A Duo-Ethnographic Conversation on Social Justice Activism:

Exploring Issues of Identity, Racism, and Activism with Young People

Darren E. Lund & Maryam Nabavi

Darren Lund:

I have been thinking about starting this conversation[1] for a long time, and I am excited about using a "duo-ethnographic" method (*Norris, in press*) **to get this going.**

The principal belief underlying this approach is that we inevitably learn more about something by talking about it with another person. I acknowledge Bill Pinar's explorations of understanding self, expressed as *currere* and extended by Rick Sawyer and Joe Norris (2004) to notions of our *dialogic self*.

A few years ago I attended an interesting presentation at an academic conference (Sawyer & Norris, 2005) and have since begun to explore this avenue of research. Perhaps we could call it a conversation, but I hope by focusing our dialogue in this way we can move it beyond a simple discussion. I appreciate the view taken by Carolyn Ellis (1997) about scholarly narrative writing, and auto-ethnography in particular; it can be "emotional, personal, therapeutic, interesting, engaging, evocative, reflexive, helpful, concrete, and connected to the world of everyday experience" (p. 120).

If you think about it, we probably began this dialogue some years ago when we first started working together on the *Youth Reach Out Against Racism* (ROAR) team (Youth ROAR, 2007). I remember seeing you as a very capable and committed youth leader, and it was great working together.

The purpose of this dialogue is to share our thoughts in a reflective conversation that opens up new insights into our topics, which can be as broad or narrow as we like. What if we start by thinking of the field we're in—collaborative anti-racism education and activism with young people—and how our own identities are part of that work? Each time we meet or talk about our research I'm sure we touch on these issues in some way, so hopefully this will seem more like a natural conversation than a formal writing project.

I know you have learned fairly recently of the accidental nature of my own initial involvement in this field, and of my rather narrow upbringing within a family that didn't exactly promote human rights or anti-racism. Should I get into the whole White redemptive discourse about my coming late to social justice? Might a few drastic anecdotes from my childhood help initiate this? I remember our recent conversation about your multiple and shifting ethnic/racial identities as they've formed and changed over the years. Any thoughts on where you imagine or hope this writing might take us?

Maryam Nabavi:

Finally, I'm taking the time to write about my experiences in anti-oppression work. It is certainly not by accident that it has taken so long for me to get to a place of writing.

I find that I really have to go deep within to find the roots of where this drive came from—this is a difficult exercise as I feel that experiences, insignificant at the time, have been instrumental in shaping who I am as well as my work in this area.

I approach this work with great interest both politically and personally. I find that my politics have been woven into my multiple identities. As an immigrant, "woman of color," academic, activist, and educator, I find that I wear multiple hats and can be a chameleon when and where I choose. This is advantageous but also incredibly confusing. Although the distinction is subtle, I feel that we are all part of the relationship between oppression and resistance.

I work to reclaim my multiple identities and become more aware of both the challenges and advantages that I carry. Finding a middle place to the extremes, as constructed by dominant rhetoric, is an ongoing process that I embrace through transformative approaches to social change and always being counter-hegemonic.

A theme that has been prevalent in the past couple of years has been the notion of existing in the "middle space." It came about when I attended a talk with a friend of mine in Toronto and, as the speaker—a self-identified Iranian and woman of color—was being introduced, my friend turned to me and asked if I, too, as an Iranian woman, identified as being a person of color. It was all I could think about during the talk and I discussed it further over dinner with my friend. We spoke about how problematic the phrase "of color" can be.

It seems especially problematic for me as I have always, as a fair-skinned Iranian, been able to pass off as various ethnicities that are not traditionally marginalized on the basis of skin color in the Canadian milieu. I have often, perhaps subconsciously, used this to my advantage though in my racism work, particularly with youth. I have often, to paraphrase George Sefa Dei et al. (2004), "played the color card."

Some months later, I was part of the organizing committee for the *National Youth Anti-racism Network*'s annual national conference in Calgary. In a particular session I attended, the facilitators asked all those who identified as being persons of color to stay in one room and those who identified as White to go in another room (if this was ethically right is another issue we could explore later) but for the first time I chose to go into the room with the "White" people. This was in many ways a liberating experience and I realized that I often align myself with persons of color as in anti-racism work; it is simply easier.

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Darren: How has your family taken up these notions of race and identity, and how have they shaped your self-perceptions and experiences within the Canadian context?

Maryam: I reflected with my family that evening, asking which room they would go to—we were equally split. Interestingly, my parents did not see themselves as racial minorities, and my brothers shared that they would go have to go into the "minority" room. I came to realize that this confusing middle space that I have often found myself in is the result of being raised by parents who genuinely did not see me as a "racial minority" and a society who saw nothing but. I benefit from being in the majority and the minority, as well as being a member of the privileged and disadvantaged—making this very political work a very personal pursuit.

I question what I have come to understand as the middle space, and why more attention is not given to it in this work. Regardless of whether, as unidentified racialized persons, or simply as persons committed to this work, aren't we all somehow a member of this middle space? I feel we too often create binaries and our multiple identities are not explored nearly enough. I don't know if this is what we are to be talking about, but perhaps you want to speak to this and ask me some direct questions.

Darren: Thanks for your thoughtful reply. It is actually daunting for me to tackle many of the poignant subjects you have addressed from my particular subject position. In many ways, I am enjoying all of this unearned privilege as an able-bodied, White, heterosexual, employed, English-speaking male, and yet in the field of anti-racism research I am very much a perennial outsider. I always think of myself as a critical educator and activist, but as George Sefa Dei reminded me a few years ago in a rebuttal to my critiques of Afrocentric schools (Dei, 1996; Lund, 1998c), I am just another liberal White scholar who means well but "just doesn't get it."

So although I enjoy the relative prestige of an academic position, with some credentials and experience in the field doing anti-racism with students, I am still very much trying to learn about the lived experiences of racism in the Canadian context. I also continue to learn much about how to be an effective ally in the struggle for equity and justice, along with other teacher educators who strive to deconstruct their own privileges as part of this work (e.g., Gallavan, 2005). Thanks for your part in illuminating my views as you and I work through these issues in this dialogic format.

Even this apologetic introduction is problematic. I mean, is that what this is all about? A woman of color sharing her experiences and views so I can be more illuminated in my own social justice work? It is pretty presumptuous and underlines a lot of the difficulty of how my mindset is always pretty much tainted by my privilege. I must feel entitled to this racialized or *minoritized* awakening, and expect you to facilitate it in a medium I have set up.

Maryam: This is a piece that I struggle with. How do we find collective meaning in creating safe spaces, not just to speak about this work, but also to act on it constructively? I realize that there are many schools of thought as to who is invited to the inner circles of anti-oppression work. Although you hold the most "privileged" characteristics in our society, you have, for all intents and purposes, *chosen* to contribute your life's work to a cause where you are, arguably, somewhat underprivileged.

I question if it is simply that you stumbled into this work, as you have previously alluded to—that your activism work did not really come to fruition until a series of events, initiated by your students, led you to it? I feel there is more to it, and your "racist" upbringing obviously played a role. Is it the combination of developing an astute analysis coupled with your own experiences?

I feel frustrated that these choices that folks like you have made—in this case to take the more difficult path—are not acknowledged as just that. You are too often slotted into the "neo-liberal good guy who doesn't get it" category. This is problematic because norms in this field only position you as the "oppressor" who can discuss the issues from a very limited framework, but not act on it from a space where you may actually have the unique ability to create meaning that would otherwise not be created. This marginalizing of a privileged voice inevitably denies that you see these issues from a lens through which I may never be able to see.

Darren: I suppose this is an example of trying to work against binaries in this field, and analyze how we already cross the borders between oppressor/oppressed and privileged/marginalized.

Maryam: Yes, and we can't deny that the lived experiences of a person of color allow anti-racism to be felt, as we know all too well that this struggle is as much personal as it is political. Beginning with our personal experiences allows room for an integrated, embodied, and non-linear approach to understanding and acting on this work. It shifts us from the logical to the creative and, perhaps, the modern to the postmodern. I admit I am simply not sure how to create space for both camps and also the "middle space" folks to find threads of meaning.

Although it is preached in academia that we must find room for "outsiders," we still see that, in practice, when the actual activist work is undertaken—when we strive to create systemic shifts—it is usually done within our respective circles; this is very much the case with the Afrocentric school of thought, for example. I understand the need for it, the fact that it is empowering, for lack of a better term, but the need to work within the system is necessary for sustainable change. This is a very "on-the-fence" approach, likely due to my "on-the-fence" identity.

I reflect on feminist movements and the mainstream societal fear of these, as feminism is often clumped into *minority radical feminism*. Feminists talk about male allies in the work and in most cases argue that the "real" work must be done by the women themselves, as men, coming from the oppressor group, could not possibly identify. I very much see anti-racism work moving in this direction, if it isn't there already.

There is a clear distinction, however, that brings me back to the middle-space; there are those from a "dominant" identity for whom what appears to be is often not the case. Although White, one's faith, ethnic background, sexual identity, and the like can play a role that allows very meaningful opportunities to act, not simply as allies, but actually to fight the fight. I would be interested to hear your views on this. I feel our lived realities can be compared between your Danish background and my ambiguity around color.

Darren: I appreciate the links you're trying to make here. Like with many conversations, our dialogue will include inevitable repetitions, overlaps, cycling back over topics, meandering, and perhaps even contradictions. I hope to pick up a few threads from what you have shared and see if we can continue to weave together something coherent.

I am intrigued by your contradictory

and complex experiences with living in a culture that most often marginalizes you for certain aspects of your identity, and yet bestows benefits and privileges in some contexts for those same social markers. You mention how you get to choose where and when you wear these identities, and I am wondering how, and to what extent, your lighter skin tone and appearance have been factors in this luxury of choice?

Even within the oppressive environment of a patriarchal, colonial, and Eurocentric nation you are somehow able to take advantage of particular aspects of your identity. A number of the authors in a volume I recently co-edited (Carr & Lund, 2007) have also directly addressed these issues of fluidity in our racialized identities and privileges. You reveal the complexity of racism but also, how understanding the shifting social terrain allows you to make strategic use of some particularities to your advantage. I am interested in hearing specific examples of how this has worked, or might play itself out in your life.

Maryam: I certainly do feel that I have been able to play my race or gender "cards" in some cases, but haven't we all? I just think some of us choose to acknowledge that we do this whereas others pretend to be blind to it, as "proper" social conventions do not approve of our doing this. I remember spending time in Swaziland, Africa, about seven years ago, where I was working with a local organization. I had to access the local library to research information for the project I was working on. Prior to making my way to the library, I was warned by colleagues that I would be unable to sign materials out as I was a visitor and needed to have a more permanent status in the country. I discounted these comments, as I was sure that I would be able to "pull the race card" and be able to access these materials. At the time, it was done subconsciously, naively, and perhaps even with good intent. Being in the more "privileged" class I was able to use my light skin and status as a foreigner to be able to do this.

Of course, issues around race were, and still are, a lot more prevalent and blatant in southern Africa than in Canada, and the norms of using identity were different. Reflecting a short time later, I was instilled with a great sense of guilt and anger about the situation—that I could actually do this, and that having a problematic identity at "home" had not taught me anything about what was and was not morally acceptable, not in terms of that society's norms, but by my own.

I really think this was the most poignant experience in learning about how we can carelessly take advantage of our social locations and perpetuate power imbalances in our communities. I find that this understanding has created a tension that, at times, I do not know what to do with, from within my standing in the Eurocentric milieu of Canada.

Darren: Your attention to the "middle space" between White and non-White identity brings to mind Daniel Yon's book, *Elusive Culture: Schooling, Race, and Identity in Global Times* (2000), in which he talks about a complex range of subject positions among young people in urban settings. He struggles with the difficulty of "separating the dynamics of identity from those of culture and race" and notes how "discourses may both facilitate and constrain identity, and there is a tension between the opportunities for playing with the racial signifiers and the need for stable group identities" (p. 71). I suppose he's getting at how partial and inadequate these labels are, and how complex and shifting the strategic uses of them can be; I see your experiences as reflecting that ongoing tension. Is this a fair link?

Maryam: Yes, it's definitely a fair comparison, and I think the above story is testament to that. I am intrigued by the intersecting links between identity, culture, "race," and ethnicity. I find that we use these terms so loosely and they are often used in place of one another, particularly as each of us has multiple identities; to maintain the integrities of these identities we have to separate them from one another. However, this becomes difficult when we are labeled in a series of descriptions.

For example White, male, and heterosexual equals oppressor, negating the multiple other identities that person brings, such as those based on his religion, class, and the like. I am interested to learn more about your multiple identities and how they have shaped you and some of the struggles you might face with these labels. How have you negotiated these various facets of yourself?

Darren: I can't do this identity shifting to the same extent, suiting the look of a "mainstream" White Canadian in a society that sets my visible identity as the unspoken cultural norm. I am not as able to live in a "middle space" here. No one ever asks me where I am *really* from, nor do they ever challenge my *Canadian-ness*, even though I am a second generation Danish Canadian whose poor grandparents all emigrated from a non-Anglo country in the 1920s. Many times I have heard my father using the argument that "our family is all immigrants and we haven't demanded that Canada change to adapt to us" (usually with a raised voice). Of course he ignores the lack of racial hurdles and cultural barriers for his parents, despite their other cultural hardships related to language and employment.[2]

I agree with scholars such as Schick and St. Denis (2005) who correctly note that "the narrative of the nation as raceless, benevolent, and innocent has implications for the reproduction of racial privilege" (p. 296). I grew up with a coded racism, along with more overt forms, and am fascinated by the claiming of an immigrant status to somehow universalize this experience and reject the legitimate claims of others while, at the same time, denying the existence of racism for non-White immigrants to Canada.

I have known you for a few years now, but mostly in academic, professional, or community contexts. So I am fascinated by glimpses into your family conversations on racial identity. My only memories of race or identity being brought up in my home were when we listened to my father's "humorous" racist impressions of the various First Nations people he would meet as a police officer on the beat in the impoverished "East End" of downtown Calgary. I also recall his off-color rants about non-White drivers and find it more than a little ironic that I am now working in the field of social justice education. I think I enjoy the privilege of raising this unsavoury aspect of my otherwise pleasant childhood with loving parents as part of my "redemptive" personal narrative on becoming a "better" person against long odds.

Maryam: Just as an aside, it is interesting how we can access these parts of our memory and with the lens through which we live our lives now see those conversations—positive or negative—about race as subsequently forming our respective racial identities. The ignorance around *what is* racialized discourse deserves more attention, I think. Although we promote education that addresses how to abate discriminatory language, I think we need to explore further what that might mean, and how it has evolved. It requires us to be a bit more political about race and identity, and to talk about those things that really sting to remind ourselves that they are still

there. It is often the euphemisms and "political correctness" of the Canadian context that does not allow us to dig deeper when necessary.

Darren: I think class and race intersect in some interesting ways that further complicate this discourse. Likely my own lowest status marker is having been raised in the Calgary district of "Forest Lawn," a low-income, working-class neighborhood that, as you know, suffers from many social problems associated with its lower social class standing. Its residents are often stereotyped in the media as criminals, illiterate immigrants, the unemployed, or alcoholics and other drug addicts.

Reflecting back now, I suppose I choose to talk about my upbringing there only in those situations where I think it will offer me some ironic social advantage, either by shocking an unsuspecting middle-class or academic audience, or to gain "street credibility" as someone who has not been raised in a life of privilege. I'll end this here before I wallow too deeply across the river of working-class White guilt.

Maryam: I'm still looking forward to learning more about the identity pieces with respect to the issues we raised earlier. For now, I'll reflect on how it is that I am even having this conversation with you. Your questions have really forced me to think deeply about the professional and personal choices that I have made to lead me to being so committed to anti-oppression work. I wish it were simple and I could say that there was one "a-ha" moment when I realized that this work was the answer to societal issues, or that I have come from a family of long-standing activists, but not so. In fact, some time back I engaged in a written exercise where I documented some poignant experiences that I feel have shaped me to some extent.

Reading these pieces recently (e.g., Angod, Hussein, & Nabavi, 2004; Nabavi, 2006) with a different lens than when I wrote them, I find that the themes of privilege and being and insider/outsider recur and have, perhaps, been more significant in my professional work that I have given them credit for in the past. On privilege, I wrote:

> *One year after having moved to Canada, my mother and I returned to Iran for the summer to visit relatives. I did not think that I had changed in that year; more so, it did not cross my mind that people may view me differently because I had gone to the "West." I soon came to the realization that I was different and that I was seen, as an eight-year-old child, an authority by my peers, on various topics and discussions. I soon learned to take advantage of this great, unexpected honour that was bestowed upon me, so much so that I learned to take advantage of situations accordingly. I learned the privileges that were associated with the opportunities that I had been given at that young age and remember, often reflecting on them that summer.*
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> *In particular, I remember a young Bangladeshi man that my parents had hired to help out around the house and the guilt that I felt every time I saw him performing his duties. I felt great anguish at the disparity between his world and mine and remember lashing out at him for a reason that I can no longer remember. I realized later, when I was able to view the incident more critically, that I was merely expressing my frustration and anger at what I viewed as a great injustice, by projecting my feelings onto him. Realizing privilege is daunting and rewarding.* (Angod, Hussein, & Nabavi, 2004, p. 44)

An innate realization of injustice and disparity between individuals, communities, and societies from a young age, being in a place of privilege, but also feeling "othered" as an immigrant and visible minority took me to the majority world in my early twenties. Being impressionable, idealistic, and perhaps naïve, I felt (and still do!) that one person's contribution can create change, and that through those contributions some stark social divides can be lessened.

Having spent time in Southern Africa, which reeked of post-apartheid tensions, and later working in rural Indian communities where caste and religion was at the forefront, I found myself learning more than ever that social divisions amongst people from the same communities played a central role in how we interacted, made progress, learned, and developed as individuals and communities.

Coming back from overseas my first "real" job was as a youth anti-racism facilitator. I was attracted to it because it was race issues that were palpable in my overseas experiences and, having a better understanding of the generational impacts of racism and oppression, it made sense to seize a meaningful opportunity to "create change" in that dimension in my own backyard. What do you think motivated you to commit yourself to this work?

Darren: I always feel a bit sheepish about sharing the motivation for my own anti-racism and other social justice work. Not only did I *not* come from an activist family, but also, I did not consciously choose to address these issues as a main part of my professional life. As you already know, it was more by accident that I stumbled into the field of human rights and felt compelled to learn more and become more involved along the way. A journalist once called me the "accidental activist" and I think that's pretty accurate.

It was in my first year of teaching high school English in Red Deer, Alberta, in 1987, and I was assigned a group of "unmotivated" learners in tenth grade who seemed to have very little interest in literature and composition. There were only three girls in a class of 30 students in this "non-academic" English class. When I shared a poem I had written about discrimination they responded quite enthusiastically to the ideas, and shared their thoughts on the *Aryan Nations* training camp that had recently formed in Caroline, a small town in Central Alberta.

The Friday afternoon class got very energized and the students talked about the idea of forming their own group to counter the racist neo-Nazis. One student even volunteered to go undercover to infiltrate the extremist organization and plant a bomb when no one was looking! He seemed so earnest that I knew I had to rechannel that energy toward more positive, non-violent activities.

As a rookie teacher, I was pleased just to see their level of enthusiasm, but had no idea where it would lead us. The weekend passed, and just before class on Monday morning, a newscaster from the local radio station called me and asked me about the new anti-racist group we had formed at the high school. She wanted to know what our plans were, and I didn't know what to say! When the class met, I asked who had called the radio station, and Wade stepped up and said he thought we were actually going to do this. I followed their lead and helped them plan some projects and initiatives that would accomplish their need to speak out against racism and fulfill my curricular objectives.

They got busy researching topics around discrimination and racism, writing letters to Alberta mayors, planning talks to local junior high schools, and circulat-

ing petitions to seek their peers' support for their new club, that we decided to call *Students and Teachers Opposing Prejudice* (STOP). When they held their first school-wide meeting, almost 200 kids showed up, and the local media made a big deal of it. Little did we know that the national media would also pick up the story, with the angle that our region was better known for racist extremism. After all, the James Keegstra trial for promoting hatred had taken place in Red Deer and attracted the national press spotlight for years.

The STOP program proved to be a worthwhile vehicle for activism by those students, and while I managed to fit their work into my English teaching goals, I also learned that we were doing something more important than fulfilling the curriculum. As the group became a regular school club the next fall, a student nominated me for the first ever *Alberta Human Rights Award*. When I won, I remember the banquet where I heard a speech by Ron Ghitter, one of the architects of Alberta's strong human rights acts under the previous government; I wondered to myself what human rights were all about. It was almost as if I had been "guilted" into learning more about the need for social justice, and began to lift the veil of my own White privilege.

As you correctly note, becoming aware of privileges can be both rewarding and daunting. As the years passed, new generations of students would be attracted to our STOP program, and each year there would be new plans and renewed enthusiasm to tackle a range of diversity and rights issues in the school, the community, and beyond. The program's activities have been well documented (Alberta Human Rights Commission, 2000; Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2001; Lund, 1998b) and the program lasted two full decades.

Clearly the group provided a vehicle that continued to offer something of value to students, and I think it was mainly that I surrendered much of the planning and direction of the program to the student leaders. With just a few dozen committed young people every year and a few teacher advisors, the group was able to accomplish a great deal of innovative programming, advocacy and activism on a wide range of issues. I would often share my own "secret identity" as a recovering racist with my students, but it was not widely known in the broader community; I became known as a community leader who brought attention to diversity issues to a community that had long languished in the shadow of extremism.

Maryam: I had heard of the group and your work in Red Deer, and I know you had been interacting with the *Youth ROAR* group in Calgary before I joined it. I'm wondering how you came to take this program and build your scholarly work and career based on your involvement with this initiative.

Darren: Over the years I became familiar with a number of fellow anti-racism activists and scholars, and was persuaded by Dr. Keith McLeod at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto to pursue my Ph.D. in this field. The University of British Columbia offered the best scholarship support and I moved there with my family for a few years to complete my doctoral studies. It was wonderful to be able to focus my academic attention on the topic of student and teacher activism in school based projects, to bounce some of the issues we had faced in STOP with activists elsewhere.

It was also a joy to find a faculty position open here at the University of Calgary, my alma mater, in my hometown, where I could continue this work with a broader range of educators and activists. And it's how I came to meet you, during my first year here in 2002 when you were the coordinator for the *Youth ROAR* program. Can you reflect a bit on the work you did through this program?

Maryam: I commented earlier in our dialogue that coming to social justice work was as a result of an awareness of inequities in both my immediate and more global surroundings. Shifting my perspective to focus on local anti-oppression issues, as the coordinator and Youth Anti-racism Facilitator of *Youth ROAR*, was an interesting and eye-opening experience in understanding youth activists. As I mentioned, I was not a particularly engaged young person, so working closely with teenagers who were ready and keen to make a difference and fight racism with a vengeance taught me a lot about the value of idealism and how, with critical analysis, it could easily shift into proactive realism.

In retrospect, my time at *Youth ROAR* was as great a learning experience for me as it was for the young people I was working with. I never saw myself as an expert and, like you, was awed by the insights the young people brought to discussions and by their creativity around implementing their ideas in a constructive manner.

I think what really worked with *Youth ROAR* was that it was very much a "for youth by youth" approach and we drew heavily on the teachings of one of my favourite scholars/practitioners, the great Paulo Freire. Using his action-reflection model (1998) to create change, we were able to discuss ideas, build meaning from the discussions and subsequent action, and continue on that spiral of awareness-building and social change. Much like STOP, *Youth ROAR* really gave the control to the youth to come up with and act on issues in ways that were meaningful and relevant to them; there was a quiet revolution happening inside each of them as they became more liberated to speak to issues and create shared meaning amongst one another (see Nabavi, 2003).

Also worth mentioning is that the youth came to *Youth ROAR* from two distinct camps, one of which was the visible minority youth, most of whom were immigrants who had experienced overt forms of racism, and were very much driven to create meaning from those experiences. The other group was White youth, most with an astute analysis of various diversity issues and a sense of agency in being able to create awareness and change on those issues.

As you know, we also found this dichotomy in youth activists in our recent research on student anti-racism engagement in the prairie provinces (Lund & Nabavi, 2005, 2006). *Youth ROAR* provided a safe space for both "camps" to voice their perspectives on these sensitive and pressing issues. It provided an opportunity for groups of youth whose paths normally did not intersect, socially or politically, to collaborate; they embarked on ambitious projects with one another and learned in ways that they may never have otherwise.

Popular educator Augusto Boal shares that "the best of learning is by doing" and we certainly did lots of "doing"! We made concerted efforts to shift from the "banking" model of education and used various modalities such as acting, panel discussions, engaging with various committees, making collages and murals, and writing; these all acted as successful vehicles for learning and ideas to percolate.

One piece that I felt was missing, even in a local context, was the collaboration and ongoing dialogue with other youth doing similar work, but perhaps using different language. So when there was an opportunity for me to be involved with the *Canadian Race Relations Foundation's* initiative, the *National Youth Anti-racism Network* (NYAN), it seemed like a perfect fit and one that spoke to the missing link that I found frustrating this work.

NYAN operated on much the same vision as *Youth ROAR* with the goals of education, awareness, and informal and formal networks. The advisory committee, on which I served for two years, acted as a catalyst to bring together individuals and organizations doing youth anti-racism work—so that there was less of a feeling of working in silos and reinventing the wheel—and building on the strengths, wisdom and past experiences of one another. It provided youth anti-racism practitioners with a sense of belonging and validation that their daily work was not only valuable but should also be celebrated.

Darren: I really admire and respect the work you have done, and continue to do in so many ways. I believe this dialogue has brought us to some deeper understandings of the complex interactions between own evolving identities and the activist work we do with young people. It has been my privilege to have the opportunity to work with you in several different settings, and to continue our activism toward equity and social justice. Thanks for agreeing to take part in this conversation, and I know it will continue for a long time.

Maryam: Darren, it's been such a great learning experience for me as well. It has been an honor to be part of such great journeys with you. I really feel that I have been able to delve into issues and create meaning from my experiences through our collaborative academic and activist work. Thank you for your insights and guidance and providing space to come to a place of understanding in a genuine and proactive way.

Notes

[1] The authors initiated their writing of this chapter as a sporadic and candid e-mail conversation between colleagues over the course of five months from in 2006. Both of us strived to be conscious of the interplay between our own identities as people who have worked collaboratively in antiracist activism with young people. The authors have included the text of their email conversations almost verbatim, with minor revisions for clarity and correctness, and the inclusion of references.

[2] I (Darren) have had the good fortune to study the first few months of my paternal grandparents' life on the prairies in the mid-1920s, as I inherited my grandmother's letters home to her parents in Denmark. I had them translated and published (Lund, 1998a) with some historical context from the time period.

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