

Copyright  
by  
Valarie R. Gold  
2021

**The Report Committee for Valarie R. Gold  
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following Report:**

**Interdisciplinary Curriculum and  
Media Literacy Education in *Global Action Project***

**APPROVED BY  
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Joseph Straubhaar, Supervisor

S. Craig Watkins

**Interdisciplinary Curriculum and  
Media Literacy Education in *Global Action Project***

**by**

**Valarie R. Gold**

**Report**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Arts**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**May 2021**

## **Abstract**

# **Interdisciplinary Curriculum and Media Literacy Education in *Global Action Project***

Valarie R. Gold, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2021

Supervisor: Joseph Straubhaar

Global Action Project (GAP) is a nonprofit organization in New York City founded in 1991 with the goal of providing media arts programming for youth from low income, new immigrant, and LBGQT+ communities. This paper will focus on GAP's Youth Breaking Borders (YBB) program, an education and leadership program for new immigrant and refugee youth within the theoretical context of critical media literacy. GAP's educational approach is self-referred to as "Transformative Media Organizing", focusing on social justice media production by youth. In 2007, Stephen Charbonneau analyzed a GAP documentary production created within the YBB program. Charbonneau shows criticism of GAP's approach to auto-ethnography by immigrant youth, arguing that GAP embraces American globalism, a single global youth identity, and a universality of the immigrant youth experience (Charbonneau, 2007). GAP continued its Youth Breaking Borders program up until December of 2020, when they announced the organizations closure. By an analysis of GAP's more recent short films produced through their Youth Breaking Borders program, this paper gives insight on how GAP's approach

to auto-ethnographic expression may have changed or stayed consistent over the course of the organization's existence. Their social justice and cosmopolitan framework will be used as a foundation to analyze the effectiveness of their approach- determining whether the final film productions by youth participants meet the organizations "Transformative Media Organizing" curriculum goals. This paper aims to determine how GAP approaches multiple pedagogy within the curriculum and whether the organization's mission over the years may reflect opportunities to effectively empower or support youth in developing a cosmopolitan, global citizen self-identity.

*Keywords:* critical media literacy, nonprofits, youth, cosmopolitanism, social justice, curriculum, global citizenship

## Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	vii
<b>INTRODUCTION: MEDIA LITERACY.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Social Justice Framework.....	3
Cosmopolitan Framework.....	4
Applying Interdisciplinary Curriculum.....	6
Nonprofits: Goals of Teaching Media Literacy & Production.....	7
Youth Identities & Hybridity.....	11
Autoethnography.....	12
<b>CASE STUDY: MEDIA LITERACY.....</b>	<b>14</b>
Methods.....	16
Short Film Textual Analysis.....	17
Results.....	20
Case Study Conclusion.....	25
<b>FINAL THOUGHTS.....</b>	<b>27</b>
Global Action Project's 2021 Curriculum.....	29
Bibliography.....	30

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1:	Global Action Project's Theory of Social Change Diagram .....	15
-----------	---	----

## **Introduction: Media Literacy**

Media literacy is an umbrella term addressing the evolving skills people utilize to critically engage with the media they consume and use daily. Media as a form of text is continuously evolving, stretching across video production, film, television, and into larger scopes of digital spaces via the internet, online communities, and virtual reality. As a result, media literacy education efforts must adjust according to the variety of media texts over time. Educational efforts to address media will shift according to the cultural capital demands on media knowledge, the perceived needs of the population being taught, and the ultimate goals of the educators. It is perhaps due to the nature of media texts that can explain the lack of cohesive standards for media literacy in the education fields.

In addition to difficulties with creating educational standards for approaching digital media, there is a wide array of terminology usage to describe the field, including different understandings and approaches to media literacy. For example, digital literacy refers to the use of technology, often emphasizing the knowledge of using digital texts or digital tools (Avila and Moore, 2012). While media literacy and digital literacy may be used interchangeably, media literacy generally entails consideration towards representation, media production, reception studies, film analysis, and other topics surrounding multimodal visual texts. Specific terminology and language are important to define in order to discern which aspects of these approaches are ultimately the most effective at teaching literacy. For example, access to technology does not equate to an individual's competency in digital media literacy nor their ability to access forms of capital (Watkins, 2018). So, while educational programming may focus on providing technology tools, such as computers or phones, and provide digital literacy on how to use said tools, there remains aspects of media literacy unaddressed. Furthermore, scholars warn that methods which



focus on the technical application of digital media tools limit the scope of media literacy by disfavoring youth empowerment and focusing on a protectionist strategy, which aims at protecting youth from negative impacts of media due to the “media effects paradigm” (Buckingham, 1998; Gutierrez, Alfonso, and Tyner, 2012; Friesem, 2016).

A different approach, termed critical media literacy originally by Kellner and Share (2006), encourages the engagement with personal media practices, emphasizing using digital and media spaces as tools in the classroom thus repositioning students as change agents rather than docile learners (Song, 2017). Such practices also provide an avenue for building traditional language and literacy skills with an emphasis on supporting youth social capital among peers in the classroom and virtual spaces (Bigelow, 2017).

Interdisciplinary use of theories, pedagogies, and curriculum can expand the possibilities of critical media literacy curriculum. Friesem, for example, offers one approach to interdisciplinary media literacy education by assessing how nonprofit organizations may apply the theories of gender studies and media representation to media classes (2016). My particular focus is on an interdisciplinary approach to the theoretical framework of cosmopolitanism and social justice that can be developed within critical media literacy education. However, there is a lack of existing literature on the best practices for media literacy education that utilizes interdisciplinary curriculum (Friesem, 2016). Further scholarship that documents the specific pedagogical practices of curriculum may offer the opportunity to expand the use of critical media literacy in various educational organizations.

In the following sections, I will discuss two different frameworks for teaching critical media literacy: social justice and cosmopolitanism. Then, I will address an interdisciplinary

approach that applies all three forms of curriculum, using nonprofit organizations and their utilization of autoethnographic projects as an example of this approach.

### **Social Justice Framework**

Social Justice as a term has evolved in recent years. Therefore, it is important to spend some time here to define what an educational social justice framework looks like. In her book, *Reframing the Curriculum*, Susan Santone explores how educators and learning communities may apply sustainability and social justice into educational spaces and classrooms. She articulates that “..to counter oppression, social justice aims to dismantle unjust systems and structures...” (Santone, 2019). In other research, the topic of social justice is framed within the English-Language Arts class, where teachers create instruction that reflects students’ personal and cultural identities (Dover, 2015). One such example is the implementation of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris, 2012), which seeks to sustain cultural pluralism in a democratic schooling system. Essentially, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy aims to value the cultural capital, heritage, and community practices of all youth- particularly youth of color (Paris and Alim, 2014). Therefore, while social justice-oriented teaching is still able to be academically standards-conscious-- meaning that it may continue to address standardized expectations of cultural capital-- the teaching methodology is not based solely upon those standards (Dover, 2015). This framework focuses on topics ranging from youth voice, personal agency, activism, and anti-racism. An interdisciplinary curriculum that uses a social justice framework will utilize any educational topic or skill (such as literacy, history, STEM, etc.) to address these topics.

One way in which the social justice framework can be applied to media literacy education, is through storytelling via media-based mediums. Film, video, and social media can be used as a tool to learn about effective storytelling and the hands-on application of technology.

For example, story-based strategies, where there is an emphasis on the importance of narrative power, can add to the dialogue of social and cultural movements (Reinsborough & Canning, 2010). Using media as a medium, educators can use story-based strategies to offer a way for students to produce media that cultivate or inspire social change.

### **Cosmopolitan Framework**

Cosmopolitanism is centered on the belief in global citizenship and recognizes more than one acceptable way to live (Appiah, 2006). Thus, curriculum that uses cosmopolitan approaches emphasizes the importance of learning difference and engaging with different cultures, persons, and ethical understandings (Hawkins, 2014). The significance of cosmopolitan curriculum is that it emphasizes “lived bridges” between self and society (Pinar, 2009). Further emphasis on self and society, known as transcultural cosmopolitanism, uses dialogue on mutual coexistence and empathy to address global citizenship (Kerr & Vasudevan, 2017). Therefore, interdisciplinary curriculum that includes a cosmopolitan framework will focus on developing participants’ identity by critically reflecting on an individual or community’s role in global relations and issues, extending beyond the teaching space and into global civic duty.

Scholars also contend that cosmopolitanism is growing among younger generations and can empower students to “engage in a dialectic of worldly issues” in the present classroom (Kazanjian, 2012). Building on that, cosmopolitanism through class relationships or curriculum can provide the knowledge for youth to understand and articulate structures of power and thus become effective allies in responding to oppressive structures (DeJaynes, 2020). Through multicultural education, individuals may be prepared for a global community, becoming active participants (Kazanjian, 2012). By structuring curriculum for youth that intersects multiple

pedagogies and cultural capitals, the curriculum may facilitate civic engagement and activism from a local to a global scale. The goal being that students who engage with cosmopolitan curriculum can be guided towards morally productive approaches to global problems (Rizvi & Beech, 2017).

Promoting youth voice and agency in curriculum can easily support cosmopolitanism and civic engagement. For example, studies have found that in classes where civic engagement is explicitly discussed, students conveyed sustained interest in discussing differences and aspired to civic lives in their careers and futures (Oikonomidou, 2019). Furthermore, education and media production are principal sources of cultural capital which can directly impact civic engagement. This civic engagement, when anchored on a collaborative inquiry process, encourages students to self-identify as “action-oriented thinkers” (Price-Dennis & Carrion, 2017). People’s agency and choices work within resources and constraints (Straubhaar, 2007), thus when educators and curriculum frame students as a source of knowledge, student’s cultural capital can be applied to the curricula and potentially expand or adapt in response to said curricula.

A way in which educators can encourage youth reflection on self and community is via autobiographical narratives (Camangian, 2010). Autobiographical narratives may serve as an avenue for storytelling and teaching story-based strategies to address social justice issues that youth or their community may be experiencing. Thus, autoethnographic projects through multimedia mediums and digital tools can become a method to combine cosmopolitan curriculum, social justice, and critical media literacy. Through autoethnographies, self-reflection is encouraged and frames students as informers which “reaffirms the significance of their personal interests, social environments, and lived experiences” (Song, 2017, pg. 70). I will later

address how autoethnographic projects can be used as an interdisciplinary tool for students and educators through a case study analysis of the nonprofit organization, Global Action Project.

### **Applying Interdisciplinary Curriculum**

Education on critical media literacy, social justice, or a cosmopolitan curriculum is currently not a standardized teaching curriculum in public education in the United States. In fact, contemporary public education has seen an increase in accountability measures, resulting in increased pressure for classrooms to focus on standardized curriculum content, which lacks in-depth focus on topics such as critical media literacy (Milner, 2013). While scholars and educators are addressing the need for critical media literacy pedagogy and educational programming, mainstream public education in the U.S. historically lacks cohesive strategies to utilize media as a tool for youth education (Hobbs, 1998).

Aside from standardized public education, alternative approaches to educating youth on media literacy can be found in nonprofit organizations and their programming. These organizations are constructed in a plethora of ways, some working in after-school programs or creating other informal or formal learning settings. Several studies have documented the process of media production and youth engagement in these alternative learning environments through ethnographic observation and textual analysis (Kolano, 2019; Camangian, 2010; McIntosh, 2014). However, I argue there is a need for critical reflection on the development of the curriculum these programs use. Understanding the various approaches to critical media literacy in different educational spaces helps to see how various approaches to interdisciplinary pedagogical methods can effectively be reflected in student projects and student takeaways. Also, analysis of curriculum in informal educational spaces allows for a comparison to standardized public education, where curriculum is inherently less flexible or adaptable.

I argue that determining how curriculum may broadly impact the level of agency and knowledge to further youth participants' development of global citizenry is a multi-level process. This process involves student reflection, extension of knowledge into the community, and the application of knowledge to cultural capital. Specific curricula strategies that aim at addressing reflection and extension of knowledge currently exist in both media literacy and education scholarship. For example, in a study examining media-literacy instruction in a high school English class, Hobbs and Frost observe the application of critical thinking skills utilizing reflection on authorship and self when analyzing media (Hobbs, 2003). Another example is by using Culturally Responsive Teaching (also called culturally relevant teaching), a theoretical teaching approach termed by Gloria Ladson-Billings, in which learning is extended beyond the classroom and into community (Ladson-Billings, 1997). Ultimately, curriculum that addresses this multi-level process is likely to support students' ability to apply their knowledge to the cultural capital they already have. The potential for youth to develop any sense of global citizenry then relies on the pedagogical approach within the educational organization.

### **Nonprofits: Goals of teaching media literacy & production**

In my own experience, I have been a part of multiple nonprofit educational organizations based in Austin, Texas, such as Creative Action, Latinitas, and Austin School of Film. Their programming has focused on digital media literacy, media production, and film analysis. As a teaching artist, assistant, and mentor in these programs, I had the privilege of learning with and guiding youth as they navigate digital storytelling, technology, and critical media literacy. In my observations, I noticed the processes in which youth can interact with and take part in creating media. The curriculum often emphasized youth agency, in which youth could critically reflect on

their own work and their peers' while exploring creative storytelling. Similar programs throughout the U.S. are recognized for facilitating this experience, various studies observing positive impact on youth's personal development, voice, and skills (Fleetwood, 2005; Halverson, 2010; McIntosh, 2014). In these organizations, teachers/mentors such as myself are often trained in Participatory Decision Making (PDM) approaches to the curriculum, which allowed a participative learning system (Bess et al., 2011). Essentially, teachers/mentors were given flexibility and choice in their construction of unit plans, lessons, and overall goals, resulting in workshops or classes that directly address the interests of the specific teachers and students. This method speaks to the common participatory culture of nonprofit educational spaces, where organizational flexibility and varying level of informality can lead to direct, interest-driven learning (Bess, et al., 2011; Vickery, 2014).

As technology impacts the methods of organizational communication and collaboration among nonprofits, nonprofits in the U.S. increasingly use digital technologies to both advocate and interact with the communities in which they aim to serve (Young, 2018). As a result, "digitally mediated education" can better serve both the nonprofit organizations in the field of education and the communities they serve, where technology is directly applied within workshops or trainings (Young, 2018). The specific focus on digital or media literacy in nonprofits ranges. Some nonprofits may focus on the STEM side of digital literacy, utilizing other technological tools aside from film equipment such as computers and robots. In the instance of media production, the creation of short films and video is often used as an opportunity to provide youth voice and agency. Filmmaking becomes a source of artistic expression, thus suggesting that youth-produced films give direct impact on youth's identity construction and representation (Halverson, 2010). Overall, there is an emphasis in media

literacy education to learn by producing, in which the goal is to get students to learn about media by creating their own media (Hobbs, 1998).

Learning by creating is common in grassroots organizing. In addition, grassroots video production is a well-established method for social action. For example, “cinema activists” in Latin American have historically used grassroots video production in which independent video organizations are motivated to create oppositional media beyond television for social and political causes (Aufderheide, 1993). Furthermore, other Latin American scholars offers the perspective that the strength of video is in the process, not the product (Valdeavellano, 1989; Cardoso, 1989). This emphasis of process over content is a focal point in media literacy education today. Essentially, grassroots videos present a space where new technology and social power interact. Technology may shape cultural patterns but is constrained by what audiences or users can afford (Straubhaar, 2007). By today’s standards, the exponential increase in technology affordability has certainly enhanced and complicated the construction of “alternative” media. As nonprofit organizations can financially access higher quality technology, there is the potential to increase the quality of filmmaking materials or tech available through different programs- though continued efforts to build community members’ media skills must happen alongside the application of newer equipment (Narayan, 2011).

Process over content is an effective way to introduce and inspire the use of media or technological tools. However, the process of scaffolding in pre-production- what students learn before creating their own media- is also important to media literacy. Scaffolding refers to the process of introducing educational topics in a progressive manner, leading step by step towards independent understanding of a topic and its concepts (Wood et al., 1976). It is at this stage of learning where critical media literacy can be applied, combining conceptual understandings that



involve “social justice, democratic learning values, critiquing authority and political systems, transformative practices of educational and social conditions, self-reflection and promoting positive identity...” (King, 2017). This is where curriculum can be introduced that effectively builds students’ knowledge throughout the course of the unit, leading to a deeper understanding of media texts and production such as filmmaking and media storytelling.

Some nonprofit organizations that focus on working with critical media literacy, cosmopolitanism, and/or social justice curriculum will gear their programs towards marginalized groups, thus often including youth of color, youth from low-income families or poverty, and youth from multicultural backgrounds including immigrants and refugees. One reason for this is to address the needs of students “at-risk”, a phrase used to describe students suffering from socioeconomic or sociocultural oppression (Swadener, 1990). While the term “at-risk” is problematized, as it labels youth with a deficit connotation, the term is embedded in various social constructions of education, and organizations may intentionally prioritize youth participants which they deem fit the “at-risk” label for their programming (Tait, (1995); Ladson-Billings, 1997; Kelly, 2000). As a result, the goal within these educational spaces is to create opportunity, safety, and familiarity for youth participants who may not otherwise have the access. Explicit focus on safety emphasizes community building, using care for students as a foundation to move a community towards collective action (Kolano and Davila, 2018).

Ultimately, nonprofits teaching media offer a unique space of study, where the application of various educational pedagogies and methods are negotiated over time. Examples of such applications include the combination of action-oriented literacy and digital literacy, where the teaching of using digital tools is combined with community and identity building. While the negotiation of curriculum is something all teachers and educators grapple with,

nonprofit organizations are not necessarily confined to standardized curriculum or mandated evaluations of student comprehension, as public schools are. Furthermore, nonprofit youth education organizations with socio-political and global impact goals or mission statements can potentially offer a glimpse into how global youth identities may be impacted via curriculum with cosmopolitan themes. As globalization, the process in which social systems have a capacity to work at a planetary scale, develops, educators and scholars will need to consider how this may impact literacy curriculum (Castells, 2010). As “global mobilities” shape the ways in which cultures and communities exist, curriculum will need to address potential challenges as people, cultures, and economies begin to move across local and global geographical space (Appadurai, 2006; Rizvi & Beech, 2017).

### **Youth Identities & Hybridity:**

Immigrant and refugee youth are unique to the discussion of global youth identities, as they grapple with multiple identities from their heritage, their identity as immigrants, and their identity as an immigrant within a different space (in the United States, for example). Some scholars refer to youth immigrants as potential pioneers of cosmopolitan perception towards society and other individuals:

“For students from immigrant experiences... cosmopolitanism is not just an imagined possibility, but often a perceptual and lived reality as well. By virtue of their diverse vantage points and transnational negotiations, they are uniquely positioned to educate their peers and teachers about the world.”

Campano & Ghiso, 2011, pg. 166

Through this understanding, immigrant and refugee youth can lead the discourse on identifying global youth identities via their personal experiences, struggles, and attention to global issues. Nevertheless, notions of a global youth identity run the risk of generalizing individually lived

experiences, the term suggests that youth immigrants are already “cosmopolitan intellectuals” (DeJaynes & Curmi, 2015).

In addition, as global interactions via the global cultural economy, culture, and politics develops, identities will continue materializing nationalities across space and places (Appadurai, 1996). As identity is increasingly hybrid and more clearly multileveled (Straubhaar, 2007), there will be shifts within the social construct of a global citizen. The field of media literacy education, then, offers an avenue of learning that already materializes across space and places which can be used to explore global citizenship and identity. The integration of cosmopolitan perceptions in media literacy educational spaces is then of particular importance when teaching immigrant and refugee youth. This method of teaching can potentially create a co-teaching environment, where immigrant youth are a teaching resource where their own lived experience can be applied directly to the curriculum.

If the increasing prevalence of media literacy education continues, activism utilizing media on a global scale may impact the negotiations of identity for youth as they make sense of the media around them. Younger generations in the U.S. are growing up in a society intertwined with information overload via the internet and social media. Yet, whether youth can access or utilize that information is dependent on individual socioeconomics and social/cultural capital.

### **Auto-ethnography**

Auto-ethnographic projects as an approach to media literacy education is a well-documented curriculum model. Autoethnographies “[provide] opportunities for students to script, perform, and dialogue about the critical narrations of their cultural experiences...” (Camangian, 2010). This speaks to the goal of giving space for youth agency and self-development where

autoethnographies can support multimedia interrogations of self and community (Song, 2017). Auto-ethnography's focus on self is otherwise a type of 'identity text' assignment, as it both (1) does not ignore home language or culture and (2) does not create a single narrative (Arizaldua, 1989; Oglou, 1982).

In 2007, Stephen Charbonneau analyzed GAP's documentary production *Peace of Mind*, created within their Youth Breaking Borders program. Charbonneau shows criticism of GAP's approach to auto-ethnography by immigrant youth, arguing that GAP embraces American globalism, a single global youth identity, and a universality of the immigrant youth experience. Since 2007, GAP has continued its Youth Breaking Borders program, continuing auto-ethnographic short films as well as similar forms of storytelling via short film production. The focal point of this analysis is to determine whether GAP's approach to auto-ethnography is similar or dissimilar in over time, analyzing short films they have produced both before and after their curriculum update in 2010. Through this analysis, I aim to add to the research on specific educational materials in critical media literacy; determining what types of projects- such as autoethnography- work best to successfully address the curriculum goals.

## **Case Study: Global Action Project**

Founded in 1991, GAP is centered on youth media-arts programming, with a mission to develop leadership skills and amplify the voices of low-income, new immigrant, TGNC (trans and gender non-conforming) and LGBTQ youth communities (Global Action Project [global-action.org], n.d.). Global Action Project's mission goals are an example of how an interdisciplinary approach to cosmopolitan and social justice framework within the context of critical media literacy may broaden and build upon the global youth identity among participants. Their Youth Breaking Borders Program (YBB) is described as a program where “immigrant youth produce critical media that aims to challenge dominant oppressive narratives about immigrants,” suggesting inherent call backs or “alternative” media through auto-ethnographic storytelling (Global Action Project, 2020). GAP also asserts that the films can be used as “educational tools to challenge islamophobia, anti-blackness and to uplift the particular struggles of young immigrant of mixed status” (Global Action Project, 2020).

A key source of information regarding Global Action Project's curriculum is via their website (global-action.org), where curriculum materials are available for free, intended to be accessible to anyone. The organization refers to their curriculum as “a rough guide, not a blueprint” and a “product of over two decades of experience” (*Curriculum* [Global Action Project], n.d.). GAP created a “Media In Action” curriculum, compiled into a .pdf file with 107 pages of content. GAP identifies their curriculum approach to be aligned with “Transformative Media Organizing” which focuses on the “intersectional analysis of race, class, gender, sexuality and ability, among other factors, and integrates media, communications and cultural work into movement-building rooted in community action.” (*Curriculum* [Global Action Project], n.d.). In addition, GAP's curriculum uses a “Theory of Social Change” which relies on three aspects of

education- (1) Media production, (2) Political education, and (3) Youth development- to reach a broader goal of social justice youth media. In the graphic below, the three aspects of education are presented in a Venn diagram, describing how the aspects relate to one another and overlap in themes, ultimately with the goal of achieving three different “Social Justice Impacts”: youth agency, building power, and youth media for social justice movements.

**Global Action Project's**  
Theory of Social Change Diagram

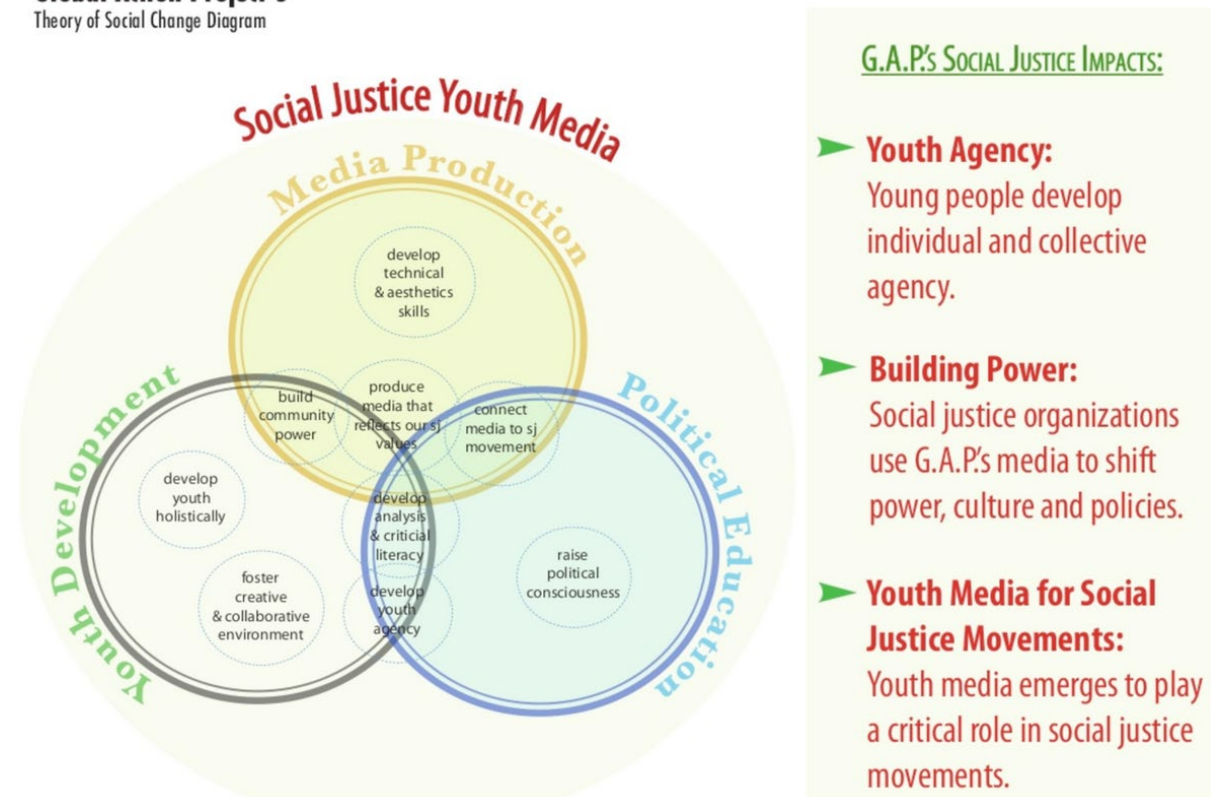


Figure 1 Global Action Project's Theory of Social Change Diagram

Next in this paper will be an analysis and discussion to determine how GAP's “transformative media organizing” curriculum may be reflected in the films created by the participants of GAP's Youth Breaking Borders program. Through analysis, this study will reflect on whether the curriculum approach, combining media literacy with social justice and cosmopolitan pedagogy, may reflect opportunity for global youth voice and discourse of global

identity among participants. In addition, this analysis will examine whether there is evidence of a developing global youth identity activism through autoethnographic projects in critical media literacy education.

Through the analysis of the short film content, I argue that the autoethnographic representations of hybridity and cosmopolitanism of immigrant/refugee youth identity lends itself as an example of how educators may imagine the future discourse of global issues via interdisciplinary curriculum similar to the curriculum presented through GAP. GAP's approach to critical media literacy education may also reflect how education may play a role in transcultural relations between the U.S. and immigrant/refugee youth.

## **Methods**

To determine how GAP's curriculum may be reflected in the films produced in their Youth Breaking Borders program, four short films will be textually analyzed. These short films were produced at different years within the YBB program. All films were made publicly available for viewing on GAP's YouTube channel. The videos are as follows: *Unsockumented* (2008), *America's Next Top Immigrant* (2007), *Echoes of Lemanja* (2017), and *Amaliha* (2018).

While there are several films available publicly via YouTube by GAP's YBB program, the four films selected for this analysis have been chosen based upon three factors: (1) selecting films from before and after the 2010 curriculum update, (2) selecting films that are featured on GAP's website, and (3) selecting films which show a degree of popularity determined by their view count on YouTube.

In this textual analysis, the themes emphasized in the short films are compared. Further analysis on what the messages and themes are implying concerning the immigrant/refugee

experience is considered. Lastly, the four films will then be analyzed in relation to GAP's 2010 "Transformative Learning" curriculum to determine what specific aspects of the curriculum has directly impacted the film projects.

### **Short film Textual Analysis**

The first emergent theme is issues of access to education. In *Unsockumented*, sock puppets are portrayed as high school students. The film begins with a small group of students discussing high school graduation and what they will be doing after high school. Several students discuss pursuing college and finding jobs. However, in the next scene two of those students discuss how they "don't have papers" and are therefore unable to apply for jobs or government financial aid for college. They speak of this amongst each other, not sharing their concerns with the rest of the group, implying a level of shame or hesitation to share this with folks who do not have the same concerns.

*Echoes of Lemanja* focuses primarily on this same issue of pursuing college as an undocumented immigrant. The film's main character, Iris, has recently graduated high school and even though she has high grades, she is unable to apply to college. Her mother insists Iris pursue becoming a lawyer, but Iris feels unsupported in this, since her mother is both unable to afford paying for her college and does not understand that Iris needs legal status to apply for financial support. Additionally, Iris struggles to relate to her friends and other family members who are attending university. She goes to great lengths to pretend she attends a nearby university. Ultimately, Iris finds herself at the beach, alone and distraught, when a young woman approaches her, explaining she too is in a similar situation. The woman states, "they taught you how to write in the sand... but not how to swim". This conversation implies that "they" is the



U.S. public education structure. Both films touch on the feelings of disconnection and shame that immigrant and refugee youth may face when unable to pursue education past high school.

The second theme is issues of access to jobs. *Unsockumented* touches on this topic at length. The two main characters miss their high school graduation ceremony as they instead attend a job interview to work in construction. While talking to their potential boss, they reflect on the low payment being offered due to their un-documentation. This touches on the issue of labor exploitation due to the fear of deportation. Nevertheless, due to their need to find income to support themselves and their family, the two main characters take the job anyways.

In *America's Next Top Immigrant*, a satire on the reality TV show *American's Next Top Model*, seven immigrants are competing for the "American Dream". However, several immigrants are disqualified due to deportation. One immigrant explains she was punished and deported due to selling illegally copied DVDs on the street. She states she needed the money to survive but was ultimately punished and disqualified. Again, the issue of finding means of income as an immigrant or refugee is raised. In both instances, the jobs that characters can find have inherent illegal aspects, speaking to a larger issue of criminalization for immigrants and refugees. At the end of this short, there is a statement presented in bold font:

We want an American Dream that  
Does not discriminate but celebrates  
Identity and cultures.

We want an American Dream that does  
Not pit us against each other, but embraces  
Collectivity and cooperation.

We want an American Dream that  
Does not blame individuals but holds  
society accountable to its people.

- Youth Breaking Borders 2008

This specific declaration is unique to this film, though all films showcase a degree of focus on either the unobtainability of the American Dream or difficulty in pursuing legal status in the United States. All films continue to focus on the immigrant and refugee experience in the U.S., which addresses the broader, global issue of civil rights for migrants. Noticeably, the situations in the latter films focus on personalized experiences that comes from the youth themselves rather than generalizations.

Lastly, all four films focus on the struggle of assimilation and connection to American culture and ideals. The films focus on characters who struggle to connect with people pursuing college or face barriers in attaining American-ness or “normalization”.

The film that discusses this issue at length is *Amaliha*, focusing on a young Haitian immigrant who is struggling with bullying at school and her immigrant identity. The film begins with a scene of Amaliha attempted to speak with an American accent. When she asks Siri “how to have an American accent”, the AI does not understand what she is saying with her strong Haitian accent. At school, Amaliha feels disconnected from the other students and teachers. When a teacher explains a public speaking presentation has been assigned, one student refers directly to Amaliha stating, “How is she going to present if she can’t even speak English?”. Ultimately, Amaliha finds friendship with another student Lucy, who is partially deaf. They initially connect while hiding in the janitor’s closet. Amaliha is hiding so she can call her mom and speak Haitian Creole without being bullied, and Lucy is hiding so she can turn off her hearing aid. The film subtly mentions issues of poverty, language barriers, loneliness, identity shame, and a disconnect from fellow students who were born in the U.S. By touching on these themes and displaying Amaliha’s desire to both become more American and stand up to bullying considers the struggles of self-identity that participants in the YBB program may face.

## Results

Overall, a prevalent theme in all 4 films is the expression of struggles as an immigrant/refugee youth in the United States. There is a given assumption/theme that being an immigrant or refugee in the United States is not easy or without stress, based on larger systemic issues. In this sense, there are consistent themes and portrayal of those themes across approximately 12 year period between which the short films were produced within. However, three critical aspects of the curriculum change were lacking in the pre-2010 films but present in the post-2010 films: singular autoethnographic perspective, focus on self-development within characters, and cinematic style used to enhance film quality and media creation.

First, there is the distinction of storytelling through the perspective of one person versus the perspective of multiple individuals. The older films articulate immigrant and refugee struggles through multiple characters and broad statements, either through the “candidates” in *America’s Next Top Immigrant* or the senior students who apply to work in construction in *Unsockumented*. The films after 2010 look more inward to issues of identity and self-discovery as an immigrant youth. In *Amaliha* and *Echoes of Lemanja* they follow the story of one immigrant teen, both characters either struggling with bullying and or applying to college, respectively. The auto-ethnographic approach in the latter films focuses on specific experiences of one individual rather than immigrant/refugee experiences more broadly. In GAP’s 2010 curriculum, they include the following core value pertaining to self-development:

A holistic approach to the healthy development of youth. A young person’s individual growth is inseparable from her critical awareness of the social and political worlds around her as well as her sense of agency in her community.

(p.2)

This theme of youth agency is prevalent in the themes of the short films, where the character's development is dependent on their own awareness of the communities around them. In *Amaliha*, Amaliha faces her bullies during a school presentation by pridefully describing her mother's job, despite it being low income. In *Echoes of Lemanía*, Iris decides to pursue filmmaking, despite her inability to apply to college and her mother's push to be a doctor. In both instances, the films address character change once the girls reflect on their identity in the context their immigrant status and yet continue to persevere. One can argue there are various potential factors as to why the latter films focus more on the individual. Aspects to consider include the artistic desires of the participants and the specific goals of their teachers/mentors on the production team. That being said, the "Youth Development" section of GAP's curriculum is explicitly showcased in both post-2010 films.

Secondly, the films showcase the ability of participants to develop critical analysis and apply critical media literacy to other forms of media. In their "Framing & Messaging" workshop description, GAP's curriculum outlines the purpose of considering media messages.

The messages that media bring to audiences are framed by ideologies, beliefs and value systems that present a worldview... the workshop engages us in considering media's role in advancing a social justice framework rather than simply reproducing the dominant frame.

(Ch.5, pg. 1)

As part of GAP's mission goals, the stories told in YBB's program feature young individuals who have been historically underrepresented, minoritized, and/or excluded from dominant media in the U.S. In the post-2010 films, for example, they feature young Black women as the main characters. As far as directly speaking back to the dominant frame goes, however, the clearest example of this being used in the films is through

*America's Next Top Immigrant*. The film can both satirically criticize the format of *American's Next Top Model* and as previously mentioned, address a sense of unobtainability of the American Dream. However, *American's Next Top Immigrant* was released prior to the 2010 curriculum update, suggesting the critical analysis of the “dominant frame” is a longer standing curriculum goal at GAP. In the latter films, they indirectly address mass media messages of success and the American Dream, using their personal storytelling to counterargue such messages. This aligns with the utilization of media creation as a form of enhancing youth agency.

Third, the curriculum calls for the youth to be critical users and audience members of media, which will enhance their ability to create:

We hope that through these workshops, each of you becomes critical users of the media – able to dissect media from the Dominant Frame as well as become equipped with the critical tools to make your own.

(Ch. 5, pg. 10)

This notion of utilizing critical tools can be seen via the production quality of the post-2010 films. Cinematic style, editing techniques, audio quality, and camera quality are all various ways in which the tools participants used can be analyzed via the short films. There is a distinct difference in the overall quality of the equipment and attention to cinematic details between the post-2010 films and pre-2010 films. This suggests that GAP encourages the enhancement of digital media for storytelling, although it is unclear how to determine the direct impact of this curriculum goal via the short films. Another way in which this aspect of “dissecting media” is conveyed specifically through *Echoes of Lemanja*, where during the credit roll, the film breaks the fourth wall. At the end of the film, Iris can be seen setting up a camera, filming, and at the

end sitting behind the camera, describing her own film. This specific scene intently frames the youth participant as the director and user of the media to tell her own story.

Returning to the commonality between all 4 films, they all maintain a consistent theme of either a call to action or a critical reflection pertaining to the struggles of immigrant/refugee youth in the U.S. This is critical to GAP's curriculum framework, in which they can raise participant's political consciousness (see Figure 1). By focusing on the youth's experience and social justice movement, the curriculum enables and recognizes young people as agents of social change. When the participants can connect their media- film projects- to a larger social justice movement there is a direct connection to a cosmopolitan approach in addressing the issues immigrant/refugees may face in the United States and globally. The films are emphasizing community action, otherwise suggesting giving a "responsible reaction to the world" (Zuckerman- in Jenkins, 2019), which directly suggests a global civic duty. There is careful articulation of this in GAP's curriculum, distancing the use of telling stories to address the experiences of multiple, diverse individuals and experiences.

...as media makers, it is not only our responsibility to put accurate images of ourselves and our struggles out there, but we also need to recognize that when we are creating and telling the stories of other people and communities that we have a huge responsibility to make conscious choices of how we represent them.

(Ch. 6, pg. 5)

This distinction articulates the main shift in the Youth Breaking Borders films before and after the 2010 curriculum: the utilization of self-reflection to speak up against personal struggles and issues that youth participants face without making broad generalized statements to address global immigrant/refugee experiences and identities. Referring to Charbonneau's study on GAP's YBB program from 1999-2000,

Charbonneau states the nonprofit is “energized by a belief in a common global youth identity” (2007). The 2010 curriculum does not directly address a common identity, though by mentioning participants responsibility in representing themselves and therefore others, still vaguely reflects a belief in global identity. However, there is a noticeable thematic difference between the older and more recent films. Films produced post-2010 focus on auto-ethnographic storytelling, using the characters Amaliha and Iris to explore issues of bullying and difficulties with college applications (respectively) due to the character’s backgrounds as Haitian immigrants. These films emphasize the experience of a single youth to add to a broader conversation of the immigrant youth experiences in the United States. The films produced pre-2010 focus on the general experiences of all immigrants or all refugees, using skits and parody to touch briefly on multiple aspects of the immigrant experience in the United States ranging from job hunting to college applications to documentation.

The findings here ultimately suggest a small but noticeable shift in the films from 2007-2018. The 2010 curriculum emphasizes the importance of media literacy, political consciousness, and responsibility in representing immigrants and refugee youth, which can be found in the themes of YBB’s film projects after 2010. By focusing on telling a singular auto-ethnographic story per short film, the issue of balancing representation without creating an immigrant/refugee trope or generalization is avoided. However, directly addressing this issue remains to be seen in the curriculum. This reflects the need for research on how curriculum may facilitate a space for cosmopolitan perspectives and general interest in reflecting on global citizenship among youth participants.

## Case Study Conclusion

Youth Breaking Borders provides insight to the unique perspective from immigrant/refugee youth in the U.S. The films not only reflect upon the struggles that participants may be facing but gives insight to what the global youth identity means when addressing global issues and creating intersectional curriculum. Further study on determining cosmopolitanism among youth would provide insight on how we may imagine social justice and activism in the coming years, as well as how media literacy can enhance or amplify the skills needed.

The lasting impact of the film projects is difficult to determine. Nevertheless, the public digital platform, a YouTube channel, in which several Youth Breaking Borders films, and other GAP films are uploaded and available, speak to the potential for online activism. In a study discussing an online justice movement that activated an offline movement, digital activism for immigrants is changing perceptions and definitions the activist and how effectively utilize digital communication tools for activist efforts (Harlow & Guo, 2014). While YBB's films do not have "viral" attention, the idea of creating digital content that activates offline movement is certainly prevalent in the curriculum that GAP provides. Another factor to take into consideration are film festivals or screenings of these films that bring wider audiences. *America's Next Top Immigrant*, for example, was selected into the Tribeca Film Festival in their "Our City, My Story" program in 2009.

How might we use the interdisciplinary approach to cosmopolitanism, critical media literacy, and social justice to address globalization? This discourse on interdisciplinary curriculum brings scholars and educators closer to understanding how to effectively navigate global issues within the educational space while also fostering the skills and experiences of



youth. I argue that when considering globalization, interdisciplinary approaches to curriculum will be essential.

Defining the “effective”-ness of teaching critical media literacy is not merely determined by access to said media. Broadly, literacy is an on-going aspect of cultural capital, essentially developing and changing as individuals do. Determining what “effective” means will be essential in media literacy education, particularly when considering global issues such as global modalities, mis/disinformation, and digital divides. For example, individuals and communities may perpetuate mis/disinformation via social media as they “generate, consume, and distribute false information” (Mejias, 2017). Thus, the use of interdisciplinary approaches offers the opportunity for learners to understand technical skills and access under a broader scope of individual, community, and cultural needs.

## **Final Thoughts**

The purpose of this analysis is not to suggest that there is one perfect or perfected way for curriculum to motivate and inspire autoethnographic reflection on individual experiences, thus inspiring a sense of global citizenship or cosmopolitan identity among students. In fact, this case analysis of GAP's curriculum demonstrates how interdisciplinary pedagogy supports media and media production education over time. As the ways in which media can facilitate social justice, education, and activism changes, curriculum must inevitably adapt. While GAP and other similar nonprofits do not use the term "cosmopolitan" to describe their curriculum, the qualities of cosmopolitan global perspectives are in fact encouraged in their programming. Nonprofits such as GAP offer an opportunity to analyze and determine effectiveness of cosmopolitan curriculum via the interdisciplinary approaches discussed in this paper. Educational communities that apply social justice and cosmopolitan frameworks to critical media literacy curriculum provide examples of future potential discourse on combatting issues with globalization.

Such a curriculum can address what it means to be a global citizen, how we can go about teaching and preparing individuals for global citizenship and critical awareness of media literacy. Educators can support students to engage with an empathetic viewpoint on the experiences and cultures of others. As our world continues to develop within the global economy and social structure, our ways in which we identify ourselves within the context of the world shifts. Societal definitions of the individual, local, national, and global community evolves. While education is highly dependent on the context of the learning space and the individuals involved, I argue framing educational efforts with younger generations necessarily need a form of empathetic relation with the world. Educators can implement this kind of pedagogy and framework when structuring curriculum, from grassroots level to the public education sphere.

One aspect of GAP not fully discussed here is the utilization of digital platforms (such as YouTube) to facilitate their educational efforts and messages. The broad use of digital platforms by nonprofits affirms the notion that platforms can act as mediations that may shape social action rather than a full facilitator (Jin, 2017). However, platforms such as YouTube are also commercial corporations, thus complicating the true facilitation for collective action and merely summarize the films into “expressive exercises” (Sanchez, 2020). As online media continues to be a medium in which global discourse occurs at the grassroots level, critical media literacy as a curriculum approach will offer a way to enhance interdisciplinary approaches in education.

Global Action Project offers an opportunity specifically for youth from marginalized groups, providing a space of identity exploration and community building. For the immigrant and refugee participants in GAP’s YBB program, their hybrid identity recognizes transcultural relations as complex, processual, and dynamic (Kraidy, 2010). The continued application on virtual spaces and platforms speaks to the transcultural cosmopolitan curriculum. How might educators address cosmopolitanism and social justice for the population of youth in the United States? Public school, for example, still offers an environment in which a broader array of youth can be introduced to pedagogies that address themes of global youth identities and civic engagement. Nevertheless, while public schools may be a key space in which education on identity development can occur, the reality of increasing regulations and standardization limits both educators and their curriculum. There is still a need for continuing research on specific curriculum and pedagogical tactics. Additionally, there continues to be a need to shift perspectives on literacy that includes critical media literacy particularly for U.S. public education standards. I propose further research is needed to understand how critical media literacy curriculum utilizing interdisciplinary frameworks and pedagogy may effectively prepare younger

generations as they navigate global citizenship, hybridization of identity, and global social movements and civil rights issues.

### **Global Action Project's 2021 curriculum**

GAP announced the organization will be shutting down by the end of 2020, however, their website remains available to view films and download curriculum. The website includes a curriculum tab, encouraging fellow educators and community organizers to use the curriculum and adapt it according to the user's specific needs (*Curriculum* [Global Action Project], n.d.). Interestingly, Global Action Project released a 2021 version of their curriculum, reflecting a "final collection of curricula, workshops, and stories from our community" (*Curriculum* [Global Action Project], n.d.). This latest update speaks to the continuous development of curriculum that utilizes an interdisciplinary approach such as GAP's, which will inevitably adapt accordingly to the community. Regardless of GAP's closure, educational organizations will continue to approach critical media literacy curriculum, applying cosmopolitanism, social justice, gender & race issues, and other critical pedagogies and approaches to educational programming and mission goals.

## Bibliography

- Bess, K. D., Perkins, D. D., Cooper, D. G., & Jones, D. L. (2011). A Heuristic Framework for Understanding the Role of Participatory Decision Making in Community-Based Non-Profits. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 47(3-4), 236-252.
- David Buckingham. (1998). Media Education in the Uk: Moving Beyond Protectionism, *Journal of Communication*, 48(1), 33-43.
- Camangian, P. (2010). Starting with Self: Teaching Autoethnography to Foster Critically Caring Literacies. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 45(2), 179-204.
- Campano & Ghiso. (2010). Immigrant Students as Cosmopolitan Intellectuals. In *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 164-178.
- Castells, Manuel. (2010). The Global Network Society. In Daya Thussu (Ed.), *International Communication: A Reader* (pp. 434-451). Routledge.
- DeJaynes, C. & Curmi, C. (2015). Youth as Cosmopolitan Intellectuals. *The English Journal*, 104(3), 75-80.
- Fleetwood, N. R. (2005). *Media youth: Community-based video production and the politics of race and authenticity*. Duke University Press.
- Friesem, E. (2016). Drawing on Media Studies, Gender Studies, and Media Literacy Education to Develop an Interdisciplinary Approach to Media and Gender Classes. *The Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 40(4), 370-390.
- Global Action Project (n.d.). *Curriculum*. <https://www.global-action.org/curriculum>
- Global Action Project (n.d.). *Our Story*. <https://www.global-action.org/our-story>
- Global Action Project (2010). *Media In Action: Curriculum Workshop Series*.
- Halverson, E. R. (2010). Film as Identity Exploration: A Multimodal Analysis of Youth-Produced Films. *Teachers College Record*, 112(9), 2352-2378.
- Harlow, S., & Guo, L. (2014). Will the Revolution be Tweeted or Facebooked? Using Digital Communication Tools in Immigrant Activism. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19(3), 463-478.
- Hobbs, R. (1998). The Seven Great Debates in the Media Literacy Movement. *Journal of communication*, 48(1), 16-32.

- Jin, Dal Young. (2017). Digital Platform as a Double-Edged Sword: How to Interpret Cultural Flows in the Platform Era. *International Journal of Communication*, 11, 3880-3898.
- Kazanjian, C. (2012). Finding a worldly curriculum: Utilizing a cosmopolitan curriculum in a global community. *Journal of Global Responsibility*, 3(2), 187–197.
- Kelly, P. (2000). The dangerousness of youth-at-risk: the possibilities of surveillance and intervention in uncertain times. *Journal of Adolescence*, 23(4), 463–476. London, England.
- King, LaGarrett. (2017). The Media and Black Masculinity: Looking at the Media Through Race[d] Lenses. *Critical Education*, 8(2), 31-40.
- Kraidy, Marwan M. (2010). Hybridity in Cultural Globalization. In Daya Thussu (Ed.), *International Communication: A Reader* (pp. 434-451). Routledge.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dreamkeepers successful teachers of African American children* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Mejias, V. (2017). Disinformation and the media: the case of Russia and Ukraine. *Media, Culture & Society*, 39(7), 1027–1042.
- McIntosh, L. (2014). “My Film Will Change the World...or Something”: Youth Media Production as “Social Text.” In K. Sanford, T. Rogers, & M. Kendrick (Eds.), *Everyday Youth Literacies*, Vol. 1, 63–79. Springer Singapore.
- Milner, H. R. (2013). Scripted and Narrowed Curriculum Reform in Urban Schools. *Urban Education*, 48(2), 163-170.
- Narayan, R., & Hughes, J. (2011). *Technology outreach programs their impact on middle-school students and their families from underserved communities*. University of Texas.
- Oikonomidou, E. (2019). *Critical cosmopolitanism in diverse students’ lives : universal and restricted expressions*. Routledge.
- Price-Dennis, D., & Carrion, S. (2017). Leveraging Digital Literacies for Equity and Social Justice. *Language Arts*, 94(3), 190-196.
- Reinsborough, P., & Canning, D. (2010). *RE:imagining change : how to use story-based strategy to win campaigns, build movements, and change the world*. PM Press.

- Renee Hobbs, & Richard Frost. (2003). Measuring the Acquisition of Media-Literacy Skills. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 38(3), 330–355.
- Rizvi, F., & Beech, J. (2017). Global mobilities and the possibilities of a cosmopolitan curriculum. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 47(1), 125–134.
- Santone, S. (2019). *Reframing the curriculum: Design for social justice and sustainability*. Routledge.
- Song, A. (2017). Critical Media Literacies in the Twenty-First Century: Writing Autoethnographies, Making Connections, and Creating Virtual Identities. *The Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 9(1), 64–78.
- Straubharr, Joeseeph. (2007). *World Television from Global to Local*. Sage Publications.
- Swadener, E. B. (1990). Children and families "at risk:" etiology, critique, and alternative paradigms. *The Journal of Educational Foundations*, 4(4), 17.
- Vickery, J. (2012). *Worth the risk: the role of regulations and norms in shaping teens' digital media practices*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Texas].
- Vickery, J. (2014). Youths Teaching Youths. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 57(5), 361–365.
- Watkins, S. (2018). *The Digital Edge How Black and Latino Youth Navigate Digital Inequality* / S. Craig Watkins [and five others]. New York University Press.
- Wood, D., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 17(2), 89–100.
- Young, J. A. (2018). Equipping future nonprofit professionals with digital literacies for the 21st century. *The Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership*, 8(1), 4-15.
- Zaidi, R., & Rowsell, J. (2017). *Literacy lives in transcultural times*. In Rahat Zaidi and Jennifer Rowsell (Eds.), Routledge.