

Inquiry in Place: Collaborative Research as Strategy for Resistance to Displacement

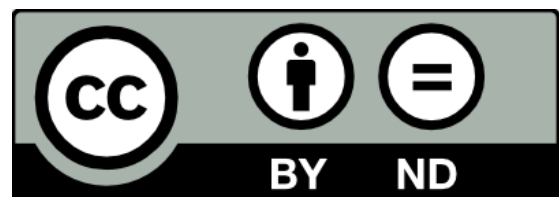
Antwan Jefferson, *University of Colorado Denver*
Ben Kirshner, *University of Colorado Boulder*

Antwan Jefferson is a Clinical Associate Professor in the School of Education and Human Development at University of Colorado Denver. In Antwan’s work as the founder and editor of the [Denver Journal of Education and Community](#), Antwan works to bring structurally-marginalized voices into education thinking and decision-making by sourcing narrative insights into education practice from local community members. This area, family and community engagement in public education and schooling, also is Antwan’s primary research interest. Make public schools public.

Ben Kirshner is a Professor of Education at the University of Colorado Boulder. In his work with the [Research Hub for Youth Organizing](#) he co-designs educational tools and research studies in partnership with youth organizing groups and networks that build young people’s capacity and power. With the [Critical Civic Inquiry](#) research group he co-develops research-practice partnerships that increase the capacity of public schools to support transformative student voice and action civics.

Author’s Note

We would like to thank Michelle Fine and Caitlin Cahill for serving as writing mentors to two of the participating teams as well as overall advisors to this project. We also thank the Spencer Foundation for providing funds to pay for costs of the convening that led to this special issue, and the Ford Foundation for providing travel funds for youth participants. Lastly, we thank those who participate in and sustain the Urban Research-Based Action Network (URBAN), which offers an intellectual, social, and ethical infrastructure to support collaborative community-based research, including this project.



See: creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Inquiry in Place: Collaborative Research as Strategy for Resistance to Displacement

Antwan Jefferson, *University of Colorado Denver*

Ben Kirshner, *University of Colorado Boulder*

This special issue of *The Assembly* contains a collection of scholarly articles focused on the phenomena of *place* and *displacement* as they occur in and near public education. These articles contribute to the growing field of community-based education research by instigating thought, discourse, and action that deepens the relationships between community members and researchers in the face of social, political, and economic disruption. Each of the articles published in this special issue demonstrates some of what is possible when researchers situate their inquiry in local communities, focus on outcomes and implications of community displacement, and take on community experiences and questions in order to collaborate on the development and design of collaborative, community-based research.

Place and Displacement

Experiences of place and displacement shape education but are rarely foregrounded in education research. When we talk about “place” we are thinking about the ways that learning and schooling happen in specific places, with their own histories, geographies, and cultural practices. Just as part of living in community means creating a sense of place, much of the work of place-making in the United States occurs against a backdrop of violent displacement and disruption. While place-making reflects human activity in the material landscape (Merrifield, 1993), it is important to consider location in the search for social justice (Soja, 2011). Thus, considering the displacement of low-income families and communities of people of color requires a perspective that understands that place is made through human interaction in geographic context.

Students and teachers engage in place-making when they work together to build learning communities that are guided by values of trust, solidarity, and belonging (DeMeulenaere, 2012; Sutton & Kemp, 2002). Community organizers work tirelessly to fashion neighborhoods and communities that are safe, supportive, and just (Shield, Paris, Paris & San Pedro, 2020; Horton, 1990). Paying attention to place means knowing the pathways and streets that young people take to get to school and exploring how the broader landscapes of young people’s lives can be part of a learning ecology that supports human development.

Today, young people in low-income communities and communities of color are growing up in a unique context of social/racial and environmental/health crises, further contextualized by long-standing disinvestment from public neighborhood schools, increasing residential segregation, political scapegoating, and the cumulative consequences for housing, employment, food access, health, and emotional well-being. School closures, immigration enforcement, mass incarceration, gentrification, disparate access to transit, food, and shelter—all of these represent forces that disrupt and displace (Gonzales, 2011; Lipman & Haines, 2007). What are the consequences, for example, for children’s readiness to learn when they fear that a family member will be deported while they are at school, or that they need to be ready to move in case immigration enforcement becomes more active in their region (Rubio-Hernandez & Ayón, 2016)? What about students who grow up in communities where the closure of neighborhood schools is normalized—first being displaced when their elementary school is shuttered and then again when the same thing happens to their high school (Kirshner et al., 2016)? We could ask similar questions about the impact of displacement caused by rapidly-gentrifying neighborhoods,

despoliation of land and water surrounding American indigenous communities, or when parents have to travel great distances to find work (Shield et al., 2020; Lipman & Haines, 2007).

Education inequity follows when families are displaced by forces such as discriminatory housing policy, immigration enforcement, over-policing and militarization, and school closures, as displacement disrupts learning progress and sense of belonging for children. Education consequences for children, whether social-emotional or academic in nature, call for intersectional approaches that draw upon the expertise of community organizers, youth, educators, and university researchers working in equitable and collaborative partnerships, consistent with the traditions of community-based participatory research (CBPR) and community organizing for education justice (Patel, 2015; Warren et al., 2018). Although different in their particulars, we view these educational issues as sharing the common of displacement. Throughout each article in this journal issue, both the social and geographic locations of young people and educators are centered, demonstrating some of the ways in which both *place* and *displacement* might inform the work of researchers examining issues of education justice emerging in local communities.

Just Leadership USA founder Glenn E. Martin noted as a guiding principle of the decarceration organization that “those closest to the problem are closest to the solution, but furthest from resources and power” (JLUSA, 2020). We find value in this principle in our work to understand the relevance of the enactments of place and displacement at points of structural intersection with public education. This principle is evident in our particular commitment to and primary concern with the lifeworld of “the community rather than the lifeworld of the scholar” (Shultz & Kajner, 2013, p. 2). In the practice of community-engaged scholarship, those who experience the consequences of education-related enactments of place and displacement should be engaged in the articulation of research problems and questions; they also should be engaged in the activity of research that produces knowledge.

The ongoing impact of education disinvestments has been exacerbated even further as we write this introduction during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Because of public disinvestment, lack of federal guidance, and limited planning, our public schools are now having to figure out the least damaging option—opening too soon or depending on a shaky infrastructure for online learning. These rapid changes raise important questions about place in learning: What do we need brick and mortar buildings for, and what can we develop through social dreaming and radical imagination? Although the articles published in this issue of *The Assembly* do not take on the topic of pandemic-instigated displacement, the articles provide conceptual tools and collaborative practices that, we believe, are relevant to the kinds of displacement created by the pandemic.

Critical Approaches to Collaborative Research

In addition to our focus on place and space in education, a second focus of this issue is community-based and collaborative approaches to research. In our call for papers for this special issue, we wanted to be sure that more equitable community-university collaborative research approaches were given a platform similar to more traditional forms of scholarship. In our view, broad access to publication platforms ensures that research activity reaches communities as they examine education inequities in their own contexts, while encouraging researchers to find value in working as co-constructors and co-researchers with community members.

We also recognize the importance of navigating different roles and positions in research which, unattended, might generate additional layers of difficulty when collaborating. The social locations of educators offer a roadmap to researchers examining how educators are dispossessed

while juggling multiple and competing demands, often outside of their formal training (Hester, Bridges & Rollins, 2020; Lambert & McCarthy, 2006). As practitioners, educators' unique *representational intersectionality* (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013) is reflected in wages unlikely to keep pace with rising housing costs (Mishel, 2012; Zeichner, Bowman, Guillen & Napolitan, 2015), significant racial and gender disparities in the workforce (Boser, 2014; Goldhaber, Theobald, & Tien, 2015), and quasi-professional status (Bascia, 2009). As educators of color experience their own forms of displacement (White, 2016), it becomes clear that the scope of education equity should address the experiences of multiple actors in different roles, including educators alongside young people as researchers and policy experts.

For us, navigating these roles means interrogating the taken-for-granted understandings of institutional power that often characterize university scholarship, including when that scholarship is community-based. Some forms of research claiming the label of participatory or community-based still privilege formally trained scholars as developers of knowledge and position community members in obscure positions of dependency and low-power (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Leal, 2007). Too often, the political and social agendas of universities obfuscate the role of communities in co-identifying, co-investigating, and co-constructing novel research at points of social and political intersections.

Building on the work of national networks such as the Urban Research-Based Action Network ([URBAN](#)), The Research University Civic Engagement Network, and the Engaged Scholarship Consortium, we hope that this issue of *The Assembly* encourages public scholarship characterized by researchers working in partnership with practicing teachers, youth, and community organizers. Such collaborations, in our view, generate new, research-based knowledge that is situated in full view of the communities implicated in the research.

Introducing the Articles

The articles in this special issue reflect a range of commitments to explore and address issues of place and displacement. The authors responded to a call for papers that we launched after a conference held in Denver, Colorado organized by URBAN (for more information about the URBAN Education Node see: <https://urbaneducationnode.weebly.com/>). The conference was successful in convening organizers, educators, researchers, and artists to exchange ideas and discuss work in their localities—from Salt Lake City to Bangor, Maine, from Santa Cruz to Miami, and from Ames, Iowa to Aurora, Colorado. This call for papers represented an opportunity to invite teams to engage in further inquiry and collaborative writing to document lessons and insights from their work. With support from the Spencer Foundation, six teams of authors gathered in Denver, Colorado in February 2019 to read and discuss each other's writing. This special issue of *The Assembly* represents one product of those interactions, with other outcomes including websites, community organizing workshops, and efforts to engage with varied publics about the implications of their collaborations.

Many themes and threads connect the articles in this issue. Most notably, all of the articles take up varied forms of displacement: geographic displacement through gentrification and Hurricane María, educational displacement because of racism and ageism, and the consequences of disinvestment in communities of color. Articles also explore how people respond to these issues by assembling in new ways to engage in place-making, organizing, and participatory research. We are excited to see the ways these articles take up tensions and contradictions in efforts to organize for more just cities and schools, including when there are

internal tensions as people come together across lines of geography, age, and privilege, or emergent tensions between inquiry and political education or PAR and organizing.

The authors developed thoughtful and creative strategies for co-writing as collaboratives writing from different social locations. Authors include high school students, graduate students, tenured faculty, full-time PK-12 teachers, and community organizers. All of the authors are researchers, writers, social theorists, and activists for more just futures. In some of the articles, you will see critical self-reflection about the author's positions and also how they managed a writing process that is often structured to favor those based in universities.

In *The right to the city and to the university: Forging solidarity beyond the town/gown divide*, Barbara Ferman, Miriam Greenberg, Thao Le, and Steve McKay draw on community-based research projects in Santa Cruz and Philadelphia to uncover how two universities—University of California Santa Cruz and Temple University—have actively contributed to or exacerbated the displacement of low-income communities and students. The authors document the ways that new political formations, including student organizers, neighborhood residents, and tenants' rights organizations, have been successful in raising awareness about the issue of displacement and building new coalitions that transcend the divisive town/gown narrative.

Thais Council, Shae Earls, Shakale George, and Rebecca Graham authored the second article, *Teachers at the center: Place and education displacement in southwest Atlanta*. This team of educators, scholars, and advocates started as a book club and evolved into a PAR collective as they began to notice increasing mobility among Black students and wondered: “what is forcing our students to withdraw from our schools and where are they going?” Through their inquiry and community listening sessions, the authors untangle the complicit relationship between education reform and gentrification. They also describe their varied efforts to fight back in their respective roles. Their chapter concludes by offering compelling arguments for the importance of teachers being at the center of education policy conversations.

The third article, *Las historias que dejó María: Educators and researchers bearing witness to the coloniality of displacement*, continues themes related to how educators and researchers work together to document the impact of displacement and develop counternarratives about displaced communities. Astrid Sambolín Morales, Molly Hamm-Rodríguez, Myrmarie Graw, Manuel Hernandez, Bethzaida Morales Rivera, and Jasmin Nunez Tejada joined together to share and develop narratives about the impact of Hurricane Maria on Puerto Rican students, families, and teachers in Florida. What came from these interactions is a complex manuscript that historicizes Hurricane María, shares letters written by the authors, and analyzes themes across letters. The authors conclude by underscoring the urgency of public scholarship that engages in reflexivity and counter-narratives to humanize the work of teachers, parents, youth, and researchers.

Two youth-based organizations collaborated to write the fourth article, *Counter-storytelling across varying youth contexts and intergenerational work in YPAR settings*. In this article, two youth organizations—Bringing Awareness to Racism in Education (BARE), based in Ames, Iowa, and Young Aspiring Americans for Social and Political Activism (YAASPA), based in Aurora, Colorado—highlight ageism in education as a practice of displacement that cuts across their two geographic locations and shares certain fundamental qualities. The article was collaboratively written by youth from BARE (Malika Davis, Karla Torres, Saja Ibrahim, and Vijay Williams), YAASPA (Julliette Gonzales, Leilani Gomez, Jocelynne Farfan, Jose Flores, Elizabeth Ortiz, Shukri Mahamud, Nevaeh Goodman, and Nancy Hechavarias) as well as adult staff and advisors connected to the two groups (Janiece Mackey, Julio Cammarota, Jihee Yoon,

and Ricardo Martinez). The article centers the voices and lived experiences of young people as they define, theorize, and share examples of displacement that occur inside their schools. The article creatively weaves “adult” voices and “youth” voices in ways that name different contributions and acknowledge the tensions and challenges of collaborative writing, particularly when working with conventions of the academy.

The fifth article, *Participation without power: A critical discourse analysis of community meetings in north Denver* by Sabrina Sideris, analyzes the relationship between university expansion and neighborhood displacement through a case study of a new campus of Colorado State University in the Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods of Denver. Sideris utilizes theories of the spatialization of race and the racialization of space (Lipsitz, 2006, 2007, 2011) to analyze data from deliberations of the “Citizens Advisory Committee”. She argues that the university engaged in *performative inclusion* (Ahmed, 2012), claiming benefits of the new development while displacing neighborhood residents from decision-making and planning. This article was originally part of a collaborative project looking at university contributions to gentrification, but the themes of this work were distinct enough that we encouraged Sideris to write it as a single case study and discuss implications for collaborative research.

The sixth article of this volume, *Intersectional organizing and educational justice movements: Strategies for cross-movement solidarities*, is written by a team of activist scholars and community organizers affiliated with the People’s Think Tank: Mark R. Warren, Patricio Belloy, Andrew King, Bianca Ortiz-Wythe, Jose Calderon, and Pam Martinez. The authors draw on interviews with community, parent, and youth organizers to advance the field of community organizing by identifying current definitions and practices of intersectional organizing, challenges that groups face, and strategies that promote inter-group solidarity. They conclude with a persuasive call for educational justice organizers to develop alliances with activists fighting for inter-related issues, such as affordable housing, immigrant rights, and worker rights, and thereby build greater political power.

The special issue concludes with *Emerging tensions: The variances and silences in survey research with youth* written by Dr. Janiece Mackey, Julia Daniel, and Keno Walker. This paper draws on case studies from two different youth organizations: YAASPA (as described above) and Power U. The authors write as insiders to these organizations: Mackey is the Executive Director of YAASPA, while Julia and Keno write from their prior experiences as organizers with Power U. This paper poses questions and dilemmas for educators and organizers looking to integrate survey data into their approaches to engaging and organizing young people to resist displacement. Specifically, they draw on Critical Race Theory and critical whiteness studies to show that when survey data takes place in a neoliberal white supremacist context, the “data” should be treated more as openings to conversation and inquiry rather than settled results. This work holds powerful implications for researchers and educators engaged in inquiry for social justice change.

Conclusion

As a theme, place and displacement offer a lens through which to understand community-level resistance and resilience, as well as countervailing forces of disinvestment and disruption that emerge in spaces that we share and construct (i.e., place). Attending to issues of place enables us to locate our bodies and minds in the everyday routes we follow to school and work and notice how issues that may emerge at national or global scales manifest in our everyday lives. In addition, attending to place grounds us in our local networks and communities, and

thereby provides us with the kinds of nourishment we need to start and sustain organizing for collective self-determination and quality of life.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press.
- Bascia, N. (2009). Teachers as professionals: Salaries, benefits and unions. In L. Saha & A. G. Dworkin (Eds.), *International handbook of research on teachers and teaching* (pp. 481-489). Springer.
- Boser, U. (2014). Teacher diversity revisited: A new state-by-state analysis. *Center for American Progress*.
- Cho, S., Crenshaw, K. W., & McCall, L. (2013). Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis. *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, 38(4), 785-810.
- Cooke, B., & Kothari, U. (Eds.). (2001). *Participation: The new tyranny?*. Zed books.
- DeMeulenaere, E. (2012). Toward a pedagogy of trust. In S. Michaels & C. Dudley-Martin (Eds.), *High-expectation curricula: Helping all students succeed with powerful learning*. Teachers College Press.
- Hester, O. R., Bridges, S. A., & Rollins, L. H. (2020). 'Overworked and underappreciated': special education teachers describe stress and attrition. *Teacher Development*, 24(3), 348-365.
- Horton, M. with Kohl, H., & Kohl, J. (1990). *The long haul: an autobiography*. Doubleday.
- Shield, A. E., Paris, D., Paris, R., & Pedro, T. S. (Eds.). (2020). *Education in movement spaces: Standing Rock to Chicago Freedom Square* (1st edition). Routledge.
- Goldhaber, D., Theobald, R., & Tien, C. (2015). The theoretical and empirical arguments for diversifying the teacher workforce: A review of the evidence. *The Center for Education Data & Research, University of Washington Bothell*. Available at: [http://www.cedr.us/papers/working/CEDR%20WP,202015\(9\)](http://www.cedr.us/papers/working/CEDR%20WP,202015(9)).
- Gonzales, R. G. (2011). Learning to be illegal: Undocumented youth and shifting legal contexts in the transition to adulthood. *American Sociological Review*, 76(4), 602-619.
- Hester, O. R., Bridges, S. A., & Rollins, L. H. (2020). 'Overworked and underappreciated': special education teachers describe stress and attrition. *Teacher Development*, 24(3), 348-365.
- JLUSA. (2020). *About us: History*. Just Leadership USA: <https://jlusa.org/about/>
- Kirshner, B., Van Steenis, E., Pozzoboni, K., & Gaertner, M. (2016). The costs and benefits of school closure for students. In W. Mathis & T. Trujillo (Eds.), *Learning from the federal market-based reforms: Lessons for ESSA* (pp. 201-216). Information Age Press.
- Lambert, R., & McCarthy, C. (Eds.). (2006). *Understanding teacher stress in an age of accountability*. Information Age Press.
- Leal, P. A. (2007). Participation: the ascendancy of a buzzword in the neo-liberal era. *Development in Practice*, 17(4-5), 539-548.
- Lemaire, J. (2009). Addressing teacher workload. *Education*, 90(9), 6.
- Lipman, P., & Haines, N. (2007). From accountability to privatization and African American exclusion: Chicago's "Renaissance 2010." *Educational Policy*, 21(3), 471-502.
- Lipsitz, G. (2006). *The possessive investment in whiteness: How white people profit from identity politics*. Temple University Press.
- Lipsitz, G. (2007). The racialization of space and the spatialization of race theorizing the hidden architecture of landscape. *Landscape Journal*, 26(1), 10-23.
- Lipsitz, G. (2011). *How racism takes place*. Temple University Press.

- Merrifield, A. (1993). Place and space: a Lefebvrian reconciliation. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 516-531.
- Mishel, L. (2012). The compensation question: are public school teachers underpaid? Analysis and opinion. *Economic Policy Institute*.
- Patel, L. (2015). *Decolonizing education research: From ownership to answerability*. Routledge.
- Rubio-Hernandez, S. P., & Ayón, C. (2016). Pobrecitos los niños: The emotional impact of anti-immigration policies on Latino children. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 60, 20-26.
- Shield, A. E., Paris, D., Paris, R., & San Pedro, T. (Eds.). (2020). *Education in Movement Spaces: Standing Rock to Chicago Freedom Square*. Routledge.
- Shultz, L., & Kajner, T. (Eds.). (2013). *Engaged scholarship: The politics of engagement and disengagement*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- Soja, E. W. (2010). *Seeking spatial justice*. U of Minnesota Press.
- Sutton, S. E., & Kemp, S. P. (2002). Children as partners in neighborhood placemaking: Lessons from intergenerational design charrettes. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 22(1), 171–189.
- Warren, M., & Goodman, D. (Eds.). (2018). *Lift us up, don't push us out! Voices from the front lines of the educational justice movement*. Beacon Press.
- White, T. (2016). Teach for America's paradoxical diversity initiative: Race, policy, and Black teacher displacement in urban public schools. *Education Policy Analysis Archives/Archivos Analíticos de Políticas Educativas*, 24, 1-42.
- Zeichner, K., Bowman, M., Guillen, L., & Napolitan, K. (2015). Engaging local communities in preparing the teachers of their children. In *Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL*.