What Happens When YPAR Moves into the Classroom? A Study of Teachers' Understanding of the Epistemology of Youth Participatory Action Research

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A Study of Teachers' Understanding of the Epistemology of
Youth Participatory Action Research

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Dedication

For my first and best teachers: my mom and dad.

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Abstract

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is an epistemological stance premised on the belief that young people can and should participate as researchers in an inquiry-based process designed to critique and take action against oppression. Over the past two decades, university-based researchers working largely outside of school settings have documented inspiring YPAR work. As a result, YPAR is gaining the attention of U.S. public school teachers, an increasing number of whom are implementing YPAR in core academic subjects with students. To date, however, few studies have examined the beliefs and experiences of teachers who implement YPAR as pedagogy with students in classrooms, and no study has done so across a wide range of contexts.

In my study, I interviewed 28 current or former U.S. public school teachers who have experience implementing YPAR with students in core academic classes in order to determine how they think about the work. The teachers taught in grade levels ranging from fourth to twelfth grade, across multiple subjects (e.g., English, history, science), and in 24 different schools located in nine large urban districts across the United States. In my analysis, I examined how the teachers converged with and diverged from each other in their understanding and enactment of the epistemology of YPAR. Further, I compared teachers' beliefs and experiences to what leading university-based researchers have written about the epistemology of YPAR in academic texts.

Most teachers in my study, like virtually all university researchers, believe that YPAR must be critical in nature, centering issues of power and oppression in the work. Additionally, the teachers believe that action is an epistemological requirement of YPAR; however, they diverge on the nature and priority of action, similar to university researchers. Further, the teachers gave substantially more control and choice to students in setting the

research agenda and driving the process than university researchers. Finally, a third of teachers asked students to engage in individual YPAR projects – an approach which has yet to be captured in the academic literature. The findings from my study provide insight to adults engaging youth in YPAR inside and outside of classroom settings.

Chapter 1: Introduction

"[A] central goal [for my class] is for students to really understand how their lives are shaped by systems, and how their reality is shaped by systems of power and privilege and oppression, and with that understanding to develop a consciousness around transformation and see themselves as actors of change . . . . I really wanted to make [the final projects for the class] feel more relevant and more authentic, and I had heard about YPAR through a friend. I mean, I love the idea of people being the knowledge producers around an issue that relates to them directly, and then through that process of knowledge production, [people] developing solutions or action steps. . . . [To] develop your own perspective through the information and data you gather on your own, that idea is really powerful, I think. Very empowering."

– Grace[1], 10th grade humanities teacher who implements YPAR in her classroom

"YPAR represents a systematic approach for engaging young people in transformational resistance, educational praxis, and critical epistemologies. By attaining knowledge for resistance and transformation, young people create their own sense of efficacy in the world and address the social conditions that impede liberation and positive, healthy development. Learning to act upon and address oppressive social conditions leads to the acknowledgement of one's ability to reshape the context of one's life and thus determine a proactive and empowered sense of self. The intended consequence of YPAR is praxis and thus changes of consciousness that allow the young person to perceive him/herself as capable of struggling for and promoting social justice within his or her community."

– Dr. Michelle Fine and Dr. Julio Cammarota, in *Revolutionizing Education* (2008, pp. 9-10)

In the above quotes, similarities exist between how Grace, a teacher in an urban public school, and Drs. Michelle Fine and Julio Cammarota, university-based researchers, describe Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). Both believe YPAR empowers young people to create knowledge in order to transform oppressive conditions, while also developing their critical lens and sense of agency. However, teachers like Grace, who implement YPAR in core academic classes in public schools, work in substantially different contexts and have received different professional preparation than most university-based researchers, who tend to engage young people in YPAR outside of school settings. In my

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[1] Grace is a teacher in my study, though this is a pseudonym. All teachers in my study were given the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms. In cases where teachers had no preference, I chose for them.

dissertation study, I set out to determine how teachers like Grace understood the

epistemological approach of YPAR and enacted it in core academic classrooms in public

schools, as well as whether their beliefs and approaches differed from university researchers

working primarily in community-based settings or on college campuses. I begin by

examining the epistemology of YPAR below and then contrasting it with the ways

knowledge is often conceptualized in U.S. public schools.

The Epistemology of YPAR

YPAR is not a *method* of conducting research, as several leading university-based

YPAR researchers have written (Caraballo, Lozenski, Lyiscott, & Morrell, 2017; Fine, 2008;

Kirshner, 2010). Instead, it is an epistemological stance on what knowledge is and how

knowledge is created, specifically *who* can create knowledge. The epistemology of YPAR

contends that youth possess important and unique knowledge, expertise, and insight – or

epistemic privilege (Campano, Ghiso, & Welch, 2015) – that can and should be centered in a

participatory process of knowledge creation. YPAR is as much a political statement about

who has the right to conduct research as it is an epistemological stance, challenging adultist[2]

conceptions of what research is and who can be a researcher (Fine, 2009; Wright, 2015).

The epistemology of YPAR is also a political stance[3] in that embedded in its

epistemology are issues of *why* we create knowledge – or *for what purposes* and *to what ends* – in

addition to *how* we create knowledge. Those who adopt an epistemological stance consistent

with YPAR believe that the purpose of research is to illuminate and interrogate systems of

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[2] Wright (2015) explains, "Adultism refers to a set of assumptions, attitudes and beliefs that young people are inferior to adults in terms of their abilities, needs, perspectives and concerns, and these notions are embedded in practices, policies, behaviors, social institutions and systems" (p. 19).

[3] This should arguably read "explicitly political," as numerous scholars of research approaches (e.g., Luttrell, 2010; McCorkel & Myers, 2003) have argued that all research, regardless of epistemology, is informed by the researchers' positionality and worldview. Therefore, all research should be considered to be "political," even if those politics are often hidden behind claims of objectivity and neutrality.

power and oppression, consistent with the critical research tradition out of which YPAR

emerged (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Caraballo et al., 2017; Mirra, Garcia, & Morrell, 2016).

Further, unlike most epistemological approaches, action is actually embedded into the

epistemology of YPAR. In other words, research must be directly linked to action in a

YPAR approach where research is undertaken for the expressed purpose of taking action to

change systems of oppression now, not at some point down the road (Duncan-Andrade &

Morrell, 2008). As such, YPAR eschews principles of objectivity or neutrality; instead,

research is viewed as a political act.

In sum, most of the leading university-based YPAR researchers who have written

about the epistemology of YPAR coalesce around some combination of these six tenets:

YPAR (1) is critical in nature; (2) takes an inquiry stance; (3) is situated in the lives of young

people; (4) draws on the unique knowledge and expertise youth possess; (5) features robust

youth participation in the process; and (6) is designed to raise awareness about issues of

injustice and to create social change (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell,

2008; Kirshner, 2010; Rodríguez & Brown, 2009; Valenzuela, 2016).

The Epistemology of Schooling

The epistemology of YPAR, where youth are positioned as experts who have the

capacity to change systems of oppression, stands in direct opposition to what most U.S.

public schools embrace as knowledge, as well as how and why it is created – or what I am

referring to as *the epistemology of schooling*. In the epistemology of schooling, student learning –

or knowledge creation[4] – is conceived of and structured as individualized, binary (e.g.,

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[4] In most schools, student learning is not often conceived of or referred to as *knowledge creation*, nor are beliefs about how and why students learn considered to be *epistemology* by most educators. However, I argue that more of us in education need to start thinking and speaking in these ways in order to better understand and name the ways teaching and learning happens in most schools at present, as well as to imagine and (re)theorize other more radical, liberatory, and humanizing possibilities like YPAR.

"right/wrong answers"), capable of being standardized and measured, and subject to rewards and punishments (e.g., grades, diplomas, dropout/pushouts). Teachers are positioned as the experts who possess knowledge that students need to acquire, and rarely is learning undertaken for the purpose of creating change inside or outside the school walls. In fact, most schools claim to be apolitical spaces, embracing classically liberal values of equality, diversity, and inclusion of all viewpoints.

Though the epistemology of schooling existed well before 2001, the neoliberal education reform movement in the post-NCLB era has pushed into overdrive attempts to reify, codify, and incentivize the epistemology of schooling.[5] Consistent with neoliberal capitalism in the larger society, the primary if not sole purpose of learning in schools is to prepare individuals with a set of (21st century) skills that they need to "compete in the global marketplace."[6] Learning is positioned as competitive, meritocratic, and economic in nature, which unsurprisingly mirrors the values that underpin systems of oppression in the U.S. (e.g., capitalism, patriarchy, settler colonialism) and, hence, reifies these systems rather than challenging them.

YPAR Moves into Public Schools

As an alternative to the epistemology of schooling and a response to neoliberal education reform, a number of university-based researchers over the past two decades have

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[5] See the work of scholars critiquing schooling and restrictive conceptions of learning published well before 2001, such as Gloria Ladson-Billings, Jean Anyon, Antonia Darder, Lilia Bartolomé, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, and Ivan Illich, just to name a few. Additionally, though I have not come across anyone using the specific term *the epistemology of schooling* in my reading of the academic literature, I make no claims of developing this term myself and instead give credit to the scholars above and many others.

[6] Those embracing this neoliberal educational goal of learning in order to "compete in the global marketplace" come from both sides of the mainstream political aisle, including Democrats like Arne Duncan (https://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/education-and-international-competition-win-win-game-secretary-duncans-remarks-council) and Republicans such as Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, whose department's mission statement reads as of May 2018: "Our mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access" (see the bottom of the department's homepage: https://www.ed.gov/).

embraced the epistemology of YPAR and partnered with young people on PAR projects[7] (Caraballo et al., 2017; Mirra & Rogers, 2016). Because of its action-oriented epistemology, these researchers also see YPAR as a way to take collective action with youth against deepening inequity in U.S. society. Through YPAR, young people along with their adult collaborators have interrogated their in-school and out-of-school experiences, presented research findings and demanded change at city council meetings and prestigious conferences like AERA, and even influenced changes in policies and practices at the local and state level (e.g, Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Kirshner, 2010; Mirra et al., 2016; Wright, 2015). Additionally, university researchers are building a body of research demonstrating a link between YPAR and various literacy, math, and other academic outcomes (e.g., Van Sluys, 2010; Yang, 2009), including through experimental quantitative study designs (e.g., Ozer & Douglas, 2013; Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, & Marx, 2014).[8]

As a result of these YPAR successes along many lines, an increasing number of university-based researchers, who have done this work with youth largely outside of K-12 school settings, have been promoting YPAR as a pedagogical approach that teachers should adopt with students in classrooms. Several books have been published in the last few years promoting YPAR as pedagogy that can be used in schools (e.g., Kirshner, 2015; Mirra et al., 2016; Valenzuela, 2016; Wright, 2015). As university researchers present inspiring YPAR work in books and academic articles, at education conferences, and in digital spaces[9], more

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[7] Throughout the paper, I use the terms YPAR, PAR, yPAR, CPAR, or PAR with youth interchangeably, unless otherwise noted. This reflects the diversity of terms university researchers have used in the academic literature.

[8] The Cabrera et al. study measured the impact of Tucson's Mexican American Studies program, which used YPAR as a key component.

[9] The Berkeley YPAR HUB is one of a number of examples online, as both university researchers and the youth they work with increasingly use digital spaces to share work: http://yparhub.berkeley.edu/

and more public school teachers are learning about YPAR and attempting to undertake the amazing work they see university researchers and youth researchers doing.

What has been left largely under-researched, under-theorized, and unsaid, however, is what happens when YPAR moves into core academic classes in public K-12 schools, where the epistemology of YPAR frequently bumps up against the epistemology of schooling. In other words, the experiences of academics and youth working largely outside of regular classroom settings may not transfer to teachers and students working within them. Public schools have always been challenging places to undertake extended, youth-centered, inquiry-based, critical work designed to create authentic change, and they have only gotten worse in two decades of neoliberal education reform (Cannella, 2008; Macedo, 2013; Patel, 2015). Further, public school teachers receive different preparation than university professors trained in doctoral programs, as most teacher preparation programs do not engage teachers in extensive research training or in critical pedagogy (Macedo, 2000; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). On the other side of the coin, university-based researchers who attempt to do this work in schools could be learning from teachers who are doing YPAR in schools, as they are experts in both pedagogy and navigating oppressive school structures. At present, however, we know little about how teachers understand and engage in the epistemology of YPAR with students in classrooms because their voices have been left largely out of the academic literature. If there are differences in teachers' and university researchers' understanding and approaches, it could help the field (re)theorize the epistemology of YPAR, particularly as more and more advocates are encouraging teachers to engage in YPAR as pedagogy while also doing the work themselves in schools (e.g., Irizarry & Brown, 2014).

To date, no study has captured what a large number of teachers across a variety of settings believe about the epistemology of YPAR and how, if at all, those beliefs diverge from university-based researchers working largely outside of schools.[10] In an attempt to bring teachers' voices into the discussion, I conducted a study in which I interviewed 28 U.S. public secondary school teachers who have implemented YPAR with students in core academic classes (i.e., not electives). In my study, I illuminate what teachers said they believed about the epistemology of YPAR and how they enacted those beliefs in core academic classes, examining how teachers converged and diverged with each other. Further, I demonstrate the ways that teachers' stated beliefs and actions converged and diverged with what university-based researchers have written in the academic literature. I thus address the following research questions in my study:

1. How do teachers with experience implementing YPAR with students in core academic classes in U.S. public schools understand and enact the epistemology of YPAR?

2. How do teachers' beliefs about and enactment of the epistemology of YPAR converge and diverge with those of university-based researchers working largely outside of school?

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[10] Kirshner (2015) conducted a study of teachers implementing a curriculum that included YPAR as one of its components (chapter 5). The study examined the experiences of seven teachers in a single school district, at times exploring what the teachers believed about epistemological components of YPAR, e.g., the critical and action-oriented pieces. However, the epistemology of YPAR was not the sole or arguably primary focus of the study. Rubin et al. (2017) focus substantially more on teachers' beliefs about the epistemological underpinnings of YPAR and how that translates into teachers' pedagogical practices in schools, but the study focused on only five teachers in two high schools in the same state. Further, in both studies, teams of university-trained researchers provided substantial support to the teachers (e.g., co-planning, co-teaching, a graduate course for participating teachers), which undoubtedly informed and shaped the teachers' epistemological beliefs about YPAR, whereas the vast majority of teachers in my study had no support in implementing YPAR from university-trained researchers.

Dissertation Structure

It is critically important to note at this point that in comparing teachers' beliefs about the epistemology of YPAR to those of university-based researchers in my study, I am not attempting to make evaluative claims about one group understanding it *better* than the other group, nor am I holding up university researchers' understanding of YPAR as *true* or *ideal* YPAR. Instead, I place these two groups in conversation with each other simply to determine if they understand the work *differently*, and whether the epistemology of schooling shapes teachers' understanding of YPAR and constrains their ability to enact it with students. In areas where teachers understood and enacted YPAR's epistemology in ways largely consistent with university researchers, those of us advocating for YPAR as pedagogy in schools can be encouraged and continue to push as we have. However, in places where teachers understood and enacted the work differently, then we need further research to interrogate why that is, which will help us better understand what is possible when YPAR is undertaken by teachers with students in classrooms. Further, we need new theorizing on how to prepare and support teachers to undertake YPAR as pedagogy, which will likely mean radically reshaping what we do in teacher preparations programs and on-the-job professional development. Finally, I argue that teachers have things to teach the Academy about the epistemology of YPAR and how it can be enacted in different settings, which should lead university researchers to reexamine what may seem established and settled. I conclude my study by providing both direction and new areas of inquiry for the field, which will hopefully be undertaken through increased communication and collaboration between

university-based researchers and teachers, consistent with a participatory epistemological approach.[11]

Before thinking about where YPAR can go next, however, let me lay out the path of where YPAR is currently as demonstrated by my study. In chapter two, I discuss my methodological approach in much greater depth, including my analytical strategy. Next, I provide three findings chapters. In each findings chapter, I explore teachers' understanding and enactment of YPAR through the lenses of different epistemological components of YPAR that emerged from my study, comparing teachers' beliefs to what university researchers have written in the academic literature.

In my first findings chapter (chapter three), I examine whether teachers in my study believed that YPAR should be *critical in nature* and *action-oriented* and, if so, what it looks like to do critical, action-oriented work in spaces like schools. Next, in chapter four, I determine whether teachers believe YPAR should be *youth-led* as well as what they think it means for youth to participate in setting the research agenda for a YPAR project. Finally, chapter five explores what teachers believe about *collective work* in a YPAR process, and how those beliefs shaped how they structured both adult and youth roles in the research process.

The structure of each findings chapter is as follows: 1.) a literature review of what university researchers have written about the epistemological themes under investigation; 2.) an analysis of what teachers in my study said they believed and enacted with respect to the epistemological themes; 3.) a discussion of the ways in which teachers' views converged and diverged with each other and with university researchers' views, as well as the role, if any, that the epistemology of schooling played in shaping teachers' views and approaches.

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[11] While I did not include student voice in this study because it did not help me answer my specific research questions, I absolutely see youth as key collaborators in better understanding YPAR as pedagogy, as well.

I conclude in chapter six by laying out next steps for the field based on the possibilities, tensions, and questions that teachers raise in my study about implementing YPAR with students in core academic classes in U.S. public schools.

Chapter 2: Methodology

I initiated this study to uncover how teachers working in core academic classrooms in U.S. public schools understood the epistemology of YPAR, and to analyze how their beliefs and approaches converged and diverged with those of university-based researchers working largely outside of regular classroom settings. Since my study focuses on what teachers believe and how they understand their experiences, it is phenomenological in nature whereby I am attempting to describe "the meaning for several individuals of their **lived experiences** of a concept or a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 57).

To understand what the teachers in my study believe, I conducted interviews with 28 public school teachers across the country about how they understood YPAR and enacted it in core academic classes. Additionally, I collected teaching artifacts (e.g., lesson plans) from those who were willing to share them in order to understand in greater depth how they enacted their beliefs. In order to determine how teachers' beliefs about YPAR's epistemology converged with and diverged from those of university-based researchers, I analyzed and assembled together what the leading university-based YPAR researchers have written about the epistemology of YPAR, both in theoretical pieces and through projects they have documented within the academic literature. I define "leading university-based YPAR researchers" as those who have written three (3) or more articles and/or one (1) or more books on YPAR in which they include a discussion of the epistemology of YPAR explicitly.

As previously stated, my approach in comparing K-12 teachers' beliefs about the epistemology of YPAR to those of university-based researchers is not meant to be evaluative in any way. To reiterate, I do not think university researchers enact some "ideal" or "true" form of YPAR which can or should be used as a standard against which we can or should

hold teachers. In fact, as I found in closely analyzing their beliefs and approaches for my study, university researchers are far from a monolith in their thinking and approaches. My methodological approach of examining the convergences and divergences among the teachers in my study and between the teachers and researchers is meant to bring to light new understandings about what YPAR might look like within and outside of core academic classrooms in schools, with researchers potentially learning from teachers in addition to teachers' work being informed by researchers.

Finally, while youth voice is essential to any YPAR study, I did not include it in my study because my study is not *a YPAR study itself.* Instead, it is a qualitative study where my lens falls primarily on teachers' beliefs and experiences implementing YPAR as pedagogy in public schools. In turn, the inclusion of student voice would not have helped me to answer my research questions about how teachers understand the epistemology of YPAR.

Participant Recruitment

I recruited experienced public school teachers who have implemented YPAR with their students in core academic classes (i.e., not electives). Because the number of teachers implementing YPAR in core academic classes at present is likely small relative to the teacher population as a whole, the only restrictions I put on the eligibility for teachers were that they:

1. had taught for three or more years, and
2. had facilitated at least two or more YPAR projects in a core academic course in a public middle or high school.

I wanted participants to have taught for three or more years to avoid confounding the understanding and experiences of implementing YPAR in public school classrooms with the challenges of being a novice teacher. In requiring teachers to have facilitated two or more YPAR projects, I attempted to separate out the understanding and experiences of

implementing YPAR in public school classrooms with the challenges of employing any unfamiliar pedagogy for the first time. Finally, I attempted to limit my sample to middle or high school teachers because my area of expertise and experience is secondary schools[12], and different structures and practices are often employed in elementary schools (e.g., self-contained classrooms where one teacher is responsible for teaching all core subjects).

In recruiting teachers, I drew primarily on personal networks of teachers, university-based researchers, and other educators, including education activist groups with whom I organize (e.g., Teacher Activist Group Boston, Education for Liberation). Additionally, I reached out via email to university-based YPAR researchers whose work I had read but whom I did not know personally, asking them to promote my study to colleagues and former students. Finally, I used social media, including Facebook and Twitter, to try and reach even more teachers. In doing so, I created a WordPress site that I and others could easily link to in social media messages that contained information about my study (Appendix A). At the end of my post on the WordPress site, I linked to a Word document version of a more formal recruitment letter (Appendix B).

I began recruiting teachers in January 2016 and ended recruitment in October 2016. I stopped recruiting when I felt I had met Seidman's (2006) definitions of *sufficiency*, whereby I had a sufficient number of participants so that others outside the sample could connect to the experiences of those within it, and *saturation*, whereby I had spoken with enough participants that I was no longer discovering new information by adding new participants.

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[12] I spent six years as middle school teacher in a public school in Cambridge, MA, and I have spent close to a decade providing professional development to middle and high school teachers across disciplines in Massachusetts and Georgia.

Sample

My final sample consisted of 28 current or former teachers who had implemented YPAR within classrooms in twenty-four (24) different schools across nine (9) large urban cities across the U.S.[13] I had intended my sample to include only current or former teachers who had taught in public schools (not charter or private schools), implemented YPAR in core academic courses (not electives), and conducted two or more cycles of YPAR. However, in a few cases, teachers did not meet one or more of these requirements, which I had not realized until the interview had started in most cases. Exceptions include the following: 1.) four teachers taught in non-profit charter schools; 2.) two teachers implemented YPAR in elective courses that students chose to take; and 3.) one teacher had participated in only one YPAR cycle.

That said, I chose to keep these teachers in my analysis because: 1.) they had interesting and important insights into the epistemology of YPAR; 2.) the conditions these teachers were working in were similar enough to those of the teachers meeting all the criteria that cross comparisons could be made; 3.) sometimes the conditions were even more restrictive for these teachers than those who met all the criteria (e.g., two of the four charter school teachers taught in No Excuses charter schools); and 4.) in the instances where these teachers had different, less restrictive conditions in which they were working, the differences led to enlightening comparisons in that they showed what might be possible if constraints were removed in regular public school settings. In turn, I am sidestepping the debate about whether charter schools are public schools for now, and I refer to all of the teachers in my study as "public school teachers."

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[13] In an effort to protect anonymity, I refrain from listing specific cities and school districts.

Additionally, one teacher had only implemented YPAR within a classroom setting with fourth and fifth grade students, but I kept him in the sample because he had facilitated numerous YPAR projects with middle and high school students in afterschool and summer programs. Therefore, my sample ranged from a teacher of 4th graders to a teacher of 16-24 years-olds in an alternative charter school, though most of the teachers (25 out of 28) taught in either middle school (grades 6-8) or high school (grades 9-12).

Finally, I attempted to recruit teachers across all disciplines that are considered to be core disciplines by most schools (i.e., English, history, science, and math); however, only one science and no math teachers responded to my calls to participate. I speak to this phenomenon in my analysis at several points in the study. For more details on the sample, see Appendix C.

Finding teachers to participate in the study was challenging because the number of teachers engaging their students in YPAR in core academic classes is small at present relative the teaching population as a whole.[14] This is the primary reason why my sample of teachers does not meet the requirements I had set perfectly, and also likely one of the reasons why my sample is severely underrepresented in math and science classrooms. That said, I still maintain that my sample meets the requirements of *sufficiency*, in addition to *saturation*, since my sample includes the voices of teachers from a wide range of grade levels, courses, geographic locations, school districts, and types of schools (e.g., from arts-based magnet schools to No Excuses charter schools). Most who teach or have taught in urban public

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[14] This is changing of course, which I explained in chapter one, as more teachers learn about YPAR and more university-based researchers and teacher educators promote it as a pedagogical practice. For example, Valenzuela (2016) writes about the National Latino/a Education Research and Policy Project's (NLERAP) Grow-Your-Own Teacher Education Institutes (GYO-TEI) initiative which launched in 2009 and is preparing teacher candidates to use YPAR as a pedagogical approach for use in schools with students in various hubs across the country.

schools and maybe even in any public schools except those in the most elite settings will likely see many of their own experiences, goals, challenges, and opportunities reflected in the teachers in my study. Those in higher education institutions who study, support, and partner with schools and teachers will also recognize many if not all of the teachers in my study, as well as the settings in which these teachers work.

Data Collection

My primary means of data collection came through a single, semi-structured interview with participants that ranged from 37-97 minutes, with the typical interview lasting between 60-90 minutes.[15] I conducted these interviews in-person, over the phone, or via videoconferencing, and I audiotaped the interviews in full.

I had started off my study wanting to understand what teachers believed about both the epistemology of YPAR and what they considered to be "core practices." In turn, I developed and used a protocol (Appendix D) that was based on what leading university-based YPAR researchers had written in the academic literature about the key epistemological components of YPAR, as well as the typical practices and challenges they faced in doing this work. My protocol was also informed by what I had learned through a pilot study where I partnered with two teachers who implemented YPAR projects in core academic classrooms in public schools. In turn, in the interviews I asked teachers to express what they believed to be the key epistemological features and core practices of YPAR, while also speaking to specific pedagogical practices and YPAR projects that illustrated their beliefs.

In May, after I had conducted fourteen interviews, I revised my protocol (Appendix E) to reflect some of the themes I had heard emerging from interviews and to focus more

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[15] Only one participant's interview lasted less than 50 minutes because the teacher was short on time and the connection was bad. An additional four lasted between 50-59 minutes, and the rest (23/28 teachers) lasted more than an hour.

on larger epistemological ideas and values, as opposed to specific practices. I felt teachers'

responses to these questions helped me better understand my research questions, which

were shifting away from the idea of "core practices" and toward larger questions of

epistemological beliefs about why teachers think it is important to engage youth in YPAR.

Based on what teachers were saying in interviews about their reasons for undertaking YPAR,

coupled with a deeper dive into the academic literature where I was noticing some

substantial divergence among what university-based YPAR researchers believed about the

epistemology of YPAR[16], I felt compelled to explore and to understand more deeply the

larger epistemological questions related to YPAR, which in turn would help us to understand

how both teachers and university researchers enact them in practice.[17]

While my research questions began focusing more on the theoretical underpinnings

of YPAR that drive practice, their scope was narrowing by shifting away from the core

practices component.[18] This shift had the logistical benefit of asking teachers fewer

questions overall as well as fewer questions about the specific and often numerous processes

they and their students engaged in, which was helpful in the handful of interviews that lasted

under an hour. Additionally, this sharper focus made my subsequent analysis more effective

in that I was able to dive more deeply into why teachers undertook YPAR with young

people and how that informed their practice, as opposed to being mired down in what were

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[16] I will explore these divergences amongst the university researchers in much greater detail in the following four chapters.

[17] I should note that I did not avoid discussion of practices when teachers brought them up, and discussion of practices helped exemplify and illustrate what they said they believed. This shift was more like a shift on a spectrum of emphasis, as opposed to a binary separation.

[18] I am no longer convinced I believe in the concept of "core practices," which seems too reminiscent of "best practices," which implies standardization and universality. I think different contexts require different practices, though different practices can be informed by the same epistemological principles.

often simple "count" questions such as whether each teacher in my study asked their students to do a literature review before developing data collection tools.

Additionally, two of the 28 teachers in this study came from a pilot study I had done where I partnered with the teachers and their students on three separate YPAR projects. While I did not ask these two teachers the exact same questions as the other 26 teachers because the pilot study had a somewhat different research question and focus[19], the questions I asked them were similar and their responses often spoke to the research questions I am trying to answer in my current study.

I transcribed each interview in full. Before, during, and after each interview, I wrote field notes about the setting and experience of the interview. Further, at the conclusion of each interview, I wrote a profile of each participant based on initial interpretations of what they told me about their beliefs about the epistemology of YPAR. Finally, I wrote ongoing memos about recurring themes across participants as I conducted more interviews; these memos drove the changes I made to the interview protocol mentioned above.

A secondary form of data collection came from asking participants for any teaching artifacts they were willing to share, e.g., lesson plans, class readings, materials used to support students through the process, publicly available student work[20]. Fourteen teachers shared artifacts with me. Four other teachers used the same curriculum as another teacher in my study who had shared it with me. One additional teacher used a curriculum that was publicly available. So, in total, I had teaching artifacts for 19 of 28 teachers in my study. That said, the artifacts ended up playing a very minor role overall in the analysis I share in

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[19] I focused more on what teachers believed to be the successes and challenges of implementing YPAR in a core academic classroom.

[20] I did not have IRB approval to collect any student work, but some teachers pointed me to work students created that was publicly available via the web.

the next four chapters, which may be partly a result of my research question shifting away from core practices – where, for example, lesson plans might be key to providing insight – and toward larger epistemological questions. That said, excerpts from these documents were important in a handful of spots in my study.

Additionally, I sent the interview transcripts to participants asking them to provide me with any corrections or changes they wanted me to make. Finally, I sent emails to a few participants when necessary, asking for clarity on parts of their interviews that may have been confusing or incomplete.

Analytical Strategy

In my analysis, I conducted a multi-step process to determine: 1.) what individual teachers in my study said they believed about the epistemology of YPAR; 2.) how teachers in my study converged and diverged with each other in their stated beliefs; and 3.) how teachers' stated beliefs converged and diverged with what leading university-based YPAR researchers have written about the epistemology of YPAR. The first two foci of analysis allowed me to answer my first research question, while the third spoke to my second research question:

1. How do teachers with experience implementing YPAR with students in core academic classes in U.S. public schools understand and enact the epistemology of YPAR?

2. How do teachers' beliefs about and enactment of the epistemology of YPAR converge and diverge with those of university-based researchers working largely outside of school?

To begin the process, I wrote initial profiles of teachers' stated beliefs after each interview, as previously mentioned. After I had five interviews, I conducted a round of

coding for each teacher using etic codes from an initial codebook of what university researchers had written about the epistemology of YPAR in the academic literature (Appendix F). During this process, I also began creating emic codes based on teachers' beliefs about YPAR's epistemology and their experiences implementing YPAR in core academic classes that had yet to be captured in the literature (e.g., *Research model - individual* and *Epistemology – required activism*). Additionally, I wrote an extensive thematic memo about the initial themes and patterns that had emerged across the first five interviews. I shared this memo in a meeting with my dissertation committee members who provided feedback on the effectiveness of my data collection in addressing my research question and the accuracy of my initial interpretations of the data. After this meeting, I continued to write thematic memos to identify emerging patterns and themes throughout the data collection process and had periodic meetings with my advisor about my analysis, which shifted the focus of my research questions and analysis, as previously mentioned.

Once the data collection was complete, I continued to code any remaining individual teachers' interview and artifact data using the etic and emic codes I had developed through earlier, initial coding. I also continued to add new emic codes when necessary, which required me to go back and re-code and re-analyze the previous interviews. At the same time, I was writing thematic memos identifying and interrogating major themes and patterns across teachers that were emerging from the coding process. I shared these memos about major themes for analysis in my study with my advisor as well as my writing group of colleagues who were either recent graduates of my doctoral program or fellow doctoral students, consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) *peer debriefings*.

From these thematic memos, I chose to focus my analysis on teachers' beliefs about four major epistemological components of YPAR: 1.) the critical and action-oriented nature

of YPAR (which I combined into one chapter since I saw them as being connected); 2.) the youth-led nature of YPAR and what it means for youth to participate; and 3.) the collective nature of YPAR and the interaction between adults and youth in the process. I chose these themes for several reasons. To the first two components (critical and action-oriented nature), I found through my coding of the data that teachers frequently talked about YPAR as being critical in nature, while also discussing and struggling with the action-oriented component of YPAR.[21] Then, I found through a closer reading of the academic literature that there was substantial divergence among university-based YPAR researchers on the perceived role of youth and adults in a YPAR process, which influenced my choice to examine the youth-led and collective components of YPAR's epistemology. Further, teachers had developed a new model of conducting YPAR – individual YPAR projects – which had not been captured in the academic literature to date and which I felt needed to be interrogated further, particularly as this model seemed to stand in opposition to what most university researchers believed about YPAR being a collective endeavor.

These four epistemological components then serve as the focus of analysis for each of the three findings chapter of my study. I begin each chapter by establishing what leading university-based YPAR researchers have written about the epistemological themes under analysis in the chapter. Then, I use what the university researchers have written as a framework to identify, organize, and analyze what teachers said they believed and how they

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[21] For example, I applied the code "critical in nature" 265 times, which was the most frequently used code of the ones based on the six major epistemological tenets of YPAR (see also Appendix F). Additionally, I applied the code "action-oriented" 204 times, which was the third most behind "relevant to youth's lives" (261) and ahead of "inquiry-based" (158), "robust youth participation" (124), and "draws on unique knowledge and expertise" (52). I also developed nine additional sub-codes for action because teachers often spoke about struggling with issues such as what counts as action, whether action-oriented outcomes should be prioritized, what happens if the action fails, and what it means to compel students to take action, among other issues. I see a critical approach and action as being qualitatively different but also related to each other, which is why I collapsed these two principles together.

enacted those beliefs. Throughout each chapter, I compare and contrast teachers' beliefs with each other, as well as how their beliefs converge and diverge from what university researchers have written. In the final chapter of my study, I conclude by using these convergences and divergences as the basis for a discussion of how those who study YPAR might interrogate the epistemology of YPAR even further, which can inform the practice of YPAR both inside and outside of core academic classrooms in schools.

Limitations

One of the main limitations of my study is my data collection approach that relied primarily on interviews, where I strove for a wide range of teacher voices to determine their thoughts on the epistemology of YPAR as opposed to going into great depth with a few teachers over time. However, I argue this limitation is mitigated to a large degree for two reasons. First, as previously mentioned, my research questions shifted away from the fine-grain particulars of what teachers did in their classrooms – where observational work would be a stronger approach to data collection – to larger questions of why teachers took on YPAR with students, to which interviews are well-suited. Second, my study is exploratory in nature, where I am primarily trying to shine a spotlight on issues facing teachers implementing YPAR in core academic classrooms that have not been captured in the academic literature thus far. In turn, my study can provide guidance for future studies that capture in greater detail the experiences of a small number of teachers over time using a different methodological approach.

Additionally, since I had a substantial amount of data to choose from among the more than 30 hours of interview data, there is a risk that I could have fallen prey to what Maxwell (2013) refers to as *research bias*, or selecting only the data that fit my preexisting ideas about the topic under investigation (p. 124). I took several steps to address this issue. First,

as I mentioned above, I shared my process and analytic memos with my dissertation committee and my writing group at several key points to receive feedback on my data collection process and my interpretations of the data, consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) *peer debriefings*. Additionally, I employed Maxwell's strategy of *respondent validation* by following up with participants about pieces of their interview that were unclear and to determine if any interpretations I was unsure about were accurate. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, my study focused not only on the convergences of teachers' beliefs among themselves and the university researchers, but also a major portion of the study focuses on divergences in teachers' and university researchers' thinking. In doing so, I satisfied Maxwell's call to find "discrepant evidence and negative cases" (p. 127), as well as his suggestion to engage in *comparison* with findings on groups doing similar work in different settings, i.e., university researchers doing YPAR outside of school settings.

Finally, the data I used to make interpretations have limitations based on the imperfect nature of my sample in meeting my criteria for participation, coupled with my methodological approach that relied substantially on self-reporting of events that are filtered through participant biases and potentially fuzzy remembering of past events. I tried to mitigate the latter by triangulating teachers' statements with examples from teaching artifacts. However, equally if not more important is the fact that I am not trying to generalize from my sample to the larger population of teachers who implement YPAR in core academic classrooms. Again, my study is largely exploratory in nature since teachers' views on the epistemology of YPAR have been left largely out of the academic literature. Therefore, I am simply trying to raise ideas, tensions, and questions for new and further interrogation by the field in promoting and/or undertaking YPAR as pedagogy in core academic classes in public K-12 schools. Ultimately, instead of adhering to strict, positivist interpretations of validity

that do not translate well to critical, constructivist, qualitative research, I want my study to satisfy the criteria of being "useful and believable" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 122) to audiences concerned with YPAR as pedagogy in schools, including other teachers and university researchers, and I believe the steps I took above allowed me to achieve that goal.

How My Positionality Informed My Analysis

I am both an *insider* and an *outsider* along many dimensions that undoubtedly influenced as well as informed my interpretations of the beliefs and reported experiences of the teachers in my study (L. Brown & Potts, 2005). I have been a graduate student in academia for close to a decade, studying YPAR deeply for over five years. Additionally, I have partnered with three different teachers and their students on four different YPAR projects, which drove me to undertake this study to capture more teachers' voices and experiences. Therefore, I am an insider to the *university-based YPAR researcher* community, albeit I am not a *leading YPAR researcher* based on my own criteria.   Further, I was a 7/8th grade ELA teacher for six years in a public K-8 school, though I have not been a full-time teacher in nearly a decade so my insider status as a teacher might be questionable in the minds of many current teachers. However, I have worked with teachers in a variety of ways throughout my doctoral program, so I have retained my connection to public school teachers and teaching since leaving the K-12 classroom. These insider positions most certainly influenced the way I viewed teachers' statements about their beliefs and practices, hopefully providing deeper insight in most cases relative to other university-based researchers who may not have this background and experience.

Further, I am an insider of virtually every dominant social group, including but not limited to being/being positioned as white, cisgender male, able-bodied, straight, legally

authorized to be in the U.S., English-fluent, adult, and a settler on colonized land.[22] While I did not ask participants to disclose their racial/ethnic, gender, ability/disability, or any other identity because I did not intend to analyze differences in beliefs based on these identity markers, the way I interpret the beliefs and experiences of the teachers in my study who are people of Color[23], women[24], disabled, undocumented, etc. is undoubtedly influenced by my positionality. I did my best to recognize and wrestle with my potential biases in order to represent the teachers' values, beliefs, and stories as truthfully as I could, given the limitations that come with trying to fully understand across boundaries.

Finally, as a former insider to the public school classroom, I remember how incredibly difficult teaching is, and I want to take an opportunity to say that I have a tremendous amount of respect for the work that all of the teachers in my study are doing with young people and communities. I also remember how busy teachers are, and the fact that these teachers took an hour or more out of their schedules to share their beliefs and experiences with me in the hope of improving our understanding of YPAR speaks volumes to how deeply they care about their craft and education for liberation. Analysis of humanizing cultural work like teaching can easily slip into dehumanization if not done carefully, and I made my best attempt to represent the teachers in my study with the dignity, empathy, and admiration they deserve. I hope that this comes through to the reader.

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[22] While I am positioned by society as an insider within these socially constructed groups (and given the associated material benefits, privileges, and access), I pledge no allegiance to any of these groups and I want to be part of a movement that disrupts and dismantles all forms of oppression based on difference.

[23] Over half of the teachers in my study would likely be positioned as people of Color in U.S. society, even though I do not know for sure how they identify.

[24] Only a third of the teachers would likely be positioned as cisgender women in U.S. society, which is arguably another limitation of my sample given that approximately 80-90% of teachers in the U.S. are women, per leading estimates.

Chapter 3: The Critical and Action-Oriented Nature of YPAR

Introduction

When considering the epistemology of YPAR, it is as important to consider *why*, or for what purposes and to what ends, knowledge is created as it is to examine *how* knowledge is created. This stands in contrast to many other epistemological approaches that often claim to take apolitical stances based on principles of objectivity and neutrality. YPAR comes out of a critical research tradition where research is undertaken with the explicitly political purpose of interrogating various forms of oppression in order to take action to change them now, not in some distant future (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Mirra et al., 2016; Valenzuela, 2016). Leading university-based researchers partnering with youth through YPAR have, by and large, fully embraced the critical, action-oriented epistemology of YPAR as evidenced by their writing, which I will demonstrate in greater detail later in this chapter.

Before doing so, however, it is important to recognize that these university-based YPAR researchers often engage with youth through YPAR on college campuses or within community-based settings. These spaces have always been more open, albeit relatively speaking, to critical, activist-oriented work than public K-12 schools in the U.S. This is even more true in the post-NLCB era, where learning and teaching (i.e., knowledge creation) inside of schools is becoming increasingly standardized by outside actors who espouse, incentivize, and often demand neoliberal conceptions of and purposes for knowledge creation (Cannella, 2008; Fox & Fine, 2013). This epistemology of schooling promotes individual achievement within a competitive, ostensibly meritocratic school system and mirrors the foundational principles of white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, and settler colonialism in the U.S. (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Patel, 2015; Tuck, 2009). In short, the

epistemology of schooling stands opposed to the critical and action-oriented principles of YPAR, which raises questions about whether teachers working in schools can adopt them.

Further, university-based researchers receive different epistemological training in research doctoral programs on the nature and purposes of knowledge creation than most teachers, who are rarely trained in social science research or in critical pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Macedo, 2008). While not all university-based researchers are trained as critical, action-oriented social science researchers, the leading academics writing about YPAR almost certainly are, as evidenced by their epistemological approaches to partnering with youth via critical action research. On the other hand, while a small number of teacher preparation programs are starting to train teachers in YPAR (Valenzuela, 2016), the vast majority of teachers working in schools at present likely received little to no training in critical, action-oriented social science research.[25]

Therefore, as YPAR increasingly moves from outside school settings into core academic classrooms in schools, it is important to determine whether teachers adopt the same critical, action-oriented epistemological stances as the university-based researchers who are increasingly encouraging them to practice YPAR as pedagogy (Mirra et al., 2016; Valenzuela, 2016; Wright, 2015). The epistemology of schooling coupled with the different professional preparation of teachers may work together to shape and perhaps constrain what teachers value and attempt to achieve when engaging in YPAR with students in schools. To date, however, no one has illuminated the beliefs about the critical and action-oriented stances of YPAR across a large sample of teachers working in different settings and

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[25] For example, I completed two teaching masters programs at two different institutions and was not exposed to the concept of PAR/YPAR in either. The two teachers I partnered with in a previous study who were implementing YPAR with their students had also not been taught about PAR approaches in their teacher preparation programs (Buttimer, Forthcoming).

contexts.[26] In this chapter of my study, I set out to determine what teachers in my study believe about doing the critical, action-oriented work of YPAR in what are decidedly non-critical spaces in most cases: public K-12 schools. Additionally, I examine how the teachers converge and diverge in their views from what university researchers believe who typically engage in YPAR outside of public school classroom settings. To begin this work, I lay out in detail what leading university-based YPAR researchers believe about both the critical and the action-oriented nature of YPAR.

What Do University Researchers Believe About the Critical and Action-oriented Nature of YPAR?

YPAR is Critical in Nature

Virtually all of the leading university based YPAR researchers[27] believe that YPAR should be critical in nature, meaning that an essential component of the work is to critique systems of power and oppression. In nearly every piece of writing from these university researchers, they locate their work within the critical research tradition out of which YPAR emerged. Often cited is the foundational work of Paulo Freire[28] who, through literacy campaigns grounded in PAR, attempted to empower impoverished rural agricultural workers to fight against class-based oppression in Brazil. Freire was working from a Marxist

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[26] As previously mentioned, Kirshner's (2015) study and Rubin et al.'s (2017) study began this work in two settings, and my study builds and expands upon this work.

[27] As a reminder, I define "leading university-based YPAR researchers" as those who have written three (3) or more articles and/or one (1) or more books on YPAR in which they include a discussion of the epistemology of YPAR explicitly.

[28] I am starting with Freire when discussing the foundations of PAR/YPAR for several reasons: 1.) Freire was one of the first thinkers, and is arguably the most well-known, to theorize and write about PAR as pedagogy, i.e., *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and the focus of my study is teachers using PAR as pedagogy; 2.) this theoretical tradition is the one I have studied the most; and 3.) several of the leading university-based YPAR researchers, as well as the teachers in my study, cite Freire as a foundational thinker and refer to a "Freirean approach." That said, as one of the teachers in my study rightly points out, people have been doing PAR-like work that interrogates oppression and takes action to change it well before Freire in the 1960s (e.g., the example the teacher used was Harriet Tubman), and I understand and respect that others may start the story of YPAR's foundation in a different place.

standpoint that centered capitalist oppression in its analysis, but many of today's YPAR

researchers use additional critical frameworks such as Feminist Theory, Critical Race Theory,

Queer Theory, Critical Disabilities Theory, and decolonizing approaches grounded in

Indigenous[29] theorizing (Cammarota, Berta-Ávila, Ayala, Rivera, & Rodríguez, 2016;

Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Mirra et al., 2016).

Consistent with these radical[30] theoretical frameworks and speaking to the explicitly

political stance of YPAR, Ginwright (2008) states that YPAR is "emancipatory research

which is unapologetically engaged and committed to distribution of power in order to

improve the quality of life for marginalized communities" (p. 21). Additionally, Tuck et al.

(2008) specifically name the forms of oppression that PAR/YPAR is designed to tackle,

writing that their research collective "understands PAR as *politic* – an embedded and outloud

critique of colonization, racism, misogyny, homophobia and heterosexism, classism, and

xenophobia" (p. 51). In their review of YPAR studies from the past two decades, Caraballo,

Lozenski, Lyiscott, and Morrell (2017) write that YPAR's "common purpose across

disciplines and research designs" is "to interrogate the conditions of oppression and surface

leverage points for resistance and change" (p. 312).[31]

Given the ubiquity of these beliefs among leading university-based YPAR

researchers, it is clear that they believe a critical, anti-oppressive framework is an essential

component of YPAR's epistemology. To this point, YPAR researchers Fine, Torre, Stoudt,

and Fox at the Public Science Project[32] refer to their YPAR work as *Critical* Participatory

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[29] Most often, though not always, these university researchers use theories developed by Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island (a.k.a. North America).

[30] "Radical" is used here to mean "at the root," or focusing on structural change as opposed to incremental, reformist change.

[31] The authors cite another Fine (2008, p. 215) in the last half of that quote.

[32] For more information on the Public Science Project: http://publicscienceproject.org/critical-par-institutes/

Action Research (emphasis is mine), or CPAR, to underscore the critical requirement of the work. This renaming of YPAR/PAR is intended to distinguish it from other work co-opted under the banner of participatory action research but used to uphold oppressive structures rather than to challenge them:

> Participatory action research as a methodology has, of recent times, become a fashionable technology of capitalism and imperialism, appropriated by the Right, the International Monetary Fund, the U.S. military, the for-profit charter movement, and varied development organizations to reframe hegemonic interests as if they were the interests of "the people"—in this case, "the youth." (Fine, 2012, p. 323)

Fine's distinction between a methodological approach that is PAR in name only versus the critical epistemological stance of YPAR/PAR/CPAR is shared by virtually all leading university-based YPAR researchers.

Related to the critical nature of YPAR is the belief among nearly all of these leading YPAR researchers that YPAR can and should help develop a critical stance among young people. Returning to one of the founders of YPAR's theoretical roots, Freire (1982, 2008) envisioned PAR as being designed to develop conscientizacáo[33], or critical consciousness, among the participants in the process. He believed that engaging in the ongoing praxis of PAR allowed participants to begin to "read the word" in order to "read the world" so that they can begin to "transform the world" (1970, 2005).

Consistent with this Freirean tradition, Cammarota and Fine (2008) argue that YPAR can facilitate critical consciousness by transforming the thinking of young people so that they no longer locate the causes of oppression in individuals/themselves. Instead, through YPAR, young people begin to recognize that the roots of the problems affecting them and their communities are embedded in "oppressive systems and subjugating discourse" (p. 6),

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[33] Borrowing from Torre and Ayala (2009), who themselves borrow from Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (2012), I choose not to italicize non-English words to avoid perpetuating English language hegemony and to promote and normalize writing that crosses linguistic borders.

which they then realize can be transformed. Further, in her book on creating critically

conscious teachers, Valenzuela (2016) and her co-authors (Cammarota et al., 2016) wrote

two chapters on the importance YPAR where they name conscientización para la colectiva –

the development of critical consciousness among the research collective – as one of the

guiding principles of YPAR (p. 72).

In turn, university researchers often use techniques like "problem trees", "power

analysis", and "community mapping" to give youth tools to interrogate root causes of

structural problems and to identify the powerbrokers and community-based allies who can

help them effect change. These are important analytical tools and organizing skills used by

critical action researchers and community organizers to interrogate and change oppression at

the systemic level (for examples of university researchers using these tools with youth, see:

Cammarota et al., 2016; Guishard & Tuck, 2014). Speaking to YPAR as developing critical

activist identities, Caraballo et al. (2017) point to a study by one of the co-authors, Morrell,

where he found that "as youth begin to construct identities as critical researchers, they

develop activist dispositions and seek to change their environment" (p. 319).

Action as an Epistemological Imperative

Virtually all of the leading university-based YPAR researchers agree that taking

action is an essential epistemological component of YPAR. Returning to Freire, in the

opening paragraph in chapter three of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* where he lays out his approach

to PAR, he contends that one cannot engage in reflection (critique) without action in a truly

liberatory approach: "if [either reflection or action] is sacrificed – even in part – the other

immediately suffers" (p. 87). Following in Freire's footsteps, Irizarry and Brown (2014) state

that "PAR has an explicit goal of 'action' or intervention into the problems being studied"

(p. 64). Additionally, Cammarota and Fine (2008) write that through YPAR "students

initiate revolutionary projects to transform themselves and the worlds which they inhabit," (p. 10) which implies that YPAR is designed to change the material conditions in which young people live in addition to changing their internal worlds. Finally, Cammarota et al. (2016) argue that YPAR must be part of a larger "movement" for liberation as opposed to being "discrete sets of isolated action" (p. 72). They continue: "Because PAR is a social movement, this process of reflection allows participants to see how local projects are connected to other regional, national, and global PAR initiatives" (p. 86).

In short, these university researchers believe that taking action to create change is an essential piece of the epistemology of YPAR, not a separate add-on at the end of the research process. Of course, many researchers operating from other epistemologies would likely say that they engage in research for the purpose of creating change. The difference, however, is that immediate change efforts connected to the research is not an essential component of the process in those epistemologies,[34] as it is in YPAR (and also other forms of Action Research; see Stringer, 2007). To this point, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) write that unlike other epistemologies where "the research process ends when the last pieces of data are analyzed and published in scholarly journals or books," in a YPAR approach "the collective action is a part of the process . . .; it is a research process designed to intervene in problems, to make them go away" (p. 109). In other words, the research and the action are inseparable from each other in YPAR; as Freire argued, you cannot have one without the other. Therefore, by definition, questions related to the action component of YPAR are epistemological questions.

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[34] For example, my study is not PAR or any other form of action research. While I *hope* change will come from my research study, there are no specific actions tied to my study.

What is Action?

That said, several university-based YPAR researchers raise questions about the nature of action and whether action to change specific policies and practices should be the primary goal of undertaking PAR with youth. Tuck (2009) wrote an article called "Re-visioning Action" in which she and the young people she worked with struggled with what action is and what it can and should be in a YPAR process. Tuck clearly agrees with other YPAR researchers on the epistemological requirement of action in YPAR; she writes that action is "the very heart of PAR (indeed, the middle word!)" (p. 52). However, she argues that PAR collectives can get trapped in the "double-bind" of struggling between revolutionary and reformist theories of change when engaging in action, i.e., whether PAR collectives should fight for incremental or fundamental change, both of which have significant challenges and risks. To bust out of this binary, Tuck asks us to make an "epistemological shift" to embracing Indigenous theorizing that places greater value in the processes through which participants create knowledge (*sovereignty*), the tactics in which they engage in the struggle against oppression (*contention*), the approaches participants use to navigate their different knowledges and positionalities within the research collective (*balance*), and the ways in which participants envision themselves as connected to each other and the larger world (*relationship*).[35]

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[35] This is my best attempt at capturing the essence of complex Indigenous theories, which Tuck writes are difficult to translate to non-Indigenous people and thinking, a point that gets amplified even further when a non-Indigenous person like myself attempts to convey them to the reader secondhand. I highly encourage the reader to read Tuck's piece firsthand, and the point I am trying to make here for the purposes of my study is that university researchers like Tuck are pushing the field to think in new ways about the action component of YPAR.

Additionally, Mirra et al. (2016) argue that while action is a necessary component of YPAR, it is secondary to the development of critical consciousness and long-term scholar-activist identities of the young people who participate in YPAR:

> As we have maintained throughout this book, the Council[36] always put exponentially more focus on empowering young people rather than pushing for any particular policy changes . . . . The theory of change that the Council espoused involved providing critical and transformative educational experiences to teachers and young people who would respectively teach and become the next generation of leaders. Small victories along the way provided hope, but the goal was much larger than change in any one school or school district. (p. 124)

Perhaps because of this stance, the students' culminating actions at the end of the YPAR project captured in their book were presentations of findings and "demands" for action at various local and national conferences (e.g., a meeting with the mayor of Los Angeles and city and state legislators; AERA's annual conference in New Orleans). At the end of their presentations, they gave audience members "marching orders" to create change in their local contexts. In essence, raising awareness about important issues and then presenting audience members with steps they should take to create change in their own contexts was the action. This approach is consistent with Valenzuela et al.'s (2016) belief that individual YPAR projects should be seen as part of larger social movements; however, it does stand in contrast to some of the other projects in the academic literature that used YPAR as a vehicle to create tangible, specific, hyper-local change such as the building of a new youth center, for example (Wright, 2015).

Questions around taking action to create change appear to be heightened even further when YPAR moves into schools. A handful of university researchers

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[36] "The Council" refers to the Council of Youth Research, which is a research collective of university-based researchers, public school teachers, and high school youth featured in the book.

who have done YPAR in schools (typically outside core academic classes) have written about the structural challenges of implementing YPAR within these structures, e.g., a lack of time to fully implement YPAR due to curricular requirements and unsupportive administrators who shut projects down when they do not like the actions (for examples, see: Irizarry & Brown, 2014; Ozer, Newlan, Douglas, & Hubbard, 2013; Ozer, Ritterman, & Wanis, 2010). However, Kirshner (2015), in one of the only two studies at present examining a group of teachers' beliefs about doing YPAR in core academic classes in schools, raised an issue that speaks to how the epistemology of schooling influenced teachers' beliefs about action, as opposed to structural barriers of schools or unsupportive actors prohibiting action. Kirshner found that some of the teachers in his study worried that if "nothing happened" at the end of a YPAR cycle – i.e., the students did not succeed in creating change – then they and/or the students might feel like the YPAR project was a failure. Kirshner locates this thinking in the "common sense of schools," or what I would argue is the epistemology of schooling: "In schools, 'learning' is assumed to have happened if a person is successful on a test or gets a good grade on a project" (p. 154). He then points out that many experiential learning organizations outside of schools – he used the example of Outward Bound – understand that some of the most powerful learning can come from failure and reflection, and that teachers' perceived need for action that creates tangible change represents a "clash of ideologies between a school paradigm and an experiential

paradigm" (p. 154).[37] Again, I would argue that this is a clash between the

epistemology of schooling and the epistemology of YPAR.

In sum, it is clear that all of the leading university-based YPAR researchers

view action as an essential piece of the epistemology of YPAR, keeping in line with

the Freirean traditional of praxis where reflection/research is connected to action.

However, university researchers also raise important questions about the nature of

action in a YPAR process – e.g., what it is, what it should be, how it should be

prioritized. These concerns can possibly be heightened in a school context as

Kirshner's study hints at but, to date, his study is only one of two to capture

teachers' voices and experiences of doing YPAR in core academic classrooms in

schools.

What Do Teachers Believe About the Critical and Action-oriented Nature of YPAR?

Near-universal consensus exists among the leading university-based YPAR

researchers that YPAR should be 1.) critical in nature, and 2.) action-oriented, although there

is divergence on the nature and priority of this last component. That said, given that many

K-12 schools claim to be apolitical spaces where equality and diversity of ideas and

viewpoints are espoused, the unapologetically critical and action-oriented stance of YPAR

may be unwelcome and difficult to implement in core academic classrooms. Further, even if

schools were set up to embrace the critical and action-oriented nature of YPAR, an

additional question arises as to whether teachers themselves have the desire and willingness

to critique oppression and to teach their students to do the same while creating learning

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[37] The other study comes from Rubin et al. (2017), and the authors dedicate an entire section to action, finding that students often wanted to skip the research piece of YPAR and jump right into the action. This, of course, undercut both the inquiry-based nature of YPAR as well as the academic skills teachers wanted students to gain through YPAR. This is a fascinating finding, but the study was not available at the time of my data collection and, therefore, I did not ask the teachers in my study about this phenomenon.

experiences designed to engage in action for social change. In the following sections, I illuminate what teachers in my study who have implemented YPAR in core academic classrooms across a variety of contexts believe about the critical, action-oriented nature of YPAR. When appropriate, I identify the ways in which I believe the structures of schooling shape and constrain their epistemological stances. Finally, at times I use the beliefs of university-based researchers outlined above as an analytical framework to show where teachers converge and diverge with what has been captured in the academic literature.

The Critical Nature of YPAR

The large majority of teachers in my study agreed that one of the key purposes for undertaking YPAR is to take on issues of oppression affecting young people and their communities. Of the 24 teachers whom I asked explicitly whether they believe YPAR must be critical in nature whereby students address issues of power, privilege, and oppression, 21 teachers (88%) said that it did.[38] Teachers frequently talked about power and oppression, with some naming specific forms of oppression such as capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and colonialism. Angela[39], a former high school teacher who implemented YPAR during a middle school writing course and a high school ethnic studies course, referred to YPAR as "countercultural or radical disruptive work that centers youth and their experiences." Teacher X, who has implemented YPAR with 7th and 8th graders in writing and history courses, stated that YPAR "fits well with my instruction in terms of wanting to teach students to grab power." In fact, when coding the data using the tenets of YPAR outlined in

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[38] In four cases, I was unable to ask this specific question, but there were no systematic differences between the teachers to whom I asked this question and those to whom I did not.

[39] I remind the reader here that all names are pseudonyms.

the academic literature, "critical in nature" was the one I applied most frequently to the statements of the teachers in my study.[40]

Other teachers referred to specific critical frameworks that informed their work, with Critical Race Theory being the one most frequently cited.[41] Additionally, eight teachers specifically mentioned Freire as important to their work, with several stating that they actually read chapters of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* with their students in class. Others stated that their work was informed by more contemporary critical researchers who engage in YPAR, including Drs. Michelle Fine, María Elena Torre, Ernest Morrell, Julio Cammarota, and Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade. One teacher, Jean, had recently attended Dr. Fine and Dr. Torre's weeklong CPAR Institute at the time of our interview. She channeled the work of these two university researchers when explaining the critical requirement of YPAR work:

> There's a huge emphasis at the Public Science Project with CPAR on developing a critical framework before doing any research. . . . [A critical framework] is important because when looking at the data . . . I want students to be able to analyze the data deeply and in the context of their experience as colonized people.

Several other teachers mentioned the importance of immersing their students in critical theoretical concepts (e.g., *funds of knowledge; the four I's of oppression; self-defeating versus transformative resistance*) at the beginning of a YPAR process which they said informed students' research approach and analysis.

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[40] The breakdown is as follows: "Critical in nature" (265 instances); "Relevance to youth's lives" (260); "Action-oriented" (203); "Inquiry-based" (157); "Robust youth participation" (124); "Draws on unique knowledge and expertise" (52). I applied the code "critical in nature" to instances where teachers spoke about the work as taking on issues of power, privilege, and oppression; see also Appendix F. I should note here that my use of "critical" as an analytical lens likely captures a wider range of stances than if I had used the word "radical" or "decolonizing," for example. Readers should take this into consideration when engaging with my analysis in this chapter. Diving deeper into the specifics of the analytical lenses and theories of change of teachers who state that they are doing critical YPAR work is a potential area for future scholarship, including my own.

[41] Critical Race Theory (CRT) centers issues of white supremacy and race-based oppression in any analysis, and Valenzuela (2016) and her co-authors of a chapter on PAR (Cammarota, Berta-Ávila, Ayala, Rivera, & Rodríguez, 2016) list CRT as one of the "theoretical and conceptual lineages" of PAR (p. 70).

In turn, students frequently took on topics related to various forms of oppression, including topics that would likely be seen by many inside and outside of schools as too controversial to address with young people in schools (Hess, 2009). Some of the topics students researched include women's reproductive rights/abortion, police brutality against Black youth, rape culture, rights for undocumented immigrants, disproportionate drop-out rates for disabled students[42], and English-only policies in schools. Additionally, many students turned the lens of interrogation on their own schools, with students taking on their school's dress codes and discipline policies, while illuminating the need for culturally relevant pedagogy, restorative justice, gender-neutral bathrooms, and sex education. Teachers often weaved contemporary liberation movements like Black Lives Matter and historical movements like the Chicano Blowouts into their teaching in order to inform and inspire students' work.

Related to selecting topics that are critical in nature, no teacher in my study reported telling a student or group of students that they could not research a topic because it was too controversial or "inappropriate" for school. Further, counter to many examples in the academic literature, none of the teachers stated that administration or anyone else for that matter (e.g., other teachers, parents) tried to shut down their projects due to the choice of topic. Admittedly, both of these findings may be at least partly a result of my sample of teachers, who were required to have successfully engaged in more than one YPAR cycle – an issue I discuss in further detail in the discussion section of this chapter. That said, a handful of teachers did, however, report receiving negative feedback when the students presented

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[42] Consistent with those who believe one's disability is an important part of one's identity of which there is nothing to be ashamed, I use identity-first language, though I respect those who use person-first language. More on the different perspectives here: https://ncdj.org/2016/01/journalists-should-learn-to-carefully-traverse-a-variety-of-disability-terminology/.

the findings to authentic audiences, usually from other teachers when students critiqued the internal practices of the schools themselves around pedagogy and school culture. However, this was relatively rare, and the vast majority of teachers stated that they and their students were able to take on issues of oppression and power without significant disruption or negative consequences.[43]

While most of the teachers in my study believed YPAR must be critical, a few teachers did hedge somewhat when asked if YPAR should be critical in nature. However, all three simply said that YPAR did not *have* to be explicitly critical, not that it should not or cannot be. One of these three teachers, Wittman, who engaged in YPAR with seniors in a mandatory capstone course, stated "I did not frame [YPAR] as 'this is about social justice' [to the students];" however, he stated that about "70 percent, maybe 80 percent" of his students chose topics that examined "the role of . . . generally underserved or underrepresented populations." Studying underserved and underrepresented populations is not necessarily critical work, of course. That said, in response to my question about YPAR being critical in nature, Wittman did specifically cite an example of a project where a student analyzed the different educational opportunities students had in urban public schools versus suburban private schools that he stated exist "by structure or by design," which is clearly a critical, structural lens. Another teacher, Eleanor, who implements YPAR with her 11/12th grade civics class, stated that she had not "look[ed] at systemic causes behind [YPAR topics]" with students in the past; however, she noted during the interview that this is something she wants to do going forward. Further, her students chose topics such as disproportionate dropout rates for disabled students, homelessness, gender equality,

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[43] This is not to undermine in any way the severity of some of the pushback teachers and their students received from adults whose actions were not only unprofessional but downright oppressive.

environmental protection, and access to nutritious foods, all of which are issues related to various forms of structural oppression (e.g., ableism, capitalism, patriarchy).[44] Finally, Brian, who engaged in YPAR with high school students in an alternative public school setting for older students aged 16-24, stated at first that he did not think that YPAR "has to be [critical]." However, he then paused and switched his position, claiming that he wanted his students to use YPAR as a vehicle "to be involved in something that gets them to question the power or social dynamics in our society, especially for students of Color or first-generation or immigrant students." So even among this small handful of teachers who perhaps did not fully embrace the critical nature of YPAR, the space for young people to do critical work that examined systems of power and oppression existed, even if it was not required.

Finally, five teachers specifically named "critical consciousness" as one of the goals for undertaking YPAR. For example, Alizea spoke about developing her students' critical perspective on oppressive structures, as well as how that critical lens led to better research and action:

> In my classroom, we focus a lot on critical analysis. The first couple of weeks of school . . . we read the first two chapters of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and so that's really deep and hard for them and so we go over terminology, we do *oppression, liberation*. We talk about the *four I's of oppression* and . . . different types of consciousness, like Paulo Freire's *magical, naïve*, and *critical* [*consciousness*]. We do a lot of scaffolding with critical thought and then bring that into everything that we learn about, so when . . . they pick their topics, we end up making what's called a problem tree where they try to figure out the root cause of the issues so that they are thinking a lot more deeply than just surface issues.

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[44] Again, one could take on any of these issues in a way that reinforces oppressive systems rather than challenges them; for example, locating the problem of homelessness in individual deficits as opposed to capitalist oppression. However, since Eleanor was amenable to the idea that she and her students might take on causes of systemic oppression in the future, it seems possible if not likely that students in her class had the freedom to take on these issues through a critical lens if they chose to do so.

She continues: "[YPAR] empowers [students]. It has them re-discover their power because it's been stripped away from so many years of education where that was its job. And so they love the critical side of it." Similarly, Preciliano, a high school ELA teacher, argued that the most important outcome in engaging his young people in YPAR is their development of critical consciousness. He stated that academic outcomes are secondary, arguing that his main concern is that his "students be critically conscious with their relationships so they evoke systemic and long-term change; the academics, they'll come." Jennifer, a former middle school ELA teacher, talked about the long-lasting effects of developing critical consciousness through YPAR that may not show up right away but will do so later in students' lives: "So I think the critical consciousness and having those conversations is what's necessary because even if it doesn't feel like it's happening right then and there, it is. And it's like planting a seed and it will eventually happen in some way." Finally, while not specifically using the term "critical consciousness," Kevin, a former 8th grade ELA teacher, does speak to developing a critical lens among his students to counter oppression, stating that he wants students to discover through YPAR the "ways that young people and families and our neighborhoods can feel a sense of power" so that students feel "that the school can be a place of empowerment as opposed to oppression."

In general, though, teachers did not use the specific term "critical consciousness" in describing mindsets and outcomes they wanted their students to develop and attain through a YPAR process. Instead, teachers frequently spoke about scholar-activist identities that they hoped students developed through YPAR. That said, activism does not necessarily require a critical lens/approach, e.g., mainstream forms of civic engagement and even conservative and reactionary activism. One explanation for these findings may be that the term "critical consciousness" is used far more frequently by academics than teachers.

However, this seems like an area for future scholarship to tease apart where, if at all, teachers diverge in the types of mindsets and approaches they hope their students develop through the process of YPAR.

Action as an Epistemological Imperative

Several teachers spoke passionately about the importance and requirement of action to create change as a key piece of YPAR. Rudy, a former high school history teacher, underscored the importance of taking concrete action through YPAR: "It was always with the intent of creating change. Nothing is theoretical but something concrete. So you're doing research to make change . . . . So the action piece, that's critical. It's not theoretical, the action." Mr. Bishop, a high school civics teacher, said that "action is necessary," explaining: "I think that action is that element of: you have that energy, and then channeling that energy into hope and that hope into transformation. So that's why I do think that action piece is necessary." Additionally, Emiliano, a high school teacher in an alternative setting for students aged 16-24, states: "My argument is that the action part is the only thing that keeps it real. Without the authenticity, the students know. The students feel that the teacher doesn't expect you to . . . for it to actually happen." Janie, who has done YPAR with high school students inside and outside of schools, stated that the goal of doing YPAR in schools cannot simply be to expose students to the research process without also engaging in well-planned actions to create authentic change, arguing: "I think it has to be both." It seems

clear that these teachers believe strongly that action must be linked to the research when undertaking a YPAR process.[45]

The sentiments of the teachers above represent others who felt action designed to create specific change was a crucial part of YPAR. As a result, the students of these teachers engaged in authentic, targeted actions such as presenting to local school boards to advocate for culturally relevant pedagogy at their school, speaking at local school budget meetings to prevent cuts to their school's funding, and engaging in an arts-based protest after school hours to fight against a new business that was displacing community members through gentrification. Further, students in the classrooms of these teachers sometimes succeeded in changing policies at the local, city level (e.g., changing a districtwide policy that locked students out of school when late) and at the hyper-local, school level (e.g., doing professional development for teachers around culturally relevant teaching; engaging in arts-based actions to raise awareness about environmental issues, anti-immigrant sentiment, and rape culture).

On the other hand, other teachers perceived the action component of YPAR as a secondary goal, for a variety of reasons. Eight of the 15 teachers to whom I asked the question stated that the least important goal in engaging in YPAR was taking action for social change, and that other goals (e.g., academic skills, scholar-activist identity development) were more important to them in choosing to implement YPAR with their students. As we saw earlier, this is not unlike what some of the university-based YPAR researchers believe, e.g., Mirra et al. However, unlike these university researchers who were

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[45] I should note here that I did not use the explicit terms "epistemology" or "epistemological requirement" with teachers here or anywhere else in my study because that is not language that most teachers, nor anyone who is not trained in research paradigms or philosophy, would use. However, whether one believes action is a requirement of YPAR is an epistemological question, as I demonstrated earlier in the literature review on what university researchers believe about the connection between action and research in YPAR's epistemology. As such, I asked teachers questions about why they undertook YPAR with students and whether action must be part of the research process to present epistemological questions in terms with which most teachers would be familiar.

typically working outside school settings, the structural constraints of schooling played a primary role in the value teachers placed on the action component of YPAR. In speaking to why they viewed action and creating change as a secondary goal, several teachers talked about how difficult it was to engage in change campaigns within core academic classrooms in schools. For example, a handful of teachers pointed to how difficult it was for teachers and students to engage in sustained campaigns that had to end when the term or the school year ended, as opposed to when a campaign would naturally end. Others said they would build momentum on a topic with one group of students who would either graduate or move on to the next grade level, and the next group of students were uninterested in keeping the action going and wanted to take on something new. These structural constraints of working in schools, where authentic change campaigns are rarely part of core academic classes, seem to push the epistemological requirement of action to the backburner for some of the teachers in my study.

Another challenge in taking action that has yet to be discussed in the academic literature came from teachers who partnered with outside community-based organizations (CBOs) on YPAR campaigns.[46] Several teachers who took this approach spoke to how challenging it was to partner with CBO members who struggled to align their work schedules with school schedules. For example, if teachers had multiple sections of a class, they felt it was a lot to ask a CBO member to stay for an entire school day when the CBO member is working full-time for an organization with many other obligations. In turn, several teachers said that there was a weak link, and sometimes no link, between the students' research findings and culminating actions, and the CBOs' actual campaigns. For

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[46] Nine teachers partnered with CBOs working on issues in the community.

example, in some cases, the reports were not shared with the CBOs and/or CBO members were unable to attend presentations.[47] Similarly, one teacher, Theo, pointed out the challenge of engaging in an authentic action outside of the school such as petitioning the people who have the political power to address students' issues, like elected officials: "You can't necessarily plan on getting a response from an elected official if you wrote them a letter on Monday and you were planning a lesson plan for the following Monday, and you're hoping that lesson plan involves a response. You don't know if that's going to happen." Again, we see the setting of school and its misalignment with community change efforts as presenting obstacles to teachers and their students in being able to fully and effectively implement the epistemological requirement of action in a YPAR process.

Finally, several teachers spoke to how much organizing labor it took on the part of teachers to support culminating actions like community forums and other public events. While these teachers were willing to undertake this work to support the students, several admitted that a.) this took a lot out of them emotionally and physically, and b.) they felt they did not possess the necessary organizing skills due to a lack of training and experience. Further, this organizing work on extended campaigns that often took place outside the classroom setting likely has not been factored into all of the other responsibilities that teachers have, which therefore makes it extra, unpaid labor. Maya, a high school economics teacher, speaks to this point when discussing all the other things she is expected to do as a teacher beyond helping to organize change campaigns: "I did this work in the midst of, you know, my seniors are having to apply for scholarships and look at financial aid packages, and

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[47] Again, this was primarily due to structural constraints of working on different schedules, in different institutions, etc., as opposed to a lack of desire to connect more effectively by either party. Teachers had nothing but positive things to say about the CBOs in the vast majority of cases.

I'm also teaching ten thousand other things. We had a month for this unit and we had other

units. . . . I mean, yeah, there is a lot more that I'm juggling."

Emiliano, who has worked in regular public schools and then worked in an

alternative school for older students (16-24) where he enjoyed extended, multiple-hour

blocks to do YPAR with his students, stated:

> I think [action] is the hardest part . . . and teachers need to be really
> emotionally invested and need a lot more time to pull that off. We can't do
> that with an hour a day. That's impossible. You can't do that – you have to
> have a team of teachers that see these students for the first hour, second
> hour, third hour and to coordinate that. And all three of those teachers need
> to get along and have the right idea. Sometimes that shit doesn't work. So I
> understand that . . . our [school's focus on action] lives in a vacuum. If I
> move on from this site, I'm not sure if I'll ever be able to do something like
> this again.

Here, we see an example of where a teacher's unique settings may have enabled him

to value and implement the action component of YPAR over other teachers in my

study who were working under more restrictive settings.[48] In sum, it appears that the

settings in which teachers were working may have caused some teachers to place a

lower value on the action component of the epistemology of YPAR.

Is YPAR a Failure if Action Does Not Create Change?

Unlike Emiliano, however, the vast majority of the teachers in my study did work in

regular public school settings, and a handful of teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the

action component when it did not result in tangible change or connect well with CBOs and

audiences outside the school setting. For example, Belen, a high school history teacher who

implemented YPAR in a senior capstone course, said that simply creating a research report

and presenting the findings to classmates – their culminating action – felt "too academic"

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[48] It should be noted, however, that Emiliano's setting was as challenging and likely more challenging than many of the teachers in my study in other ways, e.g., a highly transient student population – an issue I come back to later in the study.

and she wished students did "something outside of the school or with the local government." However, she conceded that "that's hard to coordinate."

That said, the vast majority of teachers in my study did not perceive a lack of success in creating tangible, specific change to be a major issue, unlike the teachers in Kirshner's (2015) study. In fact, despite her laments about projects feeling too academic, Belen still felt that YPAR was "valuable" and "extremely enjoyable" for the students because "there are very few humanities, history, or any teachers who get to address current issues with their students in such a purposeful way, as opposed to having to slip it in through whatever book you're reading." Additionally, Wittman said that expecting change to come from a school-based YPAR project with students is "probably an unfairly high bar," noting that this is true for any research project, including in academia. Capturing the sentiments of several teachers, Wittman said, "I think it's figuring out where the value lies," which he believed was in the development of activist identities among young people, with YPAR also "potentially [leading] to different career paths."

Similarly, Alizea, who teaches high school history, stated that exposure to the PAR process and the activist identity it engenders were more important than taking action to create tangible change on a specific problem: "[The YPAR process in my class] is just sparking their interest. It's just one year of one teacher telling them that they can make change. And now that they know they can and they have the ideas or how-to's, they're going to grow up and be change makers." In turn, at the end of the YPAR process her students created and presented a plan for potential action on their topic but they did not actually implement the action plan due to time constraints. However, at the time of our interview, she said that she was looping with her students the next year as seniors, where she was going to ask them to implement their action plans. In turn, she said she will be "revamping" what

she has done in the past, asking the students to shift the responsibility for action from the audience members at a symposium to themselves through their action plans, telling them: "You come up with a solution, right? Like, what could you do to make a change, not what do other people have to do. What could you do?"

Several other teachers argued that, while the action piece would be great or "ideal" (to quote one teacher) if it happens, the more important piece is students feeling capable to do the challenging work that YPAR requires, while also building a scholar-activist identity that they can carry into the next stage of their lives. Eleanor, a high school civics teacher, explained that "YPAR was not the goal in itself; it's a means to a different goal," which she stated is providing "life skills that my students need to be successful." She believed, like others, that creating change is a secondary goal to what students gain from the *process* of undertaking YPAR: "It is kind of like if [creating change] happens, great. But if it doesn't, that's okay, as well. It's more about the process." Similar to Alizea, as well as several other teachers in the study and some university researchers in the literature, Eleanor's students' culminating actions were presentations with recommendations and potential action plans but without students executing those action plans in concrete, collaborative efforts designed to make specific change in the community.[49] Like others, she did express dissatisfaction with the culminating actions/presentations and, as such, she had plans to amend the process in the upcoming academic year to make the action more concrete and feasible[50], despite not viewing creating change as a primary goal of undertaking YPAR with her students.

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[49] Students engaged in presentations unconnected to specific policy and practice changes as their culminating actions in the classrooms of 9 out of 28 teachers.

[50] Eleanor stated that some of her students' action plans were "unrealistic" in that they required a lot of resources including funding, e.g., starting an organization or afterschool program related to their issue.

Further to the issue of prioritizing action and creating change, two teachers, both of whom had previous community organizing experience, questioned whether it should be a primary goal of teachers for their students to create tangible change, given that the work is set in schools. Though his students did engage in actions at the end of their projects, Ernesto, a former high school science teacher, stated:

> There's a lot in common between what we do as teachers and what they do as organizers. But I think as teachers, it's our obligation to focus on [students' academic and critical consciousness development] and it's the organizers' obligation to focus on [creating change]. I think they're in a better position and more well-equipped to do that.

Maya, a high school economics teacher who also has a community organizing background, expresses sentiments similar to Ernesto about the role of teachers vis-à-vis the role of community organizers:

> I think realistically for me, it's also one of the places in which I think my situation as a classroom teacher takes me off the hook a little bit in terms of YPAR actions. If I were a youth organizer, I think I probably would have felt much more disappointed with the actions we took as a result of our data. . . . I think as a classroom teacher, it's great what my students did. They took some action around an issue and that happened in a traditional public school in a classroom and that doesn't happen very often. So I mean honestly, I think it's like I sort of get away with having a lower bar for myself around actions [laughs].

That said, while acknowledging that the action component of YPAR is difficult to do in schools, Maya states that she is not giving up on improving the actions: "If I had more capacity, I would – you know, I think every year, I try to build in more and more ideas around how we can make this project more meaningful." One of her ideas is to create more and deeper partnerships with community organizers who "take that action piece to the next level." In both Maya's and Ernesto's statements as well as those of other teachers above who wished for their students' actions to be more authentic and effective, we see the setting

of school influencing teachers' beliefs about the epistemological requirement of action in a YPAR process.

Discussion

With regards to the critical epistemological stance of YPAR, in general the teachers in my study held views that were quite consistent with leading university-based YPAR researchers working largely outside schools. In terms of YPAR critiquing systems of power, privilege, and oppression, the vast majority of the teachers embraced this stance and said they embedded it into their practice. In turn, they reported their students using YPAR as a vehicle to interrogate various forms of oppression – e.g., white supremacy, xenophobia, homophobia, capitalism, ableism, and patriarchy – that are often seen as taboo subjects in schools. These teachers' beliefs and experiences also diverge from Kirshner's (2015) study where some of the teachers involved felt uncomfortable taking on issues of oppression.[51]

Additionally, none of the teachers, or anyone else for that matter, prohibited or discouraged students from taking on these critical topics. These findings are surprising given how hostile many if not most schools can be toward critical pedagogy, or really any pedagogy that does not attempt to be neutral while presenting all viewpoints equally. Further, these findings stand in opposition to studies in the academic literature where students and their adult collaborators were told they could not take on certain topics (e.g., Kohfeldt, Chhun, Grace, & Langhout, 2011; Schensul, 2004). While a small number of teachers (at most, five) implemented YPAR in schools that explicitly or implicitly embraced

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[51] One possible difference between the group of teachers in my study and those in Dr. Kirshner's is that five of the seven teachers in his study were second- and third-year teachers who were implementing YPAR as a requirement for a graduate-level course as part of a master's program for Teach for America teachers, whereas the teachers in my study had all been teaching for at least three years, and typically many more, and had no other incentive to take on YPAR other than the fact that they believed in it. These contradictory findings, however, seem like an intriguing avenue for future scholarship, particularly when thinking about how to expand the work while maintaining its critical essence.

what could be considered a critical mission, the vast majority of teachers were working in regular public schools where the epistemology of schooling was likely tacitly if not explicitly enforced, including in two *No Excuses* charter schools, making these findings even more surprising.

This near-universal embrace of the critical nature of YPAR by teachers in core academic classes in two dozen different schools across nine urban districts in various parts of the U.S. – where the neoliberal education reform movement's focus on standardization and learning-as-test-score-production has hit hardest – is potentially promising for those of us who want to see YPAR expand into classrooms in public schools without it losing its critical essence. At the very least, we have more evidence from a much larger sample of teachers that critical YPAR work with students in core academic classes is *possible*, building on the smaller studies of teachers who have done this work in schools, which did not exist when I began this study (Kirshner, 2015; Rubin, Ayala, & Zaal, 2017).

Of course, the critical beliefs of the teachers in my study as well as their ability to implement critical YPAR with their students is undoubtedly at least partly a function of my sample. First, it would be naïve to think that the teachers in my study are representative of the teaching population as a whole in terms of their deep levels of critical consciousness. Many of the teachers in my sample found out about the study from teacher activist networks as well as from some of the leading university-based YPAR researchers themselves, which clearly attracted those with a more critical stance. Second, teachers who participated in my study were required to have completed two cycles of YPAR, which would exclude, for example, any teachers who tried YPAR once and were shut down by administration or shut down the projects themselves because students wanted to take on issues they deemed too controversial. That said, I provide guidance in chapter six on how we might get more

teachers to take on critical YPAR work who have different pedagogical and epistemological beliefs than the teachers in my study.

In terms of the epistemological component of action, all of the teachers believed that action should be connected to research in a YPAR approach, consistent with the praxis-oriented foundation of YPAR. None of the projects ended with students simply handing in individual research papers where the only audience was the teacher who handed out an A- or a C+ to students, who then dumped the papers in the recycling bin/trash folder. Instead, in every teacher's classroom, the students' YPAR projects were connected to some type of action, even if it was contained to a classroom presentation to raise awareness among classmates. Further, thirteen of the teachers reported specific policy and practices changes that resulted at least in part from their efforts, including but not limited to: the adoption of culturally relevant pedagogy and sex education at the school level; the creation of a community garden to combat lack of access to healthy food; changes to districtwide policies on affordable youth transportation and oppressive discipline codes; and even the passage of a bill at the state level affecting the education of undocumented students.[52] These findings are, again, surprising when juxtaposed with stories from the academic literature where projects were shut down when students started taking actions that rubbed administrators and others the wrong way (e.g., Irizarry & Brown, 2014; Kirshner, 2015), as well as projects where youth were condescended to by adults who then ignored their demands (e.g., Bertrand, 2016; Tuck, 2009). While negative feedback and condescension were reported by a handful of the teachers, it was surprisingly uncommon, particularly in light of the issues

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[52] This number may be even higher than thirteen teachers, as a handful of teachers did not speak directly to whether specific policies or practices changed as a result of their YPAR projects.

students and their teachers were unafraid to take on coupled with the settings in which they did the work.

That said, some teachers in my study stated that they valued and were more committed to the action-oriented stance and outcomes of YPAR than others. In turn, this divergence among the teachers in my study often influenced the types of actions that teachers took on with their students, with those who fully embraced the action-oriented component of YPAR frequently engaging in specific change campaigns at the school, community, and state level. However, instead of the other group of teachers fully rejecting the action-oriented component of YPAR's epistemology, the differences in teachers' stances on action were largely a matter of prioritization based on their beliefs about the feasibility of change within the structural constraints of schools. In fact, several teachers said they were dissatisfied with the limited actions and planned to strengthen them in the future, demonstrating that they do believe in the importance of the action component of YPAR when doing the work in schools.[53] Additionally, Maya and Ernesto indicated that the responsibility for creating change through YPAR is arguably better suited to community organizers given the contexts, although both teachers' students engaged in actions at the end of their YPAR projects, which included actions outside of school. Further, Maya stated that she may try to partner with community organizers in the future to help support her and her students with their actions. However, when thinking about Maya's proposed solution to increasing the feasibility of the action component by partnering with community organizations, it is important to remember that other teachers in my study tried to partner with organizers from community-based organizations in order to take action on existing

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[53] This finding seems to raise the issue of how to support teachers who want their students to take more extensive, more authentic, and more effective actions – an issue I address in chapter six when providing guidance on possibilities for YPAR in schools going forward.

change campaigns and they often ran into structural issues of trying to make school schedules work with the CBOs' schedules. All that said, it seems that the structural barriers of schools may be a particularly salient issue for teachers implementing the action component of YPAR with their students – something I will address in the final chapter when discussing possibilities moving forward.

On the other hand, the findings from this section of my study are interesting in terms of the structural barriers that were *not* found to be a major factor in teachers' ability to implement the action component of YPAR, in addition to those that were. While a handful of teachers did cite testing and other curricular requirements as being a substantial barrier to taking action, most did not, which counters much of the academic literature on doing this work in schools as well as my own experience in partnering with two teachers implementing YPAR in core academic subjects (Buttimer, Forthcoming). There are two important factors that likely played a role in this finding, however: 1.) more than half of teachers (17) did this work with seniors and/or juniors, when high-stakes statewide testing is typically over; 2.) more than half (16) taught history or civics, which tend not to be tested subjects.[54] This finding may be important in thinking about the subjects and grade levels in which teachers may find success in undertaking YPAR, which may be one way to mitigate and navigate the structural constraints of school that can prevent teachers from fully and effectively implementing the action component of YPAR.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings in this chapter of my study are both surprising and mostly encouraging for YPAR advocates who want to see YPAR move into core academic

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[54] Test preparation for tests in other subjects can encroach into non-tested subjects like history, however, which one teacher in my study told me was the case in her class, and this issue was also documented in several projects in the academic literature (e.g., Ozer, Ritterman, & Wanis, 2010).

classrooms in schools while retaining its critical, action-oriented stance. The questions raised about the nature and priority of action echo similar divergence on these issues among university-based researchers, and these are questions that require further interrogation and theorizing. This is particularly true given the role that the structural barriers of schools played in many teachers' perceptions of what is possible in terms of action, while also preventing some teachers and their students from taking effective actions. In the final chapter of this study (chapter six), I use the beliefs and experiences of the teachers, as well as how they converge and diverge with those of university researchers, to discuss possibilities for YPAR going forward, both inside and outside of schools.

Chapter 4: The Youth-led Nature of YPAR and What It Means for Youth to Participate

Introduction

In the last chapter, I focused on what leading university-based YPAR researchers and then teachers believed about *why* knowledge is created within the epistemology of YPAR, focusing on the purposes – to identify and critique oppression – and the ends – to develop critical consciousness and take action to transform society. In this chapter, I begin the work of identifying and analyzing the *how* of YPAR's epistemology, or how knowledge is created in a YPAR approach. To this point, Caraballo et al. (2017) write: "As a participatory methodology, YPAR is epistemologically primarily centered in who is involved in the conception, design, implementation, analysis, dissemination, and action-based impact of research, rather than a specific set of methods that are employed" (p. 317). The "who" in YPAR includes youth[55], of course, and their participation is arguably the key epistemological feature that separates YPAR from other epistemological approaches. Several university researchers who have written about the epistemology of YPAR list robust youth participation in the process as an epistemological requirement (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Kirshner, 2010; Rodríguez & Brown, 2009). According to these university researchers, the reason for including youth is not simply because it is fun or engaging for young people to participate; rather, young people bring unique knowledge, expertise, and perspectives – or "epistemic privilege" (Campano et al., 2015) – to a PAR process because of their positionality as youth (Fine, 2009). Therefore, whether and to what extent youth participate in a YPAR process, including the various roles they play, are fundamentally epistemological questions.

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[55] I take up the question of whether it is *only* youth in chapter five.

That said, what *youth participation* means and how it is operationalized in a YPAR process has been under-scrutinized in the field of YPAR studies, particularly with regards to the leadership roles youth play and the choice and autonomy they possess in the process. Of course, many university researchers have written about their *individual* experiences working with youth via YPAR, even documenting in substantial detail what that work looked like in some cases. To date, though, no one has examined differences across university-based YPAR researchers in the ways they envision and have put into practice the participatory requirement of YPAR, therefore leaving a key piece of YPAR's epistemology under-theorized. At the same time, the field has yet to study these beliefs among a large sample of public school teachers working in a variety of contexts (e.g., different subjects; middle and high school) in different locations around the country.

In this chapter, I begin the work of examining what both university researchers and teachers believe it means for youth to participate in a process of creating knowledge that leads to action, i.e., YPAR. I first examine what university-based YPAR researchers have written about youth participation in YPAR. I focus on the following four components of youth participation: 1.) is YPAR youth-led and what does that mean?; 2.) who initiates the projects?; 3.) do youth choose to participate in the projects?; and 4.) who sets the research agenda? Whether and how youth lead, initiate, choose to participle in, and set the direction for YPAR projects are key methodological components of *how* knowledge gets created in a YPAR process and are therefore key epistemological concerns of YPAR. To compare and organize university researchers' beliefs, I apply a framework for youth participation often referred to as "Hart's Ladder" (1992), which looks at different levels of youth participation. Finally, the crux of my analysis is an examination of what teachers in my study believe about the four areas of inquiry above. I again apply Hart's framework to organize teachers'

responses, and I compare what they said to what university researchers have written when appropriate.

The four components of youth participation under examination – leadership, initiation, choice to participate, and setting the research direction – comprise the epistemological approach at the beginning stages of YPAR, when the work is first being initiated. The ways youth engage in a participatory process once the work is underway are also important areas to examine when looking at the epistemology of YPAR, but I examine those pieces in chapter five.

Do University Researchers Believe YPAR is "Youth-led" and What Does That Mean?

When I talk to YPAR advocates and practitioners at conferences and other gatherings of university-based researchers and educators, I often hear people referring to YPAR as "youth-led." I have used this framing myself when presenting my research at conferences or speaking informally with others who do this work with youth. However, having read through the academic literature and participated in YPAR projects myself, I argue that the notion that YPAR is youth-led needs to be interrogated further because there appear to be differences in the way adults understand and facilitate a youth-led process, as well as whether they believe the process should even be considered youth-led. I begin this work by examining whether leading university-based YPAR researchers use the language and framing of "youth-led" to describe YPAR and, if so, what that looks like in practice.

After examining the academic literature, I found several leading university-based YPAR researchers who explicitly use the term "youth-led," or some variation of it. For example, Ozer, who has partnered with teachers in schools in California to facilitate YPAR during elective blocks, frequently refers to YPAR as "youth-led" in numerous articles (e.g., Ozer, 2017; Ozer & Douglas, 2013; Ozer & Wright, 2012). She includes "youth-led" as part

of the acronym, YPAR, in one article: "Youth-led participatory action research (YPAR)"

(Ozer & Douglas, 2015, p. 30). Similarly, Wright, in her book on YPAR as *active learning*,

writes: "In the youth-led PAR model, young people take the lead in analyzing information

that could spark an organizational improvement, institutional transformation, community

initiative, organizing campaign, or policy change" (2015, p. 22).

Additionally, YPAR researchers Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2008) refer several

times to YPAR as being "youth-initiated" (pp. 98, 106, 149). While the term "youth-led" is

not used specifically, the language of "youth-initiated" would seem to indicate that youth

initiate or begin the research process, which could reasonably be equated with YPAR being

youth-led. Finally, Morrell, writing with different university-based YPAR researchers

(Caraballo et al., 2017), argues: "By definition, YPAR is youth-driven" (p. 324). These

leading university-based YPAR researchers who have participated in many YPAR projects

and have written numerous articles and books about YPAR frequently use some variation of

the language of "youth-led" to describe the YPAR process.

However, other YPAR researchers appear to eschew the language of "youth-led,"

instead using language such as youth being at the "center" or "core" of a "collective" of

youth and adults engaging in research together (e.g, Fox & Fine, 2013). In these collectives,

youth are referred to as "partners" and "co-researchers" who collaborate with adults as

opposed to *leading* the process (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Kirshner, 2015; Rodríguez &

Brown, 2009).

In an example that highlights this divide, a group of three university researchers that

includes Morrell again (Mirra et al., 2016) refer to YPAR as "youth-led" at one point (p. 30)

but then a few pages later they address – and arguably raise further questions about – the

issue of whether YPAR is "youth-led" and what that might mean. The authors explain that,

in a summer YPAR seminar for high school students, the adults who were running the program were the ones who chose the research agenda, not the youth. In response to questions readers might have about what this means for the "youth-led" component of YPAR, the researchers explain:

> It may seem contrary to the spirit of YPAR for adults to set up a research frame to guide students' work; after all, shouldn't youth be in charge of every aspect of the research in order for it to be truly considered youth-led? While it may seem that adult involvement in YPAR takes away from the youth agency, we have found through our work that adults have a crucially important role to play in facilitating the research process. Setting young people off on a research project without access to the resources, knowledge, and relationships that adults can provide can do a disservice to YPAR by denying students the necessary tools to reap the full benefits of the process. (p. 39)

Here, we see an example of university-based researchers making the argument that the youth-led nature of YPAR can be put to the side in at least one piece of the process, i.e., setting the research agenda, in order to draw on the knowledge, social capital, and mentorship that adults bring to the endeavor. But do other university-based researchers feel this way?

While there appears to be variation among university researchers in using the language of "youth-led," the more substantial epistemological question, as demonstrated by Mirra et al.'s stance above, is how university researchers facilitate youth participation *in practice.* Before I do this work of illuminating how university researchers instantiate their beliefs about youth participation, I outline Hart's (1992) "Ladder of Participation" because it can be used analyze and categorize differing levels of youth participation in approaches to youth work that include YPAR. I then use Hart's Ladder as a framework to analyze how leading university-based YPAR researchers approach youth participation in YPAR projects. Finally, I will use the ladder later in this chapter to examine how the teachers in my study facilitate student participation in YPAR in classrooms.

Hart's Ladder of Participation

In an essay written for UNICEF entitled "Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship," Hart (1992) laid out his "ladder of participation" (p. 8) which analyzed and categorized the nature and depth of youth participation in various projects that take place in the public domain, e.g., school projects, research presentations at institutions, intergovernmental meetings:

The Ladder of Participation

8. Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults

7. Child-initiated and directed

6. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children

5. Consulted and informed

4. Assigned but informed

3. Tokenism

2. Decoration

1. Manipulation

Degrees of participation

Non-participation

Eight levels of young people's participation in projects. (The ladder metaphor is borrowed from the well-known essay on adult participation by Sherry Arnstein (1969); the categories are new).

At the three lowest rungs, Hart listed what he considered to be models of non-participation by youth, which he labeled *manipulation, decoration,* and *tokenism*, arranged in order from most harmful (*manipulation*) to least (*tokenism*) as one climbs up the ladder. While Hart states that there are "many projects entirely designed and run by adults, with children merely acting out predetermined roles" that are "very positive experiences for both adults and children" (e.g., children's dance, song, and theater performances; p. 9), participation becomes dangerous when children are manipulated and used to push adults' political agendas. In these forms of non-participation on the lowest three rungs, young people tend to have little or no: 1.) choice in participating, 2.) understanding of why they are participating, 3.) preparation before the event, 4.) decision-making during the event, or 5.) reflection after the event. Further, in these models the youth selected to participate are not there because they represent or are working on behalf of the interests of other young people, and instead they are there merely as props for adults who can claim they are "including youth voice," for example.

For a project to be "truly labelled as participatory" (p. 11), Hart says it must satisfy the following requirements: 1.) the children understand the intentions of the project; 2.) they know who made the decisions concerning their involvement and why; 3.) they have a meaningful (rather than "decorative") role; and 4.) they volunteer for the project after the project was made clear to them (p. 11). The next three levels as you go up the ladder – *assigned but informed*; *consulted and informed*; and *adult-initiated, shared decisions with children* – are the first models that represent true participation, according to Hart. In these models, the adults still initiate and are leading the events or projects, but the youth are aware of the purposes of their participation, choose to participate, participate in meaningful ways (e.g., providing

consultation to adults on projects), and even share decision-making at the highest of these three rungs: *adult-initiated, shared decisions with children*.

The final two rungs of the ladder – *child initiated and directed*; and *child initiated, shared decisions with adults* – indicate participation where the projects are initiated by the youth, not adults. Hart sees the model on the highest rung – *child initiated, shared decisions with adults* – as the most robust and most meaningful participation of youth because in this model, youth design and manage a project themselves, but then they also involve adults when it furthers the success of the project by drawing on adults' expertise, skills, and social and political capital. That said, it is critically important to point out that, with the exception the first three rungs of non-participation, Hart does not seem to make a normative argument that being higher up on the ladder is necessarily *better* than being lower on the ladder. In fact, he lists positive examples in each of the five rungs of genuine participation, noting that there are appropriate contexts and circumstances for all five models of true participation.[56]

Building on this idea, Funk et al. (2012) used Hart's ladder to assess youth involvement over the course of an extended YPAR project they facilitated where they found that youth moved up and down the rungs of the ladder at different points in the project. Further, they argue that due to a lack of skills at times (e.g., knowledge of sophisticated analytical methods) and a lack of desire to participate in certain parts of the process at other times, it was appropriate and necessary for young people to be at different rungs of the ladder at certain stages of the project. An interesting point that will reemerge when applying

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[56] Examples the author gives of participation from the middle rungs where adults initiate the work include: 1.) children of diplomats being given the role of pages with important responsibilities at a U.N. conference; 2.) the television station Nickelodeon creating low-cost versions of new shows, soliciting youth feedback, redesigning the shows based on the feedback, and then showing the new versions to the same expert youth panel for additional consultation work; 3.) adults setting up a newspaper for children and then recruiting children to participate in its production while sharing the work and decision-making responsibilities with them.

the ladder to both university researchers and the teachers in my study when examining the start of a YPAR process: Funk et al. categorize the start of their project, when adults prepared the research proposal and then hired youth to participate, as being on the lowest levels of the ladder in non-participation (*manipulation*, *decoration*, and *tokenism*), in large part because youth had no say in the direction of the project at first.

In the next two sections of this chapter, I examine what youth participation looked like at the beginning of the YPAR process when university researchers were involved, focusing on how the projects got started and who designed the research agenda. I apply Hart's ladder throughout, looking at the extent to which youth are involved in these pieces of the process. This will help illuminate what university researchers mean when they either state that YPAR is youth-led/youth-initiated/youth-driven, and/or that robust youth participation is an epistemological requirement. Establishing this will be key in examining the ways in which teachers converge and diverge with how university researchers address youth participation in a YPAR process.

How do YPAR projects begin?

For youth to *lead* a YPAR process, or even participate robustly in it, it seems reasonable to expect that they might play a role in initiating the process, consistent with Hart's two highest rungs on the ladder of participation. To test this assumption, I examined how the YPAR projects in the academic literature got started and, specifically, who initiated the process and how.

In virtually every YPAR project documented in the academic literature that I read, one or more adults initiated the YPAR project. The adults were almost always university professors who either initiated YPAR projects on their own outside of institutional settings like K-12 schools (e.g., Fox & Fine, 2013; Mirra et al., 2016; Tuck et al., 2008), or created

partnerships with teachers and administrators in schools or with adults in community-based organizations who sometimes requested the university researchers' involvement (e.g, Cammarota et al., 2016; Kirshner, 2015; Ozer & Douglas, 2013). YPAR researchers Brown and Rodríguez (2009) seem to agree with my assessment of who initiates YPAR work, albeit they do not cite specific examples: "Often a university or other institutionally based researcher will initiate a PAR project, bringing a broad research topic to a local community in search of collaborators" (p. 2).

Therefore, it appears that adults initiating the YPAR process does not violate the youth-led, participatory principles of YPAR's epistemology in the minds of university-based researchers. However, it does appear that none of these projects would satisfy the highest two rungs of Hart's ladder where youth initiate the work and either draw on adult support when necessary or do not do so at all.[57]

Do youth choose to participate?

Additionally, there appear to be questions about the extent to which youth choose to participate in YPAR projects captured in the academic literature. In most of the projects implemented outside of schools, academics initiated the YPAR project by recruiting youth to participate in afterschool or summer research projects (e.g., Fox & Fine, 2013; Mirra et al., 2016; Wright, 2015). In these projects, it appears students often did choose to participate in

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[57] The fact that all of the YPAR projects I found appear to be adult-initiated is almost certainly a function of academic journals and books being places where adults, not youth, typically publish. However, even in instances where youth are doing PAR for purposes other than publishing in academic journals, the organizations I am familiar with who do this work were typically started by adults for young people and have adult mentors who seek to bring youth together to do the work. For example, these youth leadership organizations who have done YPAR work appear to have been initially set up by adults and have adult mentors: Black Youth Project, Hyde Square Task Force, and Rethink New Orleans. That said, one possible exception I found, assuming we define "youth" as people under age 25, is Young Women's Empowerment Project – "Everybody who is on staff and has decision making power at YWEP was once a member here and is between the ages of 12-24 years old" – who undertook this YPAR project: https://youarepriceless.org/our-work/our-campaign/.

the projects, which Hart would consider one of the four requirements for true youth participation. However, it is difficult to determine the level to which students know exactly what it is they are signing up for because authors often leave these details out. It is at least possible that, like in the case of Funk et al.'s (2012) projects, students had a limited understanding of what engaging in YPAR meant and may have participated for reasons other than wanting to create change through YPAR, e.g., because of financial or academic incentives[58], because a teacher they like and respect recommended that they participate, or because they were looking for something to do over the summer.

That said, this question of choosing to participate becomes even thornier when YPAR projects move into schools. In any of the projects that took place in schools where students were required to take the courses (e.g., Kirshner, 2015; Levinson, 2012; Rubin, Ayala, & Zaal, 2017), it is nearly certain that students had no choice in participating in the YPAR process. The same may be true for YPAR projects that took place in electives or special support classes (e.g., Ozer's numerous studies), as students often have limited and sometimes even no choice to participate in elective classes, despite their names.[59]

While none of the projects listed above even come close to resembling the ones Hart listed under *manipulation, decoration,* or *tokenism*, all of these projects seem to raise doubts about the ability to call these projects "youth-initiated" or even "youth-led" if we are looking solely at how projects get off the ground and how youth get involved. That said, as Hart points out, youth participation higher up the ladder is not necessarily *better* (excluding the

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[58] For example, some authors write the students were given graduate credit for participating in YPAR projects (Mirra, Garcia, & Morrell, 2016; Torre, 2009).

[59] For example, two teachers in my study taught "elective" courses where students were assigned to the courses.

three lowest rungs), and there may be good reasons for setting aside the youth-led component of YPAR momentarily at the very beginning.

Who sets the research agenda?

Even if young people do not initiate the project or truly elect into it, it is possible for robust youth participation where youth are leading the work in other parts of the process. For example, setting the research agenda is a major piece, perhaps even the most important piece, in the YPAR process for ensuring that YPAR is relevant to youth and grounded in their lives, that it privileges their expertise and skills, and that it include robust participation – three tenets of YPAR according to leading university-based YPAR researchers. That said, not all university researchers agree that youth should lead or even play a substantial role in setting or co-creating the research agenda.

Adults Set the Research Agenda

Returning in greater detail to Mirra et al.'s (2016) summer YPAR seminar for high school students, as mentioned before it was the adults – professors, doctoral students, and local high school teachers – who chose the overarching topic for interrogation each summer. The research topic each year fell under the umbrella of educational inequity, and the adults picked a handful of subtopics to research where they had some expertise, e.g., teacher quality, curricular content, school leadership.[60] Again, they justified this decision by pointing to the knowledge and facilitation capacities that adults possess, as well as the connections to power brokers that adults have that could be drawn on to aid students in finding success in their change campaigns.

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[60] For example, in the project outlined in *Doing Youth Participatory Action Research* (2016), Dr. Ernest Morrell and Dr. John Rogers of UCLA chose the umbrella topic of examining the educational experiences of young people ten years after the *Williams v. California* decision that mandated equal educational access for all students.

Similarly, Yang (2009), who facilitated YPAR in math and sociology courses as a university professor in a high school setting, stated that in the first phase of the YPAR projects, it was "heavily teacher centered" before handing over more control to students later in the process. Yang explains that this approach "differs from those that create a youth-centered space at the outset, based on abstract ideals of democratic participation" (p. 101). Expanding on this point, Yang argues that YPAR is "threatened" by the "fallacy of idealized democracy" which "reifies the student-centered dogma that somehow democratic participation equals effective pedagogy" (p. 101). Instead, Yang believes: "The art of teaching is not to produce a world without teachers, but to distinguish between authority and authoritarianism in knowledge production" (p. 101). In turn, the students used YPAR to critically analyze the uses and misuses of California's School Accountability Report Card (SARC) and while not explicitly stated, given Yang's statements above coupled with how interested young people tend to be in dense educational documents written primarily for bureaucrats and administrators, it seems unlikely that students would choose this specific topic of inquiry if they had had input in setting the research agenda.[61]

To the point about adults leading the process at times, Kirshner (2015) warns adults against "fetishiz[ing] choice and intrinsic motivation" (p. 107) when facilitating youth activism work like YPAR. He echoes the value both Mirra et al. and Yang place on the expertise and organizational capacities of adults in increasing the potential success of any YPAR project through their involvement:

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[61] This is not to imply that young people are not interested in interrogating their own schooling experiences. I know from personal experience facilitating YPAR projects where students had complete choice in selecting a research topic that they are, as many students chose education-related topics. It just seems unlikely that students would choose to critique and reform the SARC process specifically if they were involved in creating or co-creating the research agenda, although I apologize to Dr. Yang and his students if my assumption is incorrect.

> Some youth groups, in an effort to equalize power relationships between adults and youth, aim to limit adult involvement so that project goals reflect youths' interests and viewpoints. The fear is that too much adult involvement might undermine youths' motivation or corrupt a youth-driven process. However, this emphasis on independence from adult influence can be counter-productive if it limits youths' access to expert practices or networks of power. (pp. 107)

Kirshner argues for adult involvement and mentorship that can help youth "gain access to sophisticated research methods and political change strategies," which can motivate youth to participate in change work by "being part of a sophisticated campaign that has a heightened chance of impact and where youth experience meaning, purpose, and mattering" (p. 108).

It seems that all of these university researchers see an important role for adult leadership at times in YPAR work if it enhances youths' experience and success, including setting the research agenda, at least in the cases of Mirra et al. and probably Yang.[62] These university researchers justify the trade-off of setting aside youth leadership and/or involvement at times by pointing to the different skills, contextual understanding, and social and political connections that adults possess relative to youth because of their experience and their position as adults in an adultist society. However, this approach does seem to challenge some of the youth participation tenets of YPAR as well as what participation at the highest rungs of Hart's ladder would look like in practice.

Adults and Youth Co-Create the Research Agenda

Other university-based YPAR researchers seem to embrace much more of a co-design model where youth and adults set the research agenda together. Rodríguez and

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[62] Kirshner also indicates that adults played a substantial role in setting the research agenda in a project he and Pozzoboni (2011) facilitated, though it sounds like somewhat more of a collaborative approach with youth than Mirra et al. and possibly Yang: "A local youth organizing group whose mission was to promote racial and educational justice, Students United, expressed interest to Ben (the first author) about commissioning an 'impact study.' Members of Students United suspected that the closure would have a negative impact on many students. Adult staff members said that the closure of a neighborhood middle school two years earlier had led to scores of students dropping out. In partnership with Students United, we proposed a YPAR study to RSD" (p. 1641).

Brown, in an article on the principles of PAR with youth, describe a PAR process as follows: "Local coresearchers then have an essential role in the conceptualization, design, and implementation of the study, which can change based on factors like the needs of the population being studied, the findings, or the outcomes of the actions" (p. 2). The local coresearchers in YPAR, of course, are youth. Further, Brown, writing with Irizzary (2014), states: "Ideally, local researchers participate in every stage of the PAR process: identifying problems; designing the study and instruments; collecting, analyzing, and presenting data; and carrying out action" (p. 65). It seems important to note that the authors do use the qualifying term "ideally" here.

A possible example of what Brown and Irizzary might consider an ideal scenario comes from university researcher Tuck (2008) who worked with a group of twelve young people (ages 16 to 22) who had been pushed out of the New York City public schools. Together, the youth and Tuck designed a PAR project that interrogated educational inequity in New York City in order to advocate for change. In describing the quick transition from the adult (Tuck) initiating the project to all members participating robustly in the process, the collective writes:

> In some ways, it was Eve's idea to come together, but as we worked in our twice-a-week meetings to create our research questions, develop our project design, design our research tools, and to learn together how to do research, any feelings of her ownership of our group and our process disappeared, and we all became co-founders. (p. 52)

Tuck (2009) writes about another intergenerational PAR collective that sprung from the one above where, although they did not initiate the project, the young people along with Tuck: "would have ownership and decision making power over the research questions, design, data collection, and analysis" (p. 51).

Another example comes from university-based researchers Torre and Fine (Torre et al., 2008) who initially started off their PAR project with youth by asking them to interrogate the "achievement gap" – a research agenda that came from adults (superintendents in New York and New Jersey). However, in dialoguing with the youth co-researchers, the adults learned from youth that the term "achievement gap" locates the problem of educational inequality in the youth themselves (i.e., they did not achieve), not in the systemic lack of resources and opportunity that has caused differential educational outcomes. In turn, the adult and youth researchers not only changed the name to the Opportunity Gap Project but, more importantly from an epistemological standpoint, they "reframed [their] investigation" based on youth input (p. 29). This underscores arguments that youth participation should be seen as both an epistemological requirement and strength that leads to different, deeper, and more informed research questions and inquiry.

Finally, returning to YPAR's theoretical roots, Freire (2008) lays out a very specific approach to PAR in chapter three of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in which he advocates for skilled educators and investigators to initiate a process of developing an educational program for oppressed agricultural workers in rural Brazil.[63] However, Freire states over numerous pages that these outside investigators enter the process without any preconceived notions about what the people already know or what they need to learn. Instead investigators must draw out unique, contextualized generative themes from the people that should serve as the basis of the educational program. In other words, the people's knowledge, experiences, and culture should drive the research/educational agenda, not the outside "experts". To this point, Freire warns against investigators jumping to conclusions about what the people

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[63] It seems important to note here that Freire warned that others working in different settings and circumstances should not try to replicate his pedagogical/epistemological approach exactly (Macedo & Araújo Freire, p. vii).

should study too early in the process, including at the penultimate stage where investigators might mistakenly think they know what the people know: "This perception of reality is still [the investigators'] own, not that of the people" (p. 114).[64]

These descriptions from YPAR researchers Brown and Rodríquez, Tuck, Torre and Fine, and Freire where they argue for youth (or agricultural workers in Freire's case) and adults to collaboratively design the research agenda feel qualitatively and epistemologically different than those from Yang, Mirra et al., and Kirshner. These differences appear to have significant implications for the epistemology of YPAR, particularly with respect to arguments that robust youth participation in the YPAR process, including in setting the research agenda, can change and potentially strengthen the inquiry, which we saw happen with the young people who reframed the focus to the "Opportunity Gap." Finally, youth and adults co-creating the research agenda also seems more in line with the higher rungs of Hart's ladder where youth have greater involvement and decision-making in the direction of the project. That said, it is important to remember that Hart believed that higher up on the ladder was not necessarily better, and Mirra et al., Yang, and Kirshner make compelling arguments that sacrificing youth leadership and participation at times might be worth the trade-off of increasing the likelihood of success in the process and in creating change.

What Do Teachers Believe About Youth Participation in YPAR?

When looking at the leading university-based YPAR researchers, we see some divergence in the language used to describe youth participation in YPAR, with some

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[64] It should be noted that after laying out the PAR process in substantial detail for nearly forty pages, Freire notes at the very end of the chapter: "If the educators lack sufficient funds to carry out the preliminary thematic investigation as described above, they can–with a minimum knowledge of the situation–select some basic themes to serve as 'codifications to be investigated'. Accordingly, they can begin with introductory themes and simultaneously initiate further thematic investigation" (p. 123). Depending on how one interprets this quote, it seems as though Freire leaves the door open a bit for PAR facilitators to start with some very basic, broad research topics/themes, as opposed to going into the PAR process with a completely blank slate.

referring to the process as "youth-led" or some variation thereof and others adopting the language of collaboration and co-research that is intergenerational in nature. That said, in every case, the university researchers themselves initiated the YPAR projects, not the youth. Adults initiating youth-involved projects like YPAR does not necessarily fall into the lowest three rungs of non-participation on Hart's ladder, but it does disqualify them from being on the two highest rungs of the ladder where youth initiate the work. Further, it raises questions about whether YPAR can or should be called "youth-led" or "youth-initiated." Finally, there seems to be substantial differences in the beliefs among university researchers about who should set the research agenda, with some arguing that adults alone should do this work while others seek to co-construct the agenda with youth. Therefore, when comparing teachers' beliefs about student participation in a YPAR process to those of university researchers, it is important to recognize that the university researchers themselves do not represent a monolith and that youth participation is not a binary concept but rather on a spectrum.

Do teachers believe YPAR is youth-led?

In attempting to discover what teachers in my study believe about the youth-led, participatory nature of YPAR, I began with a simple search of terms that the teachers used to describe the process in their interviews. As we saw earlier, some of the leading YPAR university-based researchers, though certainly not all or perhaps even most, use some variation of *youth-led*, *youth-driven,* or *youth-initiated* when referring to YPAR. In comparison, while several teachers did use the language of *youth-led* or *student-led*, most of the teachers in my study did not refer to YPAR work in this way. In a search for some variation of the terms *student, youth,* or *kid* combined in various ways with *-led, -driven,* or *-centered* across the transcripts of the 28 teachers, I came up with only 13 hits total across seven teachers. This

means, of course, that 21 of the 28 teachers (75%) did not use variations of the phrase "youth-led" when describing YPAR. Examples of teacher statements using some version of the terms above include: "a student-led model;" "[YPAR] gave my students the power and voice to steer [the learning];" and "[YPAR] positions young people at the center of the learning and their interests at the center of it." That said, only two teachers total used the specific term "student-led," while none used "youth-led."

Even amongst those who used language such as "student-led" or "student-driven," teachers often cited a tension between a desire for the process to student-led and the perceived need for adults to lead at times. For example, Emiliano, a humanities teacher in an alternative public charter school setting for students aged 16-24, spoke about how difficult it was for the work to be student-led when the students were absent so frequently, which he said frequently killed the momentum of the work. Anthony, a 4/5th grade elementary school teacher who has also engaged in YPAR with middle and high school students outside of classroom settings, stated: "I highly believe in the student-led piece because too many times, we as adults end up steering the students;" however, he then contrasted that sentiment by arguing that at the outset of the projects, students need a lot of "direction" and "structure" because PAR work is brand-new to them – a statement that is reminiscent of university-based YPAR researcher Yang's beliefs.

Kevin, a former 8th grade ELA teacher in a regular public school, stated that YPAR is consistent with a "youth-driven, youth-centered curriculum," particularly when compared with "the rest of the year" where he frames the learning as "teacher at the front of the classroom instructing and you might say students more as receivers of knowledge instead of constructors of knowledge, constructors of the learning." However, Kevin believes that student-driven nature of YPAR comes into tension with the need for teachers to provide

structure. For example, he discusses the lessons he learned from the first time he

implemented YPAR where the process was more student-led, which informed and changed

what he did in his second year of doing YPAR:

> What's hard about [YPAR] is creating structures to support the kids in their work so that day to day they know what they're going to come in and be able to work on, and where we can support them in ways that are meaningful without maybe quenching the student driven-ness of it all. So . . . first year might have been very student-driven, and it's great and I think you got a lot out of it – again that social and emotional piece. But at times it can feel a bit like, "What are we doing, just inventing things on the fly?" It could lead to some level of frustration, but that's maybe part of the process. And in the second year we were definitely much more structured about "Week one, this is what you got to finish," you know? And I think it allowed us to support the students better and felt more academically rigorous.

Here, we see Kevin moving away somewhat from what he perceived to be a more student-

driven YPAR process that was challenging to manage at times, to one where the process was

more teacher-directed. He also makes the case that academic outcomes are perhaps worth

the trade-off of a process that is less student-driven, which is likely a greater concern for

teachers in schools – particularly given the intense pressures that teachers, students, and

schools are facing from the current test-and-punish education reform movement – than

university researchers working outside of school settings.

Finally, Angela, a former middle and high school teacher, echoed Yang's critique of

those who embrace the "fallacy of idealized democracy" in implementing YPAR. Having

done YPAR in writing and advisory courses, Angela states the following:

> I think that sometimes people do work in the name of YPAR where they just ask youth, "What do you think? What do you want to do?" And they don't assume that youth have been living in a society that has already banked really deficit understandings of who they are and who their communities are. And that a lot of teachers have failed to understand that a good number of youth come in with a naïve consciousness because those are the messages that they've received through hegemony on television, in their communities that are state-sanctioned cages, right? They've experienced this, so if youth come in and their understanding of doing YPAR is "stop gang violence" and it's really myopic, and it's just a very deficit-oriented approach, and people consider that to be YPAR? I think that becomes extremely problematic and

really just maintains the status quo. But if the work is centered in critical
interrogation, youth stories and experiences, matched with education that
counters the miseducation that they have been receiving, then that's
technically what all schools should be doing.

Like several university researchers in the academic literature, Angela argues that adults need

to play a significant role in shaping the YPAR process due to their knowledge and expertise

of how systemic oppression works and how it can be countered, which many students might

be lacking. While Angela is perhaps further down the spectrum than most in terms of her

beliefs about adults shaping the YPAR process for youth, in general most teachers in the

study did not frame YPAR as being youth-led, youth-initiated, or youth-driven.

How do YPAR projects in schools start?

Similar to the approach of virtually every university researcher in the academic

literature, the YPAR projects described in my study were initiated by the teachers in almost

every case. These projects were almost always a planned component of teachers' course

curricula, as opposed to springing up organically to address a pressing issues, for example.

Some teachers taught entire yearlong courses dedicated to the YPAR process but, in most

cases, teachers carved out anywhere from a month to six months of their curriculum for a

YPAR project. This finding, of course, is expected given the structures and constraints of

schooling, where teachers are expected to plan out their curriculum (often for the whole

year) and work within school schedules that start and end at a predetermined point. A

couple of interesting divergences exist, though.

Two of the teachers stated that they will only engage in YPAR if and when the

students are ready. Anthony states that he will engage his 5th grade students in YPAR only if

he feels they have made enough progress by the end of the year to do so. He states:

In general . . . two-thirds of the year is spent developing the knowledge of
self, the historical aspect, dropping some theory. Fifth graders, I threw out
Freire to them and they understand the ideas of humanization . . . . And then

they get to do a little research if they're ready, usually around spring
time. But it really depends where they're at.

Additionally, Teacher X's approach to teaching appeared to be the most student-directed of any of the teachers in my study in terms of the students being allowed and supported to learn what they want and how they want to learn it. In turn, he does not have a set part of the year into which YPAR is scheduled to fit. Instead, students in his middle school history and writing classes are engaging in inquiry-based learning throughout the year and, if and when the students decide the time is appropriate, they will take action related to their projects. Teacher X states the following about the youth-led process:

> I don't want to be the educator that walks in and says, "Here's all the shit that's wrong and you need to care about." I want it to be that the youth are the ones making that decision and saying, "Here's what I see and here are the pieces of injustice that I see and here's what I know how to cope with already. Here's what I've learned to do with this." And also, "Here are places I don't know" and let's... if you're willing, let's tackle that. Let's figure out, you know, what this is and how do we deal with it and how do we address it.

Teacher X describes much more of a youth-driven process where youth create the focus of the inquiry and action and Teacher X largely defers to the youth, as illustrated by the phrase "if you're willing." Additionally, similar to Anthony, Teacher X talks about diving into a full YPAR approach when his students are ready, which may come after he has looped with students for a couple of years: "You know, as far as the baseline of gathering evidence from the community, analyzing policies, making recommendations, that's every year. We've always done that. To have a strong plan and methodology to it, that's usually year two or three in a place, you know."

These two teachers followed their students' learning and only engaged them in YPAR work when they felt that the students were ready. However, even with this more responsive approach, it would be hard not to argue that they, along with all other teachers in

the study, fail to reach the highest two categories of Hart's ladder where youth initiate the work on their own.[65] Of course, in order for teachers to achieve the highest two rungs, their students would have to have a tremendous amount of autonomy in what they learn, when and how they learn it, etc., which is extremely rare in core academic classes in public schools. That said, I return to some possibilities that arguably get closer to the top rungs of Hart's ladder in chapter six.

Do students choose to participate?

One of the required components of genuine youth participation according to Hart is that the young people volunteer for the project after it is made clear to them. As we saw with the YPAR projects initiated by university researchers in schools, that requirement seems to be in question with the projects held in elective-type classes, while not being met at all in the projects that take place in required, core academic classrooms. As one might expect, the same held true for most if not all of the projects enacted by the teachers in my study. For example, 22 of the 28 teachers in my study (79%) implemented YPAR in courses that students were required to take, including a handful where the YPAR project was a graduation requirement for seniors. In the other six cases, the students could choose to take the classes; however, two of those cases were core academic classes that students could choose to take that counted toward a state-level history graduation requirement, and two others were credit recovery programs for seniors that were likely one of a limited number of options for students. In only two cases then can it be argued that students elected into a

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[65] One teacher in my study described an example where her former students approached her on their own to ask her to help them conduct a YPAR project, which would likely be the model on the highest rung of Hart's ladder, so a student-initiated YPAR project is possible. However, these former students and she engaged in the work outside of a formal class setting.

course solely or primarily because they wanted to participate in a YPAR project.[66] Finally, in none of the cases, with the possible exception of Teacher X, were students able to opt out of doing a YPAR project once they were in the class, assuming they wanted to pass the course.

Teachers had mixed feelings about youth participating in a required YPAR project/class. On the positive side, several teachers mentioned that implementing YPAR in courses that students are required to attend allows teachers to work with young people in sustained and serious ways. For example, Angela speaks to the "consistency" of doing the work in schools that "allows for practitioners to work with young people for more time and, I think, in more consistent ways than other spaces might be able to." Similarly, Rudy makes the argument that the critical work of YPAR is necessary in core classes because once it is set up as an elective, it loses its importance and legitimacy in the eyes of many students. Other teachers see YPAR as a way to get some students involved in critical, action-oriented projects who otherwise might not engage in such activities. For example, Eleanor, who implements YPAR in an "elective" course that students who have special education designations are placed into, argues that the students in her class are often the ones who normally would not participate in YPAR projects but who benefit greatly from what she calls the "survival skills" gained through YPAR work (e.g., socioemotional and organizational skills). Furthermore, Teacher X argues against the idea that this work can and should only be done outside of the constraints of schooling where it is "pulled out completely from the standard daily experience of the vast majority of students, especially students living in poverty situations or students of Color or other marginalized groups."   These teachers

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[66] Of course, middle and high school students choose elective classes for a host of different reasons, including because their friends are taking the course, they like the teacher, they heard the class was easy, etc.

believe that the critical, action-oriented approach of YPAR is work that schools should be doing with all students in general as a matter of educational justice.

However, other teachers felt conflicted about requiring students to engage in YPAR in schools. For example, Anthony questioned what YPAR would become if it were a school requirement at a systemic level. He made an analogy to the Common Core curricular standards which he said seemed like a good idea to many at first, but once standardized tests, demands for growth, and punitive stakes were attached, it became one more way to "dehumanize" students. He worries that the same thing could happen to YPAR, which he wants to keep "underground a little bit," stating: "It's like we want it, we need it to be normalized in *some sense*, but we don't want it to be normalized and *co-opted*" (emphasis mine).

Other teachers struggled with the implications of what it means to essentially require students to take action in the community. Ernesto, a high school science teacher, talks about the tension he feels in requiring students to take action, particularly when grades come into consideration:

> And so, I struggle a lot with – and this gets back to your question of doing this in school versus doing this in informal settings – requiring action as part of the curriculum in a school setting . . . . And there are some in-school, out-of-school tensions there, too, but this idea of participating in political action for a grade, ahhh [makes uneasy sound]? Should we be giving grades, is another good question we should be asking. But as long as we are, how do we navigate those tensions of what the institution is requiring and . . . I don't know, it's tricky. There are a lot of contradictions.

Instead, his primary focus is on the academic and consciousness-raising pieces of YPAR in order to create "transformative intellectuals,"[67] while letting the action emerge organically amongst young people if and when they want to do so, which he says young people "always do."

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[67] He credits both Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci and several leading university-based YPAR researchers who are his mentors with creating this term.

A couple of other teachers seem to agree with Ernesto about doing the action component of YPAR in a required course. Sarah, who implements YPAR with her senior ELA classes[68], says that it is not her goal to "create activists" through the YPAR process. When asked why not, Sarah responded:

> Because I think sometimes it ends up feeling phony . . . or feeling like something that's being done to them rather than them having the interest in it. And I know school is being done to them, things are being done to people all the time. And so, I understand there are issues with that too because some kids might not feel empowered enough to feel like they have that voice. I think I've been part of places where there are a lot of teachers who feel like they have to create activists and I feel like that is really disempowering to a lot of kids, or that's using power in sort of a strange way.

Instead, Sarah, like some of the teachers in chapter three, sees the action piece of YPAR as being more relevant outside of schools, where students might join up with community organizations dedicated to creating change. A handful of other teachers echoed Sarah and Ernesto's sentiments including one teacher stating he did not feel comfortable doing YPAR and other critical work all year long because it might feel "biased to his way of thinking."

Finally, while many university-based researchers argue for implementing YPAR as pedagogy in schools because it is inherently engaging to young people, some teachers questioned the extent to which this is true, particularly when students were required to do the work in core classes. For example, Grace, who facilitated YPAR with her two sophomore Humanities courses, stated that while YPAR was engaging and empowering to many of her students, it often did not reach "the students who I want to reach most with something like this" because they "don't do school." For students who were not engaged in

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[68] It is important to note that Sarah explicitly stated that she does not refer to her critical, action-oriented projects as YPAR because that is "not her background," meaning that her pedagogical training and experiences were not in settings where they referred to this type of learning as YPAR. However, I argue that Sarah's projects hit on many if not all of the epistemological and methodological components of YPAR, and takes an approach similar to many other teachers in the study. In turn, this seems like a semantic difference rather than a substantive difference.

the YPAR process, Grace argued that even with an engaging approach like YPAR that is designed to be relevant to youth, "at the end of the day, it's still school." Another teacher, Belen, says about the YPAR project: "[there were] different pieces of it where of course the kids were just like sort of checking a box off, they were just like 'okay, I did this, like let me get this over with.'" Here, we see the required nature of doing YPAR in core classes in schools as not necessarily being oppressive per se, but rather failing to live up to the promise in some of the "victory narratives" (Ozer & Wright, 2012, p. 281) that can be "overly rosy" (Brown & Rodríguez, 2009, p. 4) in the academic literature on YPAR, which may be exacerbated when the work moves into schools. When requiring students to participate in YPAR, it seems like teachers will need to be thoughtful in preventing YPAR from becoming simply another thing that students are forced to do in school without their buy-in.

In general, however, most teachers did not seem to believe that requiring students to participate in YPAR was something that is overly problematic, with the exception of the teachers who felt uneasy about requiring students to participate in the action component of YPAR. This is hardly a surprising finding given that the sample of teachers in my study is comprised of those who by and large chose to implement YPAR in their classrooms; however, it does stand in opposition to one of Hart's core principles for genuine youth participation that it be voluntary.

Who sets the research agenda?

Students have substantial input and choice

One part of the YPAR process where teachers gave substantial amounts of choice, autonomy, and agency to students, particularly when compared with the university researchers, is in setting the research agenda. This is especially true when it came to choosing a research topic for investigation. In all but two cases, students had significant and

sometimes complete choice in the topic they wanted to research. Twelve of the teachers

(43%) had no limits at all on the research topics that students could choose. Ten other

teachers (36%) required that the topics fall under a broad theme (e.g., *Education* or *Policing in*

Our Communities); however, students still had choice in the specific topics they wanted to

research under those themes.[69] Four other teachers (14%) limited students' choices to issues

that the community-based organizations (CBOs) they partnered with were working on;

again, though, students still had choice in which CBOs they wanted to work with as well as

how they wanted to study the issues (e.g., choice in developing the research question). One

teacher and her colleagues chose the topic (health) and research question (e.g., "How do you

survey health using a variety of mediums?") for students each year, which appears to be an

example closest to university researchers who chose the topic and research question for

youth. That said, even in this project, students still had choice in which medium (e.g., music,

comic books, social media) they wanted to use to address the research question, albeit this is

more about specific methods than choice of topic. One final teacher, Ernesto, partnered his

students with an ongoing research project outside the school, which I will discuss further in

a moment.

Teacher X, representing teachers who fell on the end of the spectrum where students

had substantial choice in picking the research topic, describes how at the beginning of the

year students have "fuzzy choice" around a shared topic for the whole class (e.g., policing in

the community). However, once students become more comfortable with self-directed

learning as the year progresses, students basically have freedom to interrogate and take

action on whatever topic they like, assuming it is of value to the learning community:

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[69] For example, under the theme of *Education*, one teacher's students chose topics ranging from standardized testing to body image in the arts to racial bias among teachers.

> [In the second quarter], it moves into them making more choices about what to investigate, but still within a defined, shared topic, right? And then, as of late, the last couple of months, it's been much more "Go chase down whatever you want in the universe. Let's talk about it a little bit first and, you know, let's see where affinity lies in the classroom so that you're not just completely off chasing but you have your team and your cohort."

Perhaps summing up his bent toward youth setting the research agenda, Teacher X stated: "I just find it fascinating to be like, 'Hey, what do you want to work on?' and see what they do."

> *Is it YPAR if students have no choice in the research topic and question?*

On the other end of the spectrum, Ernesto's students did not have any choice in the topic or the research question. However, this is because it was out of Ernesto's control. A few years back, Ernesto had an opportunity to partner his AP chemistry students with a local professor and CBO who were leading a community-based research project on environmental justice. The topic and research question had already been defined by these outside adults. The project also required sophisticated methods and complex scientific equipment to answer a very specific research question, so the students had no choice in the methods either, though they did participate in collecting and analyzing data. However, the project adhered to the principles of YPAR in many other ways, e.g., the project was critical in nature (the project focused on environmental racism); youth participated in all aspects of an inquiry project except the research design; it was relevant to their lives (the issue affected them and their community); and the students took authentic action at the end (e.g., presenting their findings at a community forum).

That said, Ernesto, who had done YPAR projects at a different school where students did choose the topic, was torn about whether this community-based, participatory, environmental justice project qualified as YPAR because the students did not choose the research agenda. He states:

> [The students] analyzed the data, they presented their findings and their understandings to their community – about 125 community members came out to hear them speak. They learned a lot from it, you know, their final presentation was sandwiched between this community college professor who has a Ph.D. in chemical engineering and Ph.D.-holding officials from the EPA, and they held their own and actually communicated more effectively with their community then the experts did for lots of reasons. But I think there are some YPAR limitations, or I wouldn't count it as YPAR because of the lack of student involvement in designing the questions and methods. I think that an important part of YPAR is democratizing those tools of research, and that's an important part of the research process.

Ernesto's beliefs about the necessity of students choosing the research question in order for the project to be consistent with a YPAR approach arguably stands in opposition to what Mirra et al. and Yang believe, though it is consistent with higher rungs on Hart's ladder signifying deeper youth participation.

Some other teachers in my study agreed with Ernesto's assessment that the research agenda should and arguably must be set by the students. Suda, a retired teacher who has implemented many YPAR projects in different urban public schools, said that YPAR stands against the idea that "high-faluting scientists [are] asking the questions." Instead, she believes it is essential for young people to ask the research questions because "it's not just who's asking the questions, but what are the questions you're asking," implying that young people ask different questions than university researchers – which echoes the experience Torre and Fine had with students shifting the research framing to the Opportunity Gap. Another example comes from Janie, whose students have choice in their research topics, although they must always fall under the overarching theme of education. She compared these YPAR projects where students had choice in the topic with a class she was currently teaching that she felt was more of a civics project than a YPAR project because of students' lack of choice in designing the focus of inquiry: "It's not true YPAR because the kids didn't decide the topic. I decided I wanted 7th graders to redesign the school yard." Finally, Belen,

who gives her students complete choice in their topics, speaks to how this adheres to one of the tenets of YPAR, i.e., that it be relevant to students' lives: "Everything about [the YPAR projects] is just relevant to the things that the students are experiencing and what they are interested in."

The structures of school(ing) influence teachers' approaches

Teachers expressed other ideas about including students in the research design that seemed influenced by the structures of schools and schooling. For example, many of the teachers spoke about how important it was for students to choose a topic they would be invested in, given how long the projects were and the fact that students were required to participate in the work. Sarah tells her students that it is critical that they choose a research topic that is meaningful to them:

> The choice factor is big . . . [and that] the kids are doing it about something that they truly care about. And I'd say many kids do, because we say to them: "You're going to be married to this topic for three months. You're not going to be able get divorced. You're wedded to it." And so many kids do choose something that they truly care about.

Embedded in Sarah's statement, of course, is the idea that students have no choice to participate, i.e., "You're going to be married to this topic for three months." Additionally, Eric, who teaches a senior YPAR project, provides the following guidance to students in a packet designed to support them in the project: "The most successful [YPAR] projects are the ones that tap into an area of interest for you, the student." Then, the students are reminded of the importance of choosing a topic that will continue to motivate them for an extended amount of time (and where they have no choice to opt out): "consider if [the topic] will maintain your interest for 8 months." Finally, Emiliano underscores the importance of allowing students to shape the research agenda by speaking to student motivation and engagement and juxtaposing it with the amount of work he might have to do as a teacher in

supporting students: "It's easier to get more buy-in on the campaign when the students are thinking and talking and deciding about what they want to do; it's super necessary. Otherwise I'm going to be doing a lot of work for them and that's more work that I need to do." In these examples, we see teachers attempting to mitigate the fact that students are required to participate in a YPAR project – one that will consume months of their time – with the incentive of choosing a topic that interests them.[70]

Another school-specific issue related to who designs the research agenda comes from individual teachers attempting to implement YPAR essentially on their own without the support of other adults. In an attempt to mitigate this issue, teachers partnered with community-based organizations (CBOs) to support them and their students. However, doing so often limited the role students could play in designing the research agenda because they were required to investigate issues the CBOs were working on. For example, Howard, who taught a senior YPAR elective course, stated that the number of topics he allowed the students to study was dependent on how many CBOs he could find to partner with each year, which was limited to a single CBO one year. According to Howard, this is because the CBOs provided a lot of resources that the students needed to do their projects, including materials for the literature review and actions students could join. Another example comes from Kevin, who we saw earlier moving from a model where students led the process, which included having free choice of topic, to one where the topics were limited by partnerships with CBOs. Kevin discussed the tension between choice and the ability to support students: "I would say there's a bit of a trade-off in the sense that students had to kind of choose within those parameters [of what partner organizations were working on]. But we thought

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[70] I return to this issue of choice and motivation in chapter five when looking at teachers who ask students to conduct individual YPAR projects.

that we could really support [the students] a lot better because if they chose [a topic outside the CBOs' work], we would have to dig up a lot of resources for them."

Several other teachers either required students to work with CBOS or highly encouraged students to do so, in part because of management issues. It should be noted, however, that an additional reason often cited by teachers who required students to work with CBOs, including Howard and Kevin, is that students could plug into existing movements for change in the community. In speaking to this issue, Mr. Bishop makes a compelling argument for YPAR projects grounded in and vetted by the community:

> The advantage [to choosing topics from CBOs is] you have people in the community, of the community, working for the community, who have already identified an issue. People in the community [are] currently working with that, have their networks, their connections, have connected with other community organizations working on the same work . . . . [A problem with researching a topic outside the CBOs is] since it hasn't been necessarily vetted by the community, you might be bringing something that the community generally doesn't need or want or has already done…. [If you work with already established issues and groups working on them] you can maybe allow more time in terms of the research, movement building, mobilizing, and then also plugging into things that already exist.

Mr. Bishop's justification for limiting students' ability to set the research agenda by only allowing them to choose issues that CBOs are working on brings into relief the tension between being high up on Hart's ladder of participation where youth are leading the process versus Mirra et al.'s arguments for drawing on the skills, experience, and networks of adults that can increase the odds of successful change work.

One final surprising finding related to school-specific issues is that in only four cases did the course content limit what the students could interrogate through YPAR in any substantial way. In three of these four cases[71], though, the students still had substantial

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[71] The fourth case is Ernesto's environmental justice project with his AP chemistry course, about which he is ambivalent as to whether or not it is "true YPAR."

latitude to choose a research topic within the course content. For example, in Maya's senior economics course, the students had to choose a topic that fell under the course subject (economics), but in one year they chose the topic of raising the minimum wage to $15/hour while the next year they studied and took action against gentrification.

One factor influencing this finding is that many of the teachers in my study either taught courses in the humanities (e.g., ELA/writing, social studies, civics) where curricula tends to be more skills-based as opposed to content-based, or they taught courses that were senior capstone requirements that had no mandated curriculum.[72] However, another factor might be that 18 out of the 28 teachers implemented YPAR with students in grade 11 or above, when curricular demands tend to be looser, in part because many states implement their last series of high-stakes standardized tests at grade 10.

That said, one teacher, Grace, did say she struggled with students taking on hyper-local research topics (e.g., a lack of course offerings at the school) that were sometimes difficult to locate in the larger historical concepts of the US history/Humanities course, which she made a requirement of the projects. Although she was the only teacher in my study who stated she faced this problem, teachers facing similar content requirements may also struggle to integrate YPAR with the course content, especially if YPAR starts to move into science and math classrooms.

Discussion

In this chapter, I examined the epistemological components of youth leadership and youth participation, focusing primarily on the beginning of the YPAR process: who initiates the projects, whether youth choose to participate, and who sets the research agenda. I was

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[72] Notable exceptions exist here, including the five teachers who taught in US history or government courses. See Buttimer (forthcoming) for a discussion of the challenges of engaging in YPAR within courses that have mandated curricular requirements.

seeking to interrogate whether university researchers and then teachers believed that YPAR should be youth-led and, if so, what that means in practice. As with the leading university-based YPAR researchers, variation exists among the teachers in my study in what they believe about and how they facilitate youth participation in a YPAR process.

As one might have expected given traditional teacher and student roles as well as expectations in schools, the vast majority of teachers in my study do not frame the work of YPAR in schools as being "youth-led." Additionally, for the handful who do, several teachers argued that their attempts to adhere to a youth-led process were tempered by their belief that adults need to lead the process at times in order to ensure student success. Anthony and Kevin argued that students' perceived need for more structure as novice researchers might outweigh a truly student-led process at times. Emiliano argued that it is hard to put students in control of the process when so many of them are frequently absent, which kills momentum. Further, Angela appears to reject the idea that YPAR should be student-led, echoing university researchers Yang, Kirshner, and others in arguing that adults can and should mentor students who often have naïve understandings of how systemic oppression works, which if left unaddressed could lead to shallow YPAR work that reifies that status quo as opposed to challenging it.

Closely related to the idea of YPAR being student-led or student-initiated, nearly every YPAR project that took place in a classroom was initiated by the teachers themselves, not the students. Again, this is unsurprising given that the epistemology of schooling encourages if not demands that teachers decide and plan for what students will learn and how, even if sometimes this norm is looser in more progressive classrooms where students have choice within what the teacher decides. With the exception of one project that took place outside of a traditional school setting with the teacher's former students, no teacher

reported a YPAR project arising organically because students and/or teachers identified an issue that needed immediate interrogation and action, and where there was curricular freedom and autonomy to do so. The approach that came closest is Teacher X's, where he starts the year off with a shared umbrella topic of inquiry within which students have "fuzzy choice," but then he moves on to projects that are far more student-directed where students decide if, what, and how they want to study through a PAR approach toward the end of the year. While adults initiating the process is quite consistent with what the vast majority of university researchers did, it would disqualify these projects from being on the highest two rungs of Hart's ladder where youth initiate the work. Of course, it is important to point out once again that being higher up on Hart's ladder is not necessarily *better* in normative terms, and YPAR in required academic classes in school settings may be a context where being in the middle three rungs is more appropriate and effective.

Additionally, many of the teachers in my study – almost all of who implemented YPAR in required courses – did not express the view that students participating involuntarily in YPAR was a problem. In fact, several make equity and access-based arguments for requiring students to participate in YPAR, claiming that it allows teachers to reach students who would not normally participate in critical change work on their own, either in elective courses or in out-of-school settings. If one believes like Valenzuela (2016) and her co-authors (Cammarota et al., 2016) that YPAR is part of movement-building, then one could argue that increasing the number of young people who participate in YPAR is a worthwhile trade-off in removing some student agency.

However, several teachers in the study felt uneasy about requiring students to participate in the action component of YPAR. For example, Ernesto points out how messy it is to essentially require students to take action if they want to receive a good grade,

potentially corrupting students' reasons for trying to create change while also turning action into a transactional process that is capitalist in nature, i.e., the commodity of grades exchanged in return for the labor of taking action. Ernesto's contradiction becomes even thornier when students are not inherently motivated by the work, which several teachers mentioned was the case for some of their students.

While locating YPAR in required academic classes denies students the ability to volunteer to participate in the first place, the teachers in my study did however give students a lot of control and autonomy in setting the research agenda. In fact, the teachers tended to give students far more choice in selecting a research topic and question than most if not all university researchers. For example, some teachers allowed students to take on any topic they wanted, sometimes under a broad theme (e.g., education) but other times without even that restriction. This arguably goes beyond even adult and youth co-construction of the research agenda, and instead this specific aspect of the work might be considered mostly if not completely youth-driven, albeit with teachers likely overseeing the work and providing feedback to students.[73]

The substantial amount of latitude that many teachers gave their students to set the research agenda would likely fall on the highest two rungs of Hart's ladder for deep youth participation and decision-making, as well as Freire's approach where the themes under study come from the participants themselves. However, it counters what university

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[73] For example, two teachers I partnered with on YPAR projects with their students essentially took this approach (Buttimer, forthcoming). One teacher allowed students to choose from eight broad topics (e.g., food justice, youth transit justice, affordable housing), and then students worked individually to develop their own research questions and approaches under these topics. The other teacher allowed students to choose any topic and subsequent research question they wanted under the umbrella topic of education one year and under four other broad topics (race, gender, class, and citizenship) in another year. The teachers oversaw the projects and helped them shape their research questions if and when the students needed it, but this was not a process where teachers and students worked collaboratively together to co-create a single research agenda like many of the projects in the academic literature. I discuss why teachers chose this approach in much greater detail in chapter 5.

researchers like Mirra et al., Yang, and Kirshner, as well as teachers like Angela, believe about the expertise, knowledge, and critical stances adults bring to a YPAR endeavor that should drive the research direction in order to set students up for increased likelihood of success. Of course, other teachers pushed back on this idea that adults should choose for students. Janie and Ernesto questioned whether a process should be called YPAR if youth do not choose the topic, and Suda claimed that students should drive the research agenda because they ask different questions than adults, pointing to the epistemic privilege that students possess.

Further, the teachers in my study did raise some issues related to the structures of schools that shaped their approaches. Several teachers said that they gave students substantial choice in their research topics because the YPAR projects lasted months and if students checked out due to lack of interest, it would cause serious management issues for teachers. This potential issue of students spending months and months of time on something which does not motivate and engage them is at least partially a function of requiring students to participate, of course. Additionally, teachers' partnerships with CBOs often constrained the choice students had in driving the research agenda. However, several teachers made compelling arguments as to why the trade-off in student autonomy was worth the partnership with CBOs, including Mr. Bishop's belief that his students' YPAR projects should be grounded in and allied with ongoing change movements in the community. Finally, course subject matter had only minimal effect on shaping the YPAR projects, although this surprising finding/non-issue is likely a result of my sample, where the teachers generally had more curricular autonomy and less external constraints than many teachers.

Conclusion

Despite YPAR being referred to as "youth-led," "youth-initiated," or "youth-driven" by several leading university-based YPAR researchers, a closer examination of the beliefs and practices of both university researchers and the teachers in my study shows substantial variation within and between these two groups in what they believe about youth participation and how they operationalize it in practice. As YPAR moves into required academic classes in public K-12 classrooms, both opportunities and challenges arise for teachers who want to embrace the participatory and youth-driven epistemological components of YPAR. That said, where some teachers see an opportunity, e.g., reaching more students through the required nature of YPAR, others see a challenge, e.g., requiring students to take action. Finally, the divergences of beliefs about youth participation within and between university researchers and teachers alike raise important questions about *how* knowledge is created in a YPAR approach. I take on these questions and discuss future areas for reflection, debate, and (re)theorizing on the possibilities for YPAR moving forward in chapter six. Before that, though, I continue examining the *how* of YPAR in chapter five, illuminating what teachers believe to be the role(s) of adults and students in creating knowledge and taking action together in a YPAR process, while also interrogating their beliefs on the epistemological principle of collectivity.

Chapter 5: The Collective Nature of YPAR and The Interaction Between Adults and Youth in a YPAR Process

Introduction

In examining what teachers believe about the epistemology of YPAR, I began in chapter three with the *why* of doing YPAR, or *for what purposes* and *to what ends* knowledge is created in a YPAR approach. In chapter four, I shifted to the *how* of this epistemological approach, or how knowledge is created by embedding youth participation into the PAR process. Specifically, I looked at the beginning of the YPAR process: who initiates the projects, who sets the research agenda, and whether and in what ways youth have agency when participating. In this chapter, I continue examining the *how* of YPAR's epistemology, shifting my focus to how youth and adults interact together when engaging in the work once the projects get off the ground. Additionally, in the same way I interrogated whether university researchers and teachers said they believed in the youth-led nature of YPAR and what that looks like, I examine whether adults believe *collectivity* – between students and teachers, as well as between students themselves – is an essential epistemological feature of YPAR and, if they do, how they incorporate it into the work.

I begin this chapter by analyzing what leading university-based YPAR researchers have written about how they envision and operationalize young people and adults working together in a YPAR process. Next, I outline a framework developed by YPAR researcher Dr. Ben Kirshner that captures different models of collaboration that adults use when engaging in change work with youth. In doing so, I apply Dr. Kirshner's framework to different approaches that his colleagues who are YPAR researchers have used, based on their writing in the academic literature. I then use the framework to analyze and organize what teachers in my study said they believe about their roles and the roles of students when

engaging in YPAR, as well as how they said they implemented those beliefs in their classroom settings. I close with a discussion of the ways in which the approaches of university researchers and teachers converged and diverged, as well as how a new approach that emerged from my study might inform the field.

How Do University Researchers Envision the Research Groups?

Intergenerational Collaboration, Collectivity, and Conflict

In understanding how university researchers and youth work together in a YPAR process, it is important to examine the language and framing that academics use to describe the work. For example, Kirshner (2010) writes: "Contrary to what its name might suggest, YPAR typically comprises intergenerational collectives or partnerships of youth and adults" (pp. 238-239). Similar to Kirshner, Fine (2008) uses the language of "multi-generational collectives" (p. 213), while Brown and Rodríguez (2009) describe those working together through PAR as "collaborators" and "co-researchers" (p. 2). Additionally, Wright (2015) describes YPAR as a "democratic approach to building powerful youth-adult partnerships" (p. 3) where adult researchers envision youth as "co-researchers in the [PAR] process" (p. 22). In these university researchers' words, youth and adults are framed as *partners, collaborators,* and *co-researchers* who undertake work in *multi-generational collectives.*

In turn, many learning university-based YPAR researchers underscore the importance of *collectivity* in an epistemological approach consistent with YPAR. For example, as we saw in chapter three, YPAR researchers Cammarota, Berta-Ávila, Ayala, Rivera, and Rodríguez (2016) talk about the power of la colectiva and connecting different YPAR projects together as part of larger social movements. Further, they also argue that collectivity among youth and adults should be a guiding principle for YPAR: "Power with(in). The collective critically reflects on its own process, fosters trusting relationships of

mutuality between members, examines power within the group, and engages in deep self-inquiry" (p. 72). Additionally, Cammarota and Fine (2008) differentiate a PAR/YPAR process from other, more individualistic epistemological approaches as follows:

> Herein lie the differences [between PAR and "traditional" research]. The first and most important difference is the "researcher". In most PAR projects, the researcher is not the lone investigator but individuals in a collective. Together, or individually in the group, they are systematically addressing the same problem (high-stakes testing, inadequate conditions in schools, anti-immigrations policies, push-out practices, violence against women) with a lens that may be crafted individually or collectively. Researchers engage in ongoing conversation and reflections with others, across generations, similarly poised to inquire and act. Research is therefore a collective process enriched by the multiple perspectives of several researchers working together. Second, the researcher, or more appropriately, researchers, are more or less "insiders" in a given situation (p. 5).

It is important for the analysis I will conduct later in this chapter to note that Cammarota and Fine do leave open the possibility that YPAR projects can be done individually (e.g., "In *most* PAR projects…"; emphasis mine)[74]. This possibility notwithstanding, Cammarota and Fine do talk about the work as being collective in nature ("research is therefore a collective process") with participants discussing and reflecting "across generations," albeit lenses in the collective work can be individual.[75]

This collaborative work between adults and youth in true research collectives deepens the process of knowledge creation according to many university researchers. For example, Torre and Fine (2008) write that they strategically created intergenerational research collectives that were "contact zones"[76] (p. 24) where differences along lines of age and generation (and also gender, race, religion, and sexuality) were named and wrestled with

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[74] I have yet to find a YPAR study in the academic literature where a single individual does the investigation, however.

[75] Unfortunately, Cammarota and Fine do not expand upon what it means for lenses to be crafted individually in a collective effort.

[76] The authors write that they borrow this term from the work of Mary Louise Pratt and Gloria Anzaldúa.

throughout the process. In doing so, they created a "messy social space" (p. 25) where members of the collective with different relationships to power came into conflict with one another by design. Torre and Ayala (2009), in outlining an approach to PAR they call *PAR Entremundos*, refer to these conflicts as "choques"[77] or shocks that are epistemologically generative and productive in that they crack open that which is often hidden and left unsaid, which allows for deeper and better analysis and, hence, new learning. This approach seems consistent with Freire's belief that a dialectical approach is necessary to "transform reality" and, therefore, is a requirement between participants engaging in praxis together (students-teachers and teachers-students[78]): "If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity" (p. 88).

For the university researchers above and others (Guishard & Tuck, 2014; Tuck et al., 2008), YPAR work is collective in nature where adults and youth develop genuine partnerships and dialogue and work across power differences instead of pretending they are not there. This collective knowledge creation is portrayed as a more deeply informed epistemological approach that better positions participants to act on the world in order to change it.

YPAR Research Groups in Schools

It is important to recognize that most of the aforementioned university researchers arguing for collective, messy, intergenerational work have facilitated YPAR outside of core academic classrooms in public K-12 schools. The roles and responsibilities of, and power

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[77] The authors give credit here to the work of Gloria Anzaldúa.

[78] "Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (p. 80).

dynamics between, adults and youth working outside of schools are different than those between teachers and students inside classrooms. Perhaps because of this, several of the university-based researchers who have partnered with teachers implementing YPAR in schools have documented projects where teachers either struggled to engage in deep collective work with young people and/or took on different models of adult-youth/teacher-student work through YPAR.

In one of the two studies that looked at multiple teachers doing YPAR with students in core academic classes, Kirshner (2015) documented the work of teachers implementing a curriculum called Critical Civic Inquiry, a component of which was YPAR. According to Kirshner, key principles underlying this curriculum included teachers sharing power with their students, as well as teachers and students taking on issues of "race and ethnicity, power and privilege" (p. 139). Kirshner found that many of the teachers struggled with both components in large part because they had been ill-prepared to teach in a way where power is shared and negotiated, and they possessed limited experience and know-how around conversations of race(ism), power, and privilege. Additionally, Kirshner writes that this model of critical, collective learning ran up against school norms.

The other study of multiple teachers and students engaging in YPAR in a core academic subject, which comes from Rubin, Ayala, and Zaal (2017), also raises questions about whether these university researchers and the teachers they partnered with perceive the work in school to be intergenerational and collective in nature. Rubin et al. twice use the descriptor of "student-led" to refer to YPAR, and in a section on "youth leadership in an adult-directed environment," the university researchers refer to YPAR as "an approach predicated on youth leadership" with the "goal of cultivating a student-led project" (p. 187). Further, they state that teachers "aim[ed] to create a youth-driven project," and one teacher

is quoted as saying "we want you to be as self-directed as possible." Both the university researchers' and teachers' framings appear to run counter to a collaborative approach between adults and youth where new learning happens in contact zones.[79] That said, after finding that teachers were either reluctant to intervene to help students when they needed it or, conversely, fell back into the role of directing the work themselves, the Rubin et al. argue at the end of this section that teachers need to be "reassured" that it is "appropriate" for them to scaffold, support, and share resources and expertise with students, while also sharing power. However, they also state that schools may not be designed for the type of shared work that YPAR demands, although they frame this argument in language that speaks only to youth empowerment, as opposed to youth and adults being empowered by working together: "Ultimately, however, we must acknowledge that there are fundamental constraints to empowering youth within a compulsory setting" (p. 189).

Finally, prolific YPAR researcher Ozer has written numerous articles based on her experiences overseeing a multi-year, multi-school study in California where teachers implemented YPAR with students in elective courses. I conducted term searches across her articles for *collective, co-researcher, intergenerational,* and *partnership* and I only found a few hits, typically when Ozer was using these terms in theoretical discussions about YPAR's epistemology in an introduction section (Ozer et al., 2008, 2010; Ozer & Douglas, 2013, 2015; Ozer & Wright, 2012).[80] The teachers in these studies are most often referred to as

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[79] It should be noted here that one of the university researchers in this study, Dr. Jennifer Ayala, was the co-author of the paper on *PAR Entremundos* and learning through choques.

[80] One exception comes from a study Dr. Ozer did with YPAR researcher Dr. Dana Wright (Ozer & Wright, 2012), where they use the work "partner" or "partnership" on three occasions. However, the YPAR group itself is not referred to as a partnership, nor does it appear to operate as an intergenerational partnership or collective, but rather students engaging in YPAR "guided by their teacher" (p. 276).

"guides" and "facilitators," not co-researchers, collaborators, or partners, and students are portrayed as doing the work of YPAR under the guidance and support of teachers.

In sum, we see one study in schools (Kirshner) where university researchers attempted to push teachers toward more of a collective, contact zone-type approach with which teachers struggled, and two other studies in schools (Rubin et al.; Ozer's ongoing project) where teachers took on more of a facilitator or guide role while students led and undertook the work of YPAR. The approaches and experiences of these teachers raise questions that need to be interrogated further about how teachers envision their own roles and the roles of students in a YPAR approach, as well as whether schools allow for the approach embraced by university-based researchers in the previous section who see collaboration, collectivity, and conflict between youth and adults as being important if not fundamental to YPAR's epistemology.

A Conceptual Model for Analyzing Approaches to Adult-Youth Participation

To help make further sense of these different approaches to adult-youth/teacher-student interactions in YPAR work, I draw on Kirshner's framework for "Guided Participation in Youth Activism" (2015, p. 113):
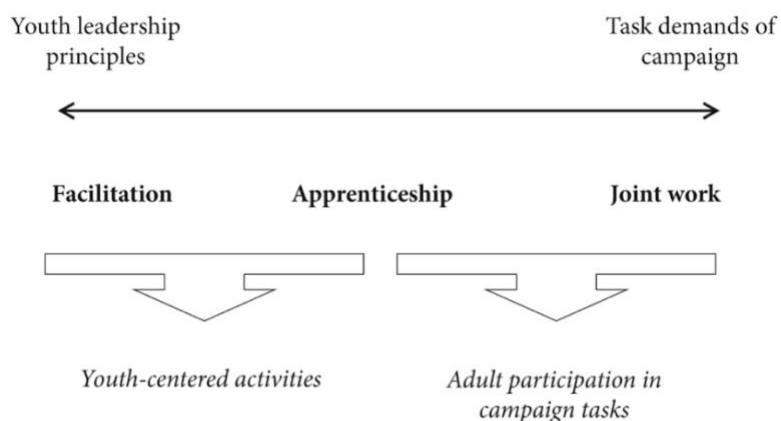

Figure 4.1. Guided Participation in Youth Activism

In his ethnographic research looking at three community groups that included youth, Kirshner created a different model for each organization based on the roles that youth and adults played during their activism work[81]: *facilitation, apprenticeship,* and *joint work.* These models can help to better understand the different YPAR approaches captured in the academic literature by university-based researchers. Additionally, I will use this framework to analyze and frame the different beliefs and approaches that teachers described in my study. In an effort to avoid essentializing categorizations that limit and obscure rather than illuminate, it is important to note up front that Kirshner states that while the different groups profiled in his study use one of the models most frequently in their work, they also employed the other two approaches at times during the months-long campaigns.

Facilitation Model

In the *facilitation model*, adults primarily play a "neutral" role in bringing together youth in order for the youth to engage in activist work. Adults set the stage for youth-led endeavors by facilitating conversation, team-building activities, and group work. However, when it comes time to make decisions and do the labor necessary for a successful campaign, the adults hand the power over to youth while rarely if ever participating in the decision-making process or affecting the direction of the work. Kirshner argues that this model can be useful in "supporting a group's democratic decision-making and collective governance" (p. 130).

Several studies exist in the academic literature where adults appear to use an approach most consistent with the *facilitation model* when engaging with young people in a YPAR process. One example comes from Ozer's studies where teachers are frequently

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[81] Kirshner does not use the term YPAR to describe the work that these organizations did, but the projects as described by Kirshner demonstrated many elements of YPAR. Further, I will demonstrate that this framework has applications for youth and adult participation in any intergenerational work, including YPAR.

described as "facilitators" who "guide" the students as they engage in YPAR. Additionally, the teachers in Rubin et al.'s study (2017) who wanted YPAR work to be "self-directed" and "student-led" would likely fall under the *facilitation model*, including the finding that teachers felt uncomfortable drawing on their knowledge and expertise to support students when they needed it: "Though it is appropriate for teachers to scaffold student efforts in developing research and action plans, enacting this type of support often felt to teachers as though they were undermining student agency and participation" (p. 188).

Apprenticeship Model

In the *apprenticeship model*, the work is still "youth-centered" according to Kirshner, meaning the work is designed specifically to involve youth in activism work. However, the adults do not act as neutral facilitators in this model. Instead, they give their opinions, share their knowledge and experience, and provide direct support and labor when they believe it is necessary. The adults from Kirshner's study who used an *apprenticeship model* stated that they intervened at times because they have different knowledge, skills, and framings than youth that should be leveraged to mentor youth for success. They justified their beliefs by stating that youth can have naïve and inexperienced perspectives on issues of racism, sexism, and other forms of structural oppression that can prevent high-quality work from being done. Additionally, they argued that adults can model skills and behaviors needed for successful change work, thereby apprenticing young people in the work. According to Kirshner, this approach may be appropriate when adults are concerned primarily with "preparing youth for sophisticated organizing strategies or linking them to a social movement" (p. 130).

The justifications for using the *apprenticeship model* above sound consistent with Yang's (2009) argument against the *fallacy of idealized democracy* from chapter four where he criticizes "student-centered dogma" while holding up the need for teachers to be authorities

in the work. In turn, Yang describes a YPAR process that implies apprenticeship where adults lead and model the work for youth at first: "The first phase was heavily teacher centered and the second youth centered" (p. 101). The *apprenticeship model* can also be applied to university researchers who argue that adults, because of their knowledge, experience, and social capital, should design the research agenda in order to set students up for success, e.g., Mirra, Garcia, and Morrell (2016).

  Joint Work Model

  The final approach adults used with youth in Kirshner's study is the *joint work model*. In this model, the work is not centered solely or even primarily around youth; instead, youth and adults come together to work collaboratively on a campaign of interest to everyone involved. Very little if any mentoring and direct instruction by adults is involved, according to Kirshner. In the *joint work model*, the decision-making is shared among adults and youth, and the labor is divided amongst them based on each individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities. The main goal of a *joint work model* is the success of the campaign according to Kirshner, not youth learning, although he hypothesizes that young people can acquire new knowledge and skills by working alongside adults on a sophisticated campaign.

  The *joint work model* can most aptly be applied to the university-based YPAR researchers above who embraced collectivity and the learning that comes through choques in intergenerational conflict zones (e.g., Fox & Fine, 2013; Torre et al., 2008; Torre & Ayala, 2009; Tuck et al., 2008). Additionally, in research collectives employing a *joint work model*, the decision-making was typically shared among adults and youth, including the co-creation of the research agenda. Of particular note to my study, the university researchers who practiced joint work with young people frequently engaged in the work outside of traditional school settings.

Kirshner's Framework as an Analytical Tool for YPAR Work

To reiterate, the three organizations in Kirshner's study did not *solely* use the model that best describes their work; rather this was the approach they used most frequently. Additionally, Kirshner believes there is a time and place for all three approaches, with each having its advantages and disadvantages. Similarly, when analyzing what university researchers have written about their YPAR projects, I found that they described aspects of the work that would likely fall under a different model than the one in which I placed them. The point in categorizing their work in this way is not to apply the category perfectly, nor do I mean to pigeonhole anyone's work. Rather, Kirshner's framework and the application of these three models are helpful in surfacing the larger epistemological questions that arise when closely examining divergent approaches to adult-youth interaction through YPAR. It is in this spirit, and with these caveats, that I will use these models to uncover and analyze how participants in my study talked about their roles as teachers engaging with their students in a YPAR process embedded in core academic classrooms in K-12 schools.

In this next section, I adapt Kirshner's three models slightly in order to better apply them to teachers' stated beliefs about partnering with students in a YPAR process.[82] This adapted framework assists in illuminating how teachers converge and diverge with each other, while also allowing for comparisons to what university researchers have written. Additionally, I identify and create a new model – *Individual YPAR Projects* – used by teachers that does not fit neatly into any of Kirshner's models and has yet to be captured in the academic literature. I close with a discussion of how the adapted models and new model, along with the convergences and divergences among teachers themselves and between

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[82] A final but necessary reminder: as Kirshner observed among the adults in the community-based organizations in his study, I also found that most of the teachers in my study used all three models at different times.

teachers and university researchers, can push the field to examine and theorize about the epistemology of YPAR in new ways, particularly with regards to how adults and youth interact when engaging in YPAR inside and outside of schools.

How Do Teachers Envision the Research Groups?

Model 1: Teachers as Facilitators

When describing their role as teachers working with students through YPAR, the teachers in my study most frequently described themselves as facilitating the process, in ways similar to how Kirshner describes the *facilitation model*. Every teacher whom I asked explicitly about how they perceived their role in the YPAR process – *facilitator, expert*, and/or *co-researcher* – answered that at least one of their roles was *facilitator*.[83] These teachers, and others to whom I did not ask the question explicitly, used language such as "facilitators" and "coaches" who "guided," "facilitated," and helped students to "navigate" the YPAR process – language similar to that used to describe teachers in several of Ozer's studies.

For example, Alizea, a high school history teacher in a regular public school, stated that she played a dual role as "facilitator/co-researcher." However, her description of how she operates during the YPAR process sounds more like Kirshner's *facilitator model* than the co-researcher role reminiscent of the *joint work model*:

> It's more the facilitator/co-researcher. When I ask the kids to do something,
> then I am expected to do the same thing. And so I may not research because
> I've got a lot going on, but I do read the chapters with them. So I'll read
> *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* for every classroom, for every class where they do it.
> And we are annotating as a class and so I facilitate. And then they're
> constantly teaching and so they do a lot of the teaching as well, plus the
> presentation. But, yeah, there have been times where I put them in their
> groups for their YPAR, and I don't have to do anything. I just sit there and

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[83] I asked 11 of the 28 teachers this question explicitly, and all 11 answered that one of their roles was *facilitator* (7 of those 11 said *facilitator* and either *expert* or *co-researcher*, or all three). I did not ask this question to all of my participants because my original interview protocol did not include this question, and I added it a little over halfway through my interviews when I heard teachers describing their role as a facilitator, expert, and/or a co-researcher.

they don't even need me because they have their own ideas on what they want to do. So they only call me over when they want, you know, if they have a question or something, or they want a pat on the back.

Alizea explicitly states here that she does not engage in the research with the students, and she concludes by stating that at times during the process, students are essentially working on their own, congruent with the *facilitation model*.

Another example comes from Teacher X, a public middle school teacher, who spoke to the various options he provides for his students in learning content and conducting research:

So [I'll say to the students], "Those of you who want me to can[84] a series of mini-lessons on poetry for you, I'll do that. Those of you who want to investigate what poetry is yourselves, do that and then come back to the other group and teach us about it," you know? And then this becomes another tool that then as you're running out and investigating stuff, where does poetry come across in this? Do you want to use poetry to communicate your research? Like how do you want to do it, right?

While Teacher X will act as an expert for his students if they want him to (e.g., he will teach poetry mini-lessons), the students have a substantial amount of choice and autonomy in how they want to engage in the work in his classroom (e.g., they can use poetry to communicate YPAR findings if they want to do so). This belief in student-led work is consistent with a *facilitation* approach, albeit his approach is fluid at times, drawing on the *apprenticeship model* if the students want him to do so. Additionally, Teacher X's statements from chapter four about giving students a lot of autonomy in how and when to participate in YPAR work as the year progresses seems quite congruent with the *facilitation model*.

Finally, Kevin, a middle school ELA teacher in a regular public school, spoke about how "it's important for us as adults to help facilitate [students'] leadership and build their

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[84] By "can," I interpret Teacher X as meaning that he will put together some more structured, teacher-directed lessons on poetry, i.e., put them in a can.

leadership skills" through the YPAR process. Similar to adults in Kirshner's study who used

the *facilitation model*, Kevin said that the decision-making ultimately lays with the students:

> I remember [my special education co-teacher] was facilitating [a] group [of
> students] and he would really just let them decide what they wanted to
> do. He could make some suggestions, but really it's more like, stand back,
> "This is what you want to do. I want to support you in doing it, and I'll help
> you in whatever way. But it's your idea. And if you want to get it done, then
> I will be there but you have to motivate your classmates, motivate your peers
> to get this done."

Additionally, Kevin states, "[Students] have a goal that [they] need to achieve by the end of

the time, and whether [they] get it done or not kind of rests on the group of students. So if

it doesn't happen, then it's on them." Unlike those using a *joint work model* or even in an

apprenticeship model, Kevin believes the success or failure of the YPAR process rests solely on

the students. That said, as we saw in chapter four, Kevin moved away from a more student-

led approach in his second year doing YPAR to one where he, the teacher, narrowed the

scope of the project topics for management purposes, so it seems like Kevin draws on the

apprenticeship model when necessary, as well.

In these examples, we hear teachers saying they adopted the role of facilitator,

whereby the students led the work and the responsibility for the success of the campaigns lay

with the students. From an epistemological standpoint, these teachers adopted stances that

positioned students as the primary knowledge creators and action takers, as opposed to

teachers and students sharing this responsibility in a *joint work model*, for example. Of course,

as we see with Kevin, he and the other teachers above made statements at times about their

beliefs that might be more consistent with an *apprenticeship* or *joint work model*. Placing these

teachers' statements within the *facilitator model* is designed solely to help us understand how

teachers think about YPAR work as opposed to placing them perfectly and completely inside

a single category. This applies to teachers and their stated beliefs in the categories to follow, as well.

Model 2: Teachers as Experts in an Apprenticeship Model

Another way that teachers spoke about the role they played in the YPAR process is that of an expert who mentors students in the research process in ways similar to those in Kirshner's *apprenticeship model*.[85] In embracing the role of expert, Angela, a former middle and high school teacher, states: "I think adults should be experts in the room." As we saw in chapter four, Angela argued that many students come to YPAR with a "naïve consciousness" about how structural oppressions works. In turn, Angela believes adults must develop students' critical consciousness so they do not reinforce the oppressive status quo through YPAR rather than challenging it. Consistent with this stance, Angela and her colleagues engaging students in YPAR at her school made sure to mentor students in decolonizing research practices before undertaking YPAR: "We started with methodology first, before students even went into the community [to collect data for their YPAR projects], because we didn't feel like just because they were poor youth of Color that they would necessarily know what to do or how to do it and to not perpetuate entitlement and colonial practices." This approach echoes the beliefs and rationale of adults who adopted Kirshner's *apprenticeship model* and pushed youth to go beyond their current understanding of the world when undertaking the work.

Other teachers reported that they required students to put together research agendas that needed to be approved by the teacher or team of teachers in an attempt to increase student success in the YPAR process, consistent with the *apprenticeship model*. An example of

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[85] Four out of the 11 teachers I asked this question named *expert* as one of the roles they played; none chose it as the only role.

this comes from Jennifer, a middle school ELA teacher, who describes how she attempted

to ensure students had a solid plan before embarking on the data collection piece of YPAR:

> [The students] had to submit a calendar of how and when they were going to
> do each of those [research] methods, and how that was going to ensure that
> they were done with the project on time. So like, "Monday, I'm going to
> interview so and so; Tuesday I'm going to transcribe what I wrote" . . . .
> [T]hey couldn't conduct the research until they had approval from their team,
> the team of teachers.

Some teachers asked students to practice various research methods (e.g., interviewing,

surveys) under their guidance in the classroom before using them in authentic situations

when gathering data for their YPAR research. In essence, these teachers were apprenticing

students in various research methods, consistent with Kirshner's *apprenticeship model.* Other

teachers reported working with students to ensure that their YPAR projects and action plans

were narrow enough in scope to fit within time periods that could be as short as 4-5 weeks.

Teachers stated that these shortened durations were sometimes a result of standardized

testing, semester breaks, and other structural barriers unique to school, which likely

heightened teachers' perceived need to ensure students had a solid plan for engaging in the

work. Teachers likely believe, justifiably, that there is no time for iterative cycles of

reflection and action, where students might learn from failure, when doing the work within

the span of only a month.

One final way that teachers acted as experts and mentors is when they provided

resources *for* students that were useful to their YPAR project, as opposed to finding them

with students or asking students to find them on their own. Some teachers supplied

students with a menu of secondary research resources (e.g., online articles and reports) for

their literature reviews because they felt students would struggle with doing internet searches

that would yield credible, relevant, and youth-friendly sources. Kevin, who taught middle

schoolers, believed that this approach of providing students with secondary research artifacts

was still consistent with the student-driven aspect of YPAR: "Whatever the kids decided became the curriculum. So it drove what lessons we would do, what articles we would bring to class, what videos we would do with them." On the other hand, Grace, a high school humanities teacher who also took this approach at times, was ambivalent about providing this level of support: "We gave them a lot of the articles [for their literature review] and I have really mixed feelings about that because I don't think that's actually helpful for them moving forward around this question of how to find strong sources and using keywords to find what you need."

The teachers above stated that they provided students with direction and intervened in the YPAR process at times in an attempt to ensure that students were set up for success in the work. This is consistent with the *apprenticeship model* as well as the writing of university researchers in the academic literature like Yang and Mirra et al. who believe adults play important roles in leading and mentoring youth through a YPAR process. However, most teachers in the study did not appear to use the *apprenticeship model* as their *primary* approach, nor did they embrace the language of *expert* when describing their work.

Model 3: Joint Work and Collectivity

If only a relatively small number of teachers embraced the framing/role of expert, then even fewer used the language of *co-researcher* or described themselves as working together with students in an intergenerational collective reminiscent of Kirsher's *joint work model* or Torre and Fine's *contact zone.* This is perhaps unsurprising, given the traditional roles and positioning of teachers vis-à-vis students in schools where teachers engaging in the same work they ask students to do might be perceived as unorthodox at best by many. That said, a handful of teachers did describe aspects of the YPAR process in ways that were similar to a *joint work* approach. Further, many teachers spoke about the power of collective work;

however, they were most often referring to collectivity among students working together, not collectivity between teachers and students.

In turn, to help guide a somewhat complex and multistep analysis of the *joint work and collectivity* model, I have divided this section into sub-sections based on teachers' views on collective work. I begin by examining statements by teachers who spoke about the work as teachers and students collaborating in ways similar to the *joint work model*. Then, I illuminate teachers' beliefs about students themselves working together collectively and how they stated that they structured the work.

Collective work between teachers and students

Of the eleven teachers I asked about how they perceived their role in the YPAR work, only four chose *co-researcher* to describe themselves and none chose that descriptor by itself.[86] However, in three of the four instances of teachers calling themselves co-researchers, they typically did not engage in what Kirshner described as joint work. When they referred to themselves as a co-researcher, these teachers indicated that they would jump in and support young people when they needed help finding secondary research for their projects, which is more consistent with the expert/apprenticeship model above.

However, one of the four teachers who called himself a co-researcher, Emiliano, describes the work in ways that are consistent with the *joint work model*. Emiliano has a small group of students (typically about 8 students per class) that he works with in a non-profit charter school for students aged 16-24 who have been unsuccessful in regular public school settings. Here he describes the work he did himself to support the success of the YPAR

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[86] Two teachers said *co-researcher* and *facilitator*; two others said all three: *co-researcher, facilitator,* and *expert*.

projects, while expressing his desire to be more explicit about calling himself a co-researcher going forward:

> It's real, it's authentic work. If nobody's going to write a press release because no one signed up to do it, you've got to write the press release. And tell me why I was sitting there at 6:00 at night still at work, at school, making sure this press release looked good? Or making sure I have all the press contacts that we have been communicating with? So it's like, I'm a co-facilitator, I'm a co-researcher. I think I probably could have made it a lot more explicit that I would be a co-researcher. That's a good idea to start [just] saying those words.

Emiliano was working in small group environment where the eight students in his class were working on the same research topic. This small environment likely encourages teachers and students to work together as an intergenerational collective, probably out of necessity at times since there are fewer people amongst whom the work can be divided.

While other teachers spoke about the process at times in ways consistent with a joint work model, in general most teachers did not describe the students and themselves in ways that would be consistent with an intergenerational research collective consistently engaging and wrestling with the work across teacher-student lines. Instead, most seemed to adopt the role of supporter, facilitator, and/or mentor over the joint model approach. Kevin, when asked specifically about which of the three roles (*facilitator, expert,* and/or *co-researcher*) he played, provides some possible insight into why:

> I never thought about the co-researcher part. Maybe the worry in my case and with kids in the 8th grade is that the adult will do too much of the heavy lifting and the students wouldn't do the work themselves. And the students will rely too much on the adult to drive things, get things done, set things up for them. So I feel like the facilitator role, maybe at that age, is better because really then, the teacher takes a step back. It's really on the students and we're supporting you to do it, but this is about you and your work. But I do really like the idea of co-researcher so there isn't a separation of the idea that this is your project and I'm supporting you but I'm not invested in it myself, because I clearly was in all of these issues. They were all very important to me living in [city neighborhood] and living in the community.

Kevin posits that the teacher-student co-researcher model might not be an effective one for classrooms settings, although he is sympathetic to Emiliano's idea about referring to himself as a co-researcher going forward.

Collective work among students

While an intergenerational research collective approach consistent with a *joint work model* appeared to be relatively uncommon, many of the teachers did espouse a belief that a collective approach was necessary and desirable *among the students.* For example, Preciliano, a high school teacher who asks his students to work on a whole-class research question together, spoke to the power of the collective learning experience his students received through YPAR, particularly as a response to the individualistic nature of the epistemology of schooling:

> I just honestly feel that they get more out of [YPAR] as people, but not just academically. This is stuff that they're not learning. Where are you really learning how to be a civically engaged and active student, just collaborating with folks? Because everything is individualistic: "You do your work. Don't turn. Don't help them. That's called cheating." I just feel that they're getting the academic skills at a more rigorous pace and they're learning skills that aren't being given to them in traditional schooling settings.

Angela, whose students interrogated a research question as a whole group but took on different parts of the work in small groups, echoed Preciliano's comments about how collective work through YPAR can counter dominant narratives that promote individualism:

> I think group work is important. And it's really challenging. That's why a lot of people don't do it . . . . But I think the group work is really important because we have a responsibility, if we are seeking to use education as a way to transform the world. We live in a very individualistic society, and [students] have to know how to work together, authentically, to see results,

and know Ubuntu and know In Lak'ech.[87] Know it and live it and, at times
eat it and be dependent on it before they get out of high school. They have
to know it. And so, if teaching is YPAR in general, then there have to be
multiple times and opportunities for students to work together. Should the
reflection be individual? I think so, but I think it should be also individually
reflective . . . . [B]ut I think most YPAR projects should be done in groups
because there's no way that I can overcome oppression alone.

Finally, Mr. Bishop, who asks students to work in groups in a senior capstone class, stressed

the importance of students working collaboratively when trying to instigate change, similar

to Angela: "I think one of the other things in terms of working with the group is you learn

to *work with the group*, which I think is a benefit because any type of change that you do in all

actuality, I mean you have to do with other people. Change doesn't happen with one person

in a vacuum." With all of these teachers, we hear a rejection of the individual work that so

frequently happens in school settings and an embrace of collectivity among students as an

epistemological strength.

These viewpoints echoed those of other teachers in the study who set up the YPAR

projects so students would undertake the work collectively, even if they as adults were not

participating in the same way adults would in a *joint work* approach. Over three-quarters of

the teachers (22 teachers) asked students to work together on a research topic either as a

whole class (10 teachers) or in small groups within the class researching different topics (12

teachers total – 8 required small group work and 4 provided the option). Students would

typically either vote or come to consensus on the research topic if they were working as a

whole class. In the small groups model, students typically were able to choose which

research topic/group they wanted to examine/join. In some cases, the teachers would

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[87] Ubuntu and In Lak'ech are concepts from African and Mayan ontologies and epistemologies, respectively,
that place great value in collectivity, mutuality, and connectedness among all people. For more on Ubuntu, see
here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftjdDOfTzbk. For more on In Lak'ech, see here:
http://vue.annenberginstitute.org/perspectives/lak%E2%80%99ech-you-are-my-other

partner the students with outside community-based organizations (CBOs), which is arguably another conception of collective work. However, because the members of these CBOs were working full-time on their organizations' campaigns and were not employed by the school, the interactions between students and the CBO members were infrequent in most cases (e.g., CBO members would present the issue they were working on to students at the beginning of the YPAR process; CBO members would come to the final presentations).

Teachers who employed either a whole-class or small-group collective model often spoke about the power of dividing up the work and co-constructing the knowledge among students. For example, Mr. Bishop created a digital media depot for his students where they were asked to upload and share articles that could be accessed by their peers working on the same topic, including those in other classes. This is similar to the set-up that some of the teachers in the apprenticeship/expert model used, but in this case the students rather than the teachers were finding and sharing the articles. Additionally, many teachers structured projects so students would divide up the work of collecting data amongst themselves, either a whole class or in small groups. This might look like individual students being required to conduct a certain number of interviews or to solicit participants for a survey, with the data being shared among the group or class. Here is an example of a worksheet from Maya's class that guides students in dividing up the data collection process:

Sample Outreach Brainstorm

We are making an outreach plan for _____ (name sample group)

We can reach out this group in the following ways:
❑ Calling/texting
    Who will you call/text? _____
    Group member(s) responsible for this outreach: _____
    Group member will complete this outreach by: _____
❑ Social media (circle all that apply): facebook, twitter, snapchat
    Group member)s) responsible for this outreach: _____
    Group member will complete this outreach by: _____

❑ Going to places where this sample will be, like _____ (name location)
    Group member(s) responsible for this outreach: _____
    Group member will complete this outreach by: _____
❑ Email
    Who will you email? _____
    Group member(s) responsible for this outreach: _____
    Group member will complete this outreach by: _____

❑ Asking a friend/family member/teacher to outreach on our behalf
    Who will ask to do outreach for you? _____
    How will you follow up with this person? _____
    Group member(s) responsible for this outreach: _____
    Group member will complete this outreach by: _____

What identifying question will help us to know that a surveyee is a part of this group?

Are there any particular questions we should include on the survey for this group? List them here.

Alizea speaks to how this collective, distributed-work approach mitigates an issue common in schools where one student fails to complete their portion of the group work:

> Each group member is in charge of having five observations where they're observing the area, observing people, where they are just watching. So everyone has to do that, and the reason is if one person in the group doesn't do that, they still have data from their other group members and they have their own data.

In all of these descriptions above, we see how a collective approach can lead to more informed research.

Further still to the power of co-creating knowledge, Maya describes how students working collectively led to both gathering more data as well as better, deeper analysis of that data. In a project examining the effects of gentrification in their neighborhood, students sent out a survey to their peers to determine their beliefs about the effects gentrification has had on their communities. Maya describes how students working collectively as a whole group motivated them to get more data, which likely made their findings stronger:

"[Working as a whole class] becomes then a collective question. So then, I think it ups the investment of students who would have been inclined to be less invested because then it's a conversation we're having across the entire senior class . . . . [S]tudents are actually motivated to get individual responses." Then, she described how collective analysis of the data lead to more "intellectually interesting and rigorous discussions" about the inquiry at hand. For example, Maya stated that her primarily Black and Latinx students had substantially different experiences with gentrification based on their race/ethnicity, and that those differences allowed them to analyze and discuss the data in ways that were deeper and more nuanced because of the different perspectives that came from working collectively. This new learning borne of working across lines of difference is one of the few instances teachers reported that resembled the choques within contact zones that Torre, Ayala, and Fine described.

Finally, many of the teachers argued that embedding collectivity in the process was motivating and upped investment in students working together to take action to create change. Mr. Bishop asked his students to take action throughout the research process, and he described how students would often engage in actions if they knew their peers would be doing so, too. The students across all of his classes created a single calendar and put their names next to actions (e.g. meetings, protests) in which they planned to participate. Mr. Bishop stated that when the students saw their friends going to an event, they would want to go, too. He claimed this peer influence resulting from collective work is powerful: "It's also building this collective aspect of interest, intrigue, actually learning more about it."

Additionally, Preciliano describes how his students overcame schooling structures that separate them in order to unite and work collectively, including beyond the school day at times:

> The kids decid[e] on the PowerPoint, breaking that down, who's going to do
> what. What they'll do after that is they'll come up with a script, "This is what

we want our presentation to say," and then they start dividing it up. As a collective, they come to a consensus on the message . . . . What's been cool [is] one year, two classes, because their projects were similar – it just naturally happened that way – they did a co-presentation. So a lot of their time was after school getting together because they were in different class periods so they didn't mix. So [they would get] together after school to practice and prep their stuff. That was pretty cool because the kids approached me wanting to get together instead of to separate.

In sum, we see that many teachers value the principle of collectivity – it is just that they tend to value it more as collective work *among students* than as collective work *between students and teachers*. This collective approach has epistemological and implications as students created knowledge together by gathering and sharing resources for a literature review; by gathering, sharing, and collectively analyzing data; and by motivating each other to work together on actions to create change.

Model 4: Individual YPAR Projects

As foreshadowed above, one new model that teachers used emerged from my study which no leading university-based YPAR researchers have written about thus far: individual YPAR projects. In this approach, teachers asked or allowed students to choose individual research topics/questions and to engage in much if not all of the YPAR work as individuals.[88] These teachers tended to say they valued the increased engagement, motivation, and empowerment that comes from students' choosing their own YPAR projects over the collective work that is typically an epistemological feature of YPAR. At the same time, this individual approach is very much in line with the epistemology of schooling, which may have played a role in teachers' decisions to implement this model, as I will demonstrate below. In this section, I divide my analysis into those two sub-sections: 1.)

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[88] In the cases where students engaged in individual work for most of the process but worked collectively at some point, I am still referring to these projects as *Individual YPAR Projects* for simplicity of writing's sake, though I make note where and when a collective approach is used in my analysis.

motivation, engagement, and empowerment; and 2.) the influence of the epistemology of schooling.

Motivation, Engagement, and Empowerment

A little over a third of the teachers (10) in my study either required students to do substantial portions of the work individually (5 teachers) or allowed it as an option (5 teachers). Teachers who used an individual YPAR projects model typically asked each individual student in the class to choose a research topic that spoke to them directly, regardless of whether others in the class wanted to work on that topic. The most common response from teachers when asked why they structured YPAR so that individuals chose their own topics and engaged in their own research projects was that doing so led to greater student motivation, engagement, and empowerment. These teachers believed that, unlike whole class or small group models where some students have to compromise and go along with the rest of the group, individual YPAR projects increased the likelihood that the students would be interested in their topic and therefore would be more invested in the work.

One teacher, Grace, used the individual YPAR project model with her students in two 10th grade humanities classes that contained approximately 25 students each. When asked what she felt the advantage was in using this model versus a whole class or small group model, she said:

> Self-determination. This ultimately is about ownership of a process and producing original knowledge for young people. Schooling is really about telling you what to do your whole life. "You do this, you do that." You don't have any choice. And choice to me is the greatest example of self-determination. I think the thinking that goes into creating a research question – that was another thing we worked on was refining your research

question and identifying what can you reasonably answer, given the constraints we have.[89] I mean, I think that's a very valuable process.

Grace continued: "[G]iving [students] an opportunity to generate their own question is really, really important, I think. I think that's essential actually, an essential piece. I feel like it would be contradictory, almost, if we didn't allow that."

Other teachers echoed Grace's belief that giving students individual choice in what they research is a powerful motivator. Theo, whose students engaged in individual research projects under eight different umbrella topics (e.g., housing justice, transit justice, environmental justice) used this model across his four sections of middle school ELA classes, explaining: "I could pick a topic or two and force everybody to do that, and it would be much more manageable but then it wouldn't be as authentic, and there wouldn't be as much buy-in." In turn, Theo brings in representatives from community-based organizations (CBOs) to talk about the issues they are working on, which Theo says gets students excited about their research topics. However, if students did not want to pick from the issues the CBOs were working on, he allowed them to go outside of those topics to pick ones they would be more enthusiastic about researching. In explaining why he gives individual students this amount of latitude in their choice of topic, Theo reiterates: "[Y]ou really need them to buy in when the work gets tough, or else they're not going to put in the work."[90]

One final teacher, Jennifer, describes how an individualized approach[91] to doing YPAR fit into her school's approach to providing individualized learning pathways for each student, which she and the school viewed as empowering. Jennifer explains:

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[89] For example, Grace's students had about six weeks to undertake and complete their YPAR projects.

[90] Theo did mention that some of his students collected data together in a jointly created survey, so the projects were not completely individualized at times.

[91] Jennifer's students practiced research methods on each other (e.g., interviewing each other) and they hosted a community forum to present their findings at the end of the YPAR process, both of which can be considered collective work, although they presented their work separately in poster sessions at the forum.

> **Jennifer:** [A]t our school . . . it was basically very, very autonomy-driven and each student has an individualized plan of how they learn and what they want to do. So that's also[92] why we did individual projects because we wanted each student to choose into what they are most passionate about and is reflective of their three years at our school.

> **Interviewer:** So, from other teachers I have talked to who do the individualized ones, that choice and autonomy, which hopefully leads to increased motivation, was arguably the main reason why they chose the individual projects. Would you agree that that was a significant factor?

> **Jennifer:** Yes. We do everything based on self-determination theory too, so giving them confident, competency[-based] feedback; relatedness, so feeling like part of a community; and then also autonomy, that they are choosing. And that the work will be of better quality and they'll be proud of it if they have those three things within what they are doing.

These teachers and others felt that the choice and autonomy of students choosing their own individual research topics and designing individual research agendas would lead to greater engagement, motivation, and empowerment.

The Influence of the Epistemology of Schooling

While teachers indicated that motivation, engagement, and empowerment were key reasons for using the individual YPAR project model, some of these teachers made decisions that appeared to be influenced at least in part by adhering to the epistemology of schooling. Returning to Grace as an example, after students conducted research and wrote up individual research papers, Grace did ask the students to work collaboratively in groups around themes that emerged from their individual projects (e.g., racism and police brutality, gender and sexuality). In these thematic groups, the students created interactive, artistic representations of their findings which they presented in groups at a community forum. Grace felt that

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[92] Jennifer also said that grades and group dynamics led her to choose an individual YPAR approach: "So they did have group work [earlier in the year]. But I was worried that when we made it high stakes, even though really they were going to go on to the next grade – and we said this [YPAR] capstone project is everything; it is your culminating thing – that they were not going to do so well doing that together."

group work was more effective during this artistic action phase rather than the

research phase, explaining:

> I don't know if [students doing research and writing it up collaboratively] would be the most helpful way to strengthen their skills . . . . I think the artistic work being a collaborative process, which it is, they do have to think about their individual piece and then how it connects to something. They have to link them somehow and come up with common questions and engage the audience. I think that is a more fruitful space for the collaborative process to unfold.

Here, Grace argues that an arts-based piece is a process that is more appropriate for

collaboration, while questioning whether a collaborative research/writing process can

develop students' individual academic skills. Individual student skill development is a

[justifiable] concern that is likely more urgent to teachers working with students in schools

than adults working with youth outside formal school settings.

Another teacher, Alizea, stated that she required students to write individual research

papers during the YPAR process, an approach that seemed to be influenced by the

epistemology of schooling where individual students are expected to be able to demonstrate

certain skills on their own. Alizea allows her students to work in groups to collect data

around the same research topic but then they have to analyze the data on their own and

write up individual research papers. Alizea explains why she uses an individual model for

writing up research as opposed to a collaborative one, speaking also to the school-specific

problem of grading:

> **Alizea**: Well, the reason is because group work really sucks [she laughs]. You have one person that's going to do everything; you have one person that's going to slack the whole time. You get the same grade and the kids see that it's unequal. And so my first year, we did a collaborative paper and there was a lot of complaints, and they had valid points. It's just better that the students were able to do their own thinking and do their own writing because they should be practicing how to write a research paper anyway. So it's a little bit more: "These are the skills that you need to be successful when you leave high school." And so they're able to use each other's information and each other's interviews and each other's observations and they can

use each other's quotes, but they need to be able to write their own paper and make their own conclusion.

Interviewer: Gotcha. And so I heard you mention that part of that is, you know, having the skills at the next level to able to do this on your own?

Alizea: Right.

Similar to Grace, Alizea states that she requires a key component of the research process to be individualized because she believes it will develop each student's skills, which she believes will help them at the next level of schooling, i.e., higher education.

On a different note, though still consistent with the individualized nature of the epistemology of schooling, Eleanor cited her lack of experience facilitating group work as the primary reason why she asks students to work individually. She claimed she wanted to move to more group work in the future, and even experimented with it a bit in the past but ran into some issues common to schools (e.g., student dropout/pushouts) that cut short successful group work:

> **Eleanor**: I can't even cross [the bridge of doing group work]. I wanted to open it up to groups at the beginning of the year . . . . I had two students do one together which was good until one of them dropped out. So then it didn't . . .
>
> **Interviewer:** And what's the – just so I can articulate it or have you articulate it on the record – what was the thinking in terms of the choice to do individual versus groups?
>
> **Eleanor:** Groups are a lot more work on my part in a way that I have no idea how to structure. I've done individual projects in my history classes before because they do so many research papers. And I don't have experience – so I have four years of experience with individual projects and I have zero experience with group projects. So that's why I was open to it, but it wasn't something that I tried to structure.

Thinking back to Angela's and Preciliano's comments about the individualized nature of schooling (and the larger society), Eleanor's comments seem very much in line with the

epistemology of schooling where it is frequently the case that learning happens and knowledge is created individually instead of collectively.

Discussion

In the previous chapter, I examined whether leading university-based YPAR researchers and then teachers believed that YPAR should be youth-led, focusing in particular on how YPAR projects got off the ground. This chapter was in large part an extension of that analysis where I sought to understand how university researchers and teachers envisioned adult roles and youth roles in creating knowledge and taking action once the YPAR work is underway. As we saw with the university researchers, divergences exist among the teachers in how they perceive adults and youth engaging with each other in a YPAR process. Kirshner's three models of how adults structure youth and adult participation in change work were helpful in analyzing the convergences and divergences within and between teachers and university researchers, while also surfacing a new approach to YPAR that has yet to be documented in the academic literature. These approaches give us insight into *how* teachers believe knowledge that effects change is created in a YPAR process – a major piece of the epistemology of YPAR, along with *why* knowledge is produced from chapter three.

Similar to some of the university-based YPAR researchers who have captured the experiences of teachers implementing YPAR in schools (e.g., Ozer; Rubin et al.), I found that the teachers in my study often spoke about their role in the YPAR process in ways that were consistent with the *facilitation model*. These teachers tended to give students a lot of autonomy in decision-making, stepped back and let students do the work much of the time, and believed the success of the campaign fell largely on the shoulders of the students. This approach is consistent with those who embrace a youth-led conception of YPAR, and it

would likely be placed high up on Hart's Ladder in terms of genuine and robust youth participation. Further, as Kirshner points out, the *facilitation model* allows for students to practice deliberation, decision-making, and self-governance, assuming the students are working collaboratively amongst themselves. However, as Yang, Mirra et al., and also Kirshner note, this approach has less focus on, and potential for, adults to model effective action research work (*apprenticeship model*) or for students to learn side-by-side with adults in a collaborative process (*joint work*). Additionally, this model lessens the opportunities for learning through choques across lines of age/generation that come when adults and youth engage in the work together in collectives.

Additionally, some teachers in my study said that they took on the role of expert and mentor at times in ways that are consistent with the *apprenticeship model*, though teachers in general were less likely to name this role as one they played when compared with a facilitator role. This reluctance is perhaps a surprising finding, given the norms of schooling where teachers are often positioned as experts, particularly in secondary schools where teachers are often seen as disciplinary experts. That said, several teachers mentioned that they did not feel like they were experts in conducting research and/or organizing for action, in part because they did not receive this training in teacher preparation programs, consistent with what several university researchers have written (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Macedo, 2008).

That said, Angela strongly endorsed teacher-as-expert, and her description of teaching her students about decolonizing approaches to conducting research is a powerful example of what university researchers like Mirra et al., Yang, and Kirshner have argued about adults' ability to share their unique expertise and skillset with young people in order to

enhance their ability to do the work.[93] Other teachers took on the role of mentor/expert when providing resources for students, modeling different research methods, and signing off on all or parts of the YPAR agenda before students took on the work. An *apprenticeship* approach has a lot of strengths, as Angela and some university researchers point out, and it still allows for substantial youth participation. That said, it would likely be further down Hart's Ladder of participation than the *facilitation model*, particularly in cases where adults do the work of finding resources and/or require student plans to be signed off by them. Further, the potential for the YPAR process to be informed and enhanced by students and adults wrestling with ideas, interpretations, and theories of action amongst each other is still somewhat limited in this approach, albeit greater than in the *facilitation model*.

On that note, the approach with the highest potential for learning through contact zones – *joint work* across differences between teachers and students in research collectives – was the one described least often by teachers, although some teachers such as Emiliano did speak about aspects of the work in this way. It is perhaps unsurprising that the *joint work model* is not widely embraced by teachers, given the epistemology of schooling where students are supposed to show what they know and are able to do on their own, with teachers assessing, not joining in on this work. Additionally, Kevin voiced concern about teachers doing too much of the work *for* students, which he noted may be a function of working with middle school students. Finally, many teachers in my study spoke about large class sizes with only one adult (themselves) supporting the students in the work – an

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[93] It is worth noting that Angela was in a research doctoral program when I interviewed her, and she had completed a master's program at a university where many of the leading thinkers on critical epistemologies teach. Therefore, her knowledge of decolonizing methodology is likely more extensive than most teachers.

environment where it is arguably impossible to set up a true joint work/contact zone/intergenerational collective approach.

While teachers infrequently described taking an approach consistent with *joint work* between themselves and students, many of the teachers (over three quarters) did promote collective work among the students by structuring the YPAR projects as whole class or small group endeavors. Teachers spoke about different pieces of the YPAR process being enhanced because students divided up the labor, which included sharing more resources, collecting more data, and being more motivated to take action than they could or would on their own. Additionally, Maya described the deeper, more nuanced analysis of data that was made possible by her students sharing experiences with the issue at hand (gentrification) that differed across racial and ethnic lines, which resembled Torre, Fine, and Ayala's contact zones and choques.

That said, over a third of the teachers either required students to work individually or allowed it as an option. Teachers who took this approach believed strongly that the choice and autonomy of students selecting their own research topics was a strong motivator that led to deeper engagement and a sense of empowerment. While students in the whole group and small group models typically had some degree of choice in the research topic, these models still require a portion of the students to take on a topic that they may only be partially interested in, if at all. This problem would be exacerbated in a whole class model with large class sizes where 30 or more students would need to be invested in a single topic – numbers of youth that are substantially larger than most of the collectives in the academic literature, particularly for out-of-school projects. Given that students were required to take the courses and participate in the YPAR projects in nearly all cases in my study, the argument that allowing individual students to work on a topic of their own choosing in order to increase

investment in the work seems reasonable, not to mention consistent with a youth-led conception of YPAR.

Teachers also stated that they chose the individual YPAR model because they wanted students to develop their individual skills, a concern that is likely influenced by the epistemology of schooling where individual skill development is a common concern. Of course, teachers wanting their students to develop their literacy, research, and other "academic" skills is not an unreasonable stance and is arguably a noble one that falls within their milieu. However, the epistemology of schooling might be influencing their belief that these individual skills cannot be developed or developed as well through collective work. Finally, these individual research designs do not allow for the full benefits of collective YPAR work that so many university researchers, as well as many of the teachers in my study, described. That said, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Cammarota and Fine (2008) did leave open the possibility for individual "lenses" within collective work, so this individual approach taken by teachers and their students may not be far from what these two university researchers describe, particularly in projects where students work together for at least part of the time.

Conclusion

The epistemological principle of collectivity is one that is espoused by most if not all of the leading university-based YPAR researchers. However, collectivity in practice can look many different ways: adults and youth crashing together across difference to create new knowledge in contact zones; adults making decisions for youth at times when they think it is in their best interests and in the best interests of the work; and adults using a very light touch in facilitating work done primarily by young people working together. The teachers in my study stated that they took approaches as diverse as the ones the university researchers have

documented, while providing the field with a new, individual model for doing the work.

These different models and conceptions of collectivity (or not) among university researchers,

among teachers, and between university researchers and teachers connect back to questions

raised in chapter four about what youth participation means in a YPAR process, specifically

the roles that youth play throughout the process vis-à-vis the roles adults play. Further, the

ways in which young people and adults come together and set the research agenda and then

work together to create knowledge through a YPAR process have important implications for

the success of the project in achieving its goals of interrogating oppression, developing

critical consciousness, and creating liberatory change (chapter three). I discuss what

teachers' and university researchers' convergence, divergence, interweaving, and new

creations means for the possibilities for YPAR moving forward in the next and final chapter.

Chapter 6: Possibilities for YPAR

In the previous three chapters, I described what teachers in my study said they believed about key components of YPAR's epistemology when doing this work with students in core academic classrooms, addressing first the *why* of knowledge creation through YPAR (chapter 3) and then the *how* (chapters 4 and 5). Additionally, I have uncovered how teachers' stated beliefs and approaches converged with and diverged from each other, as well as how they aligned with and differed from what leading university-based YPAR researchers have written in the academic literature. In doing so, I also demonstrated how the university researchers diverged from each other at times in their beliefs about the epistemology of YPAR, particularly with regard to how they enacted those beliefs in practice. The divergences in particular raise important questions about the epistemology of YPAR that need to be wrestled with further, particularly as YPAR moves into the institution of school and bumps up against the epistemology of schooling.

In the sections below, I address what I believe to be the most important issues, tensions, and questions raised by the findings in my study that need to be interrogated further through future scholarship by both university researchers and teachers who study and practice YPAR. Consistent with a participatory, action-oriented approach, this future work would ideally happen with both groups dialoguing and collaborating together in participatory projects designed to examine and strengthen the praxis of YPAR. Additionally, where appropriate, I suggest possible strategies, models, and other considerations for both teachers and university researchers who want to (re)imagine the possibilities of engaging in PAR with young people, particularly within classrooms in schools.

Critical Work

Given that all of the leading university-based YPAR researchers and nearly all of the teachers in my study believe that YPAR should be critical in nature, this component of YPAR's epistemology may seem like a surprising area to expand upon further. That said, I believe the findings in this particular area are important in highlighting what is possible in thinking about ways to expand YPAR into schools.

As I mentioned in chapter three, the fact that young people were able to tackle issues of power, privilege, and oppression in virtually all teachers' classrooms was arguably the most surprising and certainly the most encouraging finding for YPAR advocates.[94] That said, I often hear university researchers and teachers alike claim that YPAR, and critical pedagogy writ large, is too radical and political for schools. In turn, I went into my study fully expecting to find teachers who rejected the critical aspect of YPAR and instead strove for apolitical YPAR work that required a diversity of viewpoints. I imagined at least some teachers would tell me they steered students away from "controversial" topics and instead pushed them toward more universally accepted (and politically safer) change such as increasing the number of recycling bins in the school or cleaning up the local playground. Not only did I not find any teachers who approached the work in this way, but the teachers in my study were able to do critical YPAR work with students in some of the most under-

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[94] It is important to note again here that critical is not necessarily radical in terms of theories of change in particular. As noted in chapter three, I think this is an area for future scholarship. An additional area for future scholarship is investigating whether and in what ways teachers value critical consciousness development among their students, which can be different than valuing activist orientations – something many of the teachers in my study stated was a primary driver for undertaking YPAR with their students.

resourced and heavily surveilled[95] schools in the country, sometimes in settings that are extremely restrictive in what they allow teachers and students to do.[96]

Of course, as I mentioned in chapter three, my sample is likely heavily skewed toward teachers who possess high levels of critical consciousness themselves that drew them to critical work like YPAR in the first place. Further, these teachers were required to have successfully completed at least two cycles of YPAR and to have taught for three years or longer, which means these teachers have the experience and know-how of veteran teachers who have been successful in doing this work. That said, my study captured the voices of the largest number of teachers by far who have implemented YPAR in core academic classes in public schools, and we now have existence proofs of teachers and their students being able to do critical YPAR work in 28 classrooms in 24 different schools across nine different urban districts located across the U.S.

That being the case then, if we as an educational enterprise continue to, by and large, deny our young people the opportunity to engage in critical, anti-oppressive work like YPAR that is designed to tackle issues affecting them directly in order to improve their lives and their communities, then I argue it is largely a political choice. It is not because the work cannot be done but rather that we do not want it to be done. I second the sentiments of Mirra, Garcia, and Morrell (2016), who demonstrated in great detail the value of YPAR work done outside of schools with a substantial amount of resources, that if we truly valued this work we would find the resources and create the conditions necessary to engage all young

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[95] Examples of surveillance here include the type of spotlight that is shone on schools who frequently underperform on measures like standardized tests, but also surveillance in the forms of police presence and metal detectors that often exist in schools deemed "unsafe" where the lack of safety is located in the students themselves rather than in a society that refuses to provide the resources to keep students, families, and communities safe.

[96] This includes two teachers implementing YPAR in two different No Excuses charter schools – something I would not have argued was possible prior to my study.

people in YPAR: "[I]f we really do believe in the full humanity of young people, that their voices are valid and should be heard in spaces that make decisions about their schooling experiences[97], then YPAR is not an extracurricular endeavor but an imperative mandate" (p. 153).

Of course, I do not meant to erase or minimize the incredible pressures teachers face on multiple fronts from the punitive, neoliberal education reform assault, which makes critical YPAR work much harder than it needs to be in schools and, hence, needs to be dismantled. Further my use of the term "educational enterprise" above is intended to indict a wide swath of adult actors in education well beyond teachers who continue to actively or passively make the political choice to deny our young people the opportunities to engage in YPAR as a humanizing and liberatory form of learning/knowledge creation in schools. Certainly, this group of actors includes school leaders, policymakers, and academics like myself, who at best have not done enough to fight on behalf and alongside teachers, young people, and communities to make schools places of possibility as opposed to enclosed spaces (Sojoyner, 2017).

That said, if we value critical YPAR work, and I argue that we have over twenty years of empirical evidence and more than enough theoretical justification to do so (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Caraballo et al., 2017; Mirra et al., 2016), then my study points to possibilities and future directions for teachers, school leaders, university-based researchers, and teacher educators who want to implement and expand this work into core academic classrooms in schools. For teachers, their colleagues in my study have not only shown that it is possible to do critical work in non-critical spaces like schools and within the constraints of core

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[97] I would add here "and their experiences outside of schools."

academic classes, but they have also provided examples of the types of research topics and projects that students have successfully taken on. That said, teachers will need more of these examples and with much greater detail around pedagogy and navigation of structural constraints than my study was designed to provide. For example, while a handful of case studies have come out in the last couple of years that illuminate in substantial depth how individual teachers have done critical YPAR work in core academic classes largely on their own (Buttimer, Forthcoming; Mirra, Filipiak, & Garcia, 2015; Raygoza, 2016), they are still few and far between. This seems like a particularly needed area for future scholarship, one where university researchers and teachers can partner together to document critical YPAR work that can provide guidance to teachers who want to do this work.

Further, an area that was beyond the scope of my study but that future scholarship should investigate is the role that school leaders and the school cultures they develop can play in facilitating and supporting teachers to do this critical work. While the teachers in my study did not face backlash for taking on topics perceived as controversial by many, this is perhaps a result of the fact that in most cases, these were individual teachers doing YPAR in their own classrooms. As critical YPAR work expands beyond a single classroom in the school, it will likely increase the risk of drawing negative attention. If school leaders value this work and want to see it expand in their schools, they will need guidance on how to support and likely protect teachers and their students who engage in the critical work of YPAR.

Additionally, my study speaks to possibilities and hopefully provides inspiration for more university-based researchers to play a role in bringing the critical work of YPAR into more core academic classrooms in public schools. University researchers can and should develop more partnerships with schools in which they either partner with teachers in core

academic subjects to implement YPAR, sharing their formal research training beyond academic spaces, and/or implement YPAR in these classes themselves, looking to university researchers like Yang (2009) as inspiration. Additionally, they can learn from teachers in my study about different considerations and strategies of taking on critical work while thinking about classroom-based challenges such as large class sizes, semester-long courses, and grading.

Further, teacher educators who want to expand YPAR as pedagogy into more classrooms can play a crucial part in preparing and supporting large numbers of teachers to do YPAR that is critical in nature with their students. If we believe critical YPAR work is an important pedagogical approach for teachers and their students, then we need to change the fact that very few teachers get exposed to critical pedagogy in their preparation programs (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Macedo, 2008). Valenzuela (2016) and her co-authors have provided a model for what this might look like, documenting their Grow-Your-Own Teacher Education Institutes (GYO-TEI) initiative through the National Latino/a Education Research Agenda Project (NLERAP) for Latinx teachers to support Latinx students, a major component of which is YPAR. The GYO-TEI approach is embedded in communities that have struggled against intersecting vectors of oppression over time. In turn, these cross-generational, community-based, counter-hegemonic ways of knowing and doing borne of struggle are woven into GYO-TEI's approach to preparing teachers, ensuring that the work teachers are prepared to do is critical in nature. Additionally, Valenzuela and her co-authors provide a handbook with guiding principles, activities, and questions for teacher educators, as well as a case study of university-based researchers and teachers working together to implement YPAR in classrooms in schools. Those in teacher preparation programs around the country should study the GYO-TEI initiative and

Valenzuela's handbook, and further scholarship into the specifics of what these institutes do as well as if and how they need to be adapted for non-Latinx students and communities would undoubtedly aid in bringing YPAR that is critical in nature to more places.

To that point, as teachers, school leaders, researchers, and teacher educators consider existing ways to expand YPAR into more classrooms, schools, and school districts while theorizing new ones, we must be extremely careful to ensure that it retains its critical essence. As both Anthony from my study and university-based researcher Dr. Michelle Fine noted about YPAR being co-opted, when critical approaches like YPAR become institutionalized, they can easily start to take on the characteristics of the institutions that reify oppressive structures as opposed to challenging them. In turn, teachers, schools, and districts who take on YPAR will likely need substantial levels of support and feedback from both critical university-based researchers and critical teachers like those in my study to ensure YPAR does not become co-opted and sanitized to fit within the epistemology of schooling. Those working to expand YPAR into individual schools and/or at the district level can look to models such as I-SEEED[98], who helped to bring ethnic studies to the San Francisco Unified School District, and the Providence Student Union[99], who helped to bring ethnic studies to the Providence Public Schools. Ethnic studies, like YPAR, is often attacked as being too radical and controversial for schools. Therefore, teachers, school leaders, and university-based researchers might look to and learn from the above community- and youth-led organizations about how they were able to bring ethnic studies to schools at a systemic level in order to apply similar strategies and organizing principles in their specific locations. Of course, these initiatives in the San Francisco and Providence

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[98] More on I-SEEED: http://iseeed.org/ethnic-studies-for-justice-and-equity/.

[99] More on PSU: https://www.pvdstudentunion.org/ethnic-studies/.

public schools are still in the relatively early stages of implementation, so further examination of how these classes are being experienced by teachers and their students is necessary to ensure they retain their critical essence as they expand into more classrooms and schools.

Youth Participation

One of the most important questions that emerged from my study that seems like an open question for both teachers and university researchers is what it means for youth to participate in a YPAR process. First, substantial divergence exists between the teachers in my study and the university researchers in the academic literature about what role, if any, youth play in setting the research agenda at the start of the YPAR projects. Teachers in my study overwhelming supported giving students substantial leadership, control, and choice in setting the research agenda, particularly with regards to choosing the topic of investigation. This was true regardless of whether the teachers and students worked as a whole class, in small groups, or as individuals. In fact, several teachers claimed that it is not YPAR if the students do not choose the research question and topic.

Further, allowing students to determine their own research agenda, or to co-create it with adults in a negotiated process as some university-based researchers did, seems more in in line with a major piece of the epistemological justification for YPAR – that youth because of their unique positionality will ask different and better questions than adults alone when interrogating issues that affect them directly. Suda argued this point in her interview, and Torre and Fine provide a powerful example of youth actually having a better understanding of how systemic oppression works than adults by explaining that the focus and framing of their YPAR project needed to change from "Achievement Gap" to "Opportunity Gap." This seems like an area where university researchers might dialogue with and learn from

teachers, who seem to be leading the way in terms of adhering to the epistemological tenet of youth participating robustly in the process from start to finish.

That said, some of the leading university-based YPAR researchers, including Mirra, Garcia, Morrell, and Yang, make compelling arguments that adults should drive the research agenda in its initial stages because of the expertise, knowledge, and critical lenses that they possess. In doing so, adults can push students to identify root causes of oppression, while drawing on their political connections in order to increase the odds that students will find success in their PAR projects. One of the teachers in my study, Angela, also seemed to endorse this viewpoint in talking about the naïve consciousness many students bring to a YPAR project that if integrated into the research design of a YPAR project can reify systems of oppression rather than challenge them (e.g., a simplistic topic/goal like "stop gang violence").

When thinking about how to reconcile these different positions, or perhaps whether to reconcile them at all (e.g., a case for a multiplicity of approaches could be made), it seems necessary to examine what the primary goal of the work is, while also thinking about how the setting might influence that goal. For example, if the primary goal of engaging in YPAR is to create tangible change on a specific policy or practice, then an argument can be made that adults, including teachers, can and should use their knowledge, experience, critical lenses, and political connections to shape the research agenda for students. However, this may not be the primary goal for many teachers and, in fact, my study showed that it was not the main goal for a substantial portion of the teachers. In fact, developing students' scholar-activist identities was the most frequently stated goal for teachers in my study. Further, issues of student motivation and engagement were an important concern for teachers given the environments in which they were working where they often had anywhere from 20-40

students in a single class with multiple sections of that course. In turn, we saw teachers attempting to mitigate this issue by allowing students to choose the topics they wanted to research. Therefore, these twin goals of developing students' sociopolitical identities and engaging a large group of students arguably lend themselves more to a process where students drive the research agenda. Researchers should consider examining further the approaches teachers use in setting the research agenda, focusing on the role if any that their goals and, perhaps relatedly, the school setting drive their approach. They might consider using Kirshner's ethnographic study on adults and youth engaging in activist work outside of school using different approaches for different purposes as a model but changing the setting to core academic classrooms in schools, while also bringing in youth voice on the matter.

Further interrogation of the extent to which the goals and the setting of schools drive the different approaches that teachers (and university researchers) use when engaging in YPAR should also be applied to another important epistemological question raised by my study – the role that collectivity can and should play throughout the process. Virtually all university researchers agree that YPAR work should be a collective endeavor, and university researchers like Torre, Ayala, and Fine make powerful arguments about how new knowledge is formed through choques in a contact zone, which is only possible when the work is done collectively. Collective knowledge creation through dialogue seems like a key epistemological strength, if not a requirement, of a PAR approach (Freire, 2008; Valenzuela, 2016). On the other hand, some of the teachers in my study developed a new model of YPAR where students set individual research agendas and undertook much of the work on their own, which teachers said helped them address school-based concerns such as buy-in among large numbers of students as well as grading, individual skill development, and the challenges of group work. This seems like an area not only for future scholarship like I

recommend above, but also for increased dialogue between university researchers and teachers in order to wrestle with the benefits and disadvantages of collective approaches versus individual ones. This work could take place within workshops and forums in critical, researcher- and practitioner-friendly spaces such as conferences like Free Minds, Free People.[100] Further, teacher educators working to prepare future teachers to take on PAR with students should expose teacher candidates to advantages and disadvantages of collective versus individual YPAR models, while focusing specifically on the constraints of a school setting and the individualized nature of the epistemology of schooling.

Finally, when YPAR moves from outside schools into core academic classrooms, students seem to have limited if any choice in whether to participate in the YPAR process, especially if they are required to take the course, which was the case in the classrooms of nearly 80% of the teachers in my study. Several of the teachers made compelling arguments, however, that the required nature of YPAR in core classes allows them to reach students who are largely disengaged from school and likely would not participate in critical, action-based inquiry otherwise. Additionally, an argument can be made that since students are already required to attend these classes and school in general, then YPAR is preferable to the standard fare of learning experiences that are typically required in school. Further, the development of students' critical consciousness, academic skills, and socioemotional learning that occurs in a YPAR process might be worth the trade-off of students' loss of agency.

However, requiring students to participate in YPAR goes against one of the four tenets of true youth participation, according to Hart. While Hart is just one perspective, the required nature of YPAR in schools also appears to contradict what Freire believes about the

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[100] Information on Free Minds, Free People can be found here: https://fmfp.org/. Other examples include conferences from teacher activist groups around the country like TAG Boston (http://besj.weebly.com/), and increasingly in online spaces like the YPAR Action Research Community (http://arnawebsite.org/arcs/).

PAR process, as well. In the third chapter in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he makes the following caveat about the voluntary nature of initiating a participatory process: "If the participants agree both to the investigation and to the subsequent process…" (p. 110). Further, Tuck and Guishard (2014) argue that youth should have the right to refuse participation in any form of youth resistance research because of the ways in which adults have weaponized research against youth, framing them as damaged and in need of intervention from outsiders.[101] Though most teachers in my study did not see any problems with requiring students to participate in YPAR, an important voice in this conversation is absent from my study: student voice. Capturing the voices and experiences of students who are required to participate in YPAR seems like an excellent place for future research, as no study has done this yet to my knowledge.

That said, possibilities currently exist for teachers who believe requiring students to participate in YPAR is contrary to the spirit of what should be youth-led, voluntary work. First, teachers could engage students in YPAR only during elective courses or afterschool groups that students truly elect to take, while ensuring the purposes of the course/group are made clear to students at the outset. Many teachers have at least one period per day where they teach an elective course, often of their choosing. Further, administrators looking to support this work could find stipends for teachers to run afterschool programs that included a YPAR component. Engaging in YPAR in an elective or afterschool group would have the added benefit of freeing teachers up from the constraints of curricular requirements, standardized testing, and perhaps even grading, since grades in electives often hold less weight and in some instances are not required.

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[101] I should note that I believe unequivocally that none of the teachers in my study would use research in this way, but as YPAR spreads into more classrooms it would be naïve to not expect at least some teachers to use a YPAR approach irresponsibly and in ways that harm students.

For teachers who either do not have the opportunity to teach electives or afterschool clubs, or who feel strongly about integrating YPAR into core academic classes, they might consider two options in moving participation to be more voluntary – both of which come from what teachers in my study did or planned to do in the future in their classrooms. The first potential solution is to give students the option to participate in the projects, similar to the approach Teacher X said he took toward the end of the year in giving his students substantial choice in how and when they participated. Additionally, teachers who have the pedagogical freedom to allow different students to work on different projects at the same time could make YPAR one of several options from which students could choose that could still be critical in nature, e.g., making a documentary film exposing oppression in their school or doing a more traditional secondary research synthesis on a critical framework like *transformative versus self-defeating resistance.*

Another possibility comes from Jean, who suggested the concept of "outs" in our interview whereby students can opt out of certain parts of the research process in which they do not feel comfortable participating. Jean, who had done YPAR-like work with middle schoolers in a regular public school in an urban district, was planning to teach and implement YPAR in an alternative high school on an Indian reservation in the upcoming academic year at the time of our interview. A few months before our interview, Jean had attended Fine, Torre, and Fox's weeklong CPAR institute. Jean said that when these university researchers were helping her develop a plan to implement YPAR in her classes the following year, all of them agreed that they "wish it were voluntary." Since that would not be an option for Jean's students who have to take her course, coupled with the fact that Jean would be working in a setting where cultural norms may pose challenges for critical inquiry

conducted primarily by youth[102], she and the university researchers came up with the

following idea:

> Maybe forcing every student to be a researcher in collecting data doesn't work and I come up with other roles in the classroom for students who are like, "Man, I don't want to ask that question of my family members." And this also, here, ties into the fact that this is a small community, right? People are related to one another, they know one another, they have assumptions about each other's families or tribes . . . . So I think I have to create "outs" for my students. I have to give them options beyond just being the people who are asking questions. When (Dr. Fine) and I were talking, we came up with some ideas for other roles students could have. I just have to create outs for kids.

Creating "outs" for students for certain parts of the YPAR process still allows for students

to work in collaboration with their peers in a critical, action-oriented inquiry process, but

hands back some choice and agency to students if and when they need it. However, it also

provides a potential strategy for teachers, as well as any university researchers working in

schools, to use who might feel uncomfortable requiring students to participate in various

parts of the YPAR process (e.g., the teachers uncomfortable with requiring students to take

action for a grade). All that said, thinking about different ways to give students more agency

and options in different parts of the YPAR process seems like an important area for teachers

and university researchers to work together, with youth when appropriate, in order to move

the field of YPAR forward and to imagine new possibilities.

Action

A final component of YPAR's epistemology where important questions were raised

by my study is the nature, the prioritization and, when it came to school-based YPAR, the

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[102] Jean explained that youth questioning and potentially critiquing elders through a process like YPAR goes against cultural practices in the Indigenous community in which she would be teaching. Jean recognized that her outsider status as a white person of European descent adds another layer to an already complex situation, particularly in light of the damage white people of European descent have done and continue to do to Indigenous communities across Turtle Island (aka North America) using colonial research approaches (Guishard & Tuck, 2014; Patel, 2015). Of course, it should be noted that youth challenging adults through YPAR goes against cultural norms in many communities, so this issue is not limited to this particular Indigenous community or Indigenous communities in general.

feasibility of action. While virtually all of the teachers in my study and the university researchers in the academic literature believe action is directly connected to research in YPAR and hence one of its epistemological requirements, there is divergence within and between both groups as to what action is and how it should be prioritized, with the setting of school influencing teachers' beliefs about these issues. Some teachers and university researchers put a high value on the action component of YPAR and engaged with students in actions designed to create changes in specific policies and practices, usually at the school or community level, though one project from my study helped create change at the state level. Further, the fact that at least 13 of the 28 teachers reported that their students succeeded in creating tangible change in specific policies and practices is highly encouraging for YPAR advocates in that it provides evidence that classrooms and schools can be sites for young people and teachers to create change.

On the other hand, many of the teachers in my study echoed some of the university researchers who believed that other outcomes such as students' sociopolitical development superseded the goal of creating tangible change on a specific issue. Importantly, my study showed that the settings within which teachers were working influenced their beliefs about the types of actions students can take inside and outside schools, as well as the extent to which teachers are capable of supporting students to create tangible change. Further, when teachers reached out for support from community-based organizations, the structural barriers of school had real effects on the ability of teachers to link students with community-based change movements because of a mismatch in scheduling and capacity. Finally, an additional issue related to capacity was raised when several teachers discussed how the organizing roles that teachers need to play in supporting students' projects are emotionally

draining and work that they are ill-prepared and supported to do, given the countless other responsibilities that come with the profession.

In sum, while the teachers in my study show that it is at least possible for students and teachers to use YPAR to change the material conditions in which they are learning, teaching, and living, they also demonstrated that this is very difficult to do as a result of the structural constraints of schooling. In turn, a potential area for collaboration between university researchers and teachers is to document the processes and share the resources that lead to successful actions, including the strategies used to plan effective campaigns, navigate potential pitfalls, and build momentum and support. Further, this work must capture the experiences of teachers working with students in core academic classrooms. Kirshner (2015) has begun this work, identifying what he calls structural and instructional challenges of implementing YPAR in core academic classes. He provides suggestions for navigating these challenges based on the actions of the teachers in his study, such as cultivating allies, connecting with critical friends, becoming a "tinkerer" (i.e., experimenting with different approaches), and championing your work to colleagues – all of which would seem to be promising strategies for implementing the action component of YPAR in the face of various school-specific barriers. Rubin et al. (2017) added to this work, dedicating an entire section to teachers in their study "negotiating action and research in the YPAR classroom" (p. 183). That said, more examples of this work across different school-based settings and contexts is necessary, while also sharing any new knowledge in spaces that attract teachers, i.e., beyond academic articles. Further, teacher educators can play an important role in reading work like the Kirshner and Rubin et al. studies with teacher candidates and helping them to identify potential barriers to taking action in their specific contexts while strategizing how to overcome them. Doing so would help to address the concerns raised by several teachers in

my study that they felt unprepared and inexperienced in organizing students to take action. As we learned from my study, the potential for students and their teachers to create real change in their schools and communities seems well worth the effort.

Conclusion

I first learned about YPAR during my initial year of my doctoral program, after having taught in a public school for six years. I was incredibly excited about the potential of YPAR, and I was fortunate to find two colleagues who were public school teachers who allowed me to partner with them and their students as they engaged in YPAR for the first time (Buttimer, Forthcoming). Despite the students' and our enthusiasm for YPAR, we discovered that the setting of schools provided challenges to implementing YPAR that we had not read about in any of the academic literature, nor had any of us been prepared to do this work in three different teacher preparation programs.

I undertook this dissertation study because I wanted to know if other public school teachers around the country were thinking about the work and implementing it in core academic classrooms in similar ways to me and two teachers with whom I had partnered. Because my colleagues and I had faced substantial uncertainty and frustrations in implementing YPAR, I think I believed that there was a *right* way to do YPAR and that if the teachers I had worked with and I had only known what the leading university-based YPAR researchers knew and did what they did, then we would have had much greater success. At the end of this study, I have learned two important things. First, there is substantial divergence of beliefs about and implementation of the epistemology of YPAR among the university researchers themselves. If there is a right way to do YPAR – something that is more dubious in my mind than ever – then university researchers certainly have not coalesced around it yet. Second, and I am embarrassed that I may have forgotten this during

my time in academia, teachers have a tremendous amount of knowledge, too, and they are genius creators, navigators, and subversives who know their students and their settings better than any outside academic.

In turn, I believe teachers and university researchers who study and practice YPAR can learn a lot from each other. This can and should drive new learning and practice, an example of which is the creative solution of giving students "outs" when YPAR is done in classrooms that teacher Jean and university researchers Drs. Michelle Fine and María Elena Torre developed when they came together at the CPAR institute. I hope that my study can play a role in spurring increased dialogue and collaboration between teachers and university researchers, and also youth when appropriate, around epistemological questions of YPAR that had perhaps been hidden or deemed settled previously. In doing so, we have the potential to (re)imagine possibilities for teachers and students, adults and youth, to partner together to disrupt and dismantle systems of oppression inside and outside schools in order to build something new.

Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Recruitment WordPress Site Text

My name is Chris Buttimer, and I'm an advanced doctoral student working on my dissertation at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Through my dissertation study, I am seeking to understand the experiences of teachers who facilitate Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) with their students in core classrooms (e.g., ELA, math, science, history/social studies) in public schools. I'm a former middle school teacher myself and, like an increasing number of teachers, I have become inspired by YPAR advocates such as Dr. Michelle Fine, Dr. Jeff Duncan-Andrade, and Dr. Ernest Morrell who do amazing work with youth through YPAR. However, most of the academic literature written on YPAR has been done by university researchers in out-of-school settings or in non-core classes (e.g., electives), and I want to know if public school teachers in core classes approach the work with their students in the same way(s) as university researchers, while working in different contexts. I spent three of the past four years working with two teachers (one middle school ELA teacher; one high school humanities teacher) in two different public schools in an urban district, and I want to know if other teachers understand and enact YPAR in similar ways to these two teachers. I hope that my research might support teachers looking to do this work with their students in public schools, as well as help YPAR advocates better understand how to support teachers and their students doing YPAR in public schools.

In turn, I'm looking to interview current or former public school teachers in core classrooms who have experience facilitating YPAR with their students. Teachers must have **taught for 3 or more years** and **completed 2 or more YPAR projects in core/required classes in public middle or high schools**, i.e., not electives or after school programs. Interviews will likely last between 60 and 90 minutes. If finding a single 60-90 minute block of time is infeasible, I'm happy to break the interview up into two or more sessions. I am also willing to conduct phone or Skype interviews with those outside the Boston area. One additional note: all names and other identifying data will be anonymized. If you would like to participate, please feel free to contact me (chrisbuttimer4444@gmail.com). You can find a formal invitation to participate in this study below, as well as a Word version of the information contained in this blogpost. Please pass on to any colleagues who you think might be interested. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Chris Buttimer

Appendix B: Formal Study Recruitment Letter

Dear colleague,

My name is Chris Buttimer, and I am a doctoral student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Under the supervision of my advisor, Dr. Meira Levinson, and committee members – Dr. Karen Brennan, Dr. Sarah Buras, and Dr. Leigh Patel – I am currently conducting my dissertation research on teachers who conduct Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) with their students in public schools.

As part of this research, I am looking to interview public school teachers who have experience conducting YPAR with their students in core classes (ELA, history/social studies, math, or science). If you choose to participate, you will be asked to sit down for **one (1) audio-recorded interview, lasting 60-90 minutes**, to discuss how you approach the work, and what you believe to be the core practices, successes, and challenges of doing YPAR in schools. I am happy to schedule the interview at a time and place convenient for you (note: I am also willing to conduct phone or Skype interviews).

After the interview, I may ask you if you are willing to share teaching artifacts (e.g., lesson plans, readings) that will help me capture a fuller picture of your experiences facilitating YPAR projects. However, this is completely voluntary on your part and not a requirement for participating in the interview.

If you are willing to participate, and/or you have questions about this research, please contact me at you earliest convenience either by email (cjb636@mail.harvard.edu).

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Chris Buttimer, Ed.D. Candidate

Harvard Graduate School of Education
13 Appian Way
Cambridge, MA 02138

Appendix C: Sample Characteristics

Name[103]	3+ years of teaching	2+ cycles of YPAR	Public or Charter	Course(s)[104]	Grade level(s)[105]
Suda	Yes	Yes	Public	History	11-12
Belen	Yes	Yes	Public	History/Civics	12
Donald	Yes	Yes	Public	Civics (Elective)	12
Howard	Yes	Yes	Public	History/Civics	12
Maya	Yes	Yes	Public	Economics	12
Kevin	Yes	Yes	Public	English Language Arts	8
Mark	Yes	Yes	Charter	Writing	6-8
Ernesto	Yes	Yes	Public	Sociology, Chemistry	11-12
Grace	Yes	Yes	Public	Humanities	10
Eric	Yes	Yes	Public	Psychology	12
Pedro	Yes	Yes	Public	History, Ethnic Studies	11, 9-12
Emiliano	Yes	Yes	Charter	Humanities	N/A[106]
Jean	Yes	Yes	Charter	English, History	7
Wittman	Yes	Yes	Public	History/Civics	12
Janie	Yes	Yes	Public	PAR Elective	11-12
Alizea	Yes	Yes	Public	History	11-12
Rudy	Yes	Yes	Public	History	11-12
Brian	Yes	Yes	Public	History/Civics	12[107]
Sarah	Yes	Yes	Public	English Language Arts	12
Anthony	Yes	Yes	Both	All subjects	4-5[108]
Mr. Bishop	Yes	Yes	Public	History/Civics	12
Eleanor	Yes	Yes	Public	Civics	11-12
Theo	Yes	Yes	Public	English Language Arts	6
Preciliano	Yes	Yes	Public	English	9
Richard	Yes	No	Public	History/Civics	12
Angela	Yes	Yes	Charter	Writing, Ethnic Studies, Advisory	5-8, 9-12
Jennifer	Yes	Yes	Public	English	7-8
Teacher X	Yes	Yes	Public	Writing, Social Studies	7-8

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[103] Pseudonyms.

[104] This is the course(s) in which the teachers implemented YPAR, which was often not the only course they taught.

[105] This is the grade level of the course(s) in which the teachers implemented YPAR.

[106] Emiliano taught in an alternative charter school for students aged 16-24 who had been pushed out of regular public schools.

[107] Brian taught in a public school for older students (aged 19-22) who needed greater flexibility in order to attend classes. The history/civics curriculum he taught was the 12th grade curriculum for the district.

[108] Anthony had formally taught in 4th and 5th grade, but he was also a part of numerous YPAR projects outside the classroom (e.g., afterschool and summer projects) with middle and high school students.

Appendix D: Original Interview Protocol

1. ***Introductory questions***
   a. Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me. Please tell me about yourself, and your classroom and students:
      i. What do you teach? How long have you been teaching?
      ii. What are your students like? How many students do you teach each semester?

2. ***Questions on the epistemology of YPAR***
   a. Tell me about YPAR. Why did you first get involved in doing it and why?
   b. What are some of the projects you and your students have done that you're proudest of?
   c. What are some other research topics that you and your students have addressed through YPAR? How/why did you choose them?
   d. What does YPAR mean to you? How would you explain it to a colleague?
   e. Why is it important to you that youth do research? Also, there are lots of ways for students to do research and communicate their findings. Why YPAR?
   f. What are some of the goals (academic, socioemotional, action-oriented) you hope to accomplish in doing YPAR with students?
   g. Do you think action is a necessary piece of YPAR? Why or why not?

3. ***Questions on the core practices of YPAR***
   a. *Core practices for teachers*
      i. Can you talk me through the steps of a YPAR project in your classroom?
      ii. How long does a YPAR cycle typically last? How do marking periods, standardized tests, or curriculum standards play into your YPAR timing or planning?
      iii. Do you conduct YPAR with all of your classes? Do you have any support from other adults?
      iv. Do you have a curriculum that you use? If so, did you develop it on your own, or did you use a curricular resource?
      v. What makes doing YPAR challenging? How have you addressed these challenges in the past?
      vi. What role does grading play in the process?
   b. *Core practices for youth*
      i. How do students develop a research question? Do students typically work on their topic/question as one large group, in smaller groups, or individually?
      ii. Do your students do a literature review? If so, what types of texts do they typically read and include? How do you support students who struggle with reading?
      iii. What types of research tools (e.g., surveys, interviews) have students typically used? Do they develop these tools on their own? How

concerned are you that students create tools that conform to professional standards in terms of rigor, reliability, bias, validity, etc.?

iv. How do students analyze data and write up their findings? Do they look like formal research write-ups that professional researchers use?

v. How have students developed action plans based on the research? What do they look like?

vi. What actions have students engaged in? Have students ever failed in their actions? What did you do?

vii. Do you believe consciousness-raising alone can or should be an acceptable action/outcome? Are there any other outcomes, beyond action, that you hope the students will achieve?

Appendix E: Revised Interview Protocol

1. ***Introductory Questions:***
   a. Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me. Please tell me about yourself, and your classroom and students:
      i. What do you teach? How long have you been teaching?
      ii. What are your students like? How many students do you teach each semester?
2. ***Questions on the epistemology of YPAR***
   a. Tell me about YPAR. Why did you first get involved in doing it and why?
   b. How much training in research, and specifically PAR, did you have before doing YPAR?
   c. What are some of the topics your students have taken on?
   d. Do you think YPAR should be explicitly critical?
   e. Do students go in with an open question, or do they go in with a stance that they want to defend?
   f. Do they conduct research and take action collectively? What advantages and disadvantages do you see in conducting research collectively as opposed to independently?
   g. What is the value of doing YPAR in schools? What do you hope to accomplish as a teacher, and what do you hope students accomplish?
   h. Why is it important for youth to be participants in the research process? What expertise and knowledge do they bring to the process?
   i. How concerned are you that students follow the steps of professional researchers, including issues like rigor, reliability, validity, etc.?
   j. How concerned are you that the research leads to tangible change? Are the actions that students take designed primarily to raise awareness amongst classmates and adults within the school, or are the actions designed to create tangible change in the form of policy and practice changes within the school and beyond?
   k. What is the balance between goals/outcomes that are academic in nature (e.g., developing research and presentation skills), socioemotional (e.g., engagement, sense of agency, positioning as scholars/activists), or action-oriented? Are there others?
   l. What role or roles do adults play? Is it more of an expert, a facilitator, a co-researcher?
   m. What is challenging about doing YPAR in schools?

Appendix F: Codebook for Etic Codes

	Etic Code	Definition
Epistemological Tenets Of YPAR	Critical in nature	Reference to participant's beliefs that YPAR should/must be designed to interrogate systems of power, privilege, and oppression
	Situated in the lived experiences of youth	Reference to participant's belief that YPAR topics and goals should be relevant to youth and affect them directly
	Youth as key participants in the research process	Reference to participant's belief that youth should play active role as researchers and decision-makers in all or most aspects of YPAR
	Inquiry-based	Reference to participant's belief that researchers should ask open-ended questions through YPAR, as opposed to staking out positions
	Students' unique knowledge valued	Reference to participant's belief that youth possess knowledge, expertise, and skills that are valuable and different from that of adults
	Action as necessary part of research process	Reference to participant's belief that action cannot and should not be separated from research in YPAR
Practices/Desired Outcomes of YPAR (Adult Facilitators)	Adult role(s)	Reference to participant's beliefs about the role that adults should/must/do play in the YPAR process
	Establish power-sharing and decision-making processes	Reference to participant's belief that youth and adults should negotiate and establish power-sharing and decision-making processes
	Choice of research topic	Reference to participant's beliefs about how the overarching research topic should be chosen, e.g., by the adult alone, chosen together by youth and adults, chosen solely by youth
	Research model	Reference to participant's beliefs about size of research team, e.g., as one big group, as several smaller research teams, as individuals
	Length and site of work	Reference to participant's beliefs about how long (e.g., for an undetermined time because it is unclear at the outset of a research project how long it will last) and where (e.g., a dedicated research space, like a community organization) the research should take place
	Action-oriented outcomes	Reference to participant's beliefs which action-oriented outcomes should be valued by YPAR facilitators
	Youth empowerment outcomes	Reference to participant's beliefs which youth empowerment outcomes should be valued by YPAR facilitators
	Academic outcomes	Reference to participant's beliefs which academic outcomes should be valued by YPAR facilitators

	Youth role(s)	Reference to participant's beliefs about the role that youth should/must play in the YPAR process
Practices of YPAR (Youth Researchers)	Develop a research question	Reference to participant's beliefs about whether and how youth should develop their own research questions
	Literature review	Reference to participant's beliefs about whether and how youth should conduct a literature review themselves
	Develop research tools	Reference to participant's beliefs about whether and how youth should develop research tools themselves
	Analyze data	Reference to participant's beliefs about whether and how youth should analyze data themselves
	Create action plan	Reference to participant's beliefs about whether and how youth should create an action plan
	Actions	Reference to participant's beliefs about whether and how youth should take action based on the action plan

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