TAKING A CUBIST APPROACH: THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH-PRODUCED KNOWLEDGE IN MULTIGENERATIONAL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Multigenerational knowledge spaces enhance learning across diverse age groups. However, within spaces that include several generations of adults, perspectives of youth are not always present. When youth knowledge is included in feedback about educational and organizational spaces, there is a wide range of the way they are included and the weight that is given to their perspectives and ideas. Although perspectives of youth are crucial in building learning spaces that are welcoming, equitable, and productive, the inclusion of youth is often seen as largely beneficial only to youth themselves. The multigenerational authors of this paper argue that youth voice is beneficial not just to youth, but to the personal growth of adults as well, and should be valued as such. We introduce Cubism as a conceptual framing for viewing multigenerational knowledge spaces based on the characteristic of the Cubist genre of portraying multiple perspectives at once on the same canvas. Framing multigenerational knowledge from this perspective can help us reframe the way youth knowledge is valued in relation to adult knowledge in learning spaces.

Introduction

There are currently five defined generations prevalent in workforces, learning spaces, and community spaces. (Balon, 2024) Adult generations span Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and members born in the first few years of Generation Z (1997–2000) (Dimock, 2019). Youth generations include members of Generation Z born after 2000, and members of Generation Alpha. While many educational spaces are multigenerational, the majority encompass generations of adults, leaving out the voices and knowledges of youth (Cammarota & Fine, 2010). According to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, children and youths have the right to have a voice in matters that impact them. (UN, 1989 in Bron & Veuglers, 2014; Lundy

2007). There is robust research on the impacts of youth voice, participation, and leadership in educational and research spaces over the past few decades that support this right, with general consensus that student participation can increase self-esteem, engagement, academic success, and self-efficacy (Bron, et al., 2014; Corney, et al., 2022; Mitra, 2008). In spaces where youth voices are respected and incorporated into systems and structures, youth benefit from the experience of being validated and listened to, as well as improved systems and structures. Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) (e.g., Anyon, et al., 2018; Cammarota & Fine, 2010; Caraballo, et. al., 2017; Morrell, 2008) is grounded in the stance that knowledge produced by youth is relevant and important to community growth. While the positive effects of youth voice are clear, the literature also recognizes that incorporating youth voice across myriad educational and community spaces is complex, fraught, and still too infrequent.

The inclusion of youth voice and knowledge takes many forms. In some cases, youth voice is superficially incorporated into spaces dominated by adult knowledge and priorities (e.g., Mattheis, Ardila & Levaton, 2018). In other cases, particularly in schools, youth voice is used for feedback and valued for the ways it can help shape school policies, curricula, and engagement. Both adults and youth report feeling positive about these spaces. In many of these cases, noticeable change is enacted based on youth feedback, and adults note that they are able to use youth voice to improve their teaching practices. (Batsleer, 2011; Bron, et al., 2018; Bertrand, 2014; Conner, et al., 2013; Cook-Sather, 2006; Hawke, et al., 2018; Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Schaeffer, 2018; Weiss, 2018).

School and community spaces that strive to be intentional about youth participation often use YPAR, which positions youth as researchers engaging with issues that are important to them working collaboratively with adults (Anyon, et al., 2018; Cammarota & Fine, 2010; Caraballo, et al., 2017; Dolan, et al., 2015; Morrell, 2006; 2008). YPAR is undergirded by the belief that youth are important producers of knowledge, "recogniz[ing] youth as intellectual beings capable of engaging in the practice of critical investigation of community issues and the production of viable, usable knowledge" (Caraballo, et al., p. 315). This stance outlines a key difference between YPAR and more traditional spaces where the value of youth voice is largely measured in terms of benefit to youth themselves, such as internal growth, (e.g., skill-building and engagement), and external benefits (e.g., more relevant curricula and structures). The idea that youth participation is largely beneficial to youth and only narrowly beneficial to adults (measured largely in professional effectiveness), is inherently problematic. If adults do not value youth knowledge for their personal growth, including youth becomes an act of benevolence rather than a mutual need and benefit. This results in a hierarchy in which adults are positioned as going above and beyond to include youth, and youth are assumed to be grateful for any inclusion at all. In benevolent spaces, youth may not be able to give authentic critiques, and their time and labor involved in participating may go unrecognized. We argue that spaces that are considered multigenerational need to pay particular attention to whether youth are included. Furthermore, all spaces must reframe youth participation as valuable, not only for their own benefit, but also for the personal growth and learning of adults, moving beyond a benevolent space for youth benefit to a reciprocal space for the benefit and growth of everyone.

The authors, Nastasia, Amira, and Zoe, are an intergenerational team of researchers at a small university. Nastasia is an early Millennial, and Zoe and Amira are both Gen Z, born after 2000. We each have our own

research practices that have connected in various ways over the past several years. Nastasia is an adult who focuses on community-based research and knowledge creation by youth and teachers. Both Zoe and Amira are undergraduate researchers who have taken Nastasia's qualitative research course and are currently leading independent projects. Zoe began this collaboration as a high school student conducting a community-based research study in an Advanced Placement research course. Our approach to this paper seeks both to honor our different generational perspectives and to put our ideas into practice by analyzing our process. In other words, the knowledges that we have created together for this paper both inform and are informed by our process of working intentionally in a multigenerational group.

Introducing a Cubist Framework of Knowledge

We use the term knowledges intentionally in this work to signify the multiplicity of epistemologies, experiences and lived realities that constitute knowledge itself, as well as recognize the ways in which knowledge is positioned as hierarchical (see Yosso, 2005). Hierarchies of knowledge are both binary (the having, or *not* having of knowledge), and positivistic (what kinds of knowledges are important and valid and what kinds are not). We argue in this paper that no one is without important knowledge. We frame our argument for the importance of multigenerational knowledge spaces with Cubism, a genre within the postmodernist art movement that interrogated the way that artists depicted a three-dimensional object on a two-dimensional canvas. Modernists, such as Picasso and Braque, saw the dominant techniques of using shadow and object size to portray three-dimensional perspective as "trickery" that fell short of giving the viewer a real experience of the object. Instead, cubists represented objects by including all angles and viewpoints into one image. "Their aim was to show things as they really are, not just show what they look like" (Tate Museum). Sgourev, (2013) described Cubism as "...a revolutionary paradigm and artistic technique that overthrew classic principles of representation, dispensing with the idea of a single fixed viewpoint that had dominated art for centuries. Cubist works embody multiple angles so that many different aspects of an object can be simultaneously portrayed" (p. 1601). Cubism provides a metaphor to challenge the concept of a 'single fixed viewpoint' when it comes to whose knowledge is most visible and valued, particularly in formal learning spaces. Moving away from this singularity positions knowledges themselves as entities that can be interacted with and examined from different angles (simultaneously).

Adults are often viewed as being inherently wiser because of their life experience and therefore are seen as more valid producers of knowledge. Traditional schooling upholds this belief by positioning students as learners only, not as producers of knowledges that adults can also learn from. A hierarchy of more, or less, important knowledges is thus created that holds youth back from full and reciprocal participation in knowledge creation until they reach adulthood.

However, if we frame knowledges as multiple angles simultaneously coexisting, we might better understand and problematize two dominant social constructions of knowledge: 1) that knowledge is hierarchical, and should be valued according to the status of the person producing it, and 2) that knowledge is only the cumulative result of experience over time, i.e. it is acquired by years of life experiences. To the first point, we view knowledges as

"horizontal" contributions to our collective experiences. Rather than assuming knowledge as being more or less valuable depending on who is producing it, every person is seen as inherently capable of producing knowledge that is valid and valuable. Any person's knowledge therefore is not meant to be absorbed and taken as a universal "truth" or dismissed as inexperienced or immature, but rather it should be seen to contribute to the diversity of our collective consciousness and experience. To the second point, we must recognize that knowledge is not simply a product of cumulative experiences but is also highly contextual; youth knowledge isn't simply the same knowledge adults had at their age since generations don't follow the same trajectories. The knowledges that are shaped by being young in any given context are not replaceable by the memories that elders have of being that age. Cubism provides a helpful visual for approaching a horizontal and non-hierarchical concept of knowledge. As in a cubist painting, no one perspective is inherently more valuable than another, rather all angles visibly co-exist. Just as the artist need not choose one side of a multidimensional object to display, we need not prioritize only one perspective or viewpoint to consider.

Models of Youth Participation and Knowledge

There are myriad models of youth inclusion in knowledge spaces that focus on identifying and describing different aspects of including youth voice. In particular, Hart's (1992) Ladder of Young People's Participation has been the grounding for significant research on youth voice and several subsequent models that grapple with the markers that determine the authenticity of youth participation. Hart's Ladder depicts eight hierarchical rungs in ascending order. The first three describe non-participation: (1) manipulation, (2) decoration, and (3) tokenism. The top five outline degrees of participation: (4) assigned but informed, (5) consulted and informed, (6) adult-initiated, shared decisions with children, (7) Child-initiated and directed, and (8) Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults.

Shier (2001) built on Hart's framework with five levels of participation that gauge adult readiness, organizational processes that exist to facilitate youth participation, and policies that commit adults to including youth. That model emphasizes accountability to create spaces with the goal that youth involvement is not just facilitated but required. Wong et al's (2010) typology of youth participation and empowerment suggested that while many models place youth leadership and autonomy as the epitome of authentic youth participation, the lack of connection with adults could hinder youth progress and therefore proposed a model that prioritized shared work and decision making. Cahill and Dadvand (2018) argued that it is difficult to identify whether young peoples' participation is authentic based on structure alone, noting that just as a high degree of participation does not necessarily lead to empowering outcomes, a lower degree of participation does not automatically indicate a tokenizing or manipulative space. Their model focuses on sociocultural aspects of participation, such as power relations, fostering diversity of perspectives, and how youth will be positioned to participate. All of these models have in common the inherent belief that youth benefit from being acknowledged and included in knowledge spaces and seek to create structures that will facilitate healthy and authentic youth involvement. They also acknowledge the value of the perspectives that youth can bring to learning and organizational spaces and several imply that adults can and must allow themselves to have their views challenged by youth knowledge.

There is variation in emphasis of each model relating to structure, decision making, and focus. In keeping with a cubist framework that seeks not to place existing models into a hierarchy of importance and effectiveness, we recognize that multigenerational contexts vary greatly and feel that it is important for multiple models to coexist rather than coalescing around a "best practice" model. As such, we envision our cubist framework as a container that can encompass any model of youth participation, promoting the coexistence of diverse ways to build multigenerational communities, much in line with cubism itself (Figure 1).

The cubist container for youth participation models focuses on three guiding principles for cultivating youth voice in multigenerational spaces. Each component of the container is grounded in the cubist principles of multiple viewpoints interacting with each other. Drawing from cubism's rejection of a "single fixed viewpoint" (Sgourev, 2013 p.1601), the principle of plurality calls on us to resist a hierarchical structure of knowledge. Instead, this principle encourages us to see multiple viewpoints as valid and valuable contributions. The principle of reciprocity incorporates the idea that not only are multiple angles present in a single space, but that they are actively interacting with and influencing each other. In a cubist painting, multiple perspectives are not simply coexisting separate angles but rather are multiple connected perspectives. Reciprocity reminds us that we can contribute to and learn from multigenerational spaces simultaneously. Rather than building a single identity of ourselves as either knowers or learners based on our age, we can internalize coexisting identities of knower *and* learner. While cubism provides important intellectual and theoretical grounding, we must also remember that it is an art form. Art exists not just for its abilities to enhance intellectual understanding, but to elicit an embodied

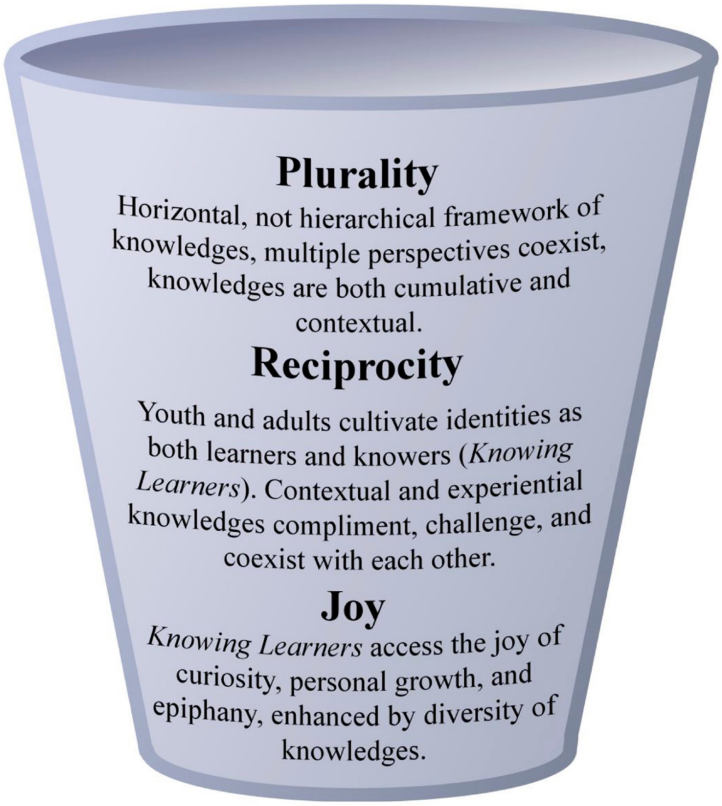

Figure 1 Cubist Container for Youth Participation Models.

aesthetic experience. (e.g., Joy & Sherry, 2003) The principle of joy invites us to prioritize the transformational potentials of multigenerational spaces rather than focusing solely on transactional outcomes. Collective learning shouldn't only be a cognitive experience, but also a joyful and embodied one. Explicitly prioritizing joy provides an important balance to navigating the complexity of multigenerational knowledges.

Rather than focusing on any one set of outcomes or markers, such as decision making, structure, buy-in, etc., as other models have effectively done, these guiding principles can be applied to any youth participation model. Any space can therefore be a cubist space if all stakeholders are committed to building plural, reciprocal spaces, and accessing the joy of learning from multiple perspectives.

Putting our framework into practice: Reflecting on our own experiences and process to demonstrate cubist principles

Developing a framework for identifying the characteristics of cubist spaces has been both an exercise in collaborating to develop the framework itself, as well as a practice of putting that framework to the test by turning the lens on our own multigenerational learning space. Our work together has spanned several years and a few formal and informal learning spaces. Nastasia has been a faculty member at a university, focusing on scholarship and teaching on centering youth voice and research in learning spaces. She connected with Zoe and Amira through formal university structures: mentoring Zoe's high school research course and teaching an undergraduate course that Amira enrolled in. After having known Amira and Zoe for several years as their mentor/instructor, Nastasia initiated this writing project and invited Zoe and Amira to collaborate. We decided to use a framework of practitioner research (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Ballenger, 2009) that uses systematic documentation of one's own practice to build theory. Our collaborative process of writing this paper gave us the opportunity to document and reflect on the ways in which we prioritized plurality, reciprocity, and joy in our work, as well as to identify in real time the inherent tensions that arise in multigenerational spaces.

We documented our process of brainstorming and writing this paper by audio-recording and transcribing all of our conversations, and by saving each of our collaborative paper drafts including our comments. We analyzed our data by coding transcripts for emerging themes from our own experiences that both connected to the literature on youth voice and informed our work developing the cubist framework and container. Each of us read and coded our transcripts individually, then came together to discuss our analyses and check for reliability. Based on these conversations, we built a collective analysis and then shared it with an outside researcher with expertise in youth voice and youth work to maintain accountability and reliability of our analysis.

The following two sections explore our individual and collective analyses, relating our framework of cubism to our individual backgrounds and experiences as well as our collaborative process. We begin with each author's personal narrative, reflecting on ways in which we have experienced multigenerational knowledge as youth (and in Nastasia's case, as an adult). We then present the collective analysis of our own multigenerational writing space.

Coexisting Within a Collective: Our individual perspectives with multigenerational knowledge

Through our work, we have navigated balancing collective commitments and individual identities and experiences. Our voices have largely blended together in laying out our frameworks. This brings up particular tensions in a multigenerational space, since it may be difficult to decipher through writing whose ideas and voices are forefronted. The following stories are a practice of plurality in our paper, with each of our individual viewpoints and experiences coexisting alongside our collective narrative.

Zoe's Experience

When reflecting on our cubist framework and my understanding of youth voice I began to think about the AP Research class I took senior year of high school. It was in that space that I most tangibly battled with knowledge hierarchies. That space was also where I met Nastasia through a mentor-mentee arrangement.

The research project I conducted was the most challenging and most rewarding academic endeavor I had taken on up to that point. In my study, I explored insider-outsider perspectives of the Latino community in Worcester through photo elicitation and interviews. Through the process of my literature review and research design, I felt clumsy and inexperienced. I struggled with self-doubt about my abilities as a researcher. Looking back, there was a distinct lack of plurality in the AP Research space, which fed into the self-doubt I experienced. Data collection was when everything shifted. The conversations that I had with participants were exhilarating and renewed my motivation. I realized the narratives my participants shared with me were rich with knowledge. My participants were all under 25, so, by valuing their lived experience without relying on academic qualifications, I was appreciating horizontal knowledge and implementing reciprocity without knowing it.

When Nastasia reached out to me about this paper, I was excited to explore more types of qualitative research. I had never considered knowledge hierarchies so explicitly and Nastasia's cubist framework was completely new to me. We met weekly over the summer before my freshman year of university and shared our ideas and experiences. Our talks allowed me to reflect on where I saw the cubist principles of plurality, reciprocity, and joy in my own experiences.

Plurality easing the pressure to be individualistic

When I started my research process, I bounced between feeling ambitious and feeling overwhelmed by the reality of my inexperience. I loved reading about what other people were doing but it often only reminded me of my inexperience. These researchers had years of experience and wisdom that I had not yet developed. At no point during my study did I feel confident or sure of myself. As I continued my work, I sought validation from adults to appease my self-doubt. I felt my ideas could not be "correct" unless approved by a teacher or mentor. However, when I received help, I felt undermined, as if the help I received invalidated my work because it was

supposed to be mine alone. Although I had classmates working alongside me, I refused to depend on them and instead worked twice as hard while still feeling invalidated. I was stuck in a paradox where either I collaborated with peers and mentors, making the work not 'mine' and it was invalidated, or I did it alone, where I could not produce such rich and meaningful results, and my work was again devalued.

This mindset reflected the individualistic society in which I have been raised. I wanted to have a successful project, which meant, at the time, that I had to beat everyone else. The way I had been taught to do this was to be rigidly independent; my work had to be wholly mine or it didn't count. Through the reflection I have done writing this paper, I have come to realize the complete lack of plurality in my research space. I viewed knowledge as undeniably hierarchical, causing stress, hesitation, and self-doubt. If my AP Research class had emphasized plurality instead, I wonder if I would have felt more confident and comfortable throughout my research process.

Leaning into collaboration and reciprocity

I began to feel strength and comfort when I leaned into collaboration instead of feeling pressure to be independent. Nastasia helped me think of qualitative research in a way that centered collaboration. I began to fall in love with the idea of a type of qualitative research that offered the freedom to involve and empower the participant. The idea that I could learn alongside my participants instead of being alone as a researcher in charge of a study comforted me. This positioned me as a *knowing-learner* instead of either one or the other.

Through Nastasia's explanation of qualitative research, I understood narrative as rich qualitative data. Once I felt responsible for the narratives of my participants, I gained confidence. The photo-elicitation methodology I chose allowed me to implement a collaborative data analysis process where I coded photographs together with my participants. This was a relationship of reciprocity which allowed me to empower my participants and more meaningfully engage with their narratives.

Joy in Shared Experiences

I found a genuine joy in research and education, which I accessed through leaning into plurality and reciprocity in my mindset and research spaces. The work I did in this year-long project, although causing a lot of inner turmoil, ended up as a source of joy, pride, and inspiration. I began to experience this joy at the beginning of my senior year of high school when I would offer help to underclassmen. Reviewing their papers, hearing their stories, and sharing my experiences gave me a sense of purpose. Similarly, while exploring the literature, reading and connecting the experience of researchers to my own experience excited me. Talking with my participants, exchanging understandings, and co-creating ideas, I grew inspired and joyful. All throughout the research process, I drew joy from collaboration and the sharing of experiences (what I would now call plurality and reciprocity). I began to overcome my struggle with self-invalidation when I realized the power of my participants' narratives.

While I was conducting my research, I did not consider the impact of my youth perspective on my process or results. When Nastasia asked me to work with her and Amira, the unstructured conversations we had prompted

me to reflect intensely and empowered me. I felt like the work I did was valuable and I wanted to encourage other young people to use their voices and share their knowledge. I wanted to spread the message to my peers that their knowledge was valid and extremely important regardless of what society said or how they had been taught to express it.

Amira's experience

Existing in Adult-Centered Spaces

In my high school years, my mixture of fear and obedience towards authority led to a naïve trust in the adults and their intentions. This brought me to many beneficial positions, but also towards participation in organizations whose methods and outlooks do not currently align with mine. An opportunity of note was my time spent as the president of STAAND (Students Taking Action Against Negative Decisions). This was a program that passed DARE's focus on alcohol and expanded to inhalants such as cigarettes, vapes, and marijuana. I joined with the intention of focusing on the ways nicotine-based companies targeted lower-income areas through advertisements. I took this as an opportunity to do my own kind of research for the first time. I decided to go to the gas stations and other distributors who sold nicotine products in my town and to count the number of times the cashiers were willing to sell to me. This was encouraged by the program, but I was also paired with a police accompaniment, which in my head legitimized what I thought to be legitimate research. Rather than being used to teach other students, my research was used to shut down a local gas station temporarily for non-compliance with the town's nicotine distributor ordinance.

Longing for Reciprocity

As a young person coming from a lower income background, it felt important for me to highlight the predatory marketing tactics of the nicotine industry. My naïvety led me to believing that all adults, no matter the uniforms they wore, were worthy of my trust and had the purest of intentions. I was shocked that my actions as a 'researcher' were used for ends other than helping to enlighten people. What I was doing was an already established program that was presented to me as a veiled way to conduct research and "educate" my peers. I began to understand that police departments and the program I was in at the time were not a "calling in" space, or a way of learning or healing from mistakes, but rather about punishment. In this specifically transactional research space, they used a youth of color to bring people into punishment, instead of aiding in the healing and awareness that was my intention. The experience began to breed in me a mistrust of adults, especially those in supposedly academic spaces.

Discovering Plurality in Higher Education

When entering college, my upbringing as well as my then- desire to become a professor led me to find avenues to continue exploring research at a young age. The college I inevitably chose won my admission through its

insistence on the ease of accessible research experience as quickly as in freshman year. This was something I found to be untrue. Research opportunities were hidden behind doors that could only be opened by people comfortable and familiar with academic spaces. Directed studies, specific research seminars, and advisement through faculty were technically accessible means of research endeavors but were practically unknown to me. This grew my distrust from adults to greater institutions of academics. My experiences so far had presented the professional educational world as a place filled with double meanings, closed gates and unfulfilled promises.

My first true research position was only possible through chance, a word-of-mouth recommendation by my roommate in my sophomore year. By the time I finally had the chance to join a class that would focus on my own personal research endeavors my naïvety had become skepticism, and I became critical of both myself and my professor. The assignment was simple enough: research something that meant something to me. I complied, choosing to do research on racial representation in children's media. The kinds of racial media I was exposed to as a child felt important to me and continued to weigh on me as an adult. I felt vulnerable researching my passions in an adult-led space funded by the very institution that I felt had lied to me. It felt challenging to trust adult-led or directed spaces to not devalue or manipulate the outcome of my research. I felt fear that my luck in conducting research as an undergraduate would be another story used to purposefully mislead prospective students. I also felt insecure that the gravity of my research was not equal to that of my classmates and therefore would not be taken as seriously in the academic world. My perception of academia, among being untrustworthy, also felt elitist. Where only studies centered around either adultism or "mature" topics would be validated. Those around me were tackling what felt like direct and pressing matters such as feminism, and the ways we perceive injustices. Though the eventuality of my research would be about racism, it was through the lens of children's media which felt vastly less important in the setting I was in.

Finding Joy Through Collaborative Research Spaces

Upon completion of my research process and interviews, my data spoke for itself. The information I gathered was pressing, it felt new, fresh and important. Through my research, sentiments about the effects of growing up in racially supportive neighborhoods on children's self image were explored. Nuances of racial representation that I identified with and also had never explored were opened up through my research. I had specifically decided to only interview those of color, and through that, it felt like I had become privy to perspectives and stories that have not been told or listened to by the dominant culture. It felt like my responsibility to protect and present these ideas with the world despite my position as a young researcher. Soon I began to realize I had the privilege to be part of a research space where youth were able to dictate the direction of their data. Our outcomes and hard work were not currency in a transactional space with our professor where we rewarded them for allowing us to do research. Instead, our research was honored, and we were thanked by our professor and peers for adding valuable information to the canon, regardless of age or position as youth or undergraduates.

My experience in that research class did not necessarily heal my relationship with academia and adults, but it has motivated me to help paint a complete picture of what undergraduate research in higher educational

spaces really looks like. I created a community through my research, of undergraduates similar to myself who were naïve, nervous, and insecure. Together, through the course, we became not only a group of researchers but people who became protectors of knowledge.

Nastasia's experience

Challenging hierarchy through plurality

Learning from Zoe and Amira's experiences and reflections as young people has fundamentally changed how I reflect on my own experiences as a young person. Specifically, I have noticed how infrequently I experienced the principles of plurality, reciprocity, and joy as a youth. Before adulthood, my knowledge was generally characterized as *practice* knowledge. I didn't consider much of my knowledge to be my own, rather it was generated by adults for me to utilize as practice to prepare for becoming a knowledgeable adult myself. I was engaged in a variety of formal and informal learning spaces: ten years of violin lessons, theater productions, leadership camps, and of course schooling, and while I experienced many moments of excitement and creativity, I never considered any of the knowledge generated to be mine. I started graduate school after having joined the professional knowledge spaces I had spent my schooling years practicing for. And yet in my classrooms, even as an adult, my identities as a learner and a knower still felt separate: at work I was a knower, and in the classroom I was back to practicing someone else's knowledge in preparation to earn a research degree. I remember feeling surprised when my knowledge stopped overlapping with my advisors and professors. In fact, the first time I had a conversation with a professor who didn't nod wisely, then explain to me the larger meaning behind my ideas, I thought maybe I was completely misunderstanding my own research to begin with. I was accustomed to believing that any knowledge that I could produce was already known to my teachers; my own contributions were simply proof that I had been paying attention. It hadn't sunk in that what I was creating was new.

Enriching collective knowledge through reciprocity

Before engaging in this process with Zoe and Amira, I had not reflected deeply on the ways in which the experience of never having my own knowledge as a youth has impacted the ways in which I approach multigenerational spaces as an adult. As an adult academic, I am deeply familiar with a consistent pressure to *know*. This pressure is present in the work of disseminating knowledge through publications, the competitiveness of searching for funding to support research, and the incessant image of the authoritative professor in university courses. The default setup of our university classrooms is chairs in rows facing a podium and projector; the ideal space for the adult *knower* to transfer knowledge to youth *learners*. While the pressure to know is placed heavily on the adult authority figure in the classroom, there is an equally weighty pressure placed on students to absorb and articulate the knowledge that is shared. In this space, the process of learning is cyclical: the knower transfers knowledge to the learner, which is then articulated back by the learner so that the knower can evaluate the accuracy and fluency of the learner's understanding of the knowledge. This positions knowledge as an entity that can only be

impacted by the knower; truth to be passed on and absorbed that can only grow and evolve through the contributions of adult knowers.

Institutional structures are set up to replicate knowledge hierarchies, so that once people become adults, they experience the other side of multigenerational spaces. I don't have strong memories of experiencing harm from this hierarchy as a youth, however as an adult I quickly developed an aversion to the hierarchy in academic spaces. Before this collaboration I characterized this aversion as largely due to my theoretical and pedagogical commitments. The process of documenting our multigenerational space within a cubist framework helped me realize that my reaction is not just theoretical, but also personal. I did not generally characterize my experiences of not having my own knowledge as inherently harmful. Yet I walked into classrooms as a teacher and experienced a hostility toward desks arranged in rows that belies a simple pedagogical stance. I feel palpable relief when we take the time to dismantle the rows of desks to form a circle to facilitate discussions. Shifting the focus away from the transfer-absorb-articulate cycle of knowledge to an ecosystem of knowledges coming from myriad perspectives, experiences, and lived realities has always aligned with my commitments as a teacher. However, our process of theorizing on the cubist framework has helped me realize that an ecosystem structure of learning has also allowed me to access a more authentic *Knowing Learner* identity for myself. Knowing that my stances are not just theoretical but also personal has helped me develop a more reflexive lens on the ways in which I show up as an adult in multigenerational spaces. As our collective data show, increasing awareness of the personal motivations behind my choices in multigenerational spaces has helped me consider their impact with more nuance.

The joy of multigenerational knowledge

Even though my classroom is intentionally nontraditional, working with Amira and Zoe has helped uncover default structures I still rely on when it comes to producing knowledge. My experience with writing academic papers led me to fall into structures and processes I had used before, without thinking critically about whether those processes benefited our work. As we moved through the emergent process of compiling literature, coding our transcripts, and adding text to our common document, Zoe and Amira challenged me to interrogate my decision making and writing style, balancing our collective cohesiveness with our individual perspectives. Each reimagining, restructuring, rewriting came with an exhilaration akin to summiting a peak; I felt inspiration that had me excitedly speaking notes into my phone during breakfast; eager to share my ideas with these brilliant colleagues and to hear theirs. Being allowed to sink into my learner identity within this multigenerational space has been a vulnerable and joyful experience that will last well beyond the writing of this paper. As with many writing processes, this work has spanned over a year of writing and an additional year of submissions and revisions. Without intentionally prioritizing and naming the joy in collaborating on this work, we could have easily become burnt out from a long and complex process and the myriad other tasks and projects that all three of us have. Remembering that cubism is art, and art is meant to be experienced aesthetically as well as intellectually has made for a process that has remained exciting and compelling throughout years of work.

Collective Analysis of our Process: Characteristics of Plurality, Reciprocity, and Joy

Reflecting on our individual backgrounds gave us important context to explore and analyze our process. Our analysis of our conversation transcripts focused on the content of our ideas for this paper as well as dialogic choices that we made, instances of diverging opinions or ideas, and how we moved forward through differences that arose. Three main themes emerged from the content of our conversations: harm experienced as youth; navigating power and vulnerability; and building community and collaboration. These themes emerged through each of us sharing personal experiences, which we connected with literature on youth voice and our ideas relating to how a cubist framework manifests in multigenerational spaces.

Theme 1: Reflecting on Experiencing Harm as a Youth in Knowledge Spaces

Throughout our conversations, we each grappled with the feeling of being positioned as *less than* when it came to our knowledge as youths. This theme became an important grounding for *why* a cubist framing is important to develop. Zoe and Amira in particular noted that the impacts of feeling devalued lasted well after the experiences had ended. Notably, even in spaces that seemed well-intentioned, both Zoe and Amira described recognizing in the moment that the spaces did not feel like they valued youth knowledge. Zoe described the experience of attending a panel celebrating young biliterate students:

> It was interesting because they were trying to get the youth in the audience to participate because they had a panel of successful multilingual people. And so they were asking questions and trying to create a discussion. And I thought it was really interesting, because it was a space where they were very interested, and they genuinely wanted to hear youth perspectives and youth voices. So it was like, a genuine good intent. But it wasn't a youth-led space…in a way I felt like, yes, I want to say something. But also, I feel like because [adults are] in charge, I don't want anything I say to mess up whatever they have planned…I still felt like I was doing a lot of thinking, and it was a lot of pressure. Even though they wanted to hear what I was going to say.

Zoe had sensed that adults had created an implicit agenda for the dialogue that youth were expected to contribute to, which made her feel not only that her knowledge might not be valued for its content, but also that her contributions might not even be relevant to a conversation that ostensibly had been created for her and her peers. The perception of conflicting explicit and implicit agendas around whether youth knowledge was authentically included in this multigenerational space appears as an example of spaces that do not uphold plurality. The consequence of lacking plurality as an explicit commitment was that youth like Zoe didn't feel comfortable participating at all, likely leading organizers to wonder why youth didn't respond to their invitation for participation.

This theme also demonstrates the ways in which each principle within the cubist container is connected. Without an explicit commitment to plurality, the status quo of knowledge hierarchy led to Zoe's implicit understanding that multiple types of knowledges were not equitably valued, leading her to avoid contributing her knowledge. Without youth contributions, members within the space were not able to build reciprocity as *knowing learners.* Instead, youth and adults were limited to fixed identities as either knowers (adult organizers and panelists) or learners (youth audience). Without plurality and reciprocity, Zoe as an audience member had difficulty accessing the joy of being in a multigenerational learning space, a particularly notable disappointment due to the fact that the content of the space was a topic of interest to her, with potential to be compelling and joyful.

Theme 2: Importance of Community and Collaboration in Multigenerational Spaces

While the first theme in our data gave us valuable insight in *why* a cubist framework is valuable in grounding multigenerational knowledge spaces, the theme of community and relationship-building emerged as crucial in *how* spaces can apply cubist principles. All three of us noted that building supportive relationships with adults and youth, particularly in our experiences doing community-based research, represented a turning point in how we viewed our own knowledge and values. As Amira described the research course that she took with Nastasia:

> I had a whole class of people my age, and we all did our [research] projects together. And so I kind of knew I wasn't alone in feeling this way. But I thought that maybe it didn't extend beyond my class. But hearing another, like, young researcher talking about this and feeling like having similar thought processes and having to go through similar preparations, I relate to it.

Prioritizing relationships and community emerged as a prevalent theme in our conversations about how to infuse cubist principles into multigenerational spaces. In every instance in which our data showed evidence of plurality through our multiple perspectives, reciprocity in both teaching and learning from each other, and joy through humor, encouragement, and excitement in new ideas, we noted that these cubist characteristics were made possible because we had built trusting and vulnerable relationships with each other. Through our relationships, we trusted each other to respect and value our perspectives, to show up with humility to learn from each other, and to cultivate the joy in creating knowledge that is important to us.

Theme 3: From Self-Doubt to Vulnerability and Joy: Navigating Power in Multigenerational Spaces

All three of us grappled with experiencing self-doubt in response to multigenerational learning spaces. Zoe and Amira spoke about doubting whether their knowledge had value, feeling like they couldn't take ownership or pride in their work. The anticipation of receiving unsupportive critique from adults caused them to downplay

the importance of the work that they were doing. As Amira put it: "I felt like I needed to downplay [my knowledge] a bit to be like 'Oh, it's nothing'...because I don't want...people to like, come at me".

For Nastasia, the memory of self-doubt as a youth was more distant due to the fact that she has been an adult educator for almost two decades. However, as she engaged with this reflection, she realized that the residue from experiencing self-doubt as a youth resulted in a hyper-sensitivity to perpetuating the hierarchical power dynamic, which at times impacted her ability to participate in idea generation or decision making for fear of overpowering Zoe and Amira's ideas. She described:

> I think adults kind of don't know where they fit...Because adults [get] so used to being the knowledge creators, right? Like, they're used to being the ones who offer their knowledge for the benefit of youth. And so I think often something that can happen is that adults then think that they shouldn't contribute at all because of these power dynamics. So then they start, retreating. And not using their knowledge and just saying, 'Well, I just want to center youth voice', but then that just increases the divide, or perpetuates the divide, because now it's not a multi-generational community anymore, because the adult isn't actually [participating] at the same level.

As Nastasia grappled with how well-intentioned adults actually make spaces less multi-generational by declining to meaningfully participate, Zoe and Amira noted that this also made spaces less cubist. When anyone, including adults, removes their perspective from the space, they erode plurality and reciprocity, leaving others in the space without opportunities to both learn from those perspectives or to use them as teaching moments. There is a unique complexity inherent to age as an identity. While many identities, racial, gender, etc., are not shared collectively by all people, the experience of being a youth and transitioning to adulthood is an identity that nearly everyone experiences throughout their life. One might make the assumption that this fact would facilitate adults and youth being in closer solidarity with each other, since adults can empathize with youth experience. However, as we note in our data, the shared experience appears to perpetuate a divide rather than to create connections. In our discussions, we saw this playing out in two ways: (1) adults maintain the knowledge hierarchy they experienced as youth by creating spaces where youth knowledge is deprioritized; and (2) adults feel so concerned about breaking this hierarchical cycle that they feel like they cannot participate in multigenerational spaces for fear of overpowering youth voice. Ironically, adults that fall into the latter category often still perpetuate a hierarchy by removing their knowledge altogether instead of interrogating the idea that it is so important as to be automatically overpowering. Nastasia realized that she had implicitly fallen into the latter category.

In an important example of reciprocity, Zoe interrupted this cycle, responding to Nastasia's grappling:

> I think because like we're seeing there has not been a lot of emphasis put on youth voice in the past. So adults, when they were young, felt like their voices [weren't] valuable. And so now that they're put back in the position of learners...in their mind, learners are not allowed to contribute either. So they feel like now they're learning and...they're not allowed to contribute. Because now we're [youth] the teachers, instead of

> everyone is learning and teaching together. That concept is not in their head...it hasn't been taught to them when they were younger. And they've been living like that for so long, that I think it's really a reversal. And like, we need to reteach them that you can be both.

As Zoe outlined, youth who are embodying the identity of a learner can teach adults in multigenerational spaces how to access that identity once again. In turn, vulnerability from adults valuing this learning opportunity for themselves can validate youth knowledges and position them as knowledge-producers. With this exchange, all stakeholders in a multi-generational space can cultivate *knowing learner* identities. We saw this instance as reciprocal both in the idea itself, as well as in the exchange between Zoe, a youth, who taught Nastasia, an adult, a new way of thinking that addressed the problem she was grappling with. It is important to note here that this exchange also brought joy into the space. Nastasia felt that this conversation facilitated a breakthrough for her; a new way to think about how to show up as an adult in youth spaces, which ignited curiosity and inspiration for how she could put this concept into practice in her future work. Zoe had a similar feeling of joy at being able to share an in-progress idea that changed the way we were thinking collectively.

Implications for Holding Multigenerational Spaces within a Cubist Container

Our data analysis brought up personal themes of the impacts of having felt invalidated as youth, as well as the ways that our relationships facilitated a cubist space in which our multiple perspectives were honored, and through which we were invited to both contribute our knowledge and to learn from each other. Our experiences align with the literature exploring the positive experiences and outcomes of participating in multigenerational feedback spaces where both youth and adult perspectives help to change structures and processes. (e.g., Batsleer, 2011; Bron, et al., 2018; Bertrand, 2014; Conner, et al., 2013; Cook-Sather, 2006; Hawke, et al., 2018; Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Schaeffer, 2018; Weiss, 2018) Weiss (2018) found that youth who collaborated with adults to improve school programs and environments became more confident in the value of their knowledge as they experienced adults reframing their approach to the knowledge hierarchy by recognizing that they could learn from youth. Mitra & Serriere (2012) explored a multigenerational professional development space where adults noted that their own engagement increased with the presence of youth. In this case, adult leaders explicitly grounded the professional development space in what we identify as plurality, announcing to students and teachers the intention of rejecting the knowledge hierarchy: "This is not a hierarchical relationship, but a partnership of equality" (p. 3). The data from our conversations also showed that when we explicitly framed our space as non-hierarchical, we all felt more engaged and confident.

We also saw alignment between our findings on the iterative relationship between community-building and cubist principles and the literature exploring YPAR. In contrast to traditional research/knowledge spaces that often center the knowledge and analytical power of the individual researcher, YPAR prioritizes collectives of researchers, building a space of plurality and reciprocity as multigenerational groups learn with and from each

other as they build collective knowledge towards transformational justice. This structure and commitment to justice are, as Cammorota and Fine (2010) noted, "nourishing to the soul" (p. 2).

Our relationships with each other facilitated our ability to prioritize and maintain the principles of a cubist container, particularly as we navigated difference and disagreement. The issue of disagreement is an inherent tension point in any collaborative space, and especially complex within multigenerational spaces due to the traditional power dynamics that exist between youth and adults. Within this tension, (re)grounding our space in cubist principles was both important in successfully navigating differences, and also presented some challenges, particularly in the context of norms and pressures of an academic project. An example of this tension arose in one case during our process of making our paper more concise to adhere to word limits. Nastasia suggested removing a specific mention of benevolent spaces, assuming that the meaning was implicit in other areas of the paper. This was a point of disagreement for Zoe and Amira. For the two younger researchers, explicitly naming benevolent spaces was important to the authenticity of the paper. We discussed multiple ways forward, finally reaching consensus that we would rewrite the paragraph to both maintain the idea of benevolence but try to be more concise with our writing. The cubist principles of plurality and reciprocity allowed us to explore our different priorities, Nastasia's priority of meeting journal guidelines, and Zoe and Amira's priority of making a particular point, without placing them on a hierarchy. Looking back, Nastasia realized that the concept she was advocating for removing is one that holds adults accountable for direct interpersonal harm that can be caused to youth even within a framework that prioritizes youth benefit. The concept of benevolent spaces complicates the idea that we can create truly equitable spaces simply by caring about youth. In fact, benevolence can encompass both genuine care for youth but also dismissiveness to their value. This concept can compel well-meaning and caring adults to interrogate their practices within multigenerational spaces, recognizing that a space does not have to be marginalizing or transactional to still be inequitable. While we were not originally attuned to this in our conversation about whether or not to include benevolent spaces, Zoe and Amira were both certain that this was important to the authenticity of the paper. Nastasia trusted that their knowledge was getting at something she didn't fully understand and agreed to keep the concept and cut wording from somewhere else. Looking back, it would have been a loss to our paper to remove a concept that confronted the notion that caring adults automatically create equitable spaces.

We note that the aforementioned process of building consensus aligned with the concept of shared decision-making present in almost every model of youth participation that we explored. As Cahill and Dadvand (2018), argued however, decision-making participation in and of itself is insufficient to gauge whether a multigenerational space is truly prioritizing equity. We see the cubist principles as an example of the sociocultural factors that Cahill and Dadvand argued as being crucial to grounding shared decision-making. Prioritizing cubist principles held us accountable to reaching an outcome to our disagreement that rejected a traditional knowledge hierarchy in which Nastasia's knowledge of journal guidelines might have invalidated Zoe and Amira's knowledge of the importance of the concept in question and pressured them to share her decision. However, we also recognize that we were able to ground ourselves in these principles because we had built trusting relationships with each other over time. Time is a precious resource that is not always available within the confines of school years, project deadlines, and the pressure to produce. As adrienne maree brown (2017) writes, work "moves at the speed of

trust" (p. 42). Too often, the speed of trust seems glacial compared with the speed at which progress is expected. Since we came into our collaboration having had the luxury of building trusting relationships in multiple spaces over several years, we benefited from a pre-existing alignment of stances and commitments. Because of this, our disagreements tended to center on smaller issues having to do with structure and form of our paper, which were easily solved through discussion and negotiation. We recognize that while our space contained many markers of plurality, reciprocity, and joy, it was never tested through conflict.

Many multigenerational spaces do not have the benefit of forming around pre-existing trusting relationships. The intentional work of building trust to facilitate plurality, reciprocity, and joy must therefore begin within the space itself. Our goal for future exploration on the cubist container is to apply it to diverse spaces and models of youth participation to better understand how these principles impact how multigenerational spaces function through conflict and differing goals.

A cubist container provides a guiding lens for any work that is done by multigenerational collectives; in academic spaces such as ours, in community spaces, and leadership spaces. Social change that pushes us as society to be accountable for building equity, participation, and justice relies on the many rich perspectives that come from people of all ages, and on committing to honoring those multiple perspectives through spaces that are plural, reciprocal, and joyful.

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