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Authors
Bucholtz, Mary
Casillas, Dolores Inés
Lee, Jin Sook

Publication Date
2020

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RESISTING RACISM AND NEOLIBERALISM IN CRITICAL LANGUAGE RESEARCH AND ACTIVISM WITH RACIALIZED YOUTH

Mary Bucholtz, Dolores Inés Casillas, and Jin Sook Lee

Introduction

A great deal of research and activism with young people from racialized groups takes place within special programs and activities designed by university researchers to provide an academically, personally, and politically meaningful alternative to the often-damaging policies and practices of conventional schooling. Many of these initiatives draw implicitly or explicitly on youth participatory action research (YPAR) and similar politically engaged frameworks in which researchers work alongside young people of color to advance social, educational, and racial justice in their lives (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Mirra, Garcia, & Morrell, 2016; Paris & Winn, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2014a). A growing focus of such projects is sociolinguistic justice (Bucholtz et al., 2014): social equity in struggles over language, and especially in challenging raciolinguistic ideologies (Rosa & Flores, 2017; see also Alim, Rickford, & Ball, 2016). Scholars working with racialized youth to address issues of language, identity, and power typically combine a YPAR-style approach adapted to a specific youth population with some form of critical language awareness to call attention to the ways that language is used as a tool of oppression as well as resistance (Davis, 2009; Paris & Alim, 2017; Wyman, McCarty, & Nicholas, 2014).

Since 2010, we have directed one such program that works primarily with Mexican– and Central American–heritage Latinx young people from low-income families in Southern California. School Kids Investigating Language in Life and Society, or SKILLS, offers youth tools for critically conceptualizing and analyzing language and guides them to carry out original research and activism projects on linguistic issues in their own lives and communities. We have worked with over 1,000 participants from ages 6 to 19 in six different municipalities in

the Santa Barbara region. The five-month-long program has taken multiple forms over the years depending on the needs and preferences of each site, implemented by graduate student teaching teams in collaboration with partner teachers. It has typically been offered as a college-level sociocultural linguistics class for high school students, in which the participants receive college credit at no cost for their successful completion of the program. Because our own institution refuses to provide free college credit, we have coordinated this effort with two generous and visionary partner institutions, Santa Barbara City College and California Lutheran University, which have worked with us to recognize the academic achievements of the SKILLS student-researchers. We are committed to such arrangements whenever possible as a way of contesting neoliberal institutional logics that commodify education.

In recent years the SKILLS program has been adapted for specific groups, including Indigenous Mexican youth, Native American children, elementary school students in a dual language immersion program, and emergent bilingual high school students (i.e., students labeled as English language learners). The specific curriculum varies from classroom to classroom based on the interests and expertise of the graduate student teaching fellows and the guidance and input of the partner teacher, but the general content focuses on topics such as linguistic practices and patterns in the local community (multilingualism, language maintenance and shift, translanguaging), language ideologies in the media and in education, and language as an index of social identity. (Sample curricula are posted on the SKILLS website at skills.ucsb.edu.) The curriculum is also informed by our own disciplinary identities in linguistics, Chicanx studies, and education, as well as by the transdisciplinary insights that we have gained from one another through our longstanding collaboration.

From the outset, we have sought (not always successfully) to create within the SKILLS program an alternative to "school as usual" (Bucholtz, Casillas, & Lee, 2018a). Taking a broadly Freirean approach that acknowledges the multidirectionality of teaching and learning (Freire, 1970), we favor core strategies of critical pedagogy such as dialogicality, real-world learning, positional understanding, critical reflection, and collective action (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003) over conventional approaches like lectures, homework, and tests, in which students are expected to passively consume information and then parrot it back. Further, we recognize that young people's own experiences as racialized, gendered, and otherwise sociopolitically positioned language users provide them with deep insights and expert knowledge, and we valorize the linguistic and cultural practices they bring from their homes, communities, and peer groups into the SKILLS classroom (Bucholtz, Casillas, & Lee, 2017). Crucially, the SKILLS program is shaped by our commitment to social and sociolinguistic justice for racialized youth (e.g., Bucholtz, Casillas, & Lee, 2018b).

The school setting of most versions of the SKILLS program imposes a variety of institutional constraints, including the need to conform to school policies

regarding the language of instruction (i.e., English rather than Spanish or other home languages of students), endless bureaucratic red tape, and the oppressive effect of school spaces on racialized youth. But when viewed through the lens of decolonizing methodologies and pedagogies (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Tejeda, Espinoza, & Gutiérrez, 2003), the location of SKILLS in schools and community spaces also functions as a challenge to scholarly assumptions about who constitutes a legitimate researcher, where legitimate research takes place, and how it is carried out.

Although we aim for the SKILLS program to expose and undermine structures of power, we nevertheless regularly face conflicts between the goals of social justice and the neoliberal and white-supremacist structures and processes that govern educational institutions, from our own public research university to the schools that form partnerships with the program. These structures and processes collude—often in ways that we fail to see until much later—to undermine our efforts toward justice and equity. In this chapter, we discuss some of the manifestations of unintended yet nonetheless damaging neoliberalism and structural racism in our research as well as in our educational orientation to SKILLS, and we explore how these ideological and material processes contribute to the sociopolitical subordination and marginalization of young people of color despite the program's explicitly antiracist goals. We then turn to three ways in which we have tried to resist these scholarly habits of oppression in our ongoing work by acknowledging and honoring the central importance of emotional and embodied experience in learning and understanding; clarifying and strengthening our commitment to self-determination for racialized youth; and rejecting narrow conceptualizations of education, research, and linguistics.

Research in the Neoliberal University

The past generation has witnessed a dramatic global shift in ideological understandings of the purpose of education. Beginning in the 1980s, corporate management models came to dominate higher education (Aronowitz, 2000) and soon afterward K–12 education as well (Abendroth & Porfilio, 2015). This neoliberal turn introduced a new discourse of "stakeholders," "competition," "entrepreneurship," "productivity," "efficiency," "outcomes," and "deliverables" in order to commodify education and constitute the subjects of the educational institution—that is, teachers and students—as rational actors seeking to maximize individual economic benefits through relentless exploitation of resources and marketing of the self (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Soto & Pérez Milans, 2018; Urciuoli, 2018).

These dynamics have also had an effect on our work with youth. First and foremost is the constant need for funding, which without our full realization has often encouraged us to reorient the program to prioritize outside interests over the young people we work with. The SKILLS program could not exist without the financial and other resources of our university as well as our other

funders—including at one regrettable point a corporate donor whose much-needed financial support for our program was nevertheless outweighed by the company's union-busting efforts. As important as such support is for the program's continued existence and success, our relationship of material dependency on the university and other funders, as well as our status as university faculty, distorts the purpose of the SKILLS program in ways that are directly harmful to the young people it seeks to support.

We recognize that there is no ethically pure access to resources, and we understand our engagement with funding agencies as a form of what Yarimar Bonilla (2015, p. 43) characterizes as "strategic entanglement: a way of crafting and enacting autonomy within a system from which one is unable to fully disentangle." Special funding is necessary to launch and sustain initiatives like SKILLS, which operate at the margins of traditional institutional structures and outside of permanent budgets. In order to secure funding, projects often must be framed in ways that serve the funder's goals rather than the researcher's goals—let alone the goals of the participants (cf. Daza, 2012). At times, we have selected some prospective partner sites over others or downplayed key elements of the program in order to make our work more appealing to potential funders. The program and our research within it have also been significantly restricted and reshaped by the demands of school districts and schools that have prioritized bureaucratic processes over student needs.

Granting agencies also frequently expect a "return on investment" down the road in the form of larger grants, which come with their own constraints, and winning and renewing such grants often requires evidence of (usually quantifiable) "impact"—even though the most significant impacts may not be measurable within the time frame of the program, or perhaps for years afterward. We have spent countless hours developing, implementing, and analyzing various evaluation instruments to meet such requirements, all the while suspecting that such tools, no matter how carefully designed, inevitably impose more meanings than they reveal. Moreover, in the educational context the act of evaluation typically reinscribes a market ideology of consumer satisfaction (Mathison, 2016); in such a framing, youth of color in SKILLS are passively positioned as customers—or, even worse, dehumanized as commodified products—rather than framed as agentive experts in their own right and core members of a collaborative project.

Further, both the university and outside funders are more likely to find value in programs like SKILLS when program activities are showcased publicly through press releases, articles in the local media, and similar promotional materials (cf. Pérez-Milans & Soto, 2018). Yet such activities are often indistinguishable from advertising, and it can be all too tempting to commodify our youth participants as hard-working and hence deserving "Young Latino Professionals" (Rosa, 2019)—in inevitable implicit contrast to some hypothetical less-deserving group of racialized young people—in order to open the wallets of potential funders and donors. Admittedly, we have allowed some mediatized local publicity of SKILLS, especially

early in its history, and we continue to organize SKILLS Day and SKILLS Night events at our university campus and in local community spaces to share the work of youth participants, while directing advance information about these events primarily toward university members and young people's own families rather than the public at large. However, since the beginning of the program we have steadfastly barred journalists and other visitors and observers from SKILLS classrooms, understanding that to invite the (typically) white adult gaze into these spaces would be a profound violation both of young people's trust and of our principles of collaboration and partnership.

A second way in which neoliberal logics exert influence on our work with youth is in the demand that these activities yield recognizable research "products." Like all academics, we face the neoliberal university's pressures toward productivity, as measured by the number and (again) impact of research publications (Feldman & Sandoval, 2018; Hermanowicz, 2016). Within research institutions like our own, programs such as SKILLS are generally devalued as mere service that distracts faculty from the real work of research, the primary labor for which we are economically rewarded in the form of salary raises. A common professional strategy for academics engaging in such activist and advocacy efforts is therefore to align these activities with the university's expectations for research (Cancian, 1993; Pereira, 2016)—and of course this chapter is, among other things, an example of this strategy.

In the early years of SKILLS, research on the program by the university team was central to the project design. The goal was to improve the quality of young people's experience within the program in a more direct and contextualized way than is possible with traditional evaluation instruments, as well as to share the process and results of our collaborative work with a broader audience of scholars and educators beyond our local community. But these legitimate goals were quickly overshadowed by the publishing imperative. Thus, it was almost inevitable that the SKILLS program would be reshaped by our research agenda, as the drive to document and publish our activities sometimes took precedence over the activities themselves and often ended up marginalizing or alienating youth participants who were uncomfortable with the intrusiveness of the research process.

When we recognized this problem—thanks largely to expressions of concern and skepticism from some graduate student teaching fellows and partner teachers who witnessed firsthand the negative effects in their classrooms—we put a halt to video recording and other data collection in most SKILLS sites. We have gradually reintroduced more limited forms of data collection in close collaboration with teachers and students. However, we continue to face a conflict between our ethical commitment to safeguard the privacy and well-being of our youth partners of color and our scholarly desire to analyze the everyday workings of the program in the kind of rich detail that our social science backgrounds have taught us is only possible with recorded data. Over the years, we have come to see more clearly not only the ethical dangers but also the epistemological limitations of such data

collection techniques and have begun to explore alternative approaches that are more in line with our antiracist, anti-colonial, anticapitalist, and critical feminist commitments, such as counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Regardless of methodology, simply by advancing and circulating knowledge about marginalized groups, research constitutes a powerful resource for reproducing the sociopolitical domination of those groups. In this process, knowledge itself becomes appropriated and distorted for the workings of power, at times even against the researcher's explicit objections. A growing number of scholars, many of them informed by Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies and working in Indigenous contexts, have argued for silence as a counterstrategy that helps prevent damaging misrepresentations and cultural appropriations (Debenport, 2010; Simpson, 2007; Tuck & Yang, 2014b). Such a strategy is especially important in today's academy, where the researcher's thirst for knowledge is heightened by the demands of neoliberalism. The imperative to publish leads to a necessarily exploitative relationship between the researcher and the researched: The racialized research "subject" possesses raw materials—their lives—that can be rendered into profitable "data" by the enterprising researcher. Thus, the productivity quotas of the neoliberal academy perpetuate the racist orientation of academic research.

At times we have fallen prey to this productivist logic, reducing SKILLS participants' lived experiences to mere data, a dehumanizing move that also denies young people's right to make their own meanings (Paris & Winn, 2014). As we discuss in greater detail later in this chapter, the insights and experiences of some of the program's graduate student teaching fellows helped us to understand the importance of "refusing research" (Tuck & Yang, 2014b; cf. Simpson, 2007) when to do otherwise might lead to harm for our youth collaborators. Moreover, given the hyper-surveillance of racialized youth (Kelly, 2003; Martinez, 2016), research in these contexts and in the current political climate is especially likely to be coopted for purposes of surveillance and control. We have therefore become more cautious about making public what we learn from and about young people within the program, and we have sought to frame our work in ways that avoid perpetuating stereotypes and that highlight youth expertise. This approach is in line with our longstanding rejection of discourses that frame research as benevolently "giving voice" to or "empowering" racialized youth (Bucholtz, Casillas, & Lee, 2016) as well as our commitment to research as youth-centered, youth-led knowledge creation.

A final way in which white supremacy is reproduced in everyday neoliberal practices of scholarship is through the form that research is expected to take in academic settings. By decontextualizing research participants' lived experience, translating it into the arcane register of academic discourse, and publishing it in inaccessible scholarly journals, researchers regularly engage in acts of intellectual expropriation and theft. Again, the injury is amplified when research participants are racialized youth, who are systematically excluded from the academy on the basis of age as well as socioeconomic resources. Although we aim to share our

research with SKILLS participants whenever possible, it is clear that their experiences are not adequately represented in the dry abstractions of academic prose (an issue that this chapter again exemplifies).

Neoliberalism and Racism in Education

As suggested above, neoliberalism and racism are at work in education as they are in research, and these processes have similarly injurious impacts on youth participants in the SKILLS program. Within the prevailing neoliberal discourse of "diversity" in California's higher education system, the largely Latinx student population of the state's public schools, including in the Santa Barbara area where we work, is positioned in two interrelated ways, both of which rely on racialized stereotypes and ideologies. On the one hand, Latinx youth are framed within a pathologizing discourse of diversity-as-deficit, in which they are characterized as beneficiaries of the presumed benevolence of university researchers like ourselves who engage in "outreach" activities to the local community (see also Baldridge, 2014; LaViolette, 2018). On the other hand, young Latinxs are also positioned within a celebratory diversity discourse of the university as a "happy" multicultural utopia (Ahmed, 2012). In this version of diversity discourse, Latinx youth are framed as future university students and Young Latino Professionals, to again borrow Rosa's term.

At the same time, this discourse draws on the raciolinguistic chronotope of Latinidad that Rosa (2016, 2019) also discusses, in which an imagined Latinx-dominated future is continually invoked only to be endlessly deferred. In this utopic discourse, the neoliberal university congratulates itself on its own commitment to "diversity," where *diversity* is understood as a nonthreatening, apolitical, "value-added" commodity that enhances the educational experience of students from dominant groups (Urciuoli, 2010). The discourse of diversity-as-commodity is thus at heart a form of racist exploitation. Our own university, for example, was recently designated a Hispanic-Serving Institution, a status it achieved more by accident than design. In this context, where HSI status makes the university eligible for additional sources of funding, racialized students' bodies are prized in promotional materials as visual evidence of the university's pursuit of diversity as a social good. However, this symbolic value is not matched by financial commitments to support such students' academic and personal well-being in the context of a still hegemonically white institution. Within the diversity discourse of the neoliberal university, local Latinx high school students who participate in the SKILLS program are projected into a racially harmonious future as university students, notwithstanding the significant material and ideological barriers to their entry. In the nearly ten years that the program has been in place, to our knowledge only two SKILLS alumni have enrolled as students at UCSB, a damning indictment of the mismatch between the program's goals and its impact at our own university. Admittedly, many other SKILLS participants have gone on to pursue

higher education at other institutions in California and elsewhere; the largest number attend local tuition-free community colleges, because students from low-income families cannot "invest" in a four-year degree and must make educational decisions based on severe economic constraints. Here again, the university has failed to provide meaningful structural access to students who are central to its self-branding as "diverse."

Of course, white-supremacist processes of education are not limited to the university; these are also imposed on young people through traditional schooling at all levels. Over the years, the SKILLS program has become more and more explicit in critiquing the disinformation that racialized youth often receive as part of their education and in addressing curricular gaps, omissions, and silences around racism and racialized experience. Yet as we discuss further below, our own curriculum, despite our best intentions, may also reproduce harmful ideologies or contain glaring omissions.

Undoing Neoliberal and Racist Research and Education

Numerous scholars of color from different disciplines and subject positions have challenged the many pernicious effects of the dominant structural processes shaping the contemporary university (e.g., Gutiérrez y Muhs, Flores Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012; Matthew, 2016; Shahjahan, 2014). Informed by these and similar perspectives, we discuss three strategies that increasingly direct our work both epistemologically and politically: an acknowledgment of the emotional and embodied nature of all social encounters, including research and education; a deep commitment to self-determination and self-definition for youth; and the reimagining of what constitutes research and education in linguistics in the context of critical, social justice-oriented work with racialized youth. In considering these strategies, we rely on the insights of graduate student teaching fellows across a number of different SKILLS sites. At the center of all three strategies is an ongoing critical reflexive scrutiny of our goals and agendas, both stated and unstated, and an interrogation of what genuine collaboration can look like given the massive structural inequities between us as university researchers and the young people with whom we seek to collaborate.

Research and Education as Affective Encounter

Through our work within the SKILLS program, we have become increasingly attentive to the central role of emotion in young people's experiences of race and language both within and beyond the classroom, and in our research we have examined the importance of what we call *affective agency* in recognizing youth affects as a crucial force for sociopolitical change (Bucholtz et al., 2018a; Ferrada, Bucholtz, & Corella, 2019). This approach aligns with critical epistemologies that foreground the radical transformative potential of embodied experience, such as

Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's ([1981] 2015) "theory in the flesh." In our work in this vein, which we have tried to conduct as much as possible in collaboration with youth, we have drawn on scholarship that theorizes the affective, embodied grounding of race and racism (e.g., Berg & Ramos-Zayas, 2015; Zembylas, 2015) in order to shed light on the ways in which young people's affective experiences constitute a form of knowledge that may generate transformative social action. We have explored this issue primarily through analyses of how young people in the SKILLS program do not separate emotion and reason in examining the raciolinguistic ideologies they have confronted throughout their lives. Yet there is a very real danger that teaching about racism can end up retraumatizing the youth in our classrooms (Alvarez, Milner, & Delale-O'Connor, 2016), and our growing attention to affect has been accompanied by increased care regarding how, when, and whether particular instructors should introduce particular topics.

Less examined in our work, however, are the negative emotions that may be sparked by the research or learning experience itself, such as frustration, boredom, and anger. These youth affects are often framed by researchers and teachers alike as individualized and problematic in classroom contexts rather than as political and generative. As we discuss in more detail below, SKILLS graduate student teaching fellows have been instrumental in calling our attention more fully to the ways that raciolinguistic ideologies of young people's affects circulating among adults are injurious to the youth who participate in our program.

Self-determination and Self-definition in Research and Education

The SKILLS program was founded on the idea of sociolinguistic justice, or "self-determination for linguistically subordinated individuals and groups in sociopolitical struggles over language" (Bucholtz et al., 2014, p. 145). In our work we have conceptualized and discussed this issue largely in terms of youth agency and expertise (e.g., Bucholtz et al., 2016, 2018b). However, this perspective, as useful as it is, overlooks self-definition as a central component of self-determination, including such questions as: Who do we take the SKILLS participants to be, and how do our assumptions about youth identities influence the ways in which we position young people, both individually and collectively, as agents and experts within our teaching and research? This issue arises at multiple levels, from the fundamental issues of the pronunciation of young people's names (Bucholtz, 2016) and the use of their correct pronouns and gender terms (cf. Zimman, 2017), to the topics we present in the curriculum and encourage youth to pursue in their own research (or not), to the roles we enable them to play in the classroom and in the research process.[1]

We consider here the issue of what we take young people's "interests" to be—not only in the sense of their personal passions, pursuits, concerns, and goals but

also in the sense of their individual and collective rights and needs. As scholars and educators who are deeply committed to supporting minoritized and marginalized forms of language and their communities of origin, we have focused on developing SKILLS curricula that center these issues. Because many youth participants in the program are Latinx and come from homes where Spanish is used, we have emphasized in particular the value of bilingualism, a message that students in California's public schools have rarely received during more than 20 years of racist and xenophobic English-only education policies (Bucholtz et al., 2018b). However, we have been slow to fully appreciate the implications of a generation of anti-bilingual schooling for students' lived experience. Due to these policies, most Latinx youth have been denied the opportunity to develop their knowledge of Spanish alongside English, leaving many feeling insecure about their Spanish abilities despite having considerable knowledge of the language (Lateef-Jan, 2018; Zentella, 2007).

The privileging of productive bilingualism within early versions of the SKILLS curriculum thus contributed to a discourse that valorizes an idealized and unattainable notion of "balanced" bilingualism and "fluency" over other kinds of linguistic ability, such as receptive bilingualism and creative translanguaging practices (Carruba-Rogel, 2018), potentially leading young people to believe that they cannot legitimately claim a bilingual identity (Hirsch, 2018). When we recognized this problem, we introduced a fuller discussion of these latter abilities into SKILLS curricula, yet our initial failure to critically examine the concept of bilingualism and to disrupt the monolingual/bilingual binary (García, Flores, & Woodley, 2012) had the effect of marginalizing the everyday linguistic practices of many Latinx youth participants in our program. Moreover, our insistence on the importance of young people's heritage languages, while intended to combat raciolinguistic ideologies that devalue the languages of racialized groups, has sometimes resulted in the marginalization of those who do not identify closely with their language(s) of heritage or who do not wish to be essentialized as a speaker of a particular heritage language. By fetishizing bilingualism involving a heritage language, we have also missed opportunities to explore young people's deep interest in other languages that may be part of their lives via foreign language classes (e.g., French, Latin) and popular culture (e.g., Japanese, Korean).

We were fortunate to have been forewarned about this issue by a partner educator in one SKILLS site that served a sizable number of children of Indigenous heritage. Although this partner was strongly committed to fostering young people's Indigenous heritage languages, they asked that we not focus on this issue in the program, because the complex identities of many young people as well as the processes of deep historical trauma and ongoing racism that Native communities face may have led some SKILLS participants to feel ashamed of or alienated from their Indigenous language heritage. The graduate student teaching fellows in this version of the program, Katie Lateef-Jan and Kayla Palakurthy, both of whom had worked in Indigenous contexts before, were extremely responsive to

this request and designed a version of the program that enabled the children to explore a range of issues around language, identity, and power without ever being compelled to account for their own linguistic identities.

Unfortunately, however, we did not recall our partner educator's invaluable words of caution in our work with high-school-age Latinx youth the following year. In at least one SKILLS site, our uncritical celebration of bilingual ability led to an English-dominant student's being unintentionally singled out and excluded from a classroom discussion, as discussed by Anna Bax (2015), one of the graduate student teaching fellows at this site. The student in question, whom we call Adam here, had one Mexican parent and one white parent and was often taken to be white by his peers; unlike the vast majority of his classmates, he did not grow up using Spanish. During a small-group discussion of youth language brokering, the bilingual Latina undergraduate mentor leading the discussion asked the five students in the group, "So, are all of you, like, some sort of Latino?" Four of the students nodded, but Adam tightened his lips and did not respond, even as one of his classmates turned and looked curiously at him. In response to the mentor's next question, "And so when you were growing up, was Spanish your first language?" the first four students again replied in the affirmative, but Adam only shook his head slightly and cast his eyes downward. Bax notes that in this exchange, Adam, who was ordinarily highly engaged and expressive in the classroom—perhaps precisely in part because he was half-white and English-dominant—was reduced to "silence and stillness." Although the mentor took care not to make assumptions about students' ethnoracial and linguistic backgrounds, Adam was nevertheless placed in a painful position due to his visible phenotypical difference from his classmates as well as the presupposition underlying the discussion topic: that students were bilingual and had experience in language brokering for Spanish-dominant family members.[2] As Anna told us in a later reflection on this classroom moment (Bax, personal communication):

> [Adam's] AVID cohort had been together since 9th grade, so he'd had to face years of marginalization (or at least having the legitimacy of his Latinx identity constantly challenged and questioned) from his peers by the time SKILLS started. In a way, the situation that we set up in that classroom was worse than if we'd only facilitated a discussion that marginalized Adam in that one moment—because what we actually did was inadvertently rub salt into a wound that he'd been dealing with for years. I suppose this is another way that students' affective experiences are so critical to classroom dynamics, since students' affective histories can make our pedagogical blunders weigh far more heavily than we realize. . . . [T]his experience with Adam has shaped all my subsequent teaching in SKILLS and beyond.

Anna's insightful analysis of this crucial moment alongside Adam's other experiences of marginalization at school has helped us become more attuned to and

critical of our own raciolinguistic ideologies regarding the identities of SKILLS participants. Meanwhile, the work of another graduate student teaching fellow, Adanari Zarate (2018), has demonstrated that the more explicitly critical perspective offered by her discipline, Chicanx studies, creates space in SKILLS classrooms for young Latinxs of varied linguistic backgrounds and phenotypes to challenge ideologies linking the racialized bodies of youth to racialized ways of speaking. Mindful of these insights, we now strive to avoid essentializing Latinx youth and to recognize and support the interests—in both senses of the word—of the young people in the SKILLS program.

Reimagining Teaching, Reimagining Research

Another crucial realization that we have gained through our work with racialized youth is that traditional approaches to both teaching and research are inadequate to the task of social transformation that underlies the goals of the SKILLS program. As discussed above, part of this problem is the issue of "school as usual," which we and our graduate student collaborators have discovered is more difficult to dismantle than we initially realized (e.g., Bax & Ferrada, 2018). Another problem is the focus of the SKILLS program: linguistics. Introducing the subject matter of linguistics to K–12 students, though still rare, has become a growing interest among linguists (e.g., Denham & Lobeck, 2010; Loosen, 2014; Stewart & Kuhlemann Cárdenez, 2010). Such efforts, while useful, tend to be rooted in a relatively traditional understanding both of linguistics and of education, where the primary goal is to transmit expert disciplinary knowledge to novices in a highly structured fashion.

One of the ways that the SKILLS program has changed the most over the years is in our rethinking of the scope of what we teach as well as what and how students learn. Even from its earliest conception, the SKILLS curriculum differed radically not only from conventional high school course offerings on language (e.g., prescriptive grammar, composition, literature) but also from what is available in most linguistics departments in the United States. To begin with, the content of the SKILLS class is heavily interdisciplinary, with influences from education and Chicanx studies as well as linguistics. Moreover, the curriculum is informed by the distinctive approach to linguistics taken by the Department of Linguistics at the University of California, Santa Barbara, which emphasizes the use of language in its social context, and especially by the department's reframing of the (typically narrowly construed) disciplinary subfield of sociolinguistics as the broad interdisciplinary field of sociocultural linguistics (Bucholtz & Hall, 2008). Our theoretical perspective on linguistics therefore departs dramatically from the science-centered, cognitive-driven approach that dominates the field. In many ways, then, the program is already quite different from what is taught in most linguistics departments, and some of the curricular content as well as the focus of youth participants' research and community action projects would

certainly be dismissed as "not linguistics" by those who police the boundaries of the discipline.

Moreover, because SKILLS classes have lower enrollments than the overcrowded lecture courses we offer at our own university—a typical SKILLS class has between 10 and 30 students, ten times fewer than in our undergraduate classes—within the program we are able to minimize or eliminate many of the traditional elements of conventional classrooms, such as monologic lectures, exams, and exercise-based homework. Indeed, we eventually realized that we were providing learning experiences to high school students in the SKILLS program that we were not making available to most of our own undergraduates, especially the opportunity to conduct in-depth original research and activism projects. Our undergraduate mentors often comment enviously that they wish that they had had a program similar to SKILLS in their high school—or even as part of their college education.

Thus, SKILLS offers young people experiences that they would be unlikely to encounter anywhere else. However, we have come to see that an academic outreach program that focuses on language, regardless of its social justice goals, is likely to impose its own priorities on participants rather than truly accompanying them (Bucholtz et al., 2016) as they set their own agendas for discovering, producing, and using knowledge. Instead of marching through predetermined lesson plans, we now aim to provide space for young people to guide the focus and direction of discussions and activities, even if these might appear to us to be "off topic" or "not linguistics." We have increasingly encouraged participants to put their passions at the center of their final projects, linking these to language in whatever way and to whatever extent makes sense to them. This approach has led to numerous exciting and highly original projects, such as a powerful critique of local gentrification by one team of SKILLS youth researchers, moving spoken-word performances by two different students, one about racial profiling and another about art and identity, and a dazzling bilingual display of engineering discourse by a fourth student.

But simply broadening the academic scope of the program beyond linguistics has not always been sufficient to avoid imposing our own agenda. In some cases, the very structure of the program has had to be rethought from the ground up, especially in our partnerships with afterschool programs, where a more academic focus was unwelcome or out of place. The graduate student teaching fellows at these sites shifted away from linguistics and toward physical activities such as mural painting (Bax & Ferrada, 2018) and outdoor games. We learned through experience that framing our program around relatively formal teaching and learning was inappropriate in these contexts.

We have also realized that the program's initial focus on research has been problematic. Research—both by youth and by the university team—was the centerpiece of the original SKILLS program. The program's understanding of youth as linguistic experts leads to an emphasis on young people as producers and not

simply as consumers of linguistic knowledge. However, this worthy goal quickly becomes entangled in the sorts of neoliberal ideologies of productivity discussed above, and the artificial constraints of academic time have often forced participants to rush their experience of learning and discovery in order to have "something to show" for SKILLS Day (cf. Moten & Harney, 1999 on the "academic speed-up" in the neoliberal university). Our emphasis on research experience also plays into neoliberal logics by contributing to the escalation of résumé building among students at the very beginning of their academic trajectories. This race to overachieve is now taken for granted as the price of admission to higher education (Davidson, 2008). Moreover, a research focus limits what counts as valued production to work that is recognizable as "research"—a highly rarified activity that is unfamiliar to most young people and that may not help them meet their needs and goals. We have therefore broadened the scope of student projects from our original narrow focus on research to encompass activism, the arts, and practical contributions such as bilingual pedagogical materials for younger students.

The value of research becomes even more questionable when it is carried out *on* rather than *by* youth. A number of graduate teaching fellows have taken the path of "refusing research" discussed above, viewing their research activities as more harmful than helpful to the young people they work with in the SKILLS program. One of the graduate student teaching fellows who grappled with this problem is Jenny Sperling, who was part of a team working in a continuation high school for students who had not received the support they needed in local conventional high schools. Jenny had originally planned to carry out ethnographic research alongside her teaching, but she quickly encountered tensions between her teaching and research roles and decided that to pursue research in this context would exploit students who already experienced extreme marginalization and stigma both in the school system and in the local community. Jenny's initial writing on this topic was a critical reflection on these ethical struggles rather than an ethnographic study of the students' activities (Sperling, 2017). She ultimately produced an article about this SKILLS classroom, but she wrote it from her students' own perspective, through a discussion of a powerful documentary video they had collectively made that investigated and refuted others' contempt toward their school and toward themselves as students (Sperling 2020). As we noted above, thanks to the experiences of Jenny and others, research is now much less central to the entire SKILLS program and is now undertaken with much greater care and much more collaboration with the adults and young people at our partner sites.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have reflected on our experiences striving—not always successfully—to resist the imperatives of the neoliberal university. At the root of these challenges is the tension between the original goals of our work and

the university's injunction to commodify that work through capitalist processes such as funding schemes, advertising campaigns, and research productivity, which take a disproportionate toll on racialized young people. Although the issues we have described in this chapter are no doubt familiar to many readers, they remain underdiscussed in scholarly contexts. We therefore view this chapter as part of our larger effort to subvert and dismantle the dominant discourses of the academy by exposing our failures, our shortcomings, and our missteps, in contrast to the expected triumphalist academic narrative of continuous progress and success. At the same time, we acknowledge with gratitude the tremendous value of this transdisciplinary collaboration for our own growth as scholars and educators, which regularly prompts us to interrogate and reimagine our individual and collective theoretical, methodological, ethical, and professional commitments.

Despite the contradictions of working for social change in the context of white-supremacist and neoliberal structures of education and research, we continue to view such work, however compromised, as necessary. (And it is no accident that all three of us are female-identified, two of us are scholars of color, and one of us began this collaboration as an assistant professor—in other words, the inequities of the academy are also evident in our own experiences with regard to the burdens of mentoring and "service.") Through our work with young people in the SKILLS program, we now understand more fully the vital importance of honoring youth affect, of facilitating youth self-determination, and of avoiding the harms of narrowly defined teaching and research agendas. These insights came about as hard-won lessons—lessons that we learned at the expense of the young people we sought and sometimes failed to support. Breaking out of neoliberal, colonizing, and racist habits of thought and action is not easy, and we are constantly learning and relearning these lessons, thanks to the patience and wisdom of our youth and adult collaborators.

Acknowledgments

Our thanks to the editors and an anonymous reviewer for their warm encouragement and invaluable feedback. We are also grateful to our colleagues and students for crucial resources and insights that have informed this chapter, especially Anna Bax, Anne Charity Hudley, Katie Lateef-Jan, Jessi Love-Nichols, Jenny Sperling, and Adrienne Tsikewa; the dozens of graduate and undergraduate students who have contributed to the SKILLS program as teaching fellows, mentors, coordinators, and curriculum developers; our partner teachers and institutions; and the graduate students who participated in Mary's Fall 2017 seminar Linguistics 248: Reimagining Linguistics. Our greatest debt is to the youth researcher-activists in the SKILLS program for all they have taught us over the years. Any remaining weaknesses are our own responsibility.

Notes

1. While the graduate student teaching fellows take the lead in developing curricula for each SKILLS site with input from the partner teacher, they are guided both by the general curriculum, which is developed and revised with our close involvement, and by the year-long SKILLS training course, taught annually by one or more of the faculty directors. We therefore bear ultimate responsibility for any shortcomings in the curriculum, and we note with appreciation the many ways that the graduate student teaching fellows have vastly improved the content and implementation of the program by challenging or rethinking some of our most basic assumptions, some examples of which we discuss below.
2. The sort of exclusion described here differs in important ways from the well-documented phenomenon of white students' complaints of marginalization and exclusion when classroom discussions turn away from topics familiar to them to center the experiences of their peers of color (e.g., Matias, 2016).

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