

**DEMOCRATIZING SCHOOLS FOR IMPROVEMENT THROUGH YOUTH
PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH**

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of participating in youth participatory action research (YPAR) for students, teachers, and schools. The primary data are drawn from focus groups and interviews with a total of 150 individuals involved in the YPAR program. Our findings suggest that YPAR democratizes schools and schooling experiences. Specifically, we find that participation in YPAR fosters a collaborative relationship between students and teachers that helps students see themselves more powerfully as knowledge creators, provides students with opportunities that promote their sense of agency and efficacy, influences teachers' practices and pedagogy to be more student-centered, and changes the nature of conversations happening at schools. Taken together, these findings suggest that YPAR can be a powerful way to democratize schools for improvement.

*Note: The name of the Center has been changed for publication purposes. We refer to it here as the Center for YPAR.

Keywords: youth participatory action research (YPAR), student teacher relationships, student leadership, student voice, action research

Introduction

The Center for YPAR employs youth participatory action research (YPAR) as a means to “mobilize student insights and voices to improve school culture, policy and practice” (Center, 2016). As an extension of policy and practice, we believe that YPAR is one powerful way to excavate hidden curricula in schools (Giroux, 1981; 1983; 1997). Such curricula include taken-for-granted assumptions, practices, norms, and values that unintentionally marginalize and silence non-majority students.

In this article, we demonstrate how participating in YPAR (1) fosters a special collaborative relationship between students and teachers, (2) provides opportunities that promote students’ sense of efficacy, (3) influences teachers’ practices and pedagogy to be more student-centered, and (4) changes the kinds of conversations that are happening in and about schools.

Conceptual Framework

Our conceptual framework is guided by the belief that students offer important insights to the hidden curriculum of schools. In the following sub-sections, we articulate a conceptual framework that examines the power of student voice and YPAR. We also describe the Center’s specific model for conducting YPAR in independent schools.

The Center for YPAR and Youth Participatory Action Research

The Center for YPAR has worked with schools since 2002 and has sponsored over 100 school-based action research projects since then. The mission of the center, a research collaborative between university faculty and graduate students and the faculty and students of 10 independent schools, is “to promote the widest sense of possibility and integrity for students by systematically mobilizing their voices to improve the experience of school culture, policy, and practice” (Center, 2016). It formally adopted YPAR as its primary research methodology in 2011 when it became clear to the board that insights gained through student research could provide a powerful vehicle for promoting social justice within their schools (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007, p. 2).

As a research methodology, participatory action research takes the stance that “knowledge is produced in collaboration and action: that those ‘studied’ have knowledge and must be repositioned as subjects, architects, of research” (Torre & Fine, 2006, p. 2). Expanding this to include youth, YPAR presents opportunities for students to be involved in generating social change (Powers & Allaman, 2012) by addressing concerns that are important to them that lie at the intersection of race, class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality. The method enabled students to excavate the hidden dimensions of power within their schools. In turn, this provided a foundation for developing evidenced-based interventions to alter students’ experiences of marginalization, othering, and other identity-based, restrictive scripts and norms (Bautista et al., 2013; Morell, 2006; Ozer et al., 2013). In this applied methodological approach, students are viewed as “insiders,” experts on the daily workings of their schools and are therefore best situated to suggest how school practices might be improved to create a more equitable educational environment.

The Center's approach (see Appendix 1) to conducting school-based YPAR seeks to engender (1) collaboration among various school constituencies to enhance capacity and build sustainable change, (2) meaningful youth and teacher engagement in an inquiry process, (3) focus on issues of identity formation, including gender, race, class, sexuality, and related issues of equity, and (4) cultivation of research skills and advocacy acumen among members of school communities. Done in truly collaborative and rigorous ways, this work can generate broad-based school support for change-oriented initiatives and promote passion and energy among students, faculty, and staff for improving their schools. It also can contribute to a knowledge base for educators seeking to learn about stakeholder-driven school change.

Thus, the Center's priority is to work with students and the teachers who support them as they: (1) cultivate the research skills necessary to collect and analyze data as they consider important questions about their experiences in schools; (2) engage school leaders and the larger community in a critical consideration of findings that bear upon specific aspects of climate, policy, and practice in relation to youth identities; and (3) develop and implement strategies for change based on this action-oriented research. Its efforts are focused on co-creating conditions that foster student interaction, student-faculty engagement, student leadership development, and non-constraining norms around gender, race, class, and sexuality.

In practice, the Center's approach to YPAR varies in how it is conceptualized and enacted at each school. However, each member school generates at least one YPAR team each year that is led by at least one school-based faculty member, whom we refer to as the school coordinator. All school coordinators come to the university at the beginning of each school year for a center-led retreat that prepares them for the upcoming year. The retreat includes workshops related to teaching students YPAR, developing and conducting YPAR projects, focusing students on issues of social equity in the school, and tactical planning for the year. Each school is matched with a university-based scholar and an advanced doctoral student. They work with each school in a contextualized fashion that includes school visits, video conferencing, conference calls, and emails. In addition to this active and ongoing support, the Center has developed a YPAR curriculum that includes a variety of resources that schools can use and adapt based on their local contexts.

Research Methods

Very few studies assess the impact of YPAR processes. Ozer and Wright (2012) find YPAR has a positive impact on student autonomy, power, and voice in two public secondary schools. Watkin (2013) assessed her YPAR work with high school students in an independent school setting, and found increased feelings of agency, belonging, competence, discourse, and efficacy, consonant with Mitra and Serriere's (2012) framework of civic engagement. No other studies, to our knowledge, describe or assess the impact of conducting YPAR in independent school settings.

Situated in the traditions of YPAR (Cammarota & Fine, 2008) and practitioner inquiry (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), this study draws on qualitative methods (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Maxwell, 2013) to examine how participation in YPAR impacts students, teachers, and the broader school community. The data analyzed includes 25 focus groups, 12 individual interviews, three student panels, and a review of archival documents. Focus groups were conducted with all groups of stakeholders: we

conducted 18 student focus groups with 96 students from member schools, six focus groups with 39 school-based faculty, and one focus group with six heads of school. All focus groups were heterogeneously grouped so that participants could interact with individuals from other member schools. Individual interviews were conducted with four heads of school, three members of the Center's leadership team, and five members of the Center's staff. The study involved a total of 150 participants.

Focus group and interview instruments were constructed to determine individuals' experience with the Center's YPAR model. They were semi-structured and open-ended so that participants could share their experiences and discuss across contexts with each other. Focus group instruments included approximately three questions for adult focus groups and five questions for student focus groups to ensure there was time for participants to engage with each others' thoughts and ideas (see Appendix 2 for the guiding questions). Interview instruments included approximately 10 questions that asked participants to reflect and discuss various aspects of the Center's YPAR experience. Focus groups and interviews lasted for approximately one hour each. All focus groups and interviews were audio recorded and professionally transcribed.

Data analysis was formative and summative. The process began with multiple read-throughs of the data set, enabling the research team to develop familiarity across the data and to construct preliminary codes. During and after this process, researchers composed analytical memos to capture emerging lessons, insights, and questions (Maxwell, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Memos discussed preliminary codes, such as *changing school culture*, and included illustrative quotes for these. Throughout, data analysis was inductive, and during first-round coding, emic codes were applied. Summative analysis resulted in thematic coding, employing codes such as *change agent/student voice*, *skill building*, and *broadened awareness*. As we turned our codes into themes and findings, we created memos that mapped our data onto our findings (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To stay grounded in the data, research memos discussed illustrative quotes for each code.

Validity strategies were employed throughout the study to enhance its rigor and reliability. Primary strategies include member checks, seeking alternative explanations, and triangulation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For example, as preliminary findings were developed throughout the three-year duration of the study, we presented these findings to stakeholder groups to determine if our interpretations resonated with their experiences. In addition, throughout formative and summative analyses, we deliberatively attempted to determine alternate explanations for our interpretations, and documented these possibilities in memos shared amongst the research team members. We also enhanced the validity of our study by triangulating our findings through the use of multiple data sources (interviews, focus groups, and archival data) and multiple investigators (six researchers) (Schwandt, 2015).

Findings

This study's findings suggest four prominent themes related to the impact of participating in YPAR. First, participation in YPAR appears to transform student-teacher relationships from their traditionally hierarchical structure to a more collaborative one. Second, participation in YPAR promotes opportunities for students' sense of efficacy and broadens their perspectives through research. Third, YPAR directly and indirectly improves teacher

practices and pedagogy by encouraging both participating and non-participating faculty to be more open to listening to and seriously considering student perspectives. Finally, data suggest the Center's approach to YPAR is helping to shift the conversations at schools so that student voice is prioritized.

Cumulatively, we believe these different levels of impact can affect school cultures overall, initiating a fundamental shift in how students are positioned, and position themselves as well as in the practices and processes of education. Helping schools to wrap their arms around their historic, but largely taken-for-granted curricula for identity formation by elevating students as legitimate and institutionalized sources of knowledge creates a new kind of community of practice. Democratizing education by making space for significant student contributions makes students efficacious partners in the learning community.

YPAR Transforms Student and Teacher Relationships from Hierarchical to Collaborative

Our findings suggest that YPAR, through the development of a community of practice that centralizes student knowledge, transforms the relationship between students and teachers from one that is hierarchical to one that is collaborative. It also makes the relationships closer as students and teachers come to understand each other better as they build new kinds of knowledge together. School coordinators, heads of school, and student researchers discussed ways they believe these relationships, established in YPAR settings, are harder to achieve in traditional classroom settings.

Our analysis indicates that a range of factors explain these unique relational possibilities: the collaborative emphasis and engagement that YPAR engenders, the shift in power dynamics between students and teachers that happen as a result of this kind of knowledge and process democratization, and the less structured and stressful academic environment of YPAR research team meetings. Analysis indicates that because teachers and students are positioned as co-inquirers in the Center's research process, they become part of a community of practice (Wenger, 2000) that facilitates and supports an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), helping practitioners view themselves, their peers and colleagues, and their schools in ways that foster more energized and equitable engagement.

An important component of this relationship between students and teachers is that they work together toward a common goal as co-inquirers who shape the direction of their applied research. This means that from the beginning of their team formation, the rules are quite different in terms of power and process than what they are all used to in their daily school lives. As an example, consistent with the democratic philosophy of YPAR, students are the ones who decide upon and shape the research topic, goals, and guiding questions. This shifts the inherent power dynamic and interrupts the “expert-learner binary” (Ravitch & Tillman, 2010) that is so commonly built into school culture and relational dynamics between teachers and students. Students now also are positioned as experts about student experience. Here is how one student conceptualizes it:

I think it's cool how teachers and the students, they both want the same thing in [the Center for YPAR]. It's an interesting unifier. It's more of a team than just teachers and

students. Both working towards the same goals to help the school. You can work together much more easily and bounce ideas off each other.

This student reflects on a common theme heard across different data sources. Because students and teachers are genuinely collaborating, students often comment that they “see teachers in a new light” and “treat them like I would my fellow researchers.” Our findings suggest that these relationships are valued and valuable because students feel more “equal” to their teachers, both in the eyes of their teachers and school leaders who approach the students and teachers as a flat, (rather than hierarchical) team. This shift of power dynamics is significant in terms of how students come to see themselves and experience their identity and agency (as individuals and as a team) because it interrupts their more general academic positioning as subordinate (with its concomitant feelings of powerlessness).

The relationships with their teachers in these YPAR settings also are transformed because the YPAR team does not experience the “pressure,” as many student participants discussed, “of having to get a grade.” The pressure of grades is in some ways a proxy for asymmetrical power relationships, an issue that YPAR projects engage with directly, in research focused on pressure, or indirectly, as part of egalitarian methodological and team-building processes. YPAR, we find, becomes a physical and metaphorical space in which students can not only give voice to their stress and the myriad pressures they feel but can also develop relationships with teachers outside of the common school stressors and evaluative, performance-related pressures. A student succinctly states:

Not having the pressure of being graded and being able to say what you want to say without having to worry about what your teacher is going to think and how it relates to the topic as a whole is more freeing for the conversation as a whole. It makes for much more interesting results and questions being asked.

Regardless of the focus of their particular YPAR project, school teams overall are able to address these pressures because the democratic and egalitarian processes inherent to YPAR are part of the structural conditions that mediate student experience as co-researchers and knowledge-generators.

Our analysis also suggests that a combination of factors—leveling the playing field between faculty and students, developing a less stressful environment, and foregrounding student knowledge and experience—has created the conditions in which students and teachers are able to develop different and more multi-dimensional relationships. This student’s comments sound a note heard often in our data:

I think it gives me the opportunity to talk to teachers in ways that I wouldn’t have otherwise. Usually in our meetings, we have one or two teachers sitting in and listen, or sometimes comment. We can ask them questions, and converse with them. That wouldn’t happen if I wasn’t in [the Center].

While developing meaningful relationships between students and teachers is fostered at each of the center’s schools, YPAR can reframe the experience in deeper ways. This student speaks to both points:

I think I'm really lucky at my school because it's so small, so we are able to develop really close relationships with the teachers. Over this year, our team has two faculty advisers because one went on maternity leave. Both of them I was able to know in a life that was kind of outside a classroom setting. Even having those close relationships with teachers because of the small classes, it's...focused around that course... For your English class, it would be an English teacher. YPAR...gives you a chance to see these teachers in a new light. Both of my [YPAR] advisors are English teachers. Being able to talk to them [about things] that are totally not about English, and seeing their perspective on things that happen in the classroom, compared to our student perspective, it's very interesting.

Although member schools value authentic relationships between students and teachers, our analysis indicates that YPAR-type collaborative relationships are not as likely to happen in other classroom settings given the demands on time, for teacher and student performance, and because hierarchy is built into almost all other schools' relationships. Indeed, school coordinators describe how these YPAR generated relationships are unique and meaningful to them. For example, during focus groups, school coordinators express that they have not had the same kinds of open and honest "conversations [with students] in any other venue yet, as a teacher." The YPAR environment, from school coordinators' perspectives, allows teachers "to fully be the teacher that I would want to be." They say that this is related to how the typical norms surrounding the roles and expectations of students and teachers, including the authoritarian role of the teacher, disappear in the YPAR environment.

YPAR Promotes Students' Sense of Efficacy and Broadens Students' Perspectives Through Research

Our findings suggest that participating in YPAR affords students unusual opportunities to develop critical thinking skills through real-world experiences; or what some educators call praxis (Freire, 1970). The qualitative research skills that students learn foster a mindset of critical thinking and provide students with a set of carefully selected tools they can use to investigate issues that are important to them and their schools. This is what Freire (1970, 1993) refers to as "conscientization," which is an ideal of education that involves building in-depth, contextualized understandings of oneself in the world and of fostering independent thought, critical collaboration, and collective action. This approach to teaching and learning allows students to uncover important inequities as they are lived by students in their school. YPAR teams' exploration into such social and political realities includes identifying oppressive institutional contexts and the experiences of domination and subordination that they engender. It also means engaging with and addressing these forces at the individual, group, and institutional levels. For Center students and teachers, this kind of critical approach is nourished in the microcosm of schools, but obviously has broader relevance. This student describes the way that YPAR research methods helped her and the other YPAR team members dig more deeply into the hidden dynamics of gender:

I think it gave me the opportunity to think about something and try and fix something that I didn't realize is there before... I really was not aware of how severe the gender

mental health gap was at my school and I think now that ...it's something that I can actually work towards changing.

As this comment illustrates, being a part of the YPAR teams gives students an opportunity to engage in research that both explores, and in some cases uncovers, issues and then enables them to make changes based on the insights and understandings gained from their inquiries.

While developing critical thinking skills, students also begin to see themselves and others in new and different ways. YPAR processes explicitly teach students about the value of listening to multiple, complex, and diverse perspectives. For instance, one student stated,

learning about different people's perspectives and how important those perspectives are, and to get a range...of diverse perspectives, was really helpful. In gathering information and trying to make a change, you kind of want to hear from other people's voices, not just one particular group or person. I think that was an important takeaway for me.

Indeed, both students and heads of school state specifically that YPAR helps students understand the value of seeking out, engaging with, and challenging their own views based on a range of alternative perspectives. In fact, they argue that it helps students to discover, perhaps for the first time, that alternative perspectives on the reality of their school contexts even exist. In the interviews and focus groups, students regularly discuss how YPAR has opened their eyes to seeing their school communities differently. As this student says:

I think diversity is something that can be put on the back burner at my school. Not only diversity in race, but also, I learned this year, diversity in socio-economic status. That was a really eye-opening experience for me...That came through a lot on the surveys from both the parents of the students and the students themselves. There's something underneath the surface that still needs to be discovered. When you look at a student or when I look at a student I can't tell what socio-economic status they are. Everyone dresses the same at my school or very similar to one another...It's made me a lot more interested in diversity from different aspects. Not just race, but gender and socio-economic which are the ones that aren't talked about as much at my school.

As students learn about the range of lived experiences in their schools, many want to contribute to improving equity instead of just "moving on." As one student contends, it has "given [us] a stronger commitment to helping the issues with diversity and inclusion at our school." This leads students to describe how being a part of YPAR teams encourages them to consider carefully how to address important issues by developing a better understanding of how others are affected through research. This quote captures this well:

For me, I think it's inspired me to make a change. If I see something that I don't really like, or if I see something that the students at my school aren't really agreeing with. It's helped me to represent the student body at my school by gathering research and finding their perspectives. I think it's really helped me to do that.

Through their participation in YPAR, students become confident that they have the research skills and the capacity to work effectively in teams that together can enable them to make constructive changes as they grow into adults.

For the rest of my life I'll be able to use the skills I've learned through YPAR and [the Center]. When I'm out in the working world. If I ever need to collaborate with somebody, I'll know what works for me and what didn't work for me during this whole process. That's one of the big things I think.

Students repeatedly emphasized that they learned much about teamwork through their YPAR experiences. Part of the teamwork skills involve, as this student described, learning "to grow and roll with the punches, and know that we're not always going to agree on certain things." The acquisition of these skills was articulated in a variety of ways, all centering on the students beliefs that they know how to generate valid knowledge that can be used to improve their schools. To the students, an important dimension of those skills was learning to appreciate multiple perspectives, even when some may run contrary to their own views. This student describes how the multi-year aspect of YPAR contributes to this kind of learning:

As a person, I think I've learned how to work with a team better. It's like a long-term multi-year projects. I haven't had experience doing that before. I found that helpful. There's always new problems, different opinions [and] different arguments about what to focus on or not. That was some valuable experience for me. I learned that compromise is important.

The teamwork lessons that students learn are directly related to the qualitative research skills that students develop. These include learning to develop researchable questions, designing a study, collecting and analyzing data and then learning ways to share, get feedback on, and ultimately disseminate findings to their broader school communities. Students, research coordinators, and heads of school commented on the fact that qualitative research skills are not commonly taught at the high school level and that they should be since they are valuable for students' conceptual and character development. Students state that their schools offer Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) research experiences, but do not typically offer ways to learn qualitative research.

In addition to learning research and teamwork skills, students learn to make formal presentations to the entire student body, the faculty, the Board of Trustees, the Center's Annual Roundtable, and at national research conferences. For some student participants, these presentations represent their first opportunity to speak publically. In the process, they begin to become professionals. Our data suggest these kinds of YPAR opportunities affect students' feelings of confidence with consequences both in and outside of the YPAR setting. For example, one school coordinator discusses how she noticed that participation directly impacted one student in her history class:

It was very empowering for [this student]. You could see [how] he got stronger and more confident. I taught him last year, and I am teaching him again this year. I am seeing a huge change in his approach in class where he has found that voice. He feels

more comfortable sharing what he is thinking. So, it is really exciting for the kids because they believe they can change things. I see a difference in their approach to things.

More broadly, school coordinators also describe how students become knowledge generators and “become experts in the topic” and develop a “competence” that translates into “confidence” and “social capital” among their peers (also see Watkin, 2013).

Participating students are not the only ones affected and positively influenced by engagement in their schools’ YPAR projects and practices. According to participants, YPAR directly and indirectly improves school practices and pedagogy more broadly.

YPAR Improves Teacher Practices and Pedagogy

Finally, we found that the Center’s YPAR model directly affects participating teacher practices in positive ways. By reconceptualizing the relationship between students and teachers, teachers are able to engage as thought and action partners with students. Our data suggest a direct and meaningful impact on faculty members who participate on school-based YPAR teams. Heads of school describe how they have come to see and appreciate how YPAR impacts teachers. Heads of school state that they see a difference in how teachers think about schooling practices, especially about developing alternative ways to engage students and to leverage student knowledge and expertise. Participating teachers themselves comment that YPAR improves their overall approach to teaching and aids in their professional. One school coordinator noted that YPAR is “a more authentic, less didactic, by design, way of getting at some really important ideas.”

Heads, teachers, and students tell us YPAR helps foster richer relationships between students and teachers. In particular, teachers describe how their practices are more effective when they are less authoritarian and allow room for student voice and agency. One school coordinator and school dean describes how YPAR influences other ways that he interacts with students:

It’s powerful to be able to be allies with kids rather than being perceived as their adversary, and I think more effective. I’m much more effective if I’m sitting next to a kid engaging in a reflective conversation and listening than I am sitting behind my desk with the hammer of whatever.

Indeed, both teachers and administrators who participate in YPAR state that their interactions with students have been directly affected by their participation in the Center and represent a fundamental shift in their approaches to interacting with students.

In addition to a direct impact, participants report that there is also an indirect impact on other faculty who may begin, according to one Head of School, as “curious” about what they hear about the YPAR experience and then transition to “involvement and ownership.” In their outreach to other faculty, they enact a necessary action step in the YPAR approach. Beyond this impact on teachers, many coordinators discuss how the Center infuses their school and creates a new (and better) kind of data-driven culture. One coordinator also captured how YPAR has begun to infuse other projects, saying, “I’m bringing the [The Center] and kind of

action research mindset to other things I'm doing on committees" and in the school "lexicon." A head of school asserts that he finds that the Center's use of YPAR has made his entire faculty much more "data-driven" in their approach to professional choices and practices. He states, "Now faculty ask about the evidence for their colleagues' claims." Another Head of School describes a shift in pedagogy and curricula to evidence-based approaches, based on collaborative inquiry conducted by and with the schools' community members:

If we take our time and we continually do it well, this will, over time become a bigger more massive part of the school and as our curriculum changes more to a research curriculum instead of a, 'I'm going to listen, take notes, take a test curriculum,' I think this will become more powerful.

YPAR has the potential to help schools develop curricula that are inquiry-based and to model what it looks like to partner with students as important contributors in the production of usable, contextualized, student-centered evidence. Broadly, the Center's approach to YPAR seems to be creating an evidence-based, inquiry-based mindset among teachers and staff.

Impact on Schools: Changing the Conversation to Value Student Voice

Finally, our study found that YPAR helps to directly and indirectly affect the nature of conversations that are occurring at participating schools. One school coordinator commented,

I think we're becoming more of a culture of conversations... Now, I think we're actually having more substantive kinds of conversations, and it's going on in advisory group, it's happening in the hallways, it's happening in a lot of places where people are actually talking facts and saying, 'Where did you learn that? How do we know that?' I think that's particularly empowering for students of color who in past years have felt like they didn't have a voice within our school.

Conversations at schools are changing as students and teachers help to uncover and disrupt the ways in which some historical practices have been oppressive, deficit-oriented, and marginalizing to students. YPAR students believe that they have the agency to improve their schools. This same agentic sentiment is expressed by school coordinators. One states: "We're becoming disruptors of the historic voice and the historic narrative."

Our data suggest specific examples of ways that the policies and practices at schools are changing to value and incorporate student voice. By participating in the Center's YPAR approach, schools demonstrate a commitment to learning what students really think, feel, know, do, and need. Because of YPAR, "every student will have some interaction where they're asked...about their experiences at the school."

Other teachers in the school are impacted as YPAR research teams disseminate their findings to the school community. According to one Head of School, as other teachers appreciate the perspectives shared by YPAR students, teachers may incorporate "the voices of students" in their teaching and overall pedagogical stance. This shift in teachers' perceptions, to seeing students as "experts of their own experiences" (Jacoby & Gonzales, 1991; Van Manen, 1990), helps them to understand students as active meaning makers and culture

changers. It also helps teachers to deepen their own inquiry stance on pedagogical practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

Discussion and Conclusion

Taken together, our findings suggest that the Center's YPAR model has the power to open up opportunity structures in schools, especially with respect to pedagogy and classroom practice, and to shift them to a more student-centered, inquiry-based, community of practice orientation. Our data suggest that YPAR helps to position students (and have them position themselves and each other) as transformational change agents. The topics of research, the goals and processes of research, and who conducts the research set YPAR apart from more traditional research methods (Bautista et al., 2013; Morrell, 2006).

In this view of democratic education, students and teachers collaborate, define, and address problems of serious concern to them and share in the hopes and joys of working together (Freire, 1998). A reciprocal, as opposed to asymmetrical, relationship begins to develop when students are respected and treated as partners in the process of discovering knowledge (Freire, 1998). Thus, in order for YPAR programs to be successful, the school leader must create spaces to allow this type of democratic education to occur. This space must be cultivated both ideologically and practically. This means that a leader must commit to the principles of student voice and shared leadership. In addition, it means that a leader must value this work by deliberately making time for it during the school day.

The Center's approach to YPAR achieves this democratizing effect in a variety of ways: by generating collaborative relationships between students and teachers; providing students with opportunities to develop research skills, cultivate leadership acumen, and think differently about themselves, their schools, education, U.S. society, and the world; and shifting teachers' pedagogy and practice to be more actively inclusive of student voices and complex identities. From topic selection to research design, students develop confidence and research skills, while the school culture shifts to value student voice, which in turn changes the relationships between teachers and students and has important implications for students' sense of efficacy and agency. Pluralistic (Ozer et al., 2013; Wong, Zimmerman, & Parker, 2010) and democratic (Freire, 1998; Johnson, 1995) relationships between students and teachers are essential in service to the Center's mission that schools become better, safer, and more resonant places for all students. The realignment of adults and students in their relationships—with adults shifting from positions of relative power and control to ones that engage and offer a resource orientation and collaborative approach (Wong et al., 2010; Zimmerman, 2000)—is an important part of the YPAR process, with broader implications for a school's pedagogical practice, policy reform, and youth development.

This study indicates that the processes and practices of YPAR are working in concert to make these participating schools more equitable, democratic, and humane places. Specifically, our data suggest that the Center's approach to YPAR fosters collaborative relationships between students and teachers, provides students with opportunities to cultivate critical thinking skills while promoting their sense of agency and efficacy, and positively influences school practices and pedagogy to be more inclusive and student-centered. For these ideals to be successfully implemented, school leaders and programs that prepare them should

consider ways to teach leaders to value student voice and ways of including students in decision-making processes.

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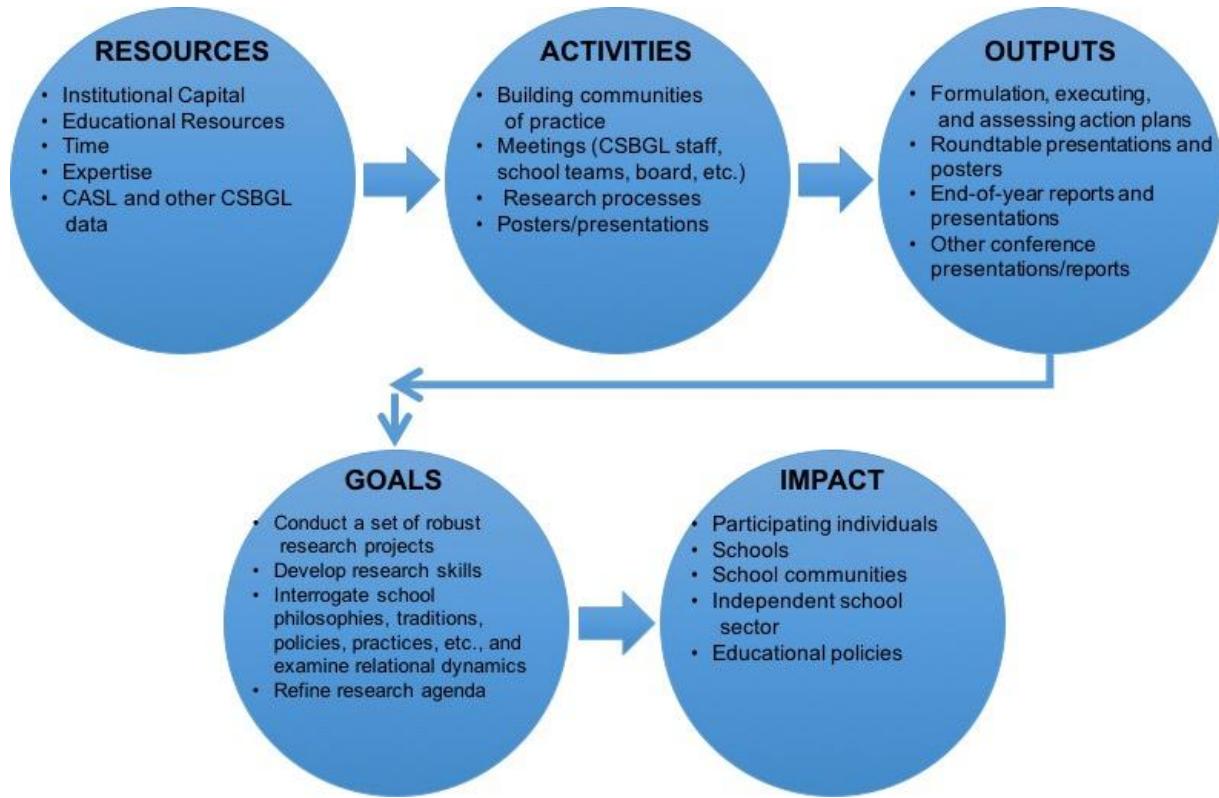
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Appendix 1
 Center for YPAR Change Logic Model



Appendix 2
Selected Interview and Focus Group Questions

Heads of School

1. Briefly describe how you see the Center in relationship to your school's mission and vision.
2. What is your role in the Center?
3. What impact have you seen in your school as a result of participating in the Center?
4. How does your investment in the Center advance your strategic agenda?
5. How would you ideally envision the Center impacting your school?
6. How can or how does the Center model impact learning in other spaces at your school?
7. What do you see as the challenges or barriers to the Center's impact at your school?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

School Coordinators

1. Has being involved with the Center impacted your identity as an educator? We would like to hear if it has, and if so, how.
2. Have and how has your involvement in the Center impacted your pedagogical practices?
3. *If not discussed above*, ask coordinators to discuss how they believe students have been impacted from participating in the Center?
4. Do you experience competing expectations (e.g., to your head, to students)? If so, how do you balance these?
5. What are the best strategies you have found to promote student agency and your own agency in this work?

Students

1. We would like to hear, broadly, what has been your experience with the Center?
2. Are there ways in which the Center has affected you personally? If so, what are they?
3. What is the primary thing you have learned from participating in the Center?
4. Has the Center given you opportunities that you might not have otherwise had? If so, can you give a specific example of these opportunities?
5. We would like to hear about your relationships with the Center staff. What are these like?