## Imagination for an Imagined Nation

*A Creative Justice Approach to Learning with a Puerto Rican/Latino/a Community*

### Event Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Presenter(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Welcome and Introduction                   | Pedro Pedraza  
Center for Puerto Rican Studies,  
Hunter College, CUNY                                                           |
| El Puente                                  | Frances Lucerna  
Co-founder and Executive Director                                                |
| Arts at El Puente                          | Joe Matunis  
Co-founder and Senior Arts Facilitator                                           |
| Creative Justice Approach                  | Melissa Rivera  
Center for Puerto Rican Studies,  
Hunter College, CUNY  
Cristina Medellin-Paz  
The Graduate Center, CUNY                                                          |
Overview of Panel

The objective of this panel presentation is to introduce an approach to learning, grounded in creativity and social justice, one that emerged from a four-year participatory action research (PAR) process with a Puerto Rican/Latino community-based organization in New York City (El Puente), its small, innovative public high school (El Puente Academy for Peace & Justice), and a university-based Latino/a research institute.
Panel Presenters’ Biographies

Melissa Rivera
Melissa Rivera is an activist, artist and scholar, dedicating the last 15 years to participatory action research (PAR) projects with public schools, community organizations and a women’s maximum-security prison. Her work is grounded in PAR, developmental, women’s, and humanistic psychology, and creativity and critical theory and focused on personal transformation, community development, and social justice. She has co-developed arts and educational projects and co-authored scholarly and popular publications as well as multimedia arts products with young people, parents, teachers, and university scholars. She co-edited (with Pedro Pedraza) an academic volume, *Latino Education: An Agenda for Community Action Research* (Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005). She received her doctorate from Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Cristina Medellin-Paz
Cristina Medellin-Paz is a Ph.D. candidate in the developmental psychology sub-program at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. She currently is a Writing Fellow at Queensborough Community College, CUNY, a Junior Research Scientist at the New York University’s (NYU) Child and Family Policy Center, and a Graduate Fellow at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies (Centro), Hunter College, CUNY. Her research interests include Latino/a education, adolescent/young adult pro-social development, the socio-cultural influences on early childhood development, including teacher quality, parental and neighborhood influences, and early care and education programs. She is currently working on two major research projects: “Quality Improvement Intervention and Early Childhood Center-based Care” at NYU and “A Study of El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice’s Integrated Arts Project” at the Centro. Her dissertation is examining the quality and use of literacy supports in kindergarten classrooms and the impact it has on overall classroom quality.

Pedro Pedraza
Pedro Pedraza was the Director of Education and Language Research at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies for over 35 years, the Director of the CUNY Exchange Program and the Director of NLERAP (the National Latino/a Education Research and Policy Project), for its first decade. His research over the years has included: Puerto Rican culture, language and literacy development, Latino/a children’s after school education, New York City education reform, community development, teacher education, and national education policy. He has served on numerous community boards, such as New Visions for Public Schools, The New Press, Youth Action Program, the East Harlem Tutorial Program and others. He has published articles and chapters on language and culture, socio-cultural theory, and education reform and co-edited (with Melissa Rivera) *Latino Education: An Agenda for Community Action Research* (Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005). He received his doctoral education in sociology at Columbia University.
Frances Lucerna
Frances Lucerna is the Executive Director of El Puente (EP) and Founding Principal of El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice (EPA). She has been a pioneer of community arts and education for the past 20 years. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Education and Dance from Hunter College and Masters of Arts in Education and Supervision from Bank Street College. After dancing professionally for 13 years, she returned to Williamsburg, Brooklyn and co-founded El Puente, a community/youth development organization nurturing holistic leadership for peace and social justice. As Artistic Director of El Puente she developed Brooklyn’s most comprehensive Latino Arts and Cultural Center, providing pre- and professional training in five arts disciplines. As Founding Principal of EPA, she broke new ground on the frontier of national school reform. She has served on many councils and boards, including the Board of 651, An Arts Center (an affiliate of the Brooklyn Academy of Music), the New York State Council on the Arts, the Advisory Committee to the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, and the Community School Task Force for the White House Conference on Character Building for a Democratic, Civil Society. Her many awards include: Celebrating Success from the Children’s Defense Fund, the Brooklyn Council on the Arts’ Arts Advocate Award and the 1998 Heinz Award for the Human Condition.

Joe Matunis, Teaching Artist & Academy Art Facilitator
In 1991, Joe Matunis established the El Puente Muralistas, a group of young artists collaborating and working under his direction and leadership in designing and painting community murals. His recent project with the Muralistas includes two murals at Woodhull Hospital in Brooklyn. Joe Matunis is also a Department of Education certified Arts Facilitator and UFT Union Representative at El Puente Academy of Peace & Justice, a school he co-developed in 1993. He heads the Academy’s Integrated Arts Project, an innovative arts education model that integrates arts across the curricula. He is also a faculty professor in the Department of Arts Education at Pratt Institute of Art in Brooklyn, NY. As an artist, he has directed and led a number of national and international mural projects. In 1997, he worked with Chicago high school students to create the I’ve Got a Feeling About the Whirl’d mural funded by the Chicago Transit Authority. In 1996, he collaborated with adults coping with mental illnesses in Manchester, England and created the Safe Harbor mural for their center, MAPS. He received a 1991 City Arts Grant to work with formerly homeless youth in Bronx, NY. The mural, created in collaboration with the Bronx youth, was the inspiration for a bilingual children’s book that he co-authored, entitled Esta Casa Que Hemos Hecho/This Home We Have Made (Random House, 1992). Joe Matunis is a graduate of Penn State University (BA, 1983) and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (MFA, 1989). He was awarded the School of the Art Institute Edward Ryerson Traveling Fellowship to study fresco painting at the Maharajah Sayajiroa University in Baroda, India, 1989-90. Joe Matunis has lived and worked in the Williamsburg Southside in Brooklyn since 1990.
Paper References
