

*True Justice 4 Borderlands Youth:  
The Four Non-Punitive Core Practices  
that Empower Youth and  
Reduce  
the School-To-Prison Pipeline*

**Coalition for Juvenile Justice**  
***2019 Racial and Ethnic Disparities Conference,***  
**Scottsdale, Arizona**

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**MY BLOG:**

**<https://truejustice4youth.org>**





# Exploring Our Belief System

- A generic matrix with cumulative consequences should be used for disciplining borderlands youth.
- Classrooms/schools should serve as third spaces.
- If my student were incarcerated I would most likely continue my teacher-student relationship.
- Lots of schools and classrooms are subtractive towards borderlands youth.
- Lecturing is effective for borderlands youth.



# Exploring Our Belief System

- Dialogue and deep listening of borderlands youth's stories are effective.
- Exclusion is an acceptable tool for discipline for borderlands youth.
- We should not talk about injustice to borderlands youth.
- We should actively help develop the agency of borderlands youth.
- A borderlands youth who commits an ordinary infraction should be
  - Excluded/included
  - Silent/expressive
  - Marginal/the center
  - Powerless/active
  - His/her life's narrative should not matter/matters.



# Exploring Our Belief System

- I believe in silent/group-sustained reading for borderlands youth.
- A borderlands young person who commits an offense should remain quiet.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant youth do better than 1<sup>st</sup> or 1.5 generation immigrants.
- It is important for borderlands youth to know, explore or to not forget their histories.
- It is essential to guide borderlands youth to do social identity exploration through literary topics via reading, writing and dialogue.



# Exploring Our Belief System

- It is OK to bridge sanctioned and non-sanctioned literary practices (for ex., rap and a poem about poverty) for borderlands youth.
- It is important for borderlands youth to reconstruct their own sense of social identity vs. the identification given from the outside.
- Circles should be used in the classrooms and schools of borderlands youth often.
- Borderlands youth would benefit for continuing to use/remember/study their heritage language.
- Borderlands youth should be required to do community service by using talent, passion and perhaps heritage language.
- (Come to the circle, close your eyes) When I think of discipline in schools, the first image that comes to my mind is...



# Punished Borderlands Youth: Other People's Children

**I am  
going to  
teach  
YOU  
a lesson!**



My Blog: "True Justice for Youth: Harsh Treatment, Subtractive Discipline"  
<https://www.truejustice4youth.org/post/true-justice-for-borderlands-youth-harsh-treatment-subtractive-discipline>



What Are Your Thoughts?





# Punitive, Subtractive Discipline

## Less Dignity

- Shameful
- Abuse of authority
- Less funds of knowledge, less dignity
- “Other people’s children”
- Association of aggression with discipline

## No Circle of Cariño/Third Space

- No real support, community, mentoring
- Misbehavior increases negative feedback
- Exclusiveness, “other people’s spaces”
- Lack of trust in the system or safety

## Less Voice

- Impersonal, incremental matrix
- No listening to child’s story
- Monologue, sentence by judge, non-transactional
- Less expressive, linguistic ability

## Less Agency

- Disempowers, external locus of control
- “Don’t get caught” mentality
- No cognitive development
- Uniqueness of how to contribute lacking
- Not more altruistic
- Reactive, defensive, not active

## No Consideration of Social Identity Issues



# Borderlands Youth

**“And yes, the ‘alien’ element has become familiar - never comfortable, not with society’s clamor to uphold the old, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd. No, not comfortable but home.” (Anzaldúa, p.19)**





Live between racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and/or national borders

Ethnicity has often been racialized

Ethnic Identity vs. Racial Identification- Impact identity, sense of self-worth

Labels

Positionalities: *Cultural straddlers, noncompliant believers, or cultural mainstreamers* (Carter, 2005); acting white

Oppositionality, prefer to fail or be punished than to be disempowered

Need to explore identities, positionalities, deconstruct injustices in society and literature, reconstruct a stronger identity

Order of immigration: 1<sup>st</sup>, 1.5, 2<sup>nd</sup> (language, history knowledge, remembrance)

Consonant acculturation vs dissonant acculturation

Role reversal, limited communication with parents

Limited bilingual, fluent bilingual (Diglossia); females and males

Downward assimilation or eventual academic disengagement

Selective acculturation: original language and culture, and English and American culture





My incarcerated student (My Blog “Freedom Readers: What I lost and gained from my literary correspondence with my incarcerated student”):

- 2<sup>nd</sup> generation
- Limited language and cultural knowledge
- Divorced parents, no father
- Dissonant acculturation
- Poor, unsafe neighborhood
- ADHD’s needs neglected by home and school

<https://www.truejustice4youth.org/post/freedom-readers-what-i-lost-and-gained-from-my-literary-correspondence-with-my-incarcerated-student>



# Social Identity Issues





What Does This Mean to You?

“I identify as a ‘hispano’ or ‘latino’ since both for me mean the same. People identify me as ‘bruto’ (brute), ‘maleante’ (criminal), gangster and all of those labels. But I don’t care. I am who I am and don’t care about what anyone says about me. I also identify as a worker since when I like to accomplish something I do a good job”.

“...that part of the individual self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (H. Tajfel & J. Turner)

Multiple identities, dual, triple; hyphenated (“I am not American”), borderlands

Marginalization: the other (often the most personal and familiar) is less

Invisible and marginal in dominant curriculum & literary practices

Subtracting schools (E. Valenzuela); low expectations

Not expressive; powerless and voiceless despite heroic stories; often ignore own histories





## Positive Sense of Identity: Challenging Task

Positive sense of identity, one of the most challenging tasks:

“Language inconsistency at home and school, a perceived gap in the status of their parents and the quality of their environment and those of the larger society, and the dangers and attractions of barrio streets create an ambiguity in their ethnic identity. Parents and older siblings are often unable to effectively guide youngsters in ways to reconcile the contrasting cultural worlds, and this results in an uneven adoption of acculturative strategies”. (J.D. Vigil, p. 41)





**True Discipline**



# Discipline with Dignity

- Describe it!
- Respects funds of knowledge.
- Helps youth save face.
- Lack of aggression, calmness.
- Choices.
- “This child could have been my own”.



Third Space, Circle of “Cariño” (Affection, Caring)

# What Do Circles Mean



To You?







# My Circle of Mentees

- My student mentee (My Blog “Freedom Readers: The Redemptive Quality of Discussing Books with My Student”)
- Healing through book talks
- Exploration of meaningful themes

<https://www.truejustice4youth.org/post/freedom-readers-the-redemptive-qualities-of-discussing-books-with-my-student>



**Ladies of Honor  
Falls Church High School  
Fairfax County, Virginia  
May, 2017**



# S.T.A.R. at Justice HS: Student Training in Accountability & Responsibility



<https://www.truejustice4youth.org/post/s-t-a-r-student-training-in-advocacy-responsibility-at-justice-high-school>





# Student Voice in Circle of Cariño

“This young person could have been my own”; inclusiveness, center, reflective, expressive

Safety, support, trust of the system

“We need to learn how to care for the world of human-made objects and their arrangement. What if we had to start from scratch? How much of the human-made world could we thirty people recreate?” (N. Noddings)

A space for co-constructing what is mutually meaningful; equal stakeholders, with equal responsibility, agency, voice, more at the center of the curriculum

Engaging schools: familism, communal values, circular, “sense of belonging”, connectivity and safety

Oral tradition for book reading & discussion; **Circle**-Sustained Reading, library visits

More expressive; bilingualism or Spanglish

Personalized, identity-related circles: exploration of stories, story-telling, deep listening, cognitive coaching, histories, funds of knowledge, social identity, labels, critical literary theory, dialogue

Mentoring/Zone of Proximal Development/Welcoming/Inclusive Programs: – Ladies of Honor, Men of Honor, S.T.A.R. (Student Training in Advocacy & Responsibility), Check & Connect Mentoring, New Jags (for recent immigrants), Attendance Restorative Circles (handouts)

Caring/empathetic teachers – more impact on hard enough students (L.J. Dance)

Restorative Justice Discipline/Attendance Circles: In the safety of the circle, explore what has been done, who has been impacted and how, and how to repair the harm (classroom example)





**(Blog) True Justice for Youth Offenders:  
My Experiences with Restorative Justice Circles**

<https://www.truejustice4youth.org/post/true-justice-for-young-offenders-my-experiences-with-restorative-justice-circles>



# Stories of Heroism

**“My parents tell me that from the age of one more or less I used to travel to El Salvador. I never went with my parents. I traveled with my grandparents, my uncles and aunts. My mother tells me that [...] I always used to come back speaking with the accents of the children from there. I used to come back as an entirely new person...each time that I go back to El Salvador I cry while I go towards the airport and take the plane to go there. I feel that I will miss my loved ones in the United States....but when I come back the same thing happens to me, I come sobbing because I feel that I leave who I really am there. Even though I was not born in El Salvador, I feel I am from El Salvador. It is in my blood, it runs through my veins. I feel, like India Maria (comedian) says, ‘I am neither from here, nor from there.’ Inside of me there is always a voice that wants to come out. I understand the importance of being bilingual and bicultural in this country but in reality almost always only English is the language that is used. The only places where I feel that I can allow that second person to come out are in Spanish class and in my home. I wish I could change that in one way or another.”**

**“I have become introverted. I was expressive before but I have changed. My father was deported; can no longer enter here. Now I cry a lot and I am sad and pretend to be happy when I don’t want anyone to know what happened. Now you know something about me and I hope you will understand why I don’t speak much in your classroom.”**

**“When I saw this movie (Under the Same Moon) for the first time I started to cry because I went through something similar. When my father came to the United States it was very sad for me and hard not to see him every day. But through the years he could save money to bring me to the United States. And for him that was really hard since he had to work night and day to make money to be able to bring us.**

**That is why I appreciate all he does for me and my siblings. I don't plan to get in trouble because he does not deserve that I fail him that way.”**



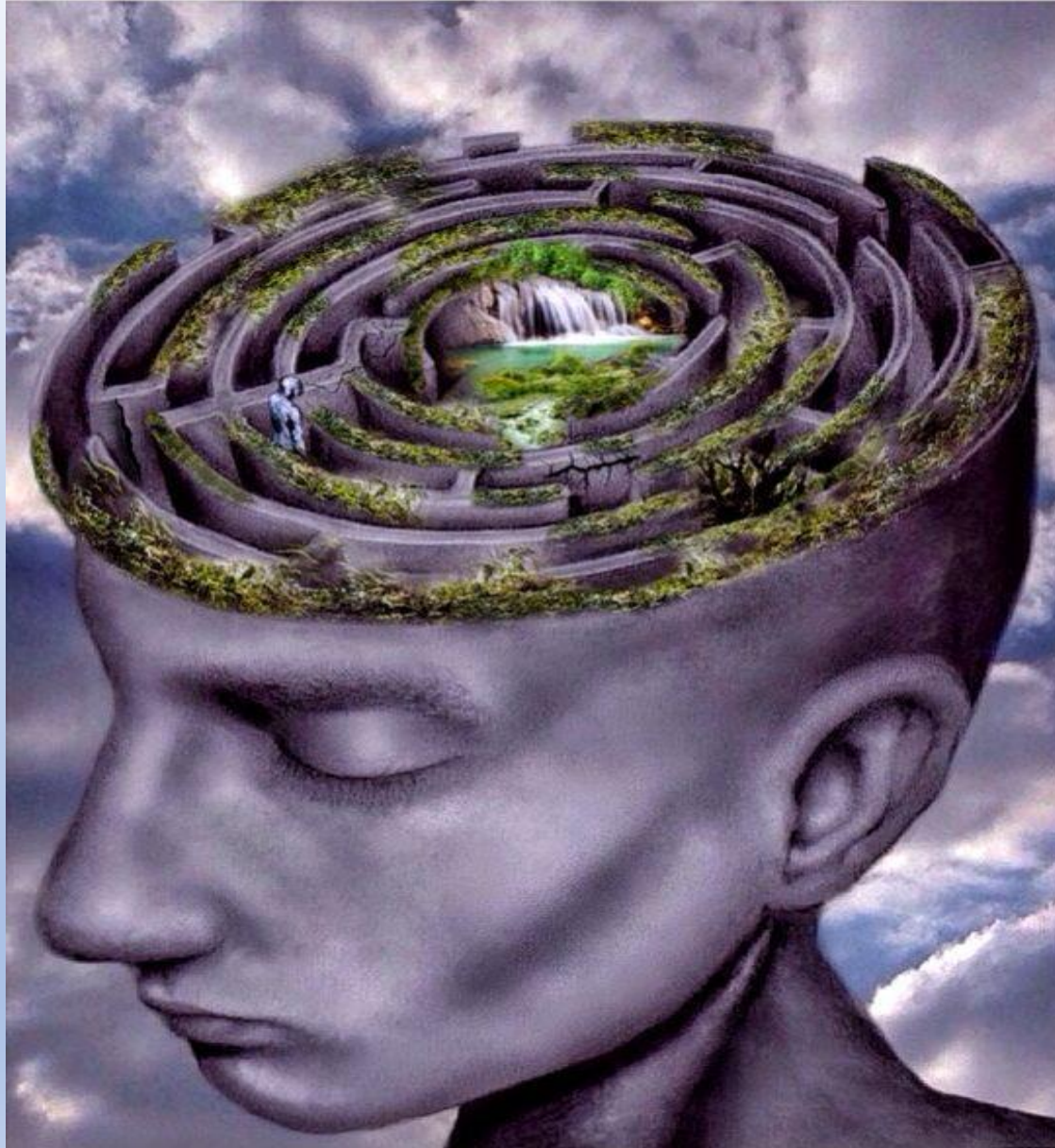
**“For two years I lived in El Salvador with my aunt. During those years I spent fun time with my cousins. [...] The movie “Under the Same Moon” made me think about my own past. I remember how much I missed my mother. And I used to think like the child in the movie. I thought that she did not love me, but when I grew up I realized that she did. Even though I lived with my aunt and used to see my oldest sister, it was not the same as having my mother with me. The idea of leaving my whole life in El Salvador caused me a lot of fear. I did not know how things were going to be here. When I used to live in El Salvador I did not have to attend school but I was told that when I came to the United States I would have to go since that was the law in the United States.**

**I felt terribly since I did not want to leave my cousins and could not bring my toys in my suitcase. When the day arrived I felt really badly. When I arrived to the airport my stomach started to hurt. I was so afraid that I lost my appetite [...]. Then the time came to get into the airplane. I started to cry. All of my relatives hugged me and told me goodbye. I got into the plane with my uncle and cousins. In the airplane I slept several hours. Finally the airplane landed. There were my mother, brother and sister waiting for me”.**

**“When I was a little girl I had to take care of my brother. My older brother was our father and mother in one person. But when he died I did not know how to make my life function. But since my older brother used to take care of us I had to start taking care of my little brother. I was a mess when my oldest brother died but I had to put myself together for my little brother. I had to comfort him during the first months and later when my parents were not at home. I used to be the one to cook for him and used to help him in his homework. Taking care of my brother meant everything for me. And it is still my obligation but I don’t feel forced. I do it because I love my brother and want the best for him. Now he tells me I am like the mother we did not have. He is my priority. Now I cook only during the weekdays. On the weekends I rest”.**

A black and white photograph of a person standing on a mountain peak with arms outstretched, overlooking a vast valley under a cloudy sky. The person is silhouetted against the sky, and the landscape below is a deep valley with rolling hills and mountains in the distance. The sky is filled with dramatic, layered clouds.

# Curriculum that Includes Voice & Social Identity Exploration



- **Strong yearning for the past of his ancestors**
- **Book about Aztecs & Mayas**
- **Longest essay**

**“I want to learn about Mayans and Aztecs. I feel connected because it is my culture; I am Mexican, Mayans love art. American history is boring, not enough background or ancient history. I like to read about what people are capable of doing; genocide and all of that. Some people break down and cry about it, but it happens. Not me. People make decisions that affect the whole world” At the time of that conversation, Nicolas was taking Advanced Placement World History, which he considered his favorite class.**



“My dad is different from Americans. Being Latino in the United States you experience racism. I like being Hispanic but people already assume that I don’t speak English; but I like being Hispanic; our class makes me feel better about being Hispanic. It makes me feel more proud all the different countries in our class. I have gone through a lot of identity crises. I have gone a lot through it. I felt ashamed because I heard things about being Hispanic. Tenth grade was when I thought about it for the most time. You start thinking about who you are and one of the things you are is Hispanic and I have gone a lot through that. [...]. I know I am Hispanic and can’t do anything about it. I am in eleventh grade. My parents are the nicest people I know. And I know many Hispanic people that aren’t like that.”

***Became really interested in his Cuban background (agency).***

“I was born here but I am not Americanized, I guess. How white people live like, like they live in those big houses. They have everything they want like picture perfect lives”.

***Became very interested in becoming more versed in the Spanish language (Vietnamese/Latino) (agency).***

**WRITING ENTRIES BECAME INCREMENTAL IN LENGTH AND DEPTH IN MY CLASS!**

Stories of heroism: More visibility, validation and exploration

Reflects funds of knowledge & identity exploration

“...school-driven definitions of literacy need to be reexamined in light of adolescents’ authentic literacy practices” (p. 178). (M. Leslie, 2001).

Broader understanding of literacy - oral and written expressions (G. Ladson-Billings)

Bridges dominant and non-dominant literary text

Library’s list (S.C. Athanases; E. Moje)

“Because English class is not interesting, but in your class we read things that have to do with us.”

Marginalization and demarginalization

More expressive

Deconstruction and positionality exploration using critical literacy theory

Agency instead of victim mentality

- **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy:**

- Linguistic identity exploration
- Cultural identity exploration
- Borderlands literary topics
- Connection to roots, family and community
- Cultural gender exploration
- Voices
- Agency
- Classroom culture

- **Literary Topics:**

- Language
- Roots
- Borderlands experiences
- Marginal experiences and positionalities
- Voices
- Cultural gender roles
- Critical theory

- **Linguistic Identity Exploration:**

- English monolingualism
- Spanglish
- Spanish/English bilingualism (diglossia).

- **Cultural Identity Exploration:**

- National identity
- Panethnic identity
- Roots
- Positive and negative cultural characteristics
- Identification vs. identity
- Labels

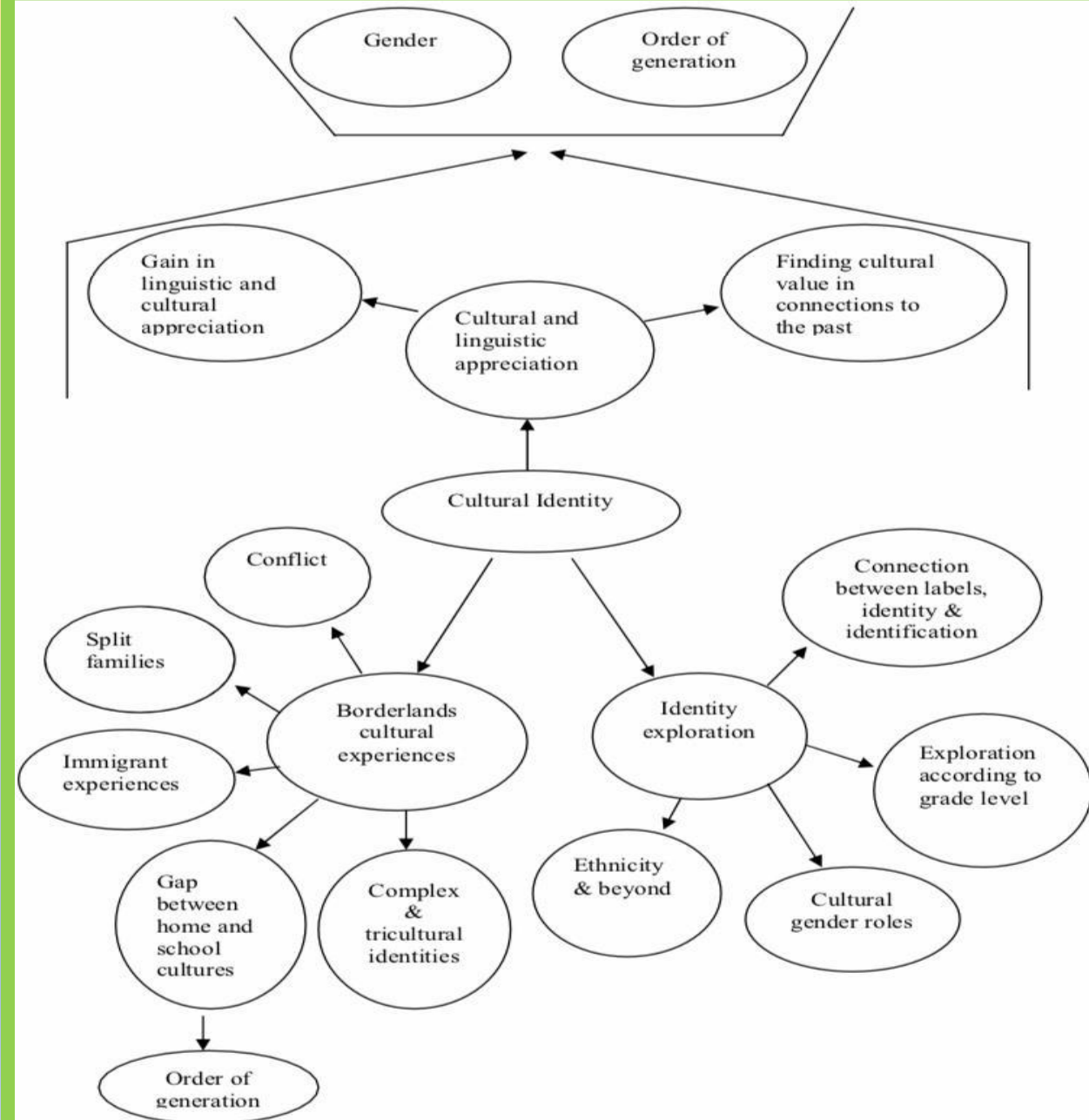
- **Reader/Writer Identity:**

- Resistant reader; semi-resistant reader; non-resistant
- Resistant writer; semi-resistant writer; non-resistant writer

# Cultural Identity Exploration

My Dissertation  
(p. 93)

<https://www.truejustice4youth.org/post/using-borderlands-literature-to-increase-interest-in-literacy-in-the-heritage-language>





Agency



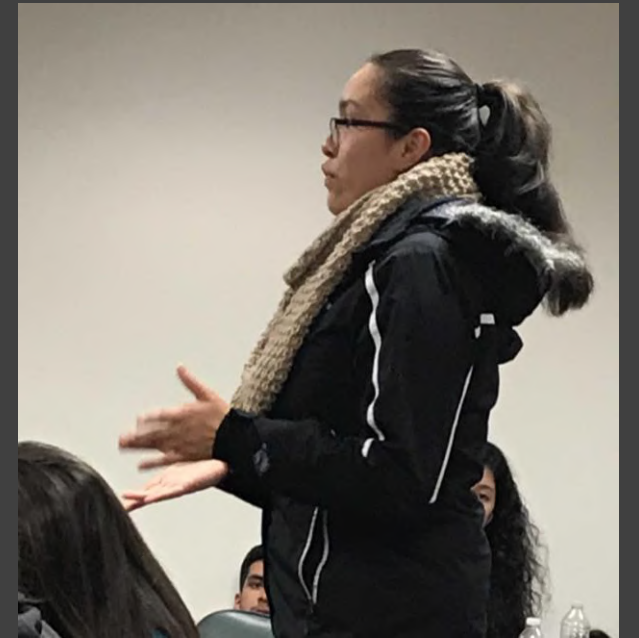


**S.T.A.R. Members Speak About Impact of their  
Community Service**



**Justice High School's S.T.A.R.  
(Student Training in Accountability & Responsibility)  
Lobby at the House of Delegates in Richmond, Virginia  
January, 2019**









**S.T.A.R. Students' Training On  
How to Lobby  
by Giancarla Rojas**

**January, 2019**





School agents who empower, facilitate, bridge.

Equal stakeholders in community involvement as prevention, enrichment & restoration. Community service a must in curricular and extra-curricular.

More authentic involvement using personal, historical, cultural, linguistic strengths.

Critical Theory & Critical Literacy focus on agency, not victimization.

Empowerment

Active, non-reactive

Frontal lobe & decision-making

Hopeful

Accountability, behavioral agreements

Involvement, restoration based on uniqueness

Growth spurt

More altruistic



Spanish Student: “I want to learn to write and read more in Spanish next year. Latin culture is strong, I want to read more, write more, those accents”.

Gang Member: Visited Maya civilization, out of gang life, child psychologist

Incarcerated Student: Second fastest to graduate from Boys' Home

A black and white photograph of a person standing on a mountain peak with arms outstretched, overlooking a vast mountain range under a cloudy sky. The person is silhouetted against the sky, and their arms are spread wide in a gesture of triumph or achievement. The landscape is rugged and expansive, with multiple mountain ranges visible in the distance. The sky is filled with dramatic, layered clouds, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall mood is one of accomplishment and resilience.

True Discipline,  
Discipline with Dignity

Prevention, enrichment, intervention, support, restoration (not punishment)

Community involvement and how to repair (if offense has been committed)

Reinforceable behavior agreements for accountability

Third space, Circle of Cariño in Zone of Proximal Development

Voice, development of speech/language functions

Agency, development of cognitive functions, making decisions

Curriculum demarginalizes, bridges, reflects, encourages expression and identity exploration

Critical Literary Theory

No assumptions, teaches a better way: explanation, practice, repetition and evaluation like academic instruction (*Discipline with Dignity*)

Challenges to grow rather than uses threats or rewards

Broken rules an opportunity to build community

Growth spur, more altruistic

Higher/stronger form of dignity and identity

Empathy and compassion, “cariño”

Other people’s children/young offenders could have been our own

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