

WHOSE EDUCATION LABOR MATTERS? GRACE, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND GRATITUDE IN COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH

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CHARLI



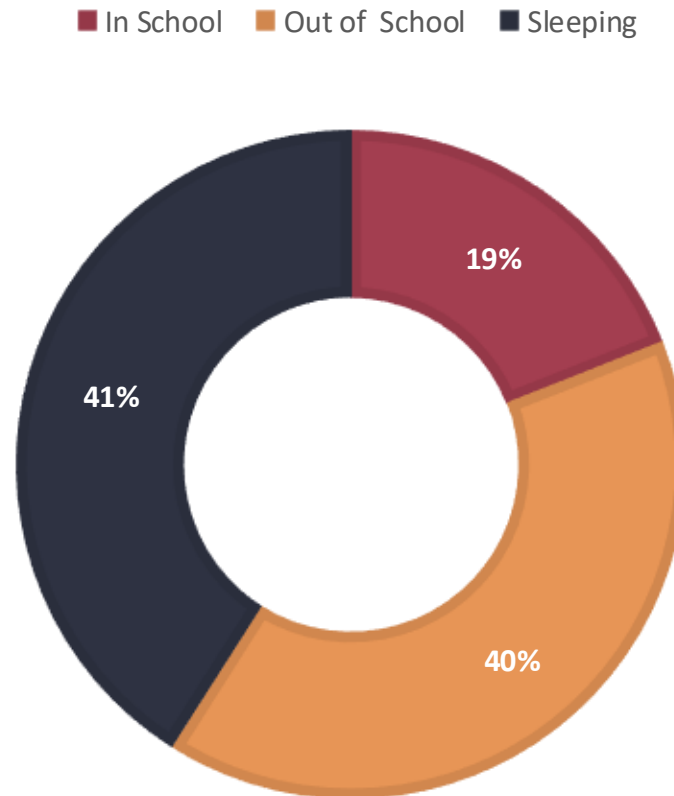
MR. TESFA



If young people have a broad
learning ecosystem, who is part
of it?

Whose education labor matters?

HOW YOUTH SPEND THEIR TIME



(Hall & Neilson, 2020; Kraft & Novicoff, 2025)

COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATIONAL SPACES

- Afterschool Programs
- Youth Organizations
- Out-of-School Time Programs

Center Agency within
Communities and Decenter
Schools as the Sole Site of Learning



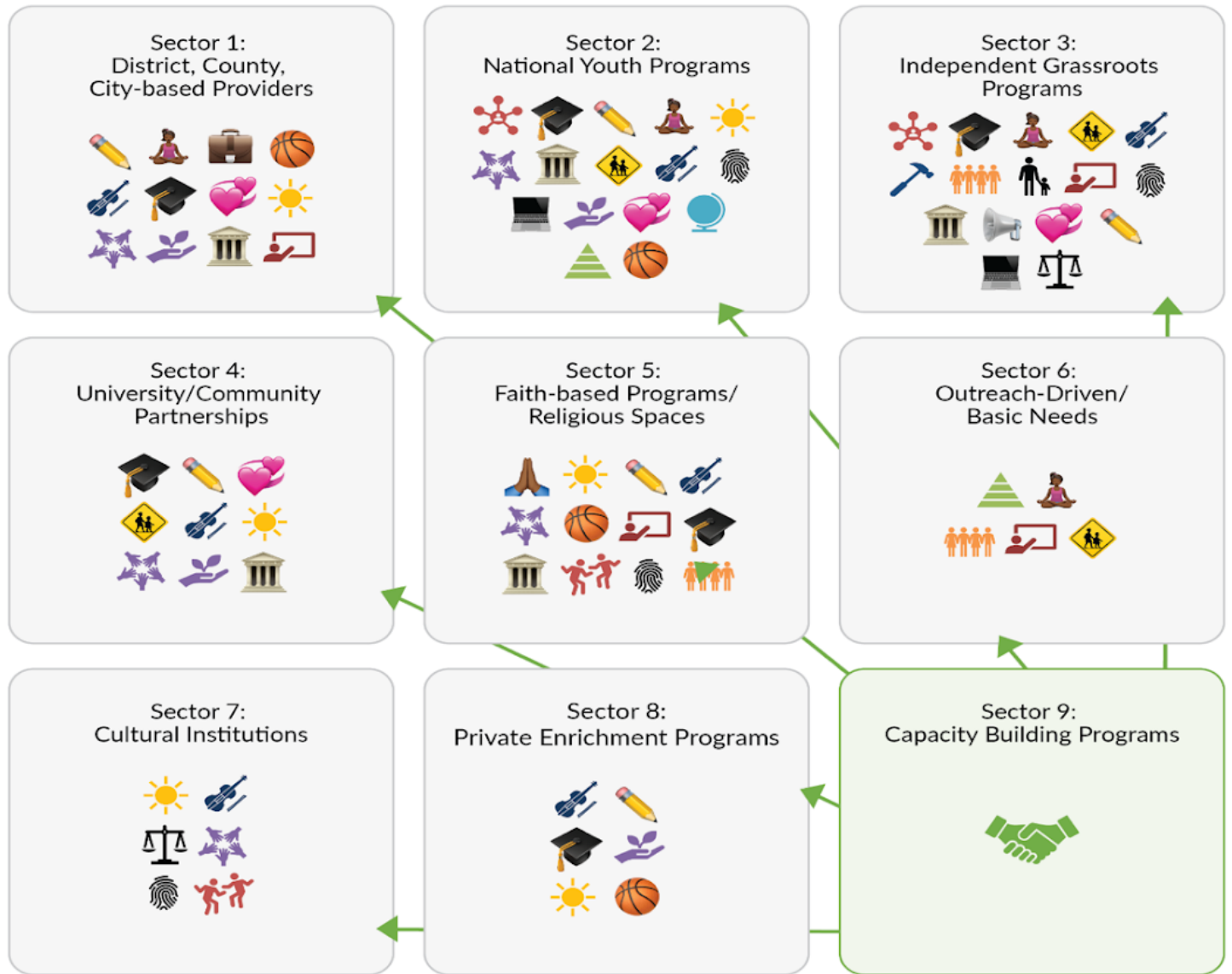
Baldrige, B. J. (2018). On educational advocacy and cultural work: Situating community-based youth work [ers] in broader educational discourse. *Teachers College Record*, 120(2), 1-28.

These spaces are essential to society because *they support our economic and family systems* by allowing parents to work beyond school hours and provide children and youth with a *safe space to play, create, dream, learn new skills, or “just be”* during non-school hours.

OST Typology Sectors

Legend

-  Academic College Attainment
-  Academic K-12
-  Basic Needs
-  Career Readiness/Workforce
-  Civic Leadership
-  Community-Driven
-  Comprehensive
-  Digital Learning
-  DIY
-  Faith & Spirituality
-  Family Engagement
-  Global Connections
-  Identity Based
-  Intermediary Partnerships
-  Land & Environment
-  Mentoring
-  SEL (Social Emotional Learning)
-  Service Learning
-  Social
-  Social Issues
-  Sports & Recreation
-  STEAM
-  Summer Camps
-  Wellness
-  Youth-Led
-  Youth Activism & Organizing



Baldrige, B., Vasudevan, D., Downing, V., Tesfa, E., & Aquiles-Sanchez, P. (2021). OST Typology Sectors – Equity in Out of School Time Report. Wallace Foundation.

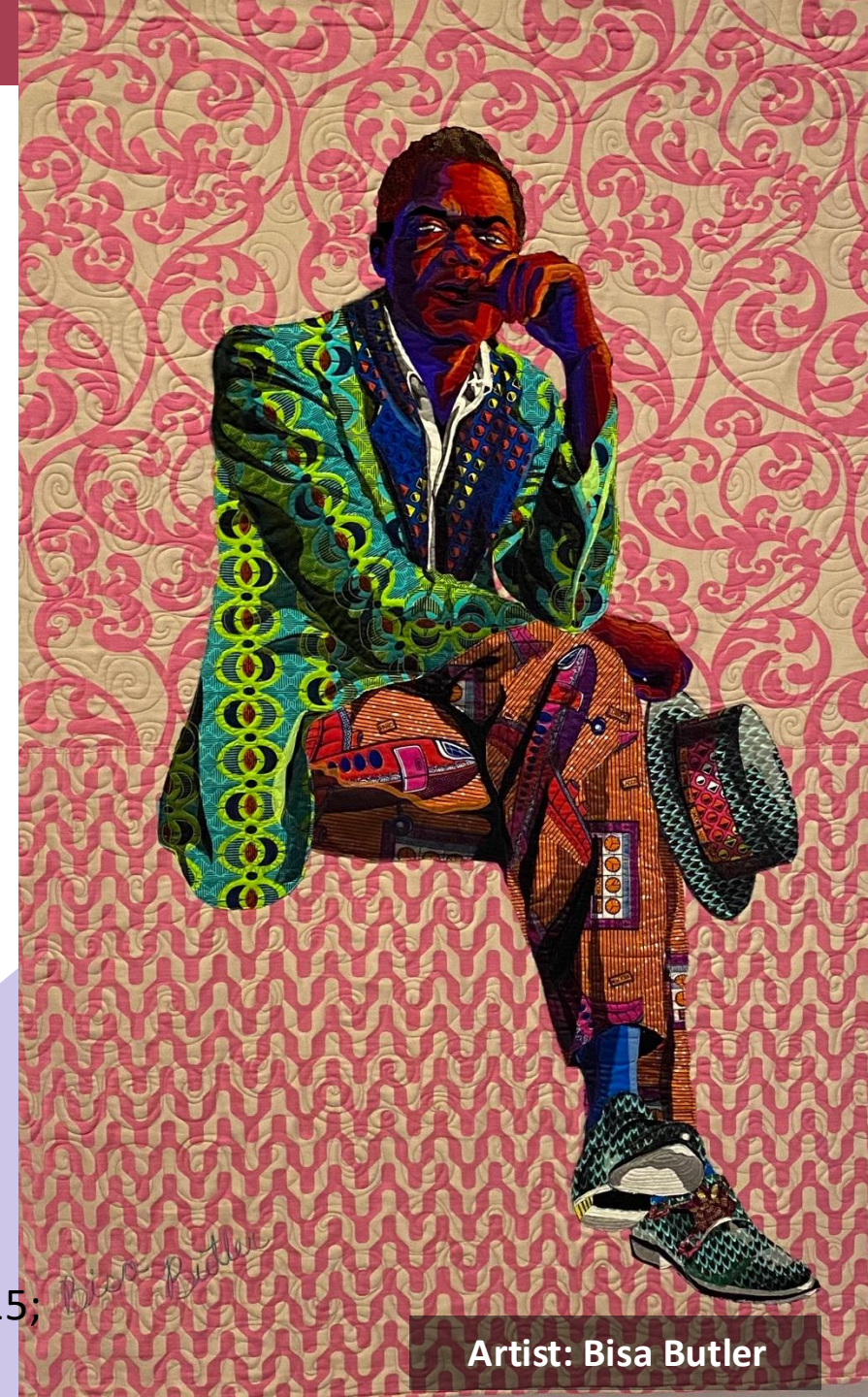
YOUTH WORKERS

Youth workers are professionals who teach, mentor, counsel, support, and guide youth in their personal, educational, and social development from childhood through adolescence, typically in informal, neighborhood, or community settings.

Estimates: 2.5 million in the US

(Assoc of Child and Youth Care Practice, 2025)

Baldrige, 2019; Brion-Meisels et al., 2015; Fusco, 2012; Heathfield & Fusco, 2015; McLaughlin, 2000; Pittman, 2018, Vasudevan, 2019



Artist: Bisa Butler

WHAT WE KNOW

Supports Academic
Achievement

Meaningful Positive
Relationship w/
Adults

Positive, Social
Justice, & Critical
Youth Development

Confidence, identity
development, civic
engagement, SEL,
etc.

Fashola, 2008; Ginwright, 2007, 2010; Ginwright + Cammarota, 2002; Heath & McLaughlin, 1996; Hirsch et al, 2011; Kirshner, 2015; Kataoka & Vandell; Larson, 2007; Lerner, 2000; Nelson, 2018; McLaughlin, 2000, 2018; Murray & Milner, 2015; McGee, 2017; Rogoff et al, 2017, Woodland. 2012.

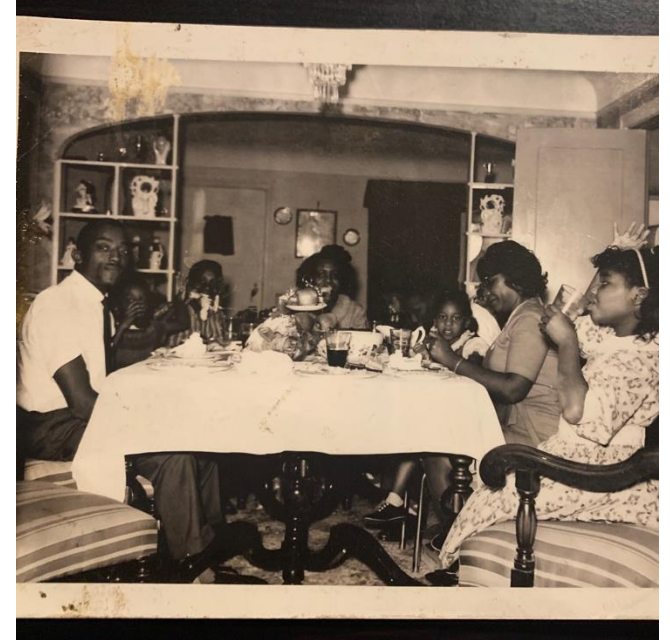
HOW I GOT HERE



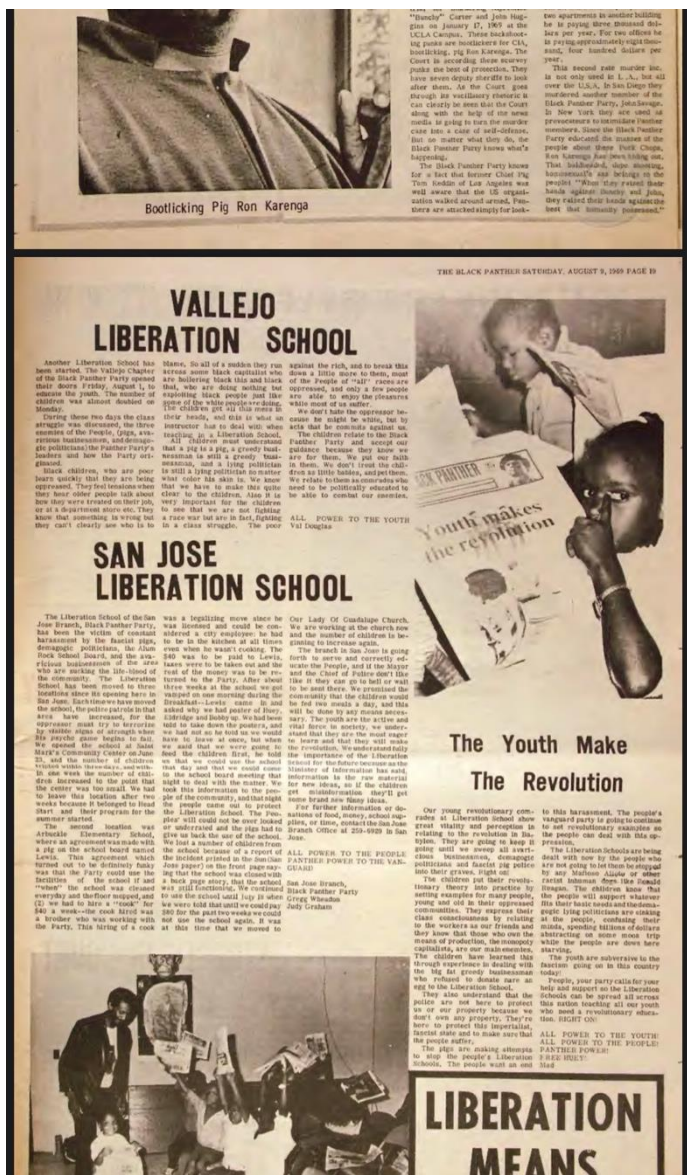
Paternal grandparents



Baby Bianca w/ brother + cousin



Maternal Grandparents Dining Table





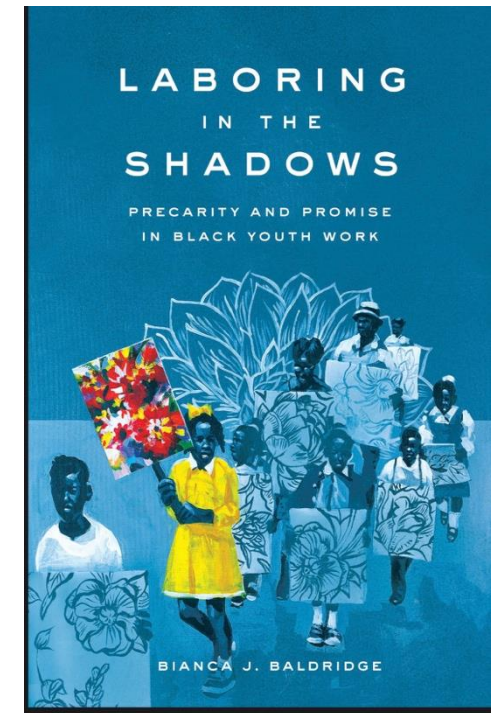
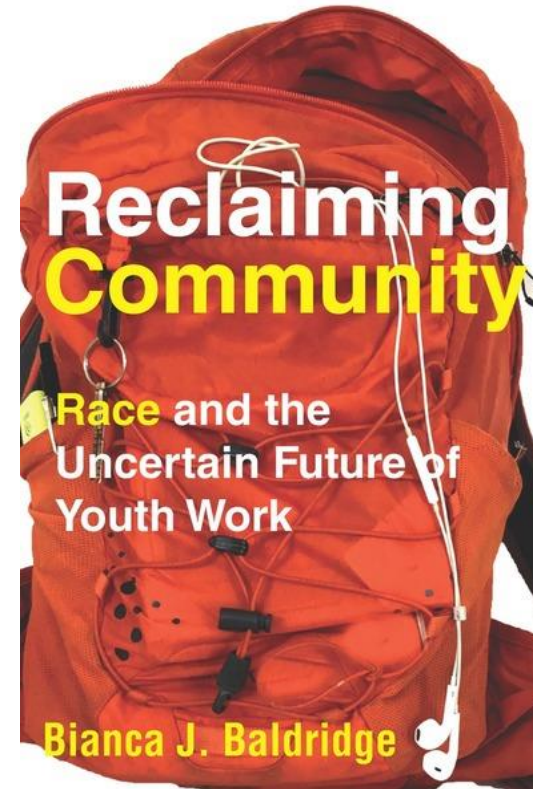
Panther Free Food Program

Children Prepare Bags of Food for Distribution at the Oakland Coliseum at the Black Panther Community Survival Conference, Oakland, California, March 1972

Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, © Stephen Shames

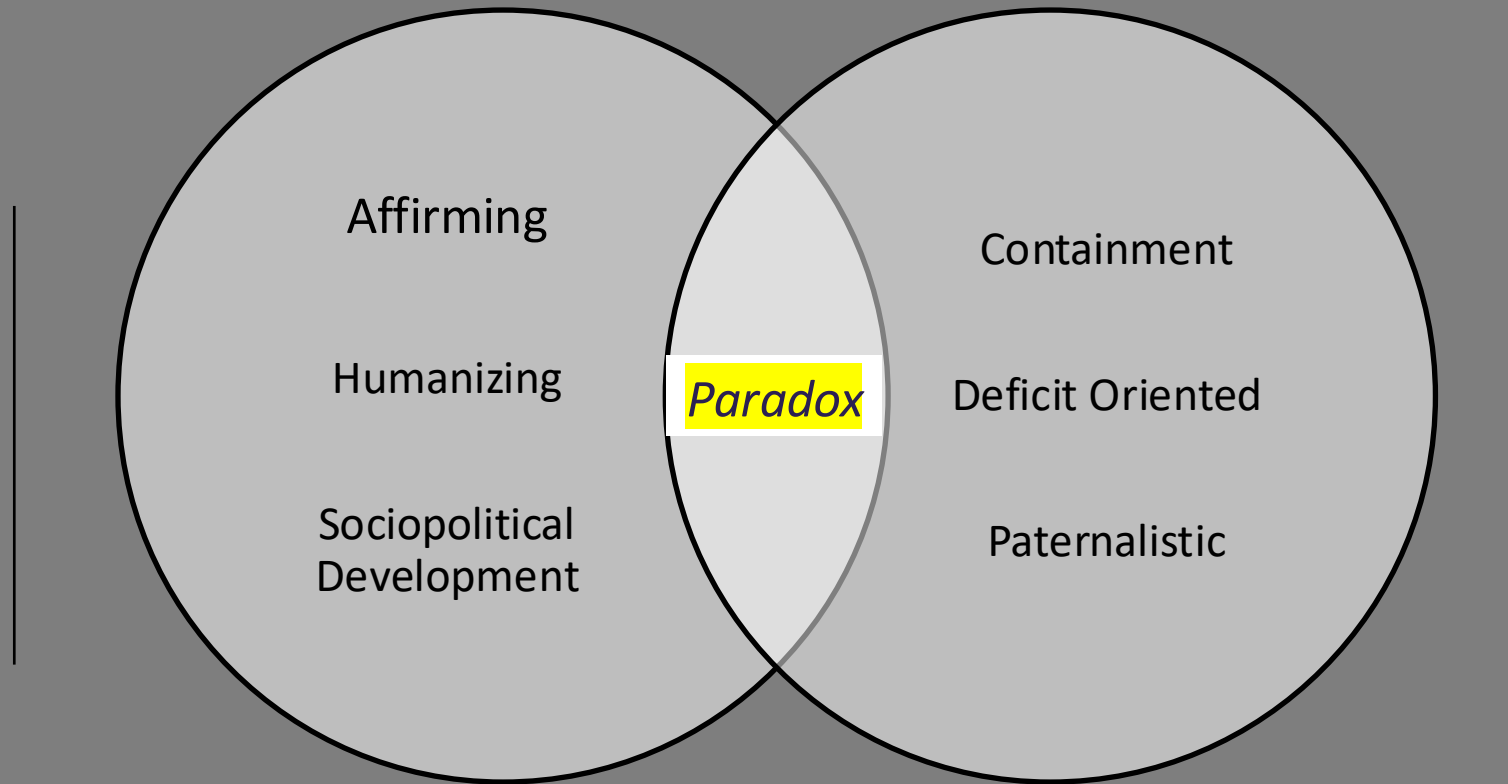
MY ROLE IN THESE CONVERSATIONS

- Sociopolitical analysis to show how social forces create paradoxes and precarity
- I elevate the experiences of Black youth workers through empirical research, as a microcosm of vulnerable workers in society.



Youthwork Paradox

Sociopolitical Context of Community-based Youth Work



Baldrige, B. J. (2020). The youthwork paradox: A case for studying the complexity of community-based youth work in education research. *Educational Researcher*, 49(8), 618-625.

YOUTHWORK PARADOX: EXPANDED

Disrupts/Reproduce Racial Harm

- Organizational

Societal Reliance/Invisibility + Underinvestment

- Field

Youth Worker Commitment/Exploitation

- Profession

PRECARITY AND PRECARIOUS WORK

Precarity

Failing economic + social
safety nets

Vulnerability/Ontological
state of be-ing) + Relational

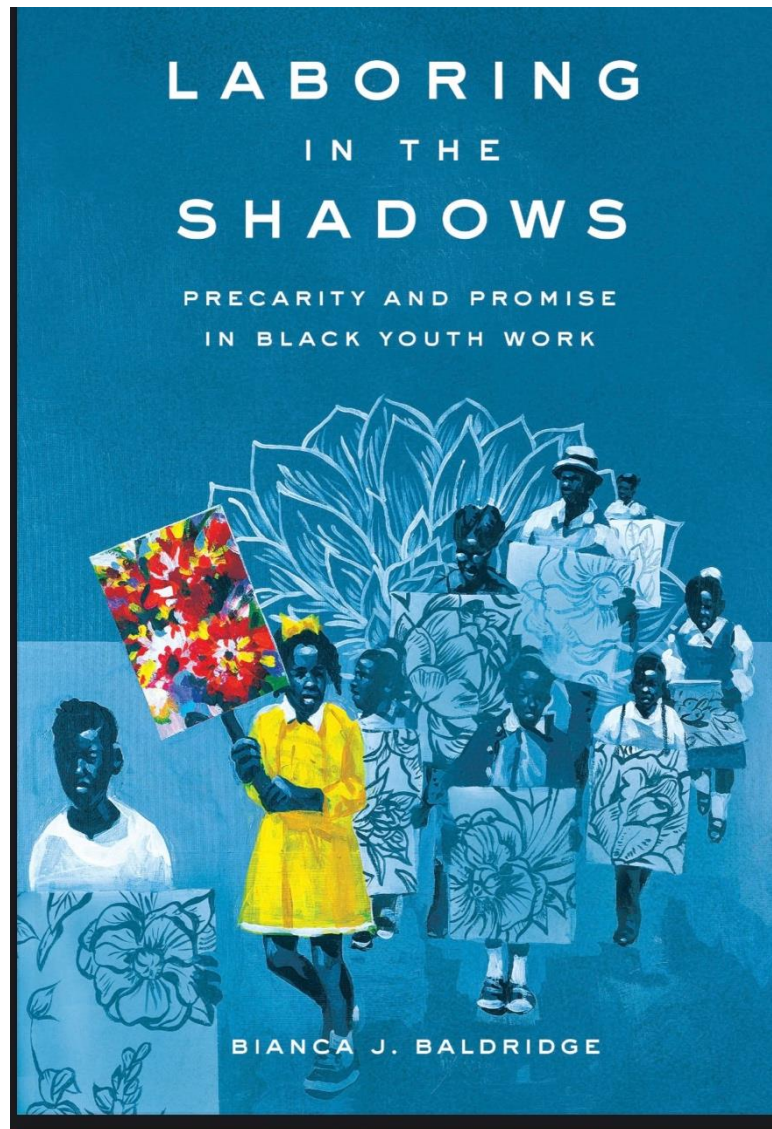
“Inherent, Situational,
Pathogenic” (Mackenzie, etc al.)

Precarious Work

Low Pay, Unable to Support
Household

Unprotected, Often Unable to
Unionize

Risk, Harm, + Exploitation



CORE QUESTION:

HOW DO BLACK YOUTH WORKERS
UNDERSTAND AND NAVIGATE THE
YOUTHWORK PARADOX AND THE
PRECARITY IT INDUCES IN THE
FIELD?



***Pleasant Ridge
Case Study**

**National Study on
Equity in Out-of-
School Time**

**Interviews with
Black Youth
Workers**

Funders:

**NATIONAL
ACADEMY
of
EDUCATION**

SPENCER

Wallace 

PROJECTS THAT INFORM *LABORING IN THE SHADOWS*

Total N = 134

Pleasant Ridge Case Study

2016-2020

- Interviews (n =16)
- 22 Event Observations (40+ hours)
- Youth Focus Group (n=10)

National Interview Project

2020-2022

- Interviews (n=58)
- Focus Group (n=35)
- YPAR Study + Survey (n=200)

Black Youth Workers

2022-2024

- Interviews with Black Youth Workers (n =15)
 - Southeast
 - West Coast
 - Midwest
 - MidAtlantic
 - Northeast
 - East Coast



Material
Precarity

Symbolic
Precarity

“...Youth work is expected to fix societal problems with a wrench. So, like, the issue is actually the economic structure at large, and the offshoots above that structure, intentional and otherwise. **And we're supposed to somehow fix that with tape and bubble gum...**

-ROBESON, EAST COAST

MATERIAL PRECARITY

“So, I’m their only transportation
...they shouldn't have to worry about
transportation, going to and from
school, or wherever. So... I uber these
kids every day.”

- HIPPOLYTA, SOUTHEAST

MATERIAL PRECARITY

“I was busting my behind. I think part of the reason that...youth workers don't stick around is because they're not paid in a way that allows them to live.

- CHRIS, MIDWEST

MATERIAL PRECARITY

“I’ve been homeless. I lived in a motel with my two sister and their kids.”

- BRANDON, PLEASANT RIDGE

MATERIAL PRECARITY

“...I got really pissed...and what that totally was about was him not feeling like he couldn’t supervise me as a black man...he talked in the past about recognizing feeling uncomfortable that it’s all white people assistant directors [in the organization]. And, a handful of years ago, when I was in a position to step into [a new role], it was like strong pushback.

-SAM, PLEASANT RIDGE

MATERIAL PRECARITY

Symbolic Precarity

“I feel like I should be paid in respect too...there are so many lives i've touched at this point over my 10 years doing the work...”

- CHRIS

NATIONAL PROGRAM, MIDWEST

Symbolic Precarity

“It becomes so engulfing and overwhelming that sometimes I have to take a break...i literally have to. My daughter wouldn't be raised if I didn't do that, right? My husband will be so mad at me, you know, because it becomes my life in a way.”

- JOY, MIDWEST

We are expected to be martyrs; we are expected to serve nobly and to never question. And if ever we asked for our needs to be met, we're demonized and told that, 'oh, you must not really care about the kids.'

- OLIVIA WEST COAST

MATERIAL AND SYMBOLIC PRECARITY FOR BLACK YOUTH WORKERS

Material



Symbolic

- Low Wages
- Lack of Benefits
- Leadership Barriers
- *Unable to Unionize

- Lack of Recognition
- Lack of Respect
- Racial Microaggressions
- Anti-Black Racism





“As for George Floyd, I just turned off my TV for a while. It was very overwhelming to hear about it over and over and over and over again.”

Harriet, Southeast



“This isn’t like some
amorphous, theoretical
thing for us...”

Robeson, East Coast



CENTERING JOY

Artist. Bisa Butler

“I’m not giving up that legacy for anything...I’m a black man who was mentored by a black man, who was mentored by a black man. I’m not going to break that line.”

Chris, Midwest

...“And that sort of recognition in their own eyes of having manifested something that was in their head that they can do ...those moments feel like triumph. Those moments feel like the seeds of self-efficacy. Those feel like the seeds of self-confidence, and you know, that's why I think the belonging aspect of [youth] programs is so important... Youth workers can see that little spark a little more frequently than some educators.

- Tamir

ORGANIZATIONS, YOUTH WORKERS, AND YOUNG PEOPLE

COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH

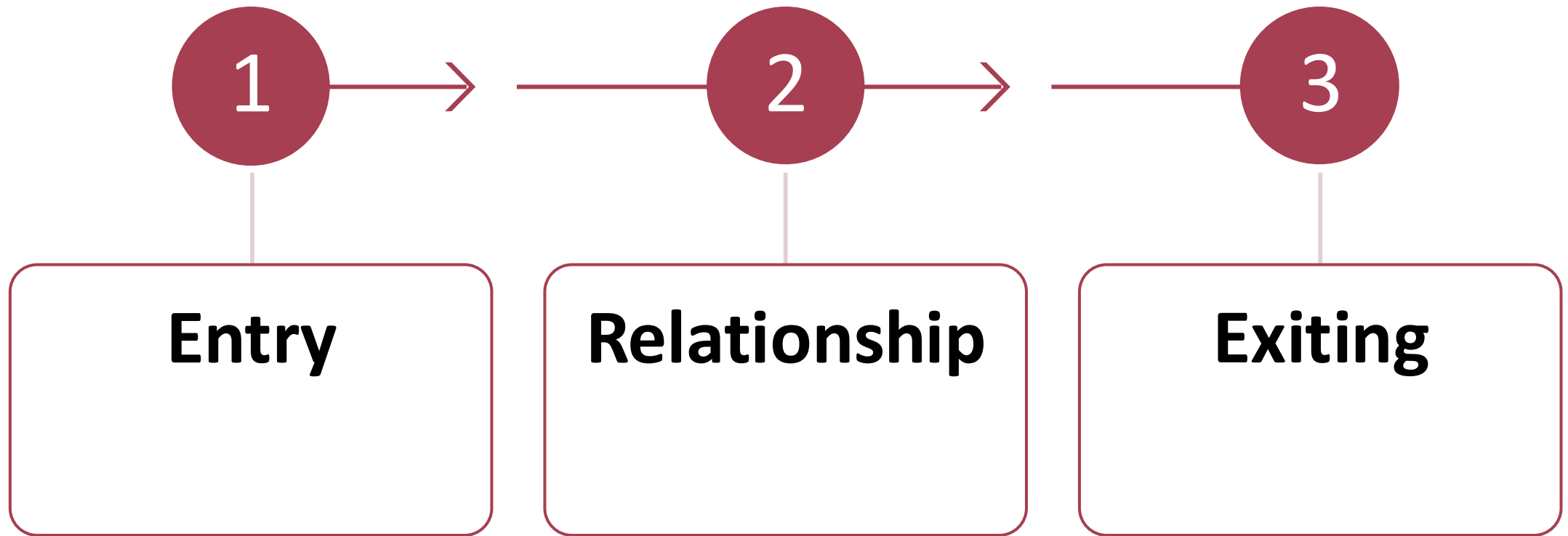
GRACE, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND GRATITUDE

HUMANIZING RESEARCH

*“Building relationships of care, dignity, and
dialogic consciousness raising”*

(Paris & Winn, 2013, xvi)

LESSONS LEARNED





Artist: Bisa Butler

NAVIGATING ENTRY

LEARN HISTORY

PRIOR RESEARCH AND/OR
COLLABORATION

REMOVE EGO

AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIP BUILDING





Artist: Charly Palmer

RELATIONSHIPS

- Be in Community
- Show Up
- Offer Support



EXITING

Share Your Work

Accountability

Relationships shift, but they don't have
to end

Artist: Bisa Butler



RESEARCH IN
COMMUNITY-
BASED
EDUCATIONAL
SPACES

- Aware of Sociopolitical Context
 - Relationship w/ University
 - Relationship to local + macro contexts
- Honor Agency of Community
- Humility + Deep Listening
- Humanizing Practices (Paris + Winn, 2013)
- Decentering Self, Centering Community
- Cultivating + Nurturing Relationships

BLACK PRECARIETY ACROSS TIME
AND SPACE.

GRACE AND GRATITUDE

GRATITUDE

Dr. Tarsha Herelle

Everyone
Graduates Center
Staff

Educational
Experiences
Qualitative
Research Hub

Critical Youthwork
Collective + ARB

Collaborators +
Wallace Team

Spencer, Wallace,
and Stuart
Foundations

Artists Featured:
Bisa Butler +
Charly Palmer (my
book cover artist!)