

Announcing the 2019–2020 Alan C. Purves Award Recipients: Inspiring Transformative Literacy Pedagogies

The 2020 Alan C. Purves Award Committee

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The Quest for Humanizing Research

One might find it difficult to argue that an
individual at their core is but a composite of intersecting identities.

We are comprised of mother, wife, educator, and friend.

Our identities align with the roles we play.

whatever the time or context requires.

Yet, though we all are composite characters in this life;

we often see each other as static beings.

In our quest to become capitalistically better,

our pathway through the kingdom of more,

we sometimes care little.

We care little about confining.

a multidimensional entity.

to a singular definition.

We need more.

We demand more.

So began the quest for humanizing research.

Seeing an individual in their totality

means work, empathy, patience.

It demands a radical love and nuanced vision.

To view research . . . no,

to view the world

with a critical lens and a discerning mind.

Society would rather apply labels,

as labels can be peeled away, reapplied,

or erased when convenient.

Is not history littered with labels?

The ones we dare not say now . . .
 but readily echoed in the not-so-distant past.
 These labels used to malign and denigrate,
 stand in contrast to the pure, wholesome ideals,
 to which society demand we ascribe.
 Yet, when I see you as a human.
 When I see your complexities and evolving designs,
 I am taking in the best of you.
 Your situated and composite perfection.
 As you evolve,
 I too alter as I take in different ideas,
 and challenge staunchly held beliefs.
 I've begun to alter my eyes to see individuals
 as kaleidoscopes: panoramic shifting colors.
 So when I look them in the eyes and say,
 "I see you my sister."
 Or
 "I see you my brother."
 They know I'm looking through eyes of radical transformation.
 . . . I'm looking to learn and love their totality.
 —Dywanna Smith, 2020

Black people's language, literacy, and writing practices are not separate from their racially related experiences. In Dr. April Baker-Bell's (2020) beautifully written book *Linguistic Justice*, she argues that "indeed, the way a Black child's language is devalued in school reflects how Black lives are devalued in the world" (p. 2). The anti-Black racism and state-sanctioned violence that plague our world have led to the recent deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Rev. Clementa C. Pinckney, Cynthia Marie Graham Hurd, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lee Lance, Myra Thompson, Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, Daniel L. Simmons, Depayne Middleton-Doctor, and Tywanza Sanders. Just keepin' it real: The anti-Black racism and state-sanctioned violence that are raging in the streets are no strangers to the classroom. Anti-Black racism and state-sanctioned violence have no boundaries: From assaulting and abusing unarmed citizens who were on the frontlines protesting for human rights to the disproportionate impact that the novel coronavirus has on Black communities, we must take into account the myriad ways that anti-Black racism, whiteness, and white supremacy are tethered to education, healthcare, housing, politics, economy, entertainment, and carceral systems. As educators, we must acknowledge that anti-Black racism plagues English language arts classrooms; and it is imperative that we—English educators, language and literacy scholars, and ELA classroom teachers—confront the anti-Black racism and violence in order to move toward antiracist and humanizing pedagogical practices.

Therefore, when our committee was given the charge to select a recipient for the 2020 Alan C. Purves Award, we understood and acknowledged that it is our

duty as English educators and language and literacy scholars to utilize language and literacy to challenge, dismantle, and push back against anti-Black racism, systemic racism, and whiteness in our communities and classrooms. In order to decenter anti-Black racism in the classroom, educators must begin to (re)imagine ELA classrooms as humanizing spaces that display the beauty and dynamism in Blackness, build upon life-affirming and life-giving justice-oriented theories and pedagogies, and envision Black and Brown people in the future. It is important to note that not only does anti-Blackness plague our society and classrooms, permeating ELA spaces, but also anti-Brownness. Martinez (2017) argues that, “[U]nquestionably, Black and Latinx youth experience violence on a daily basis, in and out of schools, as their bodies are racialized, their utterances marked, and their dispositions questioned for not aligning with the expectations of dominant culture” (p. 182). In light of our most racial and political climate, we, the committee, speak back to and stand against separation policies and practices that remove children and youth from their families. As language and literacy researchers, we recognize that separating detained children and youth from their parents, guardians, and family impedes language and literacy skills and knowledge that families provide one another. Our committee built our review process around educational scholars who embody radical love; humanizing language and literacy methods; and methodologies, imagination, and creativity.

We received a host of exceptional articles, which made for robust conversations. As a result, we selected both a recipient of the award and a powerful honorable mention. We send love, light, and our best wishes to the recipients of this year’s award, Latrise P. Johnson and Hannah Sullivan, authors of “Revealing the Human and the Writer: The Promise of a Humanizing Writing Pedagogy for Black Students” from Volume 54, Number 4 of *Research in the Teaching of English*. Johnson and Sullivan’s dynamic article upholds the essence of the award by demonstrating humanizing research and pedagogical practices that illuminate the brilliance and beauty in Blackness through providing Black youth a space to write their lives and stories into existence. In addition, we also honor Mónica González Ybarra’s article, “‘We Have a Strong Way of Thinking . . . and It Shows through Our Words’: Exploring Mujerista Literacies with Chicana/Latina Youth in a Community Ethnic Studies Course.” This article was published in Volume 54, Number 3. The committee selected this article as an honorable mention for its theoretical, methodological, and practical Chicana/Latina feminist perspectives used to explore the language and literacies experiences of Chicana/Latina youth in a community-based ethnic studies program. In closing, the recipients of this year’s Purves Award speak to our current historical movement for Black and Brown lives, which illuminates why these articles are gems in the classroom and beyond.

Revolutionary Work for Revolutionary Times: The Criteria for the 2020 Purves Award

As the committee delved into creating criteria for the 2020 Purves Award, it became vitally clear that the work needed to address humanizing research is even more

paramount when considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the wake of racial violence besieging America in the midst of students being volleyed between face-to-face instruction and its virtual counterpart. Ladson-Billings (2020) further contextualizes 2020 by saying we lived through a quadruple pandemic: (1) The COVID-19 pandemic, which has taken over 400,000 lives; (2) the anti-Blackness pandemic, which has resulted in the brutal murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd; (3) an economic pandemic in which millions of Americans struggle to pay mortgages or rent or access adequate healthcare; and (4) an environmental pandemic in which global warming ravages Mother Earth. In this time of hatred and high anxiety, it is imperative for researchers, scholars, and educators to resist the lure of binary thinking which forces us actively seek normality. Delgado & Stefancic (2017) contend that “binary thinking, which focuses on just two groups, usually whites and one other, can thus conceal the checkerboard of racial progress and retrenchment and hide the way dominant society often casts minority against one another to the detriment of all” (p. 81). The converging pandemics allowed us to bear witness to systemic and institutional racial constructs; inequalities in access to healthcare, technology, and education; and democracy’s fragility. A push to return to normality is a push to render students blind to the harsh realities they face throughout our nation. A push to return to normality is a push to render silent the myriad voices crying out for liberation, equity, and freedom. We cannot continue to view classrooms or research in a binary fashion as doing so limits our abilities to reconceptualize education and educational research in an unparalleled fashion and begin to dream the world anew.

In April 2020, novelist Arundhati Roy argued in a gripping video that has now gone viral that we should view the pandemic as a portal because:

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.

It was this call to action, to move “lightly, with little luggage,” and the need to reimagine the world, that the committee utilized to draft the following award criteria:

- commitment to anti-Blackness and indigenous knowledges
- focus on humanizing, liberative, relevant, and sustaining pedagogies
- centering of justice work and justice dreaming
- commitment to transparency for the authors’ and research partners’ positionalities and contextualization
- commitment to centering students’ and researchers’ voices and agencies
- comprehensive view of literacies
- commitment to invoking the radical imagination
- detailed implications for practice

As a committee, we felt it imperative that the works we honored not only challenged hegemony, white supremacy, and anti-Black violence but also offered a tool and lens with which we can critically analyze how society constructs, interprets, and affirms power to a privileged few. Armed with this knowledge, we can become activists of change by embracing literacies, understanding the power of stories as knowledge, and dismantling pedagogies and curricula which seek to silence, erase, or marginalize students. In essence, we deliberated over the ways the researchers invoked radical imagination as a way to engage their humanity and to ensure another's humanity is seen, affirmed, and loved.

Recognizing an Honorable Mention: *We Have a Strong Way of Thinking*

González Ybarra's (2020) "We Have a Strong Way of Thinking" is transformative in the way it illustrates the power of exploring *mujerista* literacies as a pathway toward ensuring authentic writing, designing engaging activities that center students' lived experiences, and nurturing community and civic action. *Mujerista* literacies broaden the notions of literacies because they "work as a lens to acknowledge and ground discussions of literacies within discourses and ideological intersections of power and sociopolitical structures" (p. 234). This work invokes Chicana/Latina feminist methodologies as a framework to reconceptualize what is valued as meaning making within the classrooms these literacies are taught.

Regretfully, most classrooms still utilize a deficit, monolingual, and monocultural approach and do not yet understand how these languages, literacies, and cultures can coexist within the educational lives of our children. González Ybarra emphasizes the need to create more positive dualities by utilizing *trenzas* as a methodological construct to push the boundaries of literacies research by "bringing together the lived realities of researchers, relationships cultivated with communities, pedagogical approaches, and critical theoretical orientations [to create] a legitimate lens for analysis to deepen ideas of literacy and literacy research" (p. 248).

In this way, *mujerista* literacies are profound in their ability to counteract spirit murders routinely occurring in classroom. By doing so, they build on students' funds of knowledge while helping them to develop, hone, and employ linguistic and literacies tools. In short, the strength and knowledge of *mujerista* literacies are their abilities to bring multiple rich languages, cultures, histories, and knowledges into the curriculum and the classroom thereby enhancing possibilities for expression and for broadened worldviews.

Celebrating the Award Recipient: Revealing the Human and the Writer

Johnson and Sullivan (2020) poignantly argue that all languages—in particular Black Language—should be appreciated and that every person has a right to their own language. This transformative stance demands an intuitive trust and collaboration between student, educator, and researcher, because to hear and acknowledge

students' stories is to simultaneously bear witness to their languages and cultures. To bear witness to a student's languages also means educators and researchers must truly see and validate students in their totality of being.

Boldly acknowledging how traditional English/language arts instruction is comprised of deficit perspectives and racist notions of literacies, Johnson and Sullivan elucidate how rigid notions of language, literacy, and culture create limited possibilities to define and ascertain academic achievement. Such instruction creates the walking wounded: Some students have visible scars marring their skin; while others' wounds, although present, are invisible and not quite so easily recognized. Linguistic injuries, another form of spirit murder, are often invisible to the eye, yet still felt by the heart. It is those scars that are often difficult to ignore because we simultaneously strip students of their cultural and linguistic identities and literacies, forcing them to believe that the world and all the good things in it were created by others.

To create the "write" atmosphere for literacies instruction, Johnson and Sullivan contend educators must "leverage historicized and humanizing views of Black Youth" (p. 427). Drawing from specific examples, such as using popular culture artists like Solange and Tupac and pairing literary works from Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, and Alice Walker, nurtures fertile ground toward a "relaxed and uninhibited classroom atmosphere that support[s] a sense of freedom, interaction, and sharing" (p. 429). This liberative environment enables educators to engage Black literary and cultural traditions, such as call and response, playing the dozens, oral storytelling, and experiential writing. Teaching in this manner is not limited by four classroom walls; it simply opens the possibilities inherent within the radical Black imagination.

As the committee deliberated, we discussed the many nuanced ways in which the authors depicted the vulnerability and transparency necessary to design and participate and engage in racial justice work. This began with Johnson and Sullivan situating themselves as scholar-activists whose action-focused research and teaching center equity, social justice, and literacy. Johnson and Sullivan ground their research study in transformative critical literacies, culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies, and critical race frameworks and methodologies, all of which challenge dominant ideologies, pedagogies, and practices that perpetuate social/racial injustice. Hence, race and equity are situated at the nexus of events that unfold in society and therefore in the classroom. Revisionist and white-supremist retelling of history have a way of presenting a single-perspective narrative. This purposeful action flattens the humanity of persons of color and provides a one-dimensional lens through which to view their experiences. Johnson and Sullivan's work combats the flattening of students' experiences, worlds, and identities by illuminating the work of scholars who are "centering intellectual and ideological traditions of Black people . . . [to] offer ways that Black youth, like their ancestors, have used writing in order to write themselves into the world in authentic ways, as well as to counter problematic narratives . . . about being Black" (p. 424). Education of this fashion allows students to build academic achievement while simultaneously building their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities.

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