

Bianca Baldrige: biography, research overview, and teaching statement (February 2012)

Bianca J. Baldrige, a native of South Central Los Angeles, California, graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in 2005, where she received her Bachelor's degree in American Studies and a minor in African American Studies. During her time at Berkeley, Bianca designed and instructed two student-initiated courses in leadership development under the Haas School of Business and African American Studies Department. As a Berkeley McNair Scholar, Bianca studied the experiences of Black youth in community based youth leadership and education programs. Encouraged by this experience, Bianca pursued graduate school to continue this area of research and to better understand how out-of-school educational contexts supported students' academic achievement and social development.

After completing her Bachelor's degree, Bianca moved to New York City to pursue a Masters of Education in Sociology and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, which she obtained in 2007. As a PhD Candidate in Sociology and Education at Teachers College, Bianca's dissertation, *(Re)Imagining Black Youth: The Social, Political, and Academic Impact of "Youth Work" in Community Based Educational Spaces*, explores the experiences of youth workers (i.e., adults who teach, guide, and mentor youth) within out-of-school time community based educational spaces. Through a critical ethnographic research design at an urban community-based after school program, her dissertation examines the particular ways that youth are "framed" and "imagined" within the institution. The study also demonstrates how these understandings inform (and limit) the cultural, social, and pedagogical practices of the institution. More broadly, Bianca's research interests are in sociology of education, urban sociology, community based educational spaces, community and school partnerships, sociology of youth, urban schooling, critical pedagogy, race, class, and gender studies; youth literacy practices in urban contexts, youth activism; race poverty and achievement, and ethnographic and qualitative methodology. Some of her work has been published in the *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Education* and the *Berkeley McNair Research Journal*.

In addition to her scholarly research interests, Bianca has been a community educator within out-of-school time community based programs for over ten years. Her experience as an instructor, curriculum developer, and consultant to community youth programs has informed her research in profound ways. She has worked with programs in Los Angeles and Oakland, California, and New York City, with organizations such as the Future Leaders of America, Compton Unified School District, Oakland All City Council, the New York City Lab School, and the Harlem Health Promotion Center. Bianca has also worked internationally with youth as a consultant for an international youth leadership forum in Aomori, Japan as well as a curriculum developer and consultant for youth centers established to educate youth about HIV/AIDS prevention in Johannesburg, South Africa.

While pursuing her doctorate degree, Bianca continues to work with youth regularly in community based and school settings, helping young people understand issues of race, ethnicity, gender, social class, and sexuality; leadership development, and develop critical media literacy skills. She has also worked as a consultant, providing staff development training for after school/out-of-school time programs. In addition to her work in community-based programs, she has been a lecturer at Teachers College, Columbia University and Hunter College.

Dissertation Research

(Re)Imagining Black Youth: The Social, Political, and Academic Impact of “Youth Work” in Community Based Educational Spaces

My dissertation explores the experiences of youth workers (i.e., adults who teach, guide, and mentor youth) within out of school time community based educational spaces. Although the research literature generally depicts these institutions as valuable settings that support the academic achievement, social, and emotional development of young people, these spaces can unconsciously perpetuate narratives about Black youth as “problems to be fixed.” Such framing is deficit focused and ultimately disregards the assets that Black youth bring to educational spaces, thereby limiting the ways that youth are imagined, engaged, and educated. Through a critical ethnographic research design, employing participant observations, interviews and focus groups with youth workers, document analysis, and student assessments at an urban community-based after school program, my dissertation examines the particular ways that youth are “framed” and “imagined” within the institution. The study also demonstrates how these understandings inform (and limit) the cultural, social, and pedagogical practices of the institution. Findings indicate that the current trend toward deficit framing is directly linked to the current neo-liberal educational market, which incentivizes community based educational spaces to frame youth as socially, culturally, and intellectually deficient in order to successfully compete with charter schools for funding. My research spotlights the possibilities of community based educational spaces as viable and necessary institutions to support and complement students’ schooling experiences. These insights will contribute to research literature in after school/out of school time education, race and educational policy, teacher education, and youth cultural studies.

Second Strand of Research

A secondary strand of my research focuses on the role of out of school literacy in the lives of urban youth – in particular, I have researched how youth make sense of street fiction – a sub genre of urban fiction – as a form of cultural reproduction in an after school community based organization. I examine how street fiction functions as a form of cultural production and public pedagogy, as well as informal labor, within lives of urban youth. As part of a research team, I have conducted close textual analyses of 30 street fiction books. Using ethnographic content analysis, I have highlighted the common themes, ideologies, and narrative structures within and across the texts. For the next phase of the project, I am collecting qualitative data at Urban Word, a community arts-based youth organization, which offers courses on street fiction authorship. Through this research, I aim to understand the various purposes for which youth engage and produce street fiction narratives within their lives. In the future, I plan to study the Urban Word organization itself, examining the various ways that it functions as a community based educational space.

Statement on Teaching and Consulting Work

Aside from research, teaching has also been a valuable part of my graduate experience. For the last two years, I have taught a master’s level social research methods course, *Social Research Methods and Reporting*, in the sociology and education program at Teachers College. Most recently, I taught a core foundation masters’ level course, *Historical and Social Foundations of*

Early Childhood Education, at Hunter College, City University of New York. I embrace teaching as an opportunity to challenge students to stretch beyond what they know and to think more deeply about the world around them. I have also assisted professors in developing and managing courses as a teaching assistant for a number of courses in sociology of urban education, popular culture, and social and cultural diversity. My goal in the classroom is to teach with passion and to introduce students to new ways of thinking about their social world. Because of my background as a community educator in after school community-based spaces, my approach to teaching is engaging and interactive which encourages optimal participation between my students and I. Teaching in this way not only provides opportunities for rich discussion, but it also connects the learner and educator with the material they are teaching. How one teaches and learns is based upon their lived experiences and various social identities they negotiate daily and carry to their classrooms. Therefore, it is also important that I bring who I am into the classroom in order to provide an authentic teaching experience for my students.

In addition to my scholarly research interests and teaching experiences at the university level, I have been a community educator within out-of-school time/after school programs for over ten years. My experience as an instructor, curriculum developer, and consultant to community youth programs has informed my research in profound ways. As detailed on my CV, I have worked with programs in Los Angeles and Oakland, California, and New York City, as well as abroad in South Africa and Japan. In addition to providing workshops and courses for young people on social identity, leadership development, and critical media literacy, I have also worked as a consultant, providing staff development training for after school programs serving youth in diverse economic and social contexts. These experiences have given me considerable firsthand experience of the day-to-day nuances, triumphs, and complexities within after school community programs and their relationship to schools. My research and practice inform one another, and allows me to stay abreast of educational policies that impact the construction of these programs. I am passionate about developing scholarly research understanding how youth, staff educators in these programs, and parents make meaning of their experiences in these spaces. Throughout my research career, I plan to explore how stronger relationships can be built between schools and community-based educational programs for the optimal social and academic development of students – as there are many program elements, pedagogical practices, and innovative approaches for educating students occurring in these spaces that go unacknowledged within educational policy.