting of collaborative, community-based research for justice (Fine, 2007). Academic advancement pivots on supposedly *individual* intellectual contributions; prestige comes from articulating either the ‘first word’ on some matter or having the ‘last word’ on it, when in truth there are only ‘middle words’ that always co-imbricate others besides the named author (Lipsitz et al., 2019). Inter and intra-discipline collaborations – in and across the university – are sometimes encouraged in principle or in the rhetoric of the public university, but little is done to facilitate the challenging practice of such approaches (Harnois, 2013). This is even more the case with outer-university collaborations, like partnerships with community organizations or leaders. The university invests in and evaluates scholars on their individual outputs; even in the case of articles with multiple authors, hierarchical contributions are signified through author order. The expectations of scholarly output de-incentivizes the deep, long-term, relational commitments of democratic participation, community partnerships, and value-based inquiries and actions that seek to impact the actual daily lives of those in aggrieved communities. Collaborative research for justice challenges the expectation to publish alone or only with academic colleagues. It challenges the requirement to publish frequently and in high impact factor journals. And it challenges the assumption that academic discourse and outlets should be the primary venue for sharing and judging the impact and value of research.

Indeed, this kind of research for justice confronts the very notion of academic impact (Stein & Daniels, 2017). Academics generally are accountable to other academics exclusively. The university researcher is primarily accountable to other colleagues within the institution and across their academic discipline rather than to the human “subjects” from where their social science studies are based. Because academic peers and outside granting agencies staffed by academically trained program officers act as gatekeepers (Clawson, 2007), it is they who judge what topics are worthy of research, through what means and by what standards. The general public is generally a secondary audience, if considered at all. Scholar-activists and collaborative researchers face the same institutional pressures to write peer-reviewed articles, chapters, or books in for-profit, proprietary journals and academic presses as well as to give presentations at professional conferences since these are the only legitimated avenues for advancing truth claims produced through research. Other forms of research-based truth telling, e.g. opinion editorials, or policy, legal or activist channels, are regarded as extra-curricular. Other strategies for sharing knowledge (e.g. art, video) are generally discounted. Engaged scholarship does not reject research impact defined narrowly as publishing in a high rejection rate journal with a high impact factor and generating high citation numbers, it only seeks to expand notions of research impact in relation to liberatory goals pursued through research informed action. The projects described in this special issue understand their activist efforts as both enhancing ethical practices *and* strengthening validity. Put simply, collaborative research for justice expands and reframes standards of quality defined by traditional social science and reinforced within universities. It resists defining research impact in relation to other academics and instead, seeks actual socio-political impact with and for the general public.

### **Universities as Sites of Struggle for Scholar-Activists**

In our call for collaborative research for justice, we do not intend to devalue or delegitimize universities or erase the long legacy of university research pursued in the name of a more equitable society. For all their limits, as contradictory and contested spaces, universities are also important

sources of education, understanding, and knowledge for the public good, and the URBAN mission to make research serve the least advantaged emerges from the work of many justice scholars worldwide and across generations who also carved paths in challenging times (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). We hold the public mission of public education and of public universities like the University of California and the City University of New York (CUNY) where we work, as worthy, and we seek to uphold the best of public university traditions in our scholarship and practices. Nor do we intend our critiques to devalue or delegitimize academic social research in general. Social science methods and discourses remain potent tools that help to dig beneath the layers of harmful dominant ideologies to discern the complicated patterns and dynamics of oppressive structures (Morrow & Brown, 1994). We believe that universities, academics, and academic research have an important role to play in the public sphere, and that the disciplines of knowledge production are not fatally corroded and hopelessly doomed. Yet, for all the ways academic research has been and continues to be worthwhile, we find it still wanting. Researchers remain too limited in their commitment to the least advantaged, still involved in the appropriation of land and removal of the poor, particularly indigenous people and people of color, and still too unmindful of the historical, ongoing, and potential for violence in the quotidian practices of academe (Chatterjee & Maira, 2014). Indeed, scholars have effectively demonstrated that university research has too often served the powerful and privileged by rationalizing, justifying, legitimizing, and sometimes even manufacturing oppressive conditions in ways that extend a colonial project (Patel, 2015, Walter, 2003).

Universities and colleges are situated in crossroads and crosscurrents that provide fertile intersections for engaging the difficult tasks of any culture as it renews itself. At the same time these locations make work dangerous, with traffic coming from many different directions, and riptides among the currents. As socially, economically, legally, and politically powerful institutions that organize knowledge sharing, giving, and producing, our local, regional, and national universities and colleges shape how publics and communities make sense of their everyday lives and judge among policy choices. The authors of this special issue and the URBAN membership more broadly, seek to build capacity and commitment to collaborative research for justice, to forms of scholarship that could more fully support the social policy and organizing campaigns of community and education activists and contribute to the formation of a broader movement to reclaim and reconfigure the public sphere. Universities and colleges are by no means uniform across or within themselves, but they share important senses of academic culture, professionalism and standards. Therefore, *to do this work, the academy must also be a site of struggle and transformation for engaged scholars*. This includes struggles against the globally imposed neoliberal restructurings that are realigning the curriculum toward the needs of capital, growing adjunct faculty exploitation, and introducing an “audit culture” that reduces the already constrained space for public scholarship and for the formation of activist-community-university coalitions (Chatterjee & Maira, 2014). Colleges and universities remain among our culture’s primary institutions for legitimating certain forms of knowledge-creating that not only shape our futures but that also provide the forms of understanding that enable or disable ways of grappling with particular presents and of curating conflicted and tangled pasts. Therefore, scholar-activists must also continue deconstructing and reimagining all parts of how the production of knowledge is institutionally valued, practiced and taught within the halls of higher education.

To be clear, we – the academic community – are implicated in the reproduction of oppression and structural violence, in practices that rationalize, justify, or legitimize injustice. “We” are involved with university and disciplinary systems that tend to reproduce knowledge favorable to (or at least, does not effectively challenge) state power, the political economy and other forms of structural privilege (Oparah, 2014). The following four sites of struggle are areas that URBAN scholar-activists are attempting to reimagine and transform in their own “homes” – classrooms,

departments, committees, disciplines, associations – in order to create the conditions needed for sustainable and widespread engaged scholarship for justice.

**Expanding expertise.** URBAN scholar activists – as exemplified in this special issue – work to expand notions of expertise and knowledge-making by expanding who is considered *necessary* in the pursuit of valid knowledge for justice. The university very nearly monopolizes the education and (re)production of “credentialed” social scientists, and remains a major employer of them as well. People with PhDs or who are PhDs-in-training receive the most opportunities to conduct “valid” research and generate “legitimate” social scientific knowledge, whether in the academy or in government, industry, think tanks, research institutes, and other non-governmental and community-based organizations. The credentialed scientists themselves are expected to compete for respect and resources, with various publication and grant award status markers signaling which of their truth claims should be culturally privileged. Those scholars who work closely with aggrieved communities occupy the most precarious and marginalized positions in these dynamics. At the same time, knowledge from outside the academy, for example knowledge generated on the streets by those without degrees, is often positioned by those in power (if acknowledged at all) as unsystematic, subjective, parochial and politically biased. Un-credentialed knowledge bearers and producers remain virtually excluded from the “serious” practice and cultural benefits of social science, and such persistent epistemic injustices not only undermine the rigor of academic knowledge itself but they undermine the capacity of universities to respond to their historical and ethical burdens and contradictions (Glass et al., 2018; Warren et al., 2018). Collaborative research for justice claims an expanded “right to research” (Appadurai, 2006) that demands to ask research by whom, for whom, and for what purpose when considering whose expertise should be “in the room” at each stage of the research and who is essential to have “at the table” when the moment of decision comes.

**Diversifying the academy.** URBAN scholar activists are working towards a radical inclusion within university spaces. They are seeking to broaden the intersectional diversity of their campuses, curricula, the professoriate, administration, the student population, conference speakers, professional organizations, tenure/promotion committees and doctoral students. At the same time, to make the transformations to the academy fundamental and sustainable, they are working to reshape the structural and cultural spaces of the institution, attending to power, and rejecting tokenism or placation (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Academia continues to be a profession occupied primarily by people who are structurally privileged in varying and intersecting ways (e.g., white, male, middle and upper class). Scholars from marginalized backgrounds often find themselves at the complicated intersection of excluded, tokenized, exoticized, burdened, or pushed out by hegemonic university spaces and constrained by university cultures not originally intended for their presence. Higher education still lacks racial diversity along race and is still marked by a substantial absence of critical content/discussion/awareness about race within and across the curriculum and campus climate. The struggle for a racially and gender diverse faculty makes it necessary to reform doctoral admissions, hiring practices, and funding opportunities as well as tenure and promotion guidelines, each of which organizes a set of standards and priorities for scholars in ways that can both contribute to ongoing structural violence to communities of color and other marginalized groups as well as limit opportunities for scholar-activism to exist freely within the university. Collaborative research for justice aims to disrupt and transform these persistent patterns of inequity in and out of the academy.

**Wearing scholar activism proudly.** Members of URBAN, as demonstrated in this *EPAA* special issue, are proudly claiming ‘scholar-activist’ or “engaged research” as a legitimate academic

identity and pursuit, of the type endorsed by public sociology (Burawoy, 2005), and are working to be taken seriously not only within academic contexts but also by policymakers, lawyers, journalists and others who consume the products of research. To identify as a scholar activist – to explicitly research *for* justice – puts one at odds with how the social science disciplines are organized into university departments and professional associations with dedicated journals (such as the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, American Sociological Association, etc.) and even with some aspects of the academic formations that exist for the interdisciplinary domains (such as the American Studies Association, or the National Association for Ethnic Studies). Scholarly life has been siloed into narrowly focused areas that seem to offer manageable, though partial, slices of the larger intellectual whole, with guarded boundaries, learned norms and legitimized discourses (Harnois, 2013). These communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) have constructed conventions, expectations, and notions of quality; they define boundaries in the research literature, shape the scope of inquiries that are considered interesting and worthwhile, authorize particular epistemologies, and set methodological standards. While perhaps many (most?) professors and graduate students pursue their work with hopes it will prove socially relevant and be applied for public good, such outcomes are frequently seen by faculties as outside the required purview of research itself, as hopeful but not necessary byproducts that are work for which others have responsibility, not the scholar. Too often, academic policies and practices confine the ethical and political commitments of activism exclusively to projects pursued on one's own time rather than as fundamental and explicit parts of all aspects of an academic career. Those looking to pursue research explicitly articulated with commitments to justice often find it necessary to restructure, contort, sanitize, or 'redact' (Chang, forthcoming) their ethical and political interests, and that is why the assertive pride of the scholar-activists of URBAN and elsewhere is so important for holding space for one another and to open new possibilities for future generations of researchers and community leaders. Engaged scholars enacting collaborative research for justice thus are working to reconstruct their professional context to expand their understanding of epistemological diversity and revise their notions of quality and impact to incentivize community-grounded, value-explicit work with the specific intent to better society and overcome inequities.

**Reconstructing critical methodologies in the social sciences.** The cases in this special issue demonstrate a variety of flexible and innovative methodological strategies while having clarity about their ontological, epistemological and ethical assumptions. Said differently, the authors are critical of the tangled colonial, racist, and patriarchal roots and branches of the social sciences while also purposeful in how they employ the "master's tools" (Lorde, 2003) imaginatively to invent participatory, justice-oriented inquiries geared to transformative action. The needs of the community in understanding and transforming their situation drive the aims and methods of the research rather than any kind of orthodoxy derived from mainstream social science that emphasizes measurement, replication, control groups, modelling, statistical inference, and simplified causal relationships, all of which privilege quantitative approaches, random sampling, experimental designs, and traditional forms of validity/reliability as the gold standards of empirical quality (Byrne, 2002). These, of course, have value when used appropriately, but they also have received serious critique (Sprague, 2016) and at the very least, restrict our possibilities of understanding when they are the only way (or the best way) to produce and consume knowledge about people and society (Young, 2011). Dynamic, inductive, open-ended forms of knowledge production using qualitative designs like ethnography, interviewing, and focus group methods have become more acceptable (particularly as "mixed-methods" additions to quantitative work; Creswell, 2003) but less frequently practiced exclusively. Qualitative studies still are often perceived as less rigorous and systematic both among the larger public and within the academy, where their dedicated journals are often considered less

prestigious. Other important ways of knowing discovered and expressed through humanistic methods, like embodied and artistic methodologies utilizing, for example, spoken word, drawing, filmmaking, hip hop, or improv theatre, are entirely excluded as legitimate social science (Fox, 2016). For communities focused on their struggle for justice, the full range of forms of knowing are of value in understanding and transforming their situation, and what counts is being able to marshal and deploy appropriate methods to the focus of their study and their ways of linking their knowledge production to knowledge dissemination and mobilization. For engaged scholars, what is important is deploying the substantial resources of the academy in ethical reconstructions of *all* its social science methodological approaches, whether oriented towards quantitative or qualitative, so that they can be articulated with deep, equitable, community based participation, forms of knowing, and needs. The challenge for scholar activists is to both combat the possibilities of alienating, distorting and misrepresenting communities of color and other marginalized groups in social science research while also forging new communities of practice that can navigate the remaining fraught ethical issues and can elaborate norms and approaches that can give guidance for this work (Warren et al., 2018).

Ethically and politically committed scholars concerned about issues of justice have, over the past several decades, increasingly turned to these engaged forms of research, which have coalesced around a variety of frameworks in different fields and disciplines: action research, participatory action research, community-based research, community-based participatory research, practitioner research, collaborative ethnography, translational research, and more. Some large-scale interdisciplinary projects inside universities have supported approaches that center issues of ethics and power in research and were driven by the research needs of the least advantaged communities<sup>4</sup>, but mostly engaged scholars labor in isolation within their academic departments and within the university at large. These conditions spurred the formation of URBAN, and its three conferences sought to build the capacity of both scholars and activists to grasp the determining forces at work within the complexity of today's "wicked" problems and to design interventions into the circuits of dispossession in daily life and into the academy that could enable forms of collaboration with sufficient force to transform the world. We refuse to look away from the wickedness and refuse to give up on the wellsprings of imagination and resilience that make other, more just, schools and communities possible.

The essays in this *EPAA/AAPE* special issue powerfully demonstrate it is possible for other visions and practices to be pursued. We hope that by sharing these examples of research for justice that we might help build the sustaining communities of practice necessary to bring other worlds into being, not only in the academy but more substantially in our communities. Collaborative research for justice offers no guarantees, but without doubt, it offers promise.

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<sup>4</sup> For examples of such efforts at two public universities, the University of California and the City University of New York, see: <http://ccrec.ucsc.edu>; <http://publicscienceproject.org>

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