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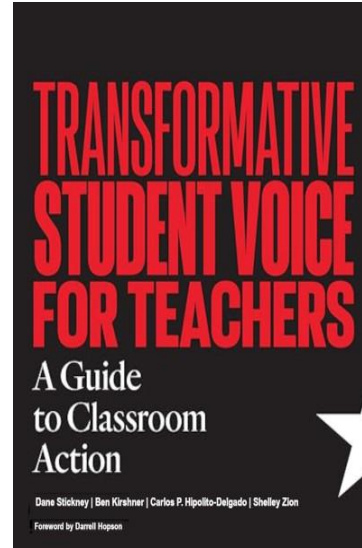
**Stickney, D., Kirshner, B., Hipolito-Delgado, C. P., & Zion, S. (2025). *Transformative student voice for teachers: A guide to classroom action*. Harvard Education Press.**

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*Transformative Student Voice for Teachers: A Guide to Classroom Action* is designed for educators who seek to transform school culture and systems by placing youth at the center. Aiming to start a youth revolution, the book authors, **Dane Stickney, Ben Kirshner, Shelly Zion, and Carlos P. Hipolito-Delgado**, provide readers with methodological approaches to “activate” youths’ critical thinking skills and create spaces that allow for meaningful praxis in schools. These approaches support young people’s critical self-reflection through the use of a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) framework. YPAR encourages those most affected by injustice take the lead in aspects of the change process. In other words, youth are at the center of the research design, methodology, and analysis, and that ordinary people, such as kids, have knowledge based on their positionality that is useful for making change occur.



The YPAR framework is based on the fundamental belief that youth are constructors of knowledge and hold a right to research oppressive structures that impede belonging, safety, and learning. As the authors note, “Empowered youth are more confident in the public sphere; they don’t just accept the world as it is but see it through a critical and imaginative lens” (p. 185). YPAR’s use of a critical framework works in opposition to the neutral positioning that teaching, learning, and schools often attempt to take. *Transformative Student Voice for Teachers* is a timely and urgent response to generations of failures by schools to create inclusive spaces for all students and a call for educators to be a part of radical school transformation.

The book aims to empower teachers as a lever for school transformation and improvement. Starting with a critical self-reflection process, which is woven throughout the book, teachers can use the reflective questions provided by the authors to move toward more authentic and meaningful partnerships with youth. When students develop relationships with their teachers and peers rooted in social justice and equity, it is possible to address systemic issues of inequity in school

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spaces. The authors encourage teachers to be intentional in these relationships with the aim of redistributing power to young people and co-creating learning experiences. In the book, teachers are shown ways to position students as experts who hold unique wisdom based on their familiarity with specific school issues. Challenging the imbalance of school's traditional power structures, navigating resistance, and common pitfalls toward equity.

This book addresses a vast audience—anyone who works primarily with students in secondary education settings. Potential readers might include: educators who have had gut checks time and time again, knowing that creating a safe and inclusive classroom for their kids is not enough; educators who understand that schools, despite all the good that they do, do not support all students; educators who know they work in educational spaces that may be constructed or transformed by people; educators who know that sometimes those people who hold the least amount of power in schools, know the most; and educators who understand that being a teacher means more than delivering content knowledge.

*Transformative Student Voice for Teachers* is an action- and justice-oriented book. Rooted in critical frameworks, culturally responsive pedagogy, and YPAR, this book is on solid theoretical and methodological grounding. Case studies and examples shine a light on how YPAR can drive school improvement, making the abstract more concrete for its readers. The authors also acknowledge the challenges that come with youth leading the way and carefully guide educators through common missteps, such as perfectionism, adultism, and urgency, which may derail youth-led initiatives. Additionally, each chapter asks teachers to reflect on their unique journey with this work by building self-awareness and recognizing their biases and positionality.

The book's greatest strength is its ability to show teachers how to be in the fight for justice with their students. However, readers who hold positions outside the classroom may need to look elsewhere. School leaders can certainly be partners in this work, but without a deeper systemic understanding of key stakeholders who control the school and systems, transformation ultimately led by youth can be flattened. Another limiting piece here is not naming that YPAR work is in direct opposition to much of the work that keeps schools on autopilot.

*Transformative Student Voice for Teachers* is deeply connected to a long line of critical scholarship that seeks to channel youth voice and disrupt power imbalances. Freire's (1970, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) dialogic approach to co-creating knowledge with students and collaboratively solving problems is a central theme throughout this book. Furthermore, the authors echo Freire's call to uplift the voices of those traditionally silenced when they ask educators to listen deeply to the needs and voices of students. Bell (1995) stated that in order "to be successful in our work with young people, we must understand a particular condition of youth: that young people are often mistreated and disrespected simply because they are young" (p. 1). Often, educators' work to "care" for young people is a guise that instead manifests itself in the goal to control youth. Stickney and colleagues offer practical strategies to disrupt the pervasive adultism present in schools and

redistribute power back to those most closely positioned to teaching and learning in school spaces—the youth.

As a framework, YPAR can be seen as a pedagogy of resistance. This volume, like Fine and Cammarota's (2008) *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion* (2008), seeks to channel collective power between adults and youth to disrupt inequity. In this sense, *Transformative Student Voice for Teachers* is more than methods or steps; it involves a shift toward social transformation brought about through collaboration and resistance. Relatedly, the authors of this book share a vision of change work through alternative frameworks for transformation, like Eve Tuck's (2009) *Re-visioning Action: Participatory Action Research and Indigenous Theories of Change*. Tuck's Indigenous theories of change are also evident, as the authors argue for YPAR to be culturally sustaining, requiring relationships with youth that are deeply related to a sense of place and autonomy.

Weaving together strands of the works by Fine, Cammarota, Bell, and Tuck, *Transformative Student Voice* offers sound theoretical grounding and practical strategies for teachers. As such, the book connects theory and practice while giving teachers a roadmap for enacting justice-oriented pedagogy in everyday classrooms.

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## About the Reviewer

**Steven Sandman** is a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Theory and Practice at the University at Albany, SUNY. He is a 15-year educator and school leader currently serving at Kingston High School in New York. Deeply embedded in the everyday life of the school, Steven is often found in classrooms, hallways, and spaces within the school where young people can be found, working alongside the students and staff. His research focuses on Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) and the development of research collectives within school spaces. Steven's work is grounded in a belief that young people can interrogate the systems that shape their lives and are therefore essential partners in transforming them. His practice challenges traditional models of schooling that continue to perpetuate harm and marginalization. Within research, teaching, or



leadership, Steven's work demonstrates a vision of education rooted in the transformative power of youth, collaboration, and justice.

### About the Book Authors

**Dane Stickney**, PhD, began his career as a journalist in both Nebraska and Colorado prior to becoming a classroom educator of sixth graders. His work with students in Denver created the space to use writing collaboratively and critically examine aspects of their lives. Dane's continued support of Youth through the Student Voice and Leadership Initiative for Denver Public Schools, his work as an assistant professor at University of Colorado Denver's ASPIRE to Teach Program, and assistant professor of the graduate program in Curriculum and Instruction, make him a knowledgeable and reliable mentor for youth in Colorado and beyond.



**Ben Kirshner**, PhD, is a professor of Learning Sciences and Human Development at the University of Colorado Boulder. Time spent working with youth in San Francisco's Mission District catalyzed his research focus on young people's relationship to social justice change. He is the Director of CU Engage: Center for Community-Based Learning and Research working to mitigate barriers that create public challenges and instead promote educational justice. Ben's research focuses on studying the environments that support spaces for youth agency and voice.

**Carlos P. Hipolito-Delgado**, PhD, is a professor of counseling at the University of Colorado Denver. His area of expertise is race and racism, cultural competence, and sociopolitical development of youth. His background in counseling adds value to the work of this book as it provides an intersectional lens of counseling and sociological development of youth. His work as a professor and counselor enriches the contents of this book with his expertise and perspective related to student voice, cultural development, and youth advocacy.



**Shelly Zion**, PhD, is a professor at Rowan University in the Department of Educational Leadership and Research or ELAR where she teaches, mentors, and leads multiple research labs. Dr. Zion's work in these labs, all committed to creating better schools, support youth, increasing access, success, and equity, makes her an exceptional educator and contributor to the development of this book.

  
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