KINSHIP, BEING TOGETHER, AND "BELONGING OTHERWISE" IN YPAR COLLABORATIONS WITHIN COMMUNITY–UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

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Abstract

This article theorizes the concept of kinship in the context of a time-bound university–community collaboration between a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) team and an undergraduate course at an elite liberal arts college in the Midwest. The two co-authors, the two adults involved in this partnership, build on the YPAR team's definition of and emphasis on kinship in their research and action to center Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) youth in creating liberatory educational spaces. We examine how this concept can guide the development of university–community collaborations that move away from a history of extraction and exploitation. Kinship can instead point us toward the possibility of being together "otherwise" by creating multiple opportunities to collectively refashion the role that young people can play in educational and activist spaces. This case study also provides a concrete example of how to move beyond platitudes about putting relationships first in such collaborations.

Introduction

This article theorizes the concept of kinship in the context of a university–community collaboration between a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) team (YoUthROC) and an undergraduate course at an elite liberal arts college (Carleton College). As two adults involved in this partnership (Anita, the course instructor, and Abby, YoUthROC co-founder/adult advisor),[1] we build on the YPAR team's definition of and emphasis on kinship in their research and action to center Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) youth in

1 Anita is an Asian American woman who teaches at a small elite private college that was the site of the partnership discussed in this study and Abby is a white woman who teaches at a large state university that hosts the YPAR team.

creating liberatory educational spaces. We explore how this concept can guide the development of university–community collaborations that move away from a history of extraction and exploitation. Kinship can instead point us toward the possibility of being together and belonging "otherwise" by creating multiple opportunities to collectively refashion the role that young people can play in educational and activist spaces. This case study also provides a concrete example of how to move beyond platitudes about putting relationships first in such collaborations. It demonstrates how kinship conceived as "multiple good relations," as Kim TallBear describes it (Wilbur & Keene, 2019), allows for flexible and temporary formations that can be responsive to "community partners' expressed near-term and long-term material needs, desires, and aspirations for specific research and research products" (London et al., 2022, p. 33). The myriad kinship relationships among the adults and young people involved *before* the development of this specific collaborative project allowed for this time-bound project to be more successful than previous, more individualized university–community collaborations YoUthROC had experienced. We explore YoUthROC's definition of *kinship* alongside theorizations within critical feminist, queer of color, and Indigenous Studies contexts to provide a more robust framework for productive collaborations than "community-building," especially in the context of education-related projects and courses where collective work is essential for building anti-oppressive educational spaces.

Literature Review

Critical literature on community–university collaborations makes it clear that such collaborations need to account for the "legacies of extreme capitalism, colonialism, institutionalized slavery, and White supremacy" that are ever present in educational institutions (Parker, 2020, p. 137). While community-engaged learning is touted by universities as key to their students' learning and to higher education's public purpose (Seed Coalition, 2025), university efforts to collaborate with communities can harm communities if we are not paying careful attention to hierarchies of power and uneven distribution of resources. Yep and Mitchell (2017) argue that college instructors who often initiate and structure such collaborations need to ensure that "an element of decision-making power is retained in the community" and that instructors and students "are responsive to the needs, demands, and expectations of our partners" (p. 301). The questions that Maori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, asks about decolonizing research methodologies are relevant to university–community partnerships: "Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it?" (1999, p. 10). Mitchell and Chavous (2021) posit that these partnerships should center on the goal of bringing "more just conditions to our communities and more just futures for the people in those communities" (p. 4). In educational studies courses, including those that aim to prepare future teachers, partnerships with youth are often in the form of college students tutoring individual K-12 students during or after school or college students partnering with community organizations on an individual or small group basis. A partnership between an entire class of college students and one community partner for an entire term seems less frequent.

One way that university-based educators have tried to create more equitable partnerships with youth is through Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) projects. These projects allow youth and adult collaborators to

"conduct root-level analyses of structural oppression that affects them directly with the aim of taking action to change those structures" (Buttimer, 2018, p. 39). The principles that guide YPAR projects provide a powerful opening to build partnerships between youth and adults as well as universities and community partners that pay attention to power and hierarchies. YPAR is one form of participatory action research (PAR), an approach to research that posits that those who are most impacted by a "problem" are the ones best situated to investigate that problem and generate solutions (Participatory Action Research, 2025). PAR projects can involve a range of qualitative and quantitative methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups, surveys, GIS mapping, photo voice), depending on the questions being asked and the information needed. PAR projects honor different types of knowledge (e.g., academic, experiential, community-based) and view collaboration across differences as *key* to doing "good" research.[2] From a PAR perspective, research is always for the purpose of change in the research context. While PAR has many roots and origins, there are two shared foundational beliefs: (a) we all have the capacity and power to think critically about ourselves and our world and (b) the world we live in is always being transformed and we—especially as organized collectives—can help transform our world. As educational scholars, we are particularly indebted to the work of critical educator Paulo Freire (1970) in helping us think through the idea of "problem-solving" education and research.

One type of participatory action research (PAR) is Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) where young people conduct research that addresses problems relevant to their lives and, through that research, advocate for changes to improve their living/learning conditions. This approach to research *by* and *with* youth reframes deficit narratives of youth and positions them as "capable of generating expert knowledge of value in understanding and addressing problems that affect their development and well-being" (Ozer, 2016, p. 191). For young people of color or otherwise historically marginalized young people, YPAR can be a way "to experience self-determination, social justice, and empowerment" (Ballonoff Suleiman et al., 2019, p. 27). YPAR is not just about "including" student voices in adult-created venues or about individual students being able to choose the topics for their research projects: collaboration among youth and *collective* agency and action are important in YPAR projects.

Many YPAR-related community–university collaborations involve university-based faculty or university students acting as mentors and facilitators to younger youth in the community (Higuera, 2019; Jones et al., 2018; Lee, 2019; Lozenski, 2014; Mirra & Rogers, 2016). For example, Higuera (2019) describes a program where undergraduate students were trained to facilitate PAR workshops for middle and high school students. Similarly, Jones et al. (2018) discuss a program where undergraduate business students used a PAR approach to plan a financial literacy event for high school students. Such projects with university faculty and students providing resources and mentoring to students in K-12 contexts are important—existing literature points to how participating in YPAR can be empowering for K-12 students (Anyon et al., 2018; Ballonoff Suleiman et al., 2019; Ozer, 2016). However, we were unable to find studies where an established YPAR team, consisting of high school and university students, were the ones mentoring and guiding university students, which was the structure for this partnership.

2 One important "difference" might be in the writing styles within articles discussing PAR projects such as this one when multiple authors are involved from different identities and positionalities; we want to note that multivocality within academic articles is especially important to honor when co-authors include youth.

In the collaboration we analyze in this article, reciprocity was key. The YPAR team members—the community partner—were the ones who developed the project that students from the college course contributed to and the YPAR team provided feedback on the college students' work. While Carleton students brought their interests and expertise to the project and co-mentored each other, the framework, the pacing, and the project were determined by YoUthROC in collaboration with this article's co-authors and adult collaborators (Anita, the college course instructor, and Abby, YoUthROC's adult advisor). This feature created a productive context for reframing ever-present hierarchies between universities and community partners. One central conceptual framework that the YPAR team brought to the project was that of "kinship." In the next section, we describe how YoUthROC defined this concept, and we build on their definition in relation to how "kinship" has been used within critical feminist, queer of color, and Indigenous Studies contexts. We highlight the need to pay attention to power and hierarchies within kinship relationships before describing and analyzing the collaboration between YoUthROC and Carleton students. We argue that the framework of kinship could be one way that community–university partnerships can help us move away from exploitative, transactional frameworks and toward more reciprocal relationships where community members, especially youth, are positioned as experts and university partners are positioned as learners.

Kinship: An Analytic Frame

Our goals in developing the framework of kinship to better understand this particular collaboration and university–community partnerships, in general, are three-fold: (1) to honor and build on the YPAR team's theorizing, which identified kinship and shared purpose as one of three tenets of their pedagogical frame and theory of change; (2) to deepen our own understanding and thus lived and liberatory potential of kinship (including within YPAR contexts); and (3) to apply this concept toward decolonizing university–community partnerships. As we reflected while co-writing this article as the two adult advisors involved in this partnership, we wondered how the concept and praxis of kinship might help us nurture shared goals across community and university partners and keep us from being lured into a gamification of community-building activities that do not lead to material benefits for community partners. Kinship has a rich and developing history in fields such as women's and gender studies, queer theory, Indigenous Studies, foster care, and adoption studies, but it has not yet been theorized deeply within the context of scholarship on community engagement. Thus, we use this youth-forward precipice to dig into and stretch the definition and praxis of kinship within that context.

YoUthROC's development of an asset-based concept of kinship came from reading Tara Yosso's explanation of this term, applying the concept to their own lived experience and knowledge, and continuing to redefine it over several years. Yosso (2005) explains:

> Familial capital refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition (see Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2002). This form of cultural wealth engages a commitment to community well being and expands the concept of family to include a

> more broad understanding of kinship...From these kinship ties, we learn the importance of maintaining a healthy connection to our community and its resources (p. 79).

Building on this idea, YoUthROC specifically queered the concept of familial wealth by extending it beyond relatives to chosen relations. They strived for kinship that lifted each other and pushed each other toward deeper understanding, base-building collectives, and liberatory praxis. YoUthROC (2022) understands kinship to be in alignment with a collective shared purpose to center BIPOC youth in community and school spaces:

> Working with a shared purpose connects youth to each other and to the community, which cultivates kinship and social action. Kinship is a feeling around people who make you feel connected. Kinship can include birth or chosen family, friends, peers, and colleagues. Kinship needs to be actively, informally, and intentionally nourished. With strong kinship connections, you are free to call out and hold each other accountable, to feel supported and unafraid to express yourself and your thoughts. Kinship is a goal. Creating and developing a shared purpose is a main step in kinship building. It makes youth spaces sustainable because positive relationships keep young people invested in their space (p. 10).

Thinking about YoUthROC's understanding of kinship alongside conceptualizations in previous scholarship, we highlight three elements that are particularly important when using this concept within the fields of both YPAR and community engagement: (1) kinship builds on and goes beyond familial "kin"; (2) kinship is a praxis of critical and collective care; and (3) the praxis of kinship necessitates reflection on hierarchies, power, and care. We see these three elements as overlapping parts of an ongoing praxis of kinship, rather than a linear process. We also do not see these elements as prescriptive—we offer these explorations as one way forward in building more reciprocal and generative university–community partnerships, especially with and among youth from both sites.

Building On and Beyond Kin

With kin, and in groups where there are shared and distinct cultural characteristics, there can be a hum that aligns and pops, that sparks love, fights, and laughter. As Marin et al. (2020) note, enacting kinship and care grounds us in relations: "the perspectives that we offer are grounded in our familial relations as well as our individual participation in specific Indigenous communities, with particular histories and ways of doing, being, and acting in the world" (p. 248). It is a grounding and, as YoUthROC reminds us, it is a feeling. Creating opportunities for kinship opens up space to bring in familial and cultural capital and to share family knowledge and stories, so that people can be free just to be.

This feeling of kinship also carries beyond the biological relations of kin to chosen family and friendships (Bradway & Freeman, 2022). Black communities, for example, have historically relied on relationships with "fictive kin"—people who do not share biological or legal ties but are connected in the community—"as a means of establishing a system of support, improving access to additional resources, and procuring protection within a

larger oppressive society" (Scott & Deutsch, 2021, p. 319). This kind of kinship encourages and requires active, assertive, and affirmative practices, in part because some (biological) kin do not welcome a whole self; some family and inner circles work against a collective social purpose; many places of work, worship, or education are sites of unbelonging and outright violence and harm for folks from marginalized communities. As Bradway and Freeman (2022) note,

> there can be no history of queerness without an attention to the ways that kinship operates as a key site of dispossession, exploitation, and struggle for racialized and minoritized social groups. Kinship cuts across them, yet these histories are also distinct and in many incommensurable. Therefore, to make kin under the sign of kinlessness is a radical act (p. 17).

The deliberate creation of kinship requires intention, commitment, and labor—in other words, "Each of us must work in this space [of kinship] to sustain one another" (Blockett et al., 2022, p. 49). Muhammad and Haddix (2016) note how Black girls' literacy practices can be one avenue for the deliberative construction of fictive kinship. Black, Indigenous, youth, and queer knowledge and practices teach us about the "multiple good relations" as Kim TallBear puts it (Wilbur & Keene, 2019) that can be constructed through an extended base-building toward a kinship that fosters collective and critical care. TallBear describes how "being in good relation" is part of "the fundamental ethical frameworks" of her ancestors and how those frameworks guided how "my ancestors shared resources, the way that they shared childcare...It's about taking care of family, right? It's about taking care of each other" (Wilbur & Keene, 2019). She posits that reframing care as collective and critical within kinship means that we have to push back against "the doctrines of scarcity and separation...[and] shatter pervasive beliefs of boundaries, binaries, and taboos within our relations" (Young, 2020). In the context of university–community partnerships, focusing on kinship allows us to develop skills and practices that help us think beyond normative and comfortable partnership practices that often reinforce narratives of scarcity and separation. Kinship points to a more collective approach that can help us move beyond the individualist zero-sum approach that undergirds the current American educational system (Labaree, 1997).

Kinship as a Praxis of Collective and Critical Care

In addition to considering kinship "with whom," kinship is an intentional praxis, a braided practice of action and reflection, that works to build trust and foster collectivism, creating opportunities for care, emotion, call-outs/call-ins, and complex relationships.

Collective Care

As Ramnath (2022) explains, "Kinship offers a way of navigating the world as an individual and within a community" (p. 37). It works against characteristics of white supremacy such as "productivity" and "urgency"

(Okun, 2021) because it implores us to take a beat to be with one another, rather than just bearing down to complete a task. It also works against a particular kind of centering that is often a hallmark of white supremacist logic: "Praxis kinship lacks a center: it is diffuse and mobile, a doing...a vast web of relationship that crosses 'official' and uncodified social bonds alike" (Bradway & Freeman, 2022, p. 3). It is a lived concept, an intentional experience, and a praxis of care for the whole selves of participants (Blockett et al., 2022; Ramnath, 2022). A focus on kinship pushes up against the kind of certainty and closure demanded by university processes such as syllabi development, credit hours, and assessment. It is difficult to predict how much time creating and recreating "a vast web of relationships" will take or to quantify or measure kinship. As Bradway and Freeman (2022) note, "...[kin]ship theory weaves critique with imagination to dream belonging otherwise" (p. 2). As we explored how kinship played out in this case study, we came to believe that it provided a concrete example of how to move beyond icebreakers while still putting relationships first in such collaborations. We suggest that kinship conceived as "multiple good relations" (Wilbur & Keene, 2019) can help us create robust partnerships that center the needs and knowledge of communities.

Understanding that kinship relations exist before and beyond a particular partnership can lead to flexible and temporary formations that are able to meet a community partner's immediate and long-term needs and goals (London et al., 2022). The kinship developed between the two co-authors and between them and the young people involved in the collaboration (YoUthROC members and Carleton students) before this specific project allowed for a short-term, time-bound partnership to be more successful than previous transactional university–community collaborations experienced by advisors and by YoUthROC. These kinship relationships were grounded in caring for and with one another and our multiple overlapping communities. While our example features a project with concrete outcomes (lesson plans for and by youth), using a kinship framework allows, particularly, university partners to focus on building relationships with community partners as an important outcome in itself.

Critical Care

Within partnerships, opportunities for critical care can be nurtured, pushing us in service of a greater purpose. Burden-Stelly's (2018) explanation of mutual comradeship helped us understand kinship beyond a "feel good" concept. Like mutual comradeship, in which "the work of building socialism, not identity, is paramount" (p. 199), the praxis of kinship aims to build relationships toward a shared purpose, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of what it means to have non-extractive community–university partnerships. We can show up in service to each other—by humanizing one another—and to a shared goal. In a space of critical care, when tensions rise within, those who have been developing kinship can move through it. When injustice consumes our local or global world, being able to sit back or recall a space of kinship—a practice of joy, solace, and shared purpose—can ground us and keep us moving forward. Kinship is an always emerging and shifting praxis that requires vulnerability and an openness to dealing with uncertainty and disagreement while supported by opportunities for mutual and authentic care. In our teaching roles, both of us encounter the problem of how to

support our students in engaging critically with each other's ideas and to move beyond the culture of "niceness" that is especially prevalent in our predominantly white institutions (Castagno, 2019). Reframing disagreement as a necessary part of the shared goal of learning—a critical aspect of the kinship framework—can be generative in classroom settings as well as university–community partnerships.

Intentional Reflection on Hierarchies, Power, and Care

Locating kinship within scholarship on community partnerships helps us to think through how kinship—and intentional reflection on relationships and care—can create opportunities for gentle pushes toward humanizing relationships that require risk, vulnerability, and humility. Kinship, like care, might be misunderstood or be limiting (Rivera-McCutchen, 2021) without intention and attention. Kinship can work toward ways to care that are "fair, inclusive, and in solidarity with the most vulnerable" (Shalaby, 2020, p. 42). A partnership that focuses on kinship may lead to a momentary or longer-lasting flattening of hierarchy. As Blockett et al. (2022) describe, "ways of being human and sharing in humanity with others" allow us to understand how our interactions with others, within research or community partnership contexts, "can simultaneously reflect and transcend power asymmetries" (p. 52). Within university–community partnerships, kinship can move us toward being together and belonging "otherwise" without assuming shared affinity at the outset of a collaboration; instead, it creates a container where shared responsibility for a product, for example, can allow for a co-constructed process that challenges existing power hierarchies and a reimagining of the role that community partners play in creating more just conditions for their communities. Since both authors shared a background in youth participatory action research (YPAR), they both entered this partnership with commitments to care for the young people themselves and to value the knowledge production of young people and the change they clamored for in their communities (Caraballo et al., 2017).

In this section, we outlined how kinship builds on and beyond familial kin and works from a praxis of collective, critical, and reflective care. These elements of kinship build on and reinforce important tenets of the YPAR framework: the value of honoring and working across differences in positionality, identities, locations, and contexts; the importance of collective work and shared goals and the value of critical care and feedback in moving toward these goals; and the core belief that we and our contexts can change with our collective efforts. There is no one starting place for building and nurturing kinship as part of university–community partnerships—instead, we suggest that viewing these partnerships as the opportunity to build kinship networks that allow for a praxis of collective, critical, and reflective care within specific projects might be the way to move away from more extractive partnerships and ground us in principles of reciprocity and justice.

Next, we describe the partnership context and findings from this trimester-long case study (embedded within a multi-year relationship). In the conclusion, we outline how kinship ties—and connected projects—are strengthened through reflective care and through examining hierarchies and power inherent in community partnerships and youth spaces.

Partnership Context

University Context

The college course in this project was a culminating seminar for the Educational Studies minor at Carleton College, a predominantly white elite college in Minnesota, located approximately 45 miles from the YoUthROC team. In Spring 2021, the course had 13 seniors with a range of majors including Psychology, Sociology/Anthropology, History, and Computer Science; 7 were students of color. Most students planned to work with youth in some capacity after their graduation. The senior seminar is taught on a rotating basis by faculty in the Educational Studies department; this was Anita's third time teaching the seminar with a focus on youth activism and organizing. Anita is an Asian American tenured professor who had been teaching at Carleton for 13 years at the time of this project.

The first 5 weeks of the 10-week virtual class focused on readings, discussions, and guest speakers that provided students with frameworks for youth activism, which they then applied to case studies: Indigenous youth activism around environmental justice and sovereignty; youth organizing for police-free schools; Civil Rights activism; and Ethnic Studies advocacy. During the second five weeks, students focused on developing youth-powered lesson plans for YoUthROC's website about youth in social movements (YoUthROC, 2023). Virtual class sessions included: group research time; meetings with YoUthROC; debrief and feedback meetings; and incorporating feedback from YoUthROC and the instructor about their lesson plans. Anita chose to dedicate the second half of the course to developing the lesson plans so that the students could have enough time and energy to focus on their work with/for YoUthROC. This decision signaled that the work was important enough to spend five weeks of their senior seminar on it. It also allowed everyone to slow down during a stressful academic year in pandemic mode.

YoUthROC Context

Anita's syllabus provided this initial information about YoUthROC:

> We will partner with YoUthROC, a youth participatory action research (YPAR) team in North Minneapolis. You can learn more about YoUthROC from their Instagram and Twitter pages. This year, YoUthROC's research is focused on youth in social movements—please watch this video for a recap of their research project (from a presentation they did this February at the Ethnography in Education Research Forum). You will work with YoUthROC to create lesson plans to be included in their youth-powered curriculum focused on local, national, and global youth movements and the role of young people in social movements.

YoUthROC is a community and university-connected youth research team composed of young people, ages 15–23, from the predominantly Black neighborhood, where the University of Minnesota's (UMN) Urban

Research and Outreach-Engagement Center (UROC), is located along with other youth of color from the University. Youth from the community tend to join YoUthROC due to their relationships with current team members or referrals from local teachers or organizations; UMN students often hear about the team through community-engaged learning (CEL) courses. Abby's role was both as co-founder/advisor of the team and as a lecturer in CEL-based courses in urban education at UMN. Abby is a middle-aged white woman who has been involved in teaching middle, high school, or college for over two decades, including with service-learning or YPAR. She initiated this model for a YPAR team to be sustained through a university in service to and with youth in the community. YoUthROC members during the time of this partnership were mostly young women with African American, Somali, Vietnamese, Hmong, Latine, and multiracial heritages. Similar to the Carleton students, most YoUthROC members plan to work in education or community-engaged fields after graduation from college.

"Multiple Good Relations": The Development of Kinship Before the Partnership

We want to describe the kindling of kinship that created a shared fire of commitment to youth and to creating more reciprocal community–university partnerships for Abby, Anita, and YoUthROC. Abby and Anita first met five years before this partnership through a mutual colleague when Anita was looking for young people to speak in her senior seminar on youth activism in Spring, 2017 at Carleton College. Independently of their relationship, Anita met two future members of the YoUthROC team through a Carleton alumnus who was teaching a YPAR course at their high school. These students presented about YPAR in Anita's Multicultural Education course in Spring 2018. Around the same time, Abby and those two students connected when they presented in the same youth-focused conference session at a local university, and one of those students, a long-time resident of North Minneapolis, joined Abby in co-founding YoUthROC in Fall, 2018. In March 2019, YoUthROC came to Faribault to conduct a workshop for youth researchers who were collaborating with Anita and other Carleton staff on a PAR project (*Carleton-Faribault PAR Collaboration*, 2025). This trip helped to solidify YoUthROC's desire to build capacity through facilitating YPAR with other young people. In the Fall of 2019, Anita was invited to be a member of YoUthROC's advisory board. The bi-directional nature of these relationships also created multiple opportunities for the two of us, as adults in youth-centered spaces, to recognize and affirm our shared sensibility of how we want to create spaces where youth can collaborate with each other toward collective youth-led change. Our relationship was forged not only in academic spaces but also in community spaces such as education organizing and marching together in youth-led protests against School Resource Officers. Our interest in working for educational justice crossed institutional spaces and social identities. Our decision to write this article together was one way that we wanted to honor what we, as adults, have learned from the young people we have had the privilege of collaborating with, a theme we have explored elsewhere (Chikkatur, 2023; Rombalski, 2020).

We delineate this timeline of relationships between the faculty member, adult advisor, and YoUthROC members to illustrate the long-standing and multiple connections that we all had to each other before this specific

partnership in Spring, 2021. Ongoing work and relationships between Anita, Abby, and YoUthROC members created a sense of trust and solidarity—in other words, kinship—long before this course-based partnership was developed. The existing web of relationships made it possible for Anita and Abby to imagine a short-term but honestly dope opportunity for collaboration between young adults in the two organizations. As Abby noted in a meeting with Anita discussing how well the partnership went toward the end of the term, it did not just "happen": "Serendipity is not the same as happenstance." This partnership did necessitate a certain level of alignment between Anita's teaching schedule and YoUthROC's current project, but we were able to imagine and mold its potential because of our multiple ongoing good relationships and kinship ties inside and outside of university affiliations. While we support the goal of creating long-term, reciprocal university–community partnerships, using the framework of kinship allows us to be imaginative and non-prescriptive about how those relationships can build on complex networks that existed before a short-term collaboration and continue to exist after the particular project ends.

Collaborative Project: Co-constructing Lesson Plans About Youth in Social Movements

YoUthROC initiated a call for BIPOC-centered, youth-powered lesson plans about Youth in Social Movements as an action component to their research about how youth move in an uprising. Young people have always been central to social movement work, and the team wanted to uplift those local and global stories in an action-based unit for youth (YoUthROC & Rombalski, 2022). YoUthROC has curated lesson plans, developed by YoUthROC members, their network of youth, and Carleton students, which are available through a website to be used in formal educational spaces such as K-12 and ethnic studies-based classrooms as well as in after-school programs or youth-led organizations (YoUthROC, 2023). This project provided the perfect container for the partnership, giving the Carleton students flexibility to choose the topic and which classmates they could work with while having guidance and feedback from YoUthROC. Unlike many K-12 classrooms where it may be difficult for teachers to be flexible in terms of the curriculum, pacing, and assessment, Anita had the academic and institutional freedom to make choices about course content, pacing, and assessments that allowed the Carleton students to feel supported during the partnership. For example, toward the end of the first online meeting with YoUthROC and the Carleton class, Anita noted quickly to her students that they would have time to debrief what they had heard and discuss the next steps during the next class meeting, reassuring the students that they would have time and space as a class to process the interactions with YoUthROC and to work.

The YoUthROC team worked together with Abby to create agendas for the university–community partnership that embodied three goals of their pedagogical framework: 1) creating kinship and shared purpose; 2) nourishing assets and youth agency; and 3) addressing issues and taking action. These goals were developed from YoUthROC's first research project about centering youth from BIPOC communities. During 90-minute online meetings between YoUthROC and Carleton, everyone usually had their videos on, which helped foster a sense of being in the same space, even virtually. Icebreaker activities aimed to build both community and knowledge in

small groups. For instance, during one meeting, the team selected two YPAR concept cards, solidarity, and direct action, to ask about student experiences: "How has solidarity and/or direct action impacted you or your actions recently?" After discussing in small groups, the full group reconvened to discuss a sample lesson plan, which included reactions, comments, and questions in the chat. Next, YoUthROC members and Carleton students went back into breakout sessions to workshop lessons being developed by Carleton students. YoUthROC often closed these Zoom sessions with questions that connected back to getting to know each other or our communities, such as about weekend plans or favorite places to eat.

Data Sources

To analyze the partnership, we drew on three data sources: transcripts of two recorded online meetings between YoUthROC and Carleton students; the lesson plans created by Carleton students; and Carleton students' final reflection papers (see Appendix A for guiding questions provided to the students). Based on the general practice established by the college's community engagement center, Carleton students provided informed consent for their coursework to be used beyond the course. Specifically, they gave permission for YoUthROC to edit and share the lesson plans they developed, for Carleton's community engagement center to share their lesson plans, and for the two co-authors to use their final reflection paper and meeting transcripts in future publications (see Appendix B). Our initial analyses of these data sources led us to consider the kinship framework as an important analytic tool; iteratively, we then went back to these sources to look specifically for examples of kinship praxis. The article is also indelibly shaped by our ongoing conversations with each other and by insights from kinship literature. The findings reflect the conceptual frame, outlining how this partnership built on and beyond kin and developed or reflected on the kinship praxis of collective, critical, and reflective care.

Findings: Understanding Kinship Within Collaboration

Building on and Beyond Kin

YoUthROC's theorization and practice of kinship was an important factor in how this partnership began and unfolded. The context of the pandemic and the socio-historical moment of Spring 2021 in the U.S. impacted how this attention to kinship was felt by Carleton students. For one Carleton student, this partnership created a space where they felt seen and affirmed as a student of color, and perhaps felt a sense of healing as well:

> Particularly with the years 2020 and 2021 being what they were, I found the times that we met with YoUthROC to be a safe space where BIPOC students could engage with difficult issues such as race and policing (among other things) and not feel like they had to explain themselves. Throughout this Spring Term, with the countless murders on black bodies, I felt a weight on my shoulders that many of my peers were able to shake off after a minute [and an] acknowledgement of what was happening, but I could not.

> With the thoughtful opening questions and space where people could discuss how they were feeling, I felt much more comfortable than I had been in a predominately white space such as Carleton. Working with YoUthROC showed me how youth organizing, and activism, can be a form of healing for groups of people that have historically been oppressed.

College campuses, especially small elite ones such as Carleton, are often positioned as places where like-minded young people develop (kinship) ties because of their shared academic interests. However, as this student's reflection attests, these spaces are often places of alienation and un-belonging of students of color (Harper, 2012; Solórzano & Huber, 2020; Yosso et al., 2009). For this student—and for other students like them—the partnership with YoUthROC provided an opportunity to build kinship beyond their institutional context where shared racialized experiences were acknowledged and affirmed. Echoing Kim TallBear's reminder that kinship extends beyond the human, one student also mentioned the opportunity to build kinship with the land through their lesson plan on land acknowledgment. Students—and we staff—appreciated these opportunities for growing kinship in multiple ways.

Other Carleton students' reflections affirmed how this project nourished their identities and assets (YoUthROC, 2022) and created the opportunity for mutual respect and benefit (Gust & Jordan, 2019). Opportunities to affirm identities—including race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality—are not always emphasized on college campuses, so this experience of building on and beyond "kin" was noted and valued. For example, a student who worked on a lesson plan about LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer & Questioning) youth of color activism said that this work "nourished my power...made me more confident in my identity as a QTPOC [Queer/Trans Person of Color] ...it supported my agency as a QTPOC person and reinforced that I mattered and the history of people like me was important." Another student similarly wrote that the lesson plans and the course focus on youth activism led her to feel "more confident, aware, and optimistic...as a college student, a woman of color, and an immigrant." While the partnership created a particularly important space of kinship and affirmation for students of color and queer students, all students indicated that the work with YoUthROC built on and affirmed what they had to offer: "While I'm not the poster child for adversity or diversity (being a white male from an upper-middle class family), I still have my own unique perspective to provide to a discussion about social justice, and YoUthROC showed that they value my opinion along with any other person's." The partnership fostered bidirectional trust with young people with a range of social identities, across what Torre and Fine name "contact zones" (2008), within different institutional contexts who were all ready to take up a shared purpose and step into their power. YoUthROC demonstrated a commitment to honor identity, assets, and choice, as they arranged online meetings in affinity spaces when requested or warranted. Their thoughtful choices offered a lived example to the theories that Carleton students had been reading about or experiencing in their own lives.

Kinship as a Praxis of Collective Care

The Carleton students spent the first half of the course examining case studies where young people, mostly Indigenous and of color, acted collectively to change the social conditions of their lives and those of their

communities. Following this work, Carleton students expressed their excitement about working together with YoUthROC on a project that had a purpose beyond getting a grade in a course and a structured opportunity to put into practice some of the theories they had learned in Educational Studies courses. As one student noted in their final reflection,

> [I]n many ways, the work we did with YoUthROC felt like the perfect culmination of the Educational Studies curriculum and minor. As Educational Studies minors, we have learned about issues of equity and access in education, ways in which the American schooling system overlooks minority students, and examples of whitewashing curricula in mandated classes. Having had numerous opportunities in my Educational Studies classes to learn about these issues in schooling, working with YoUthROC served as a way to mobilize this knowledge.

The opportunity to develop plans that focused on topics of interest to them and YoUthROC through a youth-centered lens helped build on and expand Carleton students' previous ideas about youth and curriculum. They also learned from stories shared by YoUthROC members; one particularly impactful story was about a local school-based protest against police brutality that YoUthROC supported. This action was not just a lesson in class; it was real.

The multiple avenues for conversation, connections, feedback, and reciprocity present throughout the partnership reinforced the sense that we were all doing this work to further YoUthROC's vision of a youth-powered curriculum to reframe how youth are often seen as the objects of knowledge, rather than the producers of knowledge. They created a structured container in which young people could enact practices of collective and critical care that are central to a kinship praxis that attends to a culturally responsive centering of a YPAR community, including virtually (Marciano et al., 2020). While viewing YoUthROC and youth in a different light that challenged deficit narratives about youth in general and youth of color in particular, Carleton students also felt like their own ideas, expertise, and assets were honored and nurtured through the partnership. One student, for example, noted this collaborative experience clarified their own purpose—to become an advocate for ethnic studies. The partnership was able to mobilize kinship in "diffuse and mobile" ways that honored and developed "a vast web of relationship that crosses 'official' and uncodified social bonds alike" (Bradway & Freeman, 2022, p. 3). This mobilization of kinship did not upend the ever-present hierarchies across and within institutions and social contexts and identities—however, it did give us opportunities to be and to belong "otherwise" with each other. Similarly, while the college students clearly benefited greatly from the partnership, they also viewed this project as their chance to *serve* and *support* YoUthROC. As a Carleton student noted,

> Receiving feedback from YoUthROC and the many chances we had to interact with the YoUthROC team to discuss our lessons, helped me feel closer to them. It made this project feel much more collaborative, especially because **we were writing the lesson plans *for* them**: we wanted our lesson plan to be what they were looking for (our emphasis).

In their final reflection papers, many Carleton students wrote about learning about the concept of kinship from YoUthROC (through small and large group interaction on Zoom) and many noted how kinship as a concept and praxis was relatively absent in their experiences at Carleton (including in Educational Studies). As one student noted, "The idea of kinship isn't one that comes up at Carleton a lot. For example, group projects are usually about learning how to collaborate because that's something you have to do rather than seeing it as an opportunity to connect with someone and reach higher goals because you are working together." Collaborating and working through critical feedback (Chavez, 2021) with a shared and reciprocal purpose was meaningful, concepts that are also crucial to future educators.

The work they did with each other in collaboration with YoUthROC was done in the spirit of a greater, collective purpose beyond getting a task done in a class to get a grade, which helped create a sense of kinship with each other, with YoUthROC members, and even with the content of their lesson plans. Student reflections indicated that multiple aspects of the partnership helped to develop this sense of kinship: (1) the opportunity to collaborate and learn from/with the same small group of YoUthROC members throughout the project and from/with each other; (2) the structure of the online meetings with YoUthROC that always had time for check-in questions (ranging from easy prompts such as "describe a place that makes you happy," to more challenging prompts about race, activism, or current events) which helped everyone get to know each other; and (3) the sense that they and YoUthROC were truly collaborating with opportunities to make each other's work better—for example, Carleton students provided feedback on YoUthROC's guide to creating lesson plans while they were creating their own lesson plans and receiving feedback on them from YoUthROC.

The praxis of kinship also brought a sense of community and joy to the partnership that is not quite captured by the tenets of community–university partnerships discussed by Gust and Jordan (2019), a nourishing aspect that seemed especially important during a time of pandemic-related social distancing and disconnect. As Blockett et al. (2022) emphasize, fun, pleasure and joy are important aspects of kinship spaces. As educator bell hooks (2014) also reminds us, learning spaces should be exciting places and "sometimes even 'fun'" (p. 7)! We would argue that community–university partnerships should be exciting and joyful learning spaces as well, for all involved.

Kinship as a Praxis of Critical Care

By the time the actual collaboration began, the college students viewed YoUthROC as being research experts as well as content experts. In exploring the concept of "shared power" that Gust and Jordan (2019) argue is an important component of ethical community–university partnerships, we suggest that shared power does not necessarily mean "equal" power. As one Carleton student noted, "The YoUthROC team certainly had a lot to teach us about engaging and working with youth. I appreciated learning about this from them, since this is their specific field of study—we were truly learning from experts in this case." This kind of positioning of YoUthROC as experts facilitated a relatively smooth process of feedback and revision, even when Carleton students did not initially understand the critique. For example, in the first drafts of the lesson plans that Carleton students

submitted to be reviewed, many of the Carleton students did not include information about themselves. The YoUthROC reviewers wrote in their feedback for these groups, "There is no author bio. Why did you choose to write this lesson? How do your identities/experiences inform the lesson?" The team asked everyone to write short bios and include a photo of themselves. Some of the Carleton students were not sure why this was necessary, asking: "Why are we including a photo/video/bio? Some people aren't comfortable with having their photo online. Doesn't seem entirely relevant to the rest of the guide." The YoUthROC team responded to this question at the next meeting between the two groups, explaining their position that *all* knowledge, including curricula, is situated and not neutral. For example, YoUthROC wondered about what it meant for a LandBack/Land Acknowledgment lesson to be created by students who did not identify as Indigenous. It was important that lesson creators reflected deeply on why they were creating the lessons based on who they were/their lived experiences. In their final reflection paper, one of the Carleton students who developed the land acknowledgment lesson plan wrote:

> There was power in being self-conscious and acknowledging my positionality in the lesson for me, for my peers, and for the students who would be receiving the lesson...
>
> While none of us identify as Indigenous, we are all people of color, so we talked about how these identities allow us to empathize with Indigenous communities and have affected the way we view the land acknowledgements and the Land Back Movement.

Carleton students all included bios and rationale in the next drafts of their lesson plans; some chose to use icons or cartoons that represented them instead of photos. The sense of kinship and camaraderie built during the collaboration, in addition to intentionally naming YoUthROC's power and expertise in the partnership, made Carleton students more willing to listen to critical feedback and shift their perspectives.

Kinship Through Intentional Reflections on Hierarchies and Power

The structure of this partnership also provided opportunities for the college students to reflect on how little of the community engagement work they had previously done at Carleton was *led* by youth. One student wrote that creating lesson plans that were youth-*powered*, and not just youth-*relevant*, led them to reconsider some of what they learned in previous courses: "We learned to teach subject matter that is relevant and sustaining to the students we are teaching to, but YoUthROC made me reflect on how it's another step better to enable youth to sustain themselves through my pedagogy." The emphasis on the shared, collective purpose of their work with YoUthROC allowed the young people to show up in service to each other and to reflect on how they may do so with youth in their future careers as educators.

A combination of the collective care/shared purpose *and* the Carleton students' respect for the YoUthROC team with YPAR and youth-led advocacy allowed for moments of critique, reflection, and growth. Blockett et

al. (2022) note that when engaging in research in and with communities, "researchers must always be responsible for the power they are afforded and to the communities and relationships that emerge as a result of their research" (p. 53). We would argue that university faculty and staff who want to engage in community partnerships must also do so. In this collaboration, YoUthROC was positioned as the partner with more knowledge and experience by Anita's framing of the group and their work for her students. While we do not suggest that all hierarchies and power differentials disappeared during the partnership, an explicit naming and reframing of power helped to prioritize kinship as praxis with a sense of authentic purpose. Rather than practicing a politics of deference (Táíwò, 2022) that can work against social justice goals, a commitment to dialog and to work with and from multiple perspectives led to hard conversations and actual shifts in the practices of partnership.

We want to reiterate some of the elements of the kinship and YPAR frameworks embedded within this partnership that made it more successful than previous university partnerships that YoUthROC had been involved with: (1) the web of relationships that existed between the two adults (Abby and Anita) and the youth involved (YoUthROC members and the college students), which allowed for the fruitful completion of a short-term project; (2) the emphasis on collective processes, shared justice-oriented goals, and the importance of critical feedback; and (3) the commitment to viewing youth and community partners as experts and the value of collaboration across differences in positionality, identities, and locations.

Conclusions

In Spring 2023, two years after the YoUthROC/Carleton partnership concluded, the two of us took a moment to look around a large auditorium where almost 200 youth and adults were raptly listening to a founding YoUthROC member speak about some of their research projects. We were at a 2-day YPAR summit that we helped organize along with an amazing group of youth and adult co-organizers. We start our conclusion with that moment to note one way that our kinship relationships with each other, with YoUthROC, and with other youth have continued to deepen and broaden these relationships as well as our embodied understanding of and commitment to kinship. The ways in which we experienced being together and belonging "otherwise" have created new avenues and opportunities to continue pursuing social justice with each other and in our region. Our description and analyses of the partnership may make it seem like the collaboration was entirely smooth—and it was not, as we note in our discussion about navigating feedback from YoUthROC to Carleton students. However, while the students from the 2021 course have moved on, we are still here, reflecting on how those ten weeks of collaboration still feel productive, ethical, and reciprocal, and not transactional or extractive.

We provide details of this partnership to illustrate how kinship played a part in crafting a productive partnership *and* providing a robust framework to think through how it worked and felt. We do not provide these details as a template or a checklist, however. In fact, we would argue against any easy, universal takeaways about *what* to do: (Y)PAR projects are always context-specific; they are focused on "what happens here, in this single case—not what goes on anywhere or everywhere" (McTaggart et al., 2017, p. 28). There were many specific contextual factors that facilitated a successful collaboration that might not be possible to replicate. Anita's position as a tenured

faculty member provided her with a degree of academic freedom that is being substantially eroded by the adjunctification of the profession (Schleck, 2022). Carleton's community engagement center is well-resourced and was able to pay an honorarium for YoUthROC for the collaboration, a necessary material contribution to a group that relies on such reciprocity for their fiscal sustainability. YoUthROC's youth-centered, creative, and intentional use of the virtual space functionalities made online kinship a robust possibility. However, not having a chance for everyone to meet in person and to spend time just being with each other did make it harder to build deeper and perhaps unexpected connections that sometimes come out of sharing food and a laugh together. We do wonder about what else might have been possible if we had been able to be together in person. Additionally, while we had some inkling that our partnership would provide us with important lessons about university–community partnerships in general, we did not approach this work from a research perspective—we did not, for example, design the course to have structured pre- and post-reflections that we could analyze. Future partnerships might consider the possibility of having this feature as one way to gauge their impact.

Writing this reflection allowed us the chance to theorize together about the power and possibility of a kinship framework, building on YoUthROC's kinship praxis of valuing young people from BIPOC communities. We offer this work to those of us interested in moving beyond both platitude and paralysis within university–community partnerships with the strong suggestion that power and hierarchies always need to be paid attention to, so that we do not revert to normative, comfortable, unproductive ways of working with and across differences. Kinship is not just about having "fun"—though joy is an important part of kinship; we need to ensure that shared activities create connections to each other, to content, and/or to shared purpose. We do not want "kinship" to become another toothless concept where power gets ignored. We end with two possibilities for ourselves, especially as adults working with young people in various contexts, including ones that foreground YPAR. First, a kinship frame can bolster ongoing relationships between university faculty and community members/organizations, and it can unsettle spaces like a classroom where there is typically too much unacknowledged and unchallenged hierarchy. Second, a kinship frame suggests a turn from the norm of individual college placements "in community" or "in a public school classroom" toward a collective project between two groups. Facilitating collective projects is also one way in which we can develop short-term projects within the context of long-term relationships that build kinship networks within—and beyond—institutional boundaries.

For us, and for the young people we worked with, the intersections of a kinship framework and YPAR principles provided a powerful context in which to complete successfully a time-bound project that contributed to meeting the specific needs of a community partner, deepened the learning objectives of a university course and minor, and strengthened an ongoing set of relationships between the two co-authors and between the co-authors and the YPAR team. While the contours of this project were shaped by many context-specific factors that cannot and perhaps should not be replicated, we offer these reflections on kinship as one model for how to build ethical, long-term university–community *relationships* that can lead to opportunities for a variety of successful, shared projects.

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Author Notes

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Abby Rombalski, PhD, is a faculty member in the University of Minnesota College of Education and Human Development's Department of Curriculum and Instruction, who uses Participatory Action Research as one method of public scholarship. As an organizer, Abby supports YoUthROC and other coalitional educational justice efforts, especially when they are youth-led. As an educator and a mom, Abby is committed to being of service within interracial organizations with BIPOC-leadership and with white-bodied educators, families, and students who have much work to do.

Appendix A

REFLECTION ESSAY (4–7 pages)

You will write an essay reflecting on your experiences this term collaborating with YoUthROC and working on the lesson plan. The reflection questions are based on YoUthROC's framework for building youth-powered curriculum and questions from me and Abby (YoUthROC adult facilitator). Abby and I (in collaboration with YoUthROC) hope to use your reflection essays to write an article about our collaboration as a model for future university-YPAR team partnerships. It will also provide YoUthROC with information for their future collaborations with Carleton and other universities.

Questions:

1. How did the work this term with YoUthROC nourish and sustain your assets, power, and knowledge?
2. How did the work this term with YoUthROC help you reflect on issues and take action with youth?
3. How did the work this term with YoUthROC intentionally cultivate kinship?
4. What did you learn about yourself and about how you want to work with youth from this collaboration with YoUthROC and from the seminar more generally?

Appendix B

Spring 2021 ACE Permission Form

Dear EDUC 395 students,

Thank you for all of your work in collaboration with YoUthROC.

Please sign below to give the instructor (name) permission to share your work.

Thanks!

I, give permission (check all that apply)

_____ for YoUthROC to edit and share my group's lesson plan

_____ for the CCCE to share my lesson plan on the PAR website and with other students or community leaders in the future through the Academic Civic Engagement project at Carleton.

_____ for the instructors and future co-authors to use my final reflection paper (anonymously) or transcripts from meetings (also anonymized) in future publications about the collaboration

signature date