

“IT IS POWER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE”: ENACTING HOPE BY AMPLIFYING YOUTH RESEARCH FOR SCHOOL CHANGE

Abigail Rombalski, Jaiden Leary and Daniel Brogan

Abstract

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is an epistemology and a growing field in youth leadership, youth organizing, and liberatory education spaces. YPAR’s commitment to justice is supported by social action because, without action, too many YPAR initiatives close with tepid change and dreams deferred (Bertrand & Lozenski, 2023). In one suburban school community, a cabinet-level district leader with a deep commitment to youth of color built a youth research team into her budget line and her district’s strategic and race-equity-based plan, effectively replacing “social action” with adult accountability. Within this article, a high schooler and two university researchers reflect on the ways in which a group of Youth Data Analyst (YDA) interns learned the impacts of youth research on school change. Using artifacts from the summer, such as written reflections, as well as semi-structured interviews of three YDA members, we explore the nuances of justice-oriented youth–adult research partnerships. We discuss how youth leadership is discussed, concealed, and denied in learning communities; our active hope is that these partnerships enact transparency, memory, trust, and power to work toward race equity in schools.

Truth is continually contested in schools, including the teaching of hidden histories, the banning of books, and the curbing of curriculum. Truth is hidden too, about the reality of student experiences as well as how people—legislators, administrators, families, and students—impact change in schools. What are the behind-the-scenes moves and the office-level mandates? How do young people contribute to that change? The truth of the matter is that young people can impact schools more than they know, but they are often gone in 4 years. Who remembers or shares their impact? Youth legacies left behind may linger longer on the back of bathroom stalls than board rooms. Students often do not know the work that former students have done to influence school change. School administrators can leverage their positions to invite students into systematic opportunities for research, knowledge creation, and recommendations for change, and in turn, those adults can hold themselves accountable to share the history to which young people contributed.

Students often want to create lasting change or to leave a legacy of progress for their schools. This is particularly true for students who have worked to create opportunities for racial justice and equity in school, such as starting a Black Student Union, an Equity Day, a prayer space, or changing a feminist club to an intersectional feminist club. But how does that happen? Some institutions already have structures in place to support students in their endeavors, such as student councils or leadership roles in band. In race equity work, however, those opportunities or memories can quickly fizzle or leak away. How do adults in a school building or district honor equity-based work that students have influenced in previous years?

In one inner-ring suburban school district, a Director of Research, Evaluation and Assessment started a summer internship program for Youth Data Analysts (YDA). The summer of 2023 brought its fourth iteration of students, a YDA summer family that worked with an epistemology of YPAR to study pre-existing district-level data, to do action research, and to make recommendations to the district that would be integrated into its strategic plan, supporting improvement efforts sustained by school leadership teams throughout the district.

The YDA team knew that lasting progress does not happen overnight. The results of their work might not be seen in their own high school career. They were living with the results of past years' work; however, it was not transparent how students impacted change. As impacting social change is a common goal with YPAR and other justice-oriented programs, in this article, we worked to identify how these youth researchers understood how young people impacted change initiatives in their district and why that made a difference in the power and hope that they felt.

Youth Voice and Youth–Adult Partnerships

Youth–adult partnerships are often seen as a form of youth voice in which youth can be equitable partners, engaged as agents of change, and share in decision-making within schools, communities, states, and the federal government (Lang, 2018; Mitra, 2018). Conceptually, youth voice operates in varying levels of youth agency that can be constrained by adults (Cook-Sather, 2018; Conner, 2016; Cumings Mansfield, et al., 2012; Mitra, 2018; Yonezawa & Jones, 2009). For example, many academic and practitioner texts define youth voice without explicitly co-writing definitions with youth or member-checking definitions (Fletcher, 2015). Youth voice taxonomies written by adult researchers and practitioners provide a spectrum of youth involvement, ranging from tokenistic practices as having a single-nonvoting youth member on school boards, to driving social and policy change, as well as unexplored levels of youth involvement in decision making (Cumings Mansfield et al., 2012; Hart, 1992; Fielding, 2001; Lundy, 2007).

Youth–adult partnerships often emphasize collaboration between multiple youth and multiple adults. Contemporary scholars define youth–adult partnerships as the practice of:

- (a) multiple youth and multiple adults deliberating and acting together, (b) in a collective [democratic] fashion (c) over a sustained period of time, (d) through shared work, (e) intended to promote social justice, strengthen an organization and/or affirmatively address a community issue (Zeldin, et al., 2013, p. 388).

There is a shared purpose behind youth–adult partnerships, where there is a focus on community obstacles and opportunities. There are deliberate, iterative collaborations between youth and adults to challenge existing structures and power dynamics. In other words, it is not sufficient to merely listen to youth; action and agentic changemaking is necessary (Garnett et al., 2019; Salisbury, et al., 2023; Serido, et al., 2011; Zeldin, 2020). Youth–adult partnerships are a departure from a more traditional and dominant banking model of education (Freire, 2000), where learning is transactional, and youth are passive-subordinate objects to their own learning.

Youth–Adult Partnerships Toward Transformative Youth Voice

The literature of youth–adult partnerships falls within four key conceptual perspectives: performative; manipulative; informative; and transformative (Domínguez & Bertrand, 2023; Holquist, et al., 2023; Salisbury, et al., 2020). Performative youth–adult partnerships can look like adults publicly vocalizing support for youth voice, while not providing any leverage to the asymmetrical adult power and behind-the-scenes support (Domínguez & Bertrand, 2023). This framing largely sees youth as “objects of reform” (Levin, 2000). Manipulative youth–adult partnerships can look like establishing and eventually exploiting trust of youth to advance adult-white hegemonic, and neoliberal reforms, or infantilizing and questioning the legitimacy of youth (Conner, 2016; Nelson & Charteris, 2021; Salisbury, et al., 2020). Informative youth voice limits the decision-making capacity of youth and relegates youth collectives to being, “an excellent source of data and a force for data collection and analyses” (Yonezawa & Jones, 2009, p. 206).

Transformative youth voice is grounded in being a critical, emancipatory, and antiracist movement for social change and leadership (Hipolito-Delgado, et al., 2022; Lac & Cumings Mansfield, 2018). This type of youth voice has a deliberate emphasis on marginalized youth developing sociopolitical consciousness or *conscientização* (Freire, 2000). Transformative youth voice actively attempts to disrupt white supremacy, systemic racism, and neoliberal reform as an act of resistance and liberation (Freire, 2000; Khalifa, 2018; Nelson & Charteris, 2021; Shamrova & Cummings, 2017; Stanton, et al., 2020). This theoretical perspective also considers youth agency and their collective resistance to oppressive systems and adults (Souto-Manning, 2014). Transformative youth voice seeks to explicitly recognize and disrupt systemic inequalities, whereas these disruptions are not the focus of performative, manipulative, and informative youth voice (Keddie, 2023). Zion (2020) provides an example of transformative student (youth) voice practices where youth and adults partner to interrogate racialized oppressive systems to create policy and social change within a school district:

These three teams [administrative council, equity council, and student voice council] meet regularly (monthly for adults and weekly for students) and engage in learning about and developing a critical consciousness by exploring their own social identities, learning about systems of power and privilege, examining data, and developing strategic action plans to improve equity in the school setting (p. 37).

Students with lived experience of multiply marginalized identities successfully instituted policies in their school district that led to student representation on the equity council, co-developing professional development with educators and staff, curriculum that centered the identities of all students, and student-led focus circles addressing discrimination (Zion, 2020). Zeldin's example offers an important distinction with transformative student voice in contrast with other types of student voice. In transformative student voice, institutional outcomes are not the sole or core impetus for change; instead, youth-community needs and aspirations are centered. Adult school leaders (staff, administration, educators) were also deliberate and committed to sustaining youth–adult partnerships for change with students. Adults acted on the concerns and research from youth and worked as co-conspirators in solidarity to drive change, which is integral to transformative youth voice and youth–adult partnerships (Domínguez & Bertrand, 2023; Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 8; Zion, 2020).

Performative, Manipulative, and Informative Youth Voice: Dreams Concealed and Denied

Performative, manipulative, and informative youth voice can have overlapping elements of seeing youth as points of data triangulation to improve school accountability and reform, without disrupting the power imbalance adults hold over the lives of youth. All three tend to promote neoliberal agendas that undermine the liberatory praxis of youth voice where agency and power are actualized. These three theoretical perspectives also tend to center whiteness or to background marginalized voices (Biddle & Hungafel, 2019; Lac & Cumings Mansfield, 2018; Salisbury, et al., 2020; Sheth & Salisbury, 2022).

Seldom do youth–adult partnerships focus on the capacity building and learning adults need to do to leverage transformative, equitable partnerships that seek to disrupt white hegemony (Beattie, 2020). This may partially attribute as to why youth–adult partnerships can be manipulated by adult administrators and leaders who undermine the agency and will of youth collectives (Conner, 2016; Salisbury, et al., 2020). Salisbury et al. (2020) provide a cautionary tale of how youth–adult partnerships are co-opted by adults engaged in adultism and centering whiteness. In particular, the Youth Voice Initiative (YVI) was a partnership between high school students of color and university facilitators engaged in transformative leadership skills while serving on the student advisory council at Jefferson Public Schools (JPS). Despite the intentional consciousness-raising effort and relationship-building between the university facilitators and the youth, JPS district leadership worked to undermine and disrupt the transformative contributions of the YVI. Specifically, district leaders deliberately changed district agenda meetings without notice, denied adult facilitators access to these meetings, and coerced YVI members into filling out a survey on the attendance of “Black boys” [how the district labeled the survey] (Salisbury, et al., 2020, p. 69). JPS had subverted the rights and agency of the YVI to advance district-defined equity improvements, in which district leaders questioned youth expertise and lived experience as well as the trustworthiness of YVI adult facilitators. “The youth were simply a prop for district leaders to publicly state they engaged with youth of color, and YVI instructors served as supervisors who could ensure youth presence and participation

when needed” (Salisbury, et al., 2020, p. 69). Youth and adult YVI facilitators were made to be spectacles for district leadership instead of agentic partners. The district leadership actively engaged in withholding public access to the substantial work emanating from youth of color in YVI, to maintain the status quo of centering whiteness within the district, while perpetuating a deficit approach to marginalized youth. In the words of one youth leader of color from YVI: “They didn’t even talk about oppression or anything!” (Salisbury, et al., 2020, p. 71). In this objectifying, cautionary example, the institution (JPS) was centered and prioritized over authentically engaging with youth as collaborators in their education and learning community. The well-being, agency, and dreams of these multiply marginalized youth were deliberately concealed and denied, in the interest of serving the priorities of the institution.

There is a backgrounded assumption in the literature of youth–adult partnerships that adult partners already are knowledgeable of collective consciousness raising, and are engaged in antiracist, critical praxis. This is a gap in the literature that should be addressed, specifying how adults can leverage their power within institutions to disrupt rigid adultist hierarchies and co-develop transformative change with youth (Domínguez & Bertrand, 2023; Lozenski, 2017). The focus of youth voice literature tends to emphasize or put the learning on youth developing these critical practices. This is another form of youth-deficit framing, in which youth are seen as solely responsible for developing these foundational critical lenses, whereas adults are presumed to already possess them. Adults and youth must both consider learning and unlearning to be pivotal for equitable, transformative social change. The work of the YDA program in this article included adults who were ready to teach as well as to learn from and with the interns. Within YDA, youth leaders, adult facilitators, and adult district leaders intentionally engaged within a transformative framework and critical praxis.

Conceptual frame: Struggles with hope and power

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is based on social justice principles and includes training for and conducting systematic research to improve the lives of youth, schools, and/or communities. However, YPAR is not a widespread or common school activity (Anyon et al., 2018); in addition, there is much concealed, especially in schools, about how change happens. Thus, it can be easy as a young person to dwell in feelings of hopelessness—and helplessness—regarding improving the lives of students, schools, and communities. When Jaiden (author 2) read Ta-Nahesi Coates (2015) this past year, he noted how Coates had an overarching theme of hopelessness in his realistic and book-length letter for his Black son. Yet, when Prince Jones’s mother comes in at the end of the book, even after her own unarmed son was killed by police, she grounds her story in hope, using examples from her lived history of integration and living up to her dream to be a doctor; Coates takes on this shift and reflects on his lived experience with his father and other organizers during the Civil Rights movement, fighting in spite of the world, because they had hope. So how do we access hope? Hope comes in facing history, sharing stories of hopelessness or oppression, and crafting stories that create solidarity. Hope comes in active and collective pursuit of a new present and future. This pursuit is a

struggle, lonely alone and stronger together. In this article, we want to better understand hope, struggle, and power as measures that we can undertake in collective practice, and in this specific context, in youth research with youth–adult partnerships.

Hope has been critiqued when it is shallow or lofty, hokey or mythical (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). Hope can fall flat and empty, dreams deferred when YPAR teams close without actors or agents to implement youth recommendations (Bertrand & Lozenski, 2023). Instead, hope can be grounded in an active practice. Organizer Mariame Kaba understands that hope is not an emotion, nor is it optimism, and it is not short-term. She writes, “Hope doesn’t preclude feeling sadness or frustration or anger or any other emotion that makes total sense” (2021, p. 26). Kaba and Hayes together write that “this practice of [active] hope allows us to remain creative and strategic” (2023, p. 97). They encourage organizers to create space to practice, discuss, and cultivate hope as well as grief, and to do so in collectivity. In the book *Hope in the Struggle* (Johnson, et al., 2019), Dr. Josie and her team outline her long lifetime working in community toward equal opportunity for African American people in Minnesota in particular (p. 186):

Hope forces us to do the next thing in our struggle, to try another approach in our collective work...I realize the struggle requires many different approaches. But what is consistent in this work is a determination to honor the historical struggle of our ancestors, and the belief in us as a people. We need to observe the world we live in, remember what has gone before us, assess results, and have understanding and empathy for all strategies.

Reviewing strategies and struggles is necessary to ground us as we gain momentum for action.

Youth and adults can struggle together to discuss authentic questions, to question systems, and to strategize together toward social change. This approach takes not only power, but sharing of power (Salisbury, 2021; Rombalski et al, 2023). Power that comes from youth–adult partnerships extends beyond the moral benefits it can have; it represents a pragmatic approach. Often, adults possess the institutional power—and institutional knowledge—that young people lack. Conversely, adults frequently miss the energy and perspectives that young people can provide, which make institutional power actionable and impactful in young people’s lives. Together, they can create the conditions in which youth have the power to shape their schools: “Radical change involves the courage to disrupt norms, the commitment to shared learning, and the vision to create a world where everyone has the power to shape their future” (Highlander Center Instagram, n.d.). When the YDA team read Freire’s chapter two excerpt from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000, see Appendix 1), they were able to see their creative power as they were positioned to “educate the teacher.” As Freire (2000) emphasizes, “Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society?” (p. 45). Students in YDA, in accessing the power of youth–adult research partnerships and of transformative student voice, are poised to challenge the structures and norms for speaking and listening that perpetuate differences in educational experiences and outcomes (Finneran, et al., 2023).

Context and Methodology: A Summer-based Youth Data Intern Program

In participatory action research (PAR), those most impacted by an area of inquiry come together as a collective to define their own research question and design, collect and analyze data, and decide together how the results should be used (Fox & Fine, 2015). However, further research is needed to understand how YPAR evidence influences adult policymakers and practitioners (Ozer, et al., 2020). The Youth Data Analysis (YDA) Program is a summer internship based on justice-oriented PAR principles, in which a group of high schoolers select a research question, critical theory, and data to analyze and study for 9 weeks throughout the summer, the findings of which are presented to the school district in August with recommendations on how to improve. The district prepares for this internship each summer, showing how they value the experience, knowledge, and power of youth.

The district, comprising approximately 50% white students and 50% students of color, with 37% of its students eligible to receive free and reduced-price lunch, is located in a suburb of a major Midwestern city. Annually, the team is composed of 5–12 students. In 2023, this included four students of color (including Jaiden) and one white student working alongside a small group of adults (two district employees whose pseudonyms are Dr Chhay, a Cambodian refugee woman, and Dr Brandi, a white Jewish woman), a white university faculty member (“Dr Abby”, author one), and two Black women from immigrant/refugee families who were recent university graduates (Friday and Lea). The following are two reflections that trace work from this 2023 summer at Lake Public Schools (a pseudonym).

Jaiden: During the internship, we met weekly for two main reasons. First, we met to learn more about ourselves and each other. Our entire lives we had gone through the education system without any true analysis of what we were experiencing. We would do readings of famous educational thinkers: Gholdy Muhammad, Lisa Delpit (2012), Angela Valenzuela, Paulo Freire, etc. Through these readings and reflecting on personal experiences, we as a group were able to pinpoint flaws within the educational system that we exist under. Second, we met to work on district data, specifically toward a presentation that we would be giving to school leaders in August. After reviewing 3 years of YDA data from previous summers, we asked to what extent prior years’ recommendations had impacted current students and wondered what would be most important to explore this summer. Collectively, we realized that some of our worst, and best, experiences in school were due to our relationships with teachers. Alongside analyzing what we had experienced, we looked at data either given to us, or collected by us to respond to our research question from that summer of 2023: How have teacher–student relationships been affected since 2020? It was through this process that we came up with suggestions for the district to follow. We presented our findings and recommendations multiple times in August, including to local professors, to the district teaching and learning team, to families, and finally, to district leadership teams.

Abby: The guiding inquiry for the 2023 summer’s YDA group was based on a review of the past 3 years, asking a question inspired by Dr Josie R. Johnson, “Did you do what you set out to do?” (informal communication, 2016). The summer was divided into three phases. Phase one included team building, an introduction to critical

research, and self-reflection. The group participated in kinship activities, engaged in shared readings and discussions, and created and shared racial autobiographies. In phase two of the summer's YDA program, the team selected the idea from the past 3 years that seemed most pressing. We wrote an action research plan to examine student interviews and teacher surveys. We completed open coding and analysis of the new research, and with the district's Research, Evaluation, and Assessment team, we identified pre-existing data to analyze from prior years. In phase three, the team worked to identify findings and recommendations and to create, practice, and receive feedback to revise their presentation. Throughout the summer, team members held discussions, wrote journal entries, and asked questions.

For this article, written by a white university research mentor/YDA co-facilitator (Abby), a Black and biracial high schooler from the YDA team (Jaiden), and a white graduate student (Dan) who had also participated in youth leadership initiatives during his teenage years, we wanted to better understand the impact of youth leadership within youth research. It was a gift to think and write together with our varied perspectives, discussing what was important, especially with a high schooler/YDA intern in the author mix. After discussing scholarly literature and personal experiences that included Abby and Jaiden's summer with YDA, we asked: How do young people experience transformative leadership, particularly as related to this youth research team? For this article, we reviewed state-wide survey data about youth leadership and YPAR; district artifacts that traced changes based on YDA recommendations; and journals from high school interns across two YDA summer programs. In addition, Jaiden conducted follow-up interviews with his fellow interns. After iterative conversations and an initial open approach to coding, we decided on three major codes (italicized) that explored the impact of youth leadership on youth researchers themselves: how youth leadership had been initially *denied* or *concealed*, and then, through the YDA program, how it was *discussed* and experienced in a new way. We went back to the data sets to deductively code for those themes. As youth leadership and youth–adult collaboration became more transparent and tangible through youth research, interns experienced an active hope and understanding of their role in justice-oriented school change.

Data and Findings

Over the past 3 years, previous YDA cohorts had studied questions and issues pertinent to forwarding equity in their school district: increasing kids of color in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate classes, reducing unfair (and racist) discipline policies, and learning the community's hopes and dreams for the district. Their work was codified into the district's strategic plan and it guided building leadership through their school improvement plans; in this district, transformative youth voice included a systemized and collaborative approach to YPAR accompanied by adult accountability embedded into district leadership for school improvement. However, interns did not have a clear picture of the research and impact that came from student leaders before them. That was particularly evident in the summer of 2023, when the YDA team was tasked with reviewing previous years' research to determine what Gibran Rivera calls the next most eloquent step (brown, 2015). Thus, for this article, we traced themes based on how interns both experienced and learned about youth leadership in regard to YDA research: how it was denied, concealed, and discussed, and what difference that made to them.

Youth Leadership Denied. Many of the YDA members in 2023 had been in youth leadership before joining YDA. For example, students were members of a feminist club, an anti-racism club, student council, and the school newspaper. During the summer, Dr. Chhay encouraged interns to interact and inquire of other district employees, all of whom were familiar with the YDA program. She regularly asked if the students wanted access to any specific data. Initially, interns were skeptical. Interns were familiar with their own leadership efforts being limited, co-opted, or denied. They shared experiences about how they had tried to get quotes about certain issues for the school newspaper, but they had not received responses or access to their query. They tried to create change with a school-based anti-racism group, but some student-proposed actions were denied (such as raising concerns about a teacher or a desire for a teach-in about Palestine) or they did not see change as lasting. During the summer research on teacher–student relationships, Jaiden shared his appreciation that state legislation requires student evaluations for teachers, while also sharing his frustration that teachers could pick-and-choose which student participated:

I think me being a black political kid I am able to understand more deeply why things happen (this can limit me though as I get too caught up in the bigger picture to focus on the macro level and how I can help out). My recommendations followed the idea that teachers need to recognize the success that a student has--though influenced by other factors--is in large part a reflection of the relationships students have had with teachers throughout their schooling experience. So, instead of teachers being able to pick and choose, teachers should give surveys to *ALL* students on how they are at teaching overall and how they are doing at building connections with their students (YDA Personal Student Journal, 2023).

This practice denied most students the opportunity to offer important feedback that could guide teacher reflection and schoolwide change. Thus, there were several recommendations that the YDA team made to district leadership to improve teacher–student relationships, aiming to turn the tables on denying youth voice (see Appendix 2). One recommendation was to increase knowledge about school leaders/district administration to students; this has come to fruition with high school administrators welcoming students every morning and with a highly engaged student and family process in a superintendent search. Another recommendation was for educators to increase reflection, rather than deflection, in hearing student research or receiving student feedback. Since, to date, no teacher had asked Jaiden for a course evaluation, he wrote: “They are reflecting on themselves in the wrong light...it’s hard to make progress if you aren’t having critical reflection, actually listening to the youth.” At least for now, the feeling is that youth are still backgrounded in the process of teacher reflection and that this recommendation continues to be denied.

Typical school structures are set up for students to ask permission rather than being in charge of their own decisions or school space; denying youth voice is woven into the thick fabric of a velvety curtain on a school stage. Students are also often denied authentic collaboration with adults, including the opportunity to build trust with adults and work with adults toward action for change. They are often told to trust the process or trust the system, but not given the opportunity to build trust with the adults working in those systems. This is true in classrooms as well as in leadership. For instance, one intern wrote about the challenge of trust, “The expectations

and the way the teachers view their position in teaching heavily affects the students' abilities to learn, to want to learn, and future trust within the system that is supposed to help them and create a safe space for them" (YDA Journal, 2022). However, within a YDA summer, adult researchers pulled back the curtain to introduce youth to the varied wizards (data, policy, district employees, and school administrators), and to learn together what may have been concealed.

Youth Leadership Concealed. In schools and communities, youth leadership initiatives and contributions can be well-kept secrets. This is the case historically, such as the role of young people in the Black Panther Party and the creation of school breakfast programs, and locally in contemporary times. For instance, a local Legal Rights Center and their youth advocates worked to ban certain restrictive holds by school resource officers (SROs). Even though the change in SRO holds was widely advertised, the large role of youth advocates in the process was rarely acknowledged. In the YDA summer of 2023, youth data interns worked to understand what change had developed in their school district connected to past YDA efforts. With adult collaborators in the program, they outwardly discussed their struggles in "seeing results of school change efforts." They asked, "Are we actually standing on the results of past years' work?" or was it "just the natural evolution of education?" (course journal, 7/23). Without a deeper knowledge of the system, they initially believed that improvement may happen without the strategy and collaboration necessary. Through the summer of 2023, YDA team members understood past years' questions, methods, and research, but it was not as clear to them what had been *done* or what had *changed* due to the research. So, adults paused to share stories about the research and its impact. First, we reviewed data from a previous YDA group who had focused on a question about a lack of students of color in advanced classes. A theme was exposed by high schoolers sharing embodied memories of not being in "GT" (gifted/talented) classes as a kid. They determined that the root cause of tracked classes did not begin at the high school; based on the data they collected, it was connected to feelings of adequacy and intelligence based on elementary school tracking. Next, Dr Chhay told a story about her bi-racial Black and Asian child, new to kindergarten in the district; he would never know school with a predictably racialized gifted and talented program. After YDA recommendations, the district had changed the design of the program to "talent development," giving increased access and opportunities to all its students, not a select few based on limited access to certain test scores, parent phone calls, and teacher recommendations. However, the youth contribution and leverage of this change in talent development, or in other school improvement opportunities, was not widely known:

YDA isn't discussed among students because they don't know it... I think knowing you can have the opportunity to work alongside them [administrators] would be a different change of pace, maybe bring some transparency (Interview 3, 2024).

Being able to leverage communication and connections with adults and young people is both instrumental to building social capital (Yosso, 2005) and critical to having community-based feedback loops that recognize the contributions of youth.

Another form of concealment is that data can stay hidden too, if not analyzed with young people most impacted by the data. When the 2023 team pursued their research question about teacher–student relationships in 2023, they disaggregated both qualitative and quantitative data by race, language, and ethnicity; they noticed that teachers were underserving their students of color. No student wants to do poorly, so something was going on in the curriculum or teaching methods, or more likely both. When this data is concealed, so is the possibility of how youth can collectively work—including in partnership with adults—to problem-solve failing grades and other issues in school. And, moreover, students want to be engaged in change: “I also hope there’s more chances for student voice to be utilized in policy making and any other sort of big decision making that goes on in our district, outside of what’s currently available” (YDA Journal, 2022). YDA was a starting point for interns to realize the potential in their voice and agency:

I think youth leadership and advocacy is super important, especially in this day and age. I think young people are often deemed less responsible or less qualified to do things in positions of leadership. So, by having known in those instances [youth in leadership] demonstrates their capability... It emphasizes voice and that’s really important... I had never really felt like I was in a position to do so but now that I’ve been able to do it once, I feel more confident stepping up when I get the chance (Interview 2, 2024).

Possibilities in youth research are also concealed from adult educators. For instance, the *Statistical Report of AmeriCorps YPAR Grant 2022 Survey Data*, surveyed 194 adult educators and staff about YPAR and student-centered approaches to teaching. Adults were surveyed in schools or districts where there was funding and adult support for a YPAR team. In this survey, 72% of white respondents reported that they were not familiar with YPAR and 91.5% of white respondents had never taught a YPAR course or served on a YPAR team (Bell, et al., 2023). 63% of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) respondents reported not being knowledgeable with YPAR, and 70% had never taught a YPAR course or served on a YPAR team (Bell, et al., 2023). White respondents were significantly less likely to be knowledgeable and have experience with YPAR than their BIPOC colleagues, yet most respondents, who are either educators, school administrators, or educational staff, have had limited or no experience with YPAR, even though their districts received YPAR funding and support. Educators will miss opportunities to meaningfully partner with and learn from students if they are not grounded in a framework that recognizes the expertise and agency of youth. After YDA presented to the school leadership teams, one student wrote:

It was interesting to see how quickly it was after our presentation for principals or department heads to ask for us do more work, wanting a consult on their process. I don’t think we got any questions about our presentation at the end, if there were any unanswered points people had in regard to our findings or recommendations. Something about the combination of those two, wanting us to keep doing more work, and a lack of things to question or add, makes me feel doubtful that we’ll see the recommendations followed through with (YDA Personal Student Journal, 2023).

This student's analysis was sharp. He understood that adults in power may continue to conceal YDA recommendations.

YPAR projects can also be muted through a lack of promoting youth contributions by school leaders, teachers, and students (Ozer, et al., 2013). As interns shared, YDA efforts have been somewhat concealed, which limits how both students and educators see youth potential. When youth leadership is revealed, including through youth research, it can lead to a transformative shift in how youth act as agents of change.

Youth Leadership Discussed. When youth leadership is discussed, what do we know? Almost 15% of the 21,856 11th-grade students who responded to a state-wide survey said they participated in leadership activities from 1 to 5 days a week (Minnesota Department of Education, 2022). For those who are in leadership, they often have a different understanding of the system than those who are not. There is a certain level of social capital that brings students to activities, including in leadership, and YDA was no different. The difference was the intentional invitation to center students of color and those historically marginalized from school and leadership opportunities, a core commitment of YPAR. The discussion of being a youth researcher as a leadership opportunity started with its recruitment and continued after the internship.

Jaiden: Before being in YDA, I learned about it through a presentation Dr Chhay gave in my European History class, in which she shared her racial autobiography (something I had also made in my Revisiting Ethnicity and Culture class). She talked about how growing up as a Cambodian refugee shaped her into who she is today and drives the rest of her life. I saw similarities myself, how personal experiences have extensive impacts, how they drive a person's life, and most of all, how they drive a person's thinking. But one of the most impactful parts was the fact that she's a district administrator; someone from the district was directly communicating with me. She also talked passionately about the work that youth can do (something which I have never seen adults discuss with youth before). She talked about how they could have an impactful change, how they could change the way things were run; she said it as if she had seen it firsthand, which she had. Then she showed pictures of past cohorts; I saw myself in the students. I saw kids who looked like me, and some of whom I knew personally. When I asked them about the process, they told me I should sign up and I wouldn't regret it. So, I trusted my peers and I did.

Abby: One thing we emphasized this summer as co-researchers was that data was not just facts and statistics, but it included experiences, interviews, and stories. It took some convincing that stories too were data, that our lived experiences were relevant, and that "being objective or neutral" (course journal), as some students initially aimed to be, was neither possible nor the goal. We discussed what research is and who researchers are. We watched the video about Mr Researchy (Morris Justice Project, 2011) and discussed our own assumptions about who can do research. Throughout the summer, young people, near-peer college graduates, and other adults were positioned as experts in their own experience. We entered the research experience together with authentic questions, a systematic approach to analysis, and we wrestled with the most effective and strategic ways to put our research together to drive recommendations into local actions. To build those relationships, we shared kinship, stories, and laughter, which built trust:

Personally knowing that people had experienced similar things or at least saw things similarly, were both helpful in establishing those relationships...that was a cool relationship too, to see people so young

[recent college graduates] work alongside you guys [adult collaborators] as well, made the situation more comfortable. And that you guys were so open about certain topics, both just instantly made the situation more comfortable (Interview 3, 2023).

Being honest, valuing personal experiences, and modeling vulnerability and collaboration were part of showing how leadership, through research and mentorship, could look.

Abby and Jaiden: Together, we read articles that made it feel like our own experience (Valenzuela, 1999; Warren & Marciano, 2018). We analyzed previously conducted research from our school district, impressed by the work of other high schoolers and district staff as well, and we designed our own action research (staff surveys and interviews with elementary and middle school students). After spending the summer as researchers on the topic of teacher–student relationships, we understood more about literature, critical theory, and our experience within it; we knew district and street-level data; we overheard school or district employees talking about the time we had spent together and how deeply we knew the data.

From the YDA process, team members reflected on their deeper understanding of systems, patterns, and strategies toward change:

It was nice to be able to have an insider’s look of how an education system works and how administrators go about handling it or trying to fix it or seeing what they can do better. And using student voices I think is a great way of doing that. (Interview 1, 2024)

I think I better understand how a system works now. And I think how I go about my daily life and how I recognize the patterns more than I used to, and I’m more aware of the reasonings but then how things work now that I was beforehand, but more appreciative...but most importantly, it was a way for me to kind of create change within the system, while still being a student. (Interview 2, 2024)

When this summer’s youth intern group challenged, “What has actually changed?,” their honest and pressing question prompted the adult facilitators to dig deeper into making the process more transparent regarding youth recommendations and subsequent actions (see Figure 1). These experiences did not just live in the summer months; knowledge creation by the YDA team continued to be discussed with administrators in school leadership teams and University professors throughout the school year.

Ongoingly, the team saw how YDA recommendations were tied to the school district’s strategic planning and school improvement plans.

Jaiden: The notion of having direct power in a way that would not just have an impact on me, but on my peers was on par with nothing I had ever experienced. YDA is not just an aesthetic showcase of power for young people; it is power for young people. The problem that follows it is enforcing it. We see this as something that is not exclusive to youth change but change generally, as any type of change is a threat to the status quo, including with the people in power who benefit from the system.

How are we responding to YDA recommendations?	
Summer 2020	Summer 2021
1. Adopted Hoonuit: Enable sites to track student enrollment in secondary advanced classes frequently Recommendation 4	5. Developed a new teacher evaluation rubric with TDE committee that centers YDA recommendations Recommendations 1 & 2
2. Developed a new teacher evaluation rubric with the TDE committee that centers YDA recommendations Recommendations 2, 3, 6, 7	6. Adopted Hoonuit: Enables school leaders to track current discipline data disaggregated by race easily and frequently Recommendations 3, 4, 5 & 6
3. Implemented Talent Development programming in K-5 Recommendation 5	7. Restorative Practices teams established at each site Recommendations 1, 2, 5 & 6
4. Invite youth voice in professional learning for educators whenever possible Recommendation 8	

Figure 1 School District Actions from YDA Recommendations (from the first 2 years).

There were transformative benefits to YDA team members and to the district, as the team overtly discussed research, critical theory, their own stories, and the past impact of youth in a summer-long youth–adult research partnership.

Discussion: A Collaborative Struggle to Activate Power, Hope, and Youth Histories

When students are invited to participate in school change, youth voice (Finneran, et al., 2023; Goncharuk, 2018; Warren & Marciano, 2018) needs to reverberate longer than a sound bite. Opportunities for YPAR, including with youth–adult partnerships, can create both a chorus and echoes of transformative youth voice. We recognize the YDA program as a unique model of district-level research, a YPAR cousin. In some district-level data presentations, “youth voice” is a quote on a slide or a data point in triangulation. However, YDA offers youth the position not as informants, but as an agentic part of an improvement process toward school transformation. It is not young people’s job to struggle alone and to engage in empty hope and circular labor. District leaders such as Dr Chhay are youth partners, and honestly, their biggest fans, followed by years-long commitment to holding adults accountable and to boosting the young people who are so generous and willing to lend honest critique and collaboration to a school.

Jaiden: Even with change, this is not a utopia; these youth struggle. Balancing ambitions, mental health, schoolwork, and fighting to get minor changes takes a toll on youth. Youth are consistently asking more of their leaders, getting told no, and then getting to work. This process occurs again and again, draining their energy and, indeed, their very essence of youth. When youth constantly defend progress, they are the first ones to get hurt, leading to a feeling of loneliness that spreads like a virus among a generation. This feeling is interpreted by the youth in two ways: Some take it as a sign to give up, and some take it as a challenge, motivating them to change their community even more. Many young people in this school are determined to succeed, not despite their challenges but because they aim to overcome them. That is hope.

The adults in the program, from the university and district alike, were grounded in a partnership of mutual-ity (Garnnet, et al., 2019), enacting care and strategy in behind-the-scenes work (Rombalski & Gora, 2024) to support transformative youth voice; this was a critical praxis in school leadership (Domínguez & Bertrand, 2023). Adults have a responsibility to archive, credit, and sustain the work from youth, as there will be cohorts of youth YDA members who graduate before seeing their work realized. For youth in the YDA, there is a dual recognition that they may graduate high school by the time their efforts lead to material change, and they are also living in the work of former youth. This continuity of community is a promising practice that can sustain youth power (Ozer, et al., 2013): “In these [YPAR] cases, students appeared to care about the topic selected by the prior cohort and did not report diminished feelings of interest or ownership because they themselves had not originally decided on the topic” (p. 21). Power resonates from shared youth–adult responsibility; engaging collective memory sparks authentic hope and sustains capacity for change.

Transformative youth voice relies on raising consciousness, collectively disrupting and resisting the status quo, and sustaining relationships to enact change. Jaiden’s consciousness-raising and political education, discussing Freire and relevant stories throughout the summer, emboldened him and the YDA team to resist an evaluation system whereby teachers pick and choose student survey participants. They recognized that “...Students of color have knowledge of the day-to-day operation of schools in ways that are concealed from white leaders by white supremacy and other systems of oppression” (Salisbury, et al., 2020, p. 58). Asymmetrical adult power and white supremacy characteristics conceal and ultimately devalue the knowledge, perspectives, and lives of youth from BIPOC communities. Jaiden and others leaned on newly formed relationships with a racially diverse group of adults, and a district policy on race equity, to resist a practice and press for more inclusive recommendations. This combination of youth–adult partnerships and adults acting on the recommendations of youth in YDA makes this a transformative experience where there is a leveraging of power and action (Zion, 2020). If teacher evaluations shift—whether by involving more students in the survey or by inviting feedback through other methods—how will future students know the YDA team’s role in that work? For the transformative youth voice to take its fullest shape, it should be recorded, played back, and amplified for others to hear. When youth write their own histories of change, we cannot let those stories slip off stage. In the same way that Gholdy Muhammad (2020) knows how integral it is for students to access their cultural historical knowledge and literacy lineage, youth contributing to change in our schools deserve to have their agentic stories told to shape our collective memories.

Implications for Sharing Struggle, Power, Hope, and History

For Adult Leaders

Educators can leverage their power with youth to build transformative partnerships that drive just, equitable change. Adult leaders acting as co-conspirators can struggle alongside and broadcast the insightful work youth

create, while offering support and mitigating institutional barriers (Domínguez & Bertrand, 2023). Creating intentional, accessible ways of historicizing the social change youth are engaged in is pertinent to expanding knowledge of youth leadership, while humanizing youth as integral members of the community. Most educators are not familiar with YPAR, and this hinders the capacity to engage in transformative youth–adult partnerships. It is imperative for adult leaders to be cognizant of how youth, including Indigenous youth and youth of color, can be systematically devalued, and to actively leverage and share power toward community changemaking. Under-discussed in this article are steps that YPAR teams can plan toward social action. In this YDA model, adults take up a role to bring youth recommendations to school action. Nonetheless, it may also take multiple strategies to push change forward, and adults should also be prepared to work alongside young people as they strategize in their own creative ways toward change.

From and for Youth

The Youth Data Analyst Intern Program team learned throughout the summer that progress does not happen overnight. They gleaned this lesson in a multitude of ways, but the most prominent was when past years' efforts were revealed. They learned of recommendations to increase BIPOC enrollment in Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and honors classes; before that, they knew nothing about it. They learned of efforts to address disparaging discipline data; before that, they knew nothing about it. They learned of efforts to see if the district was living up to the communities' hopes and dreams; before that, they knew nothing about it. They knew nothing, not because nothing had happened (though that was the case sometimes), but because the progress was slow in its implementation, and it was not transparent to youth. Thus, the sustained results of their work might not be seen in their own high school career. Nonetheless, they recognized that they are currently living in the results of former youth advocates' work, either through YDA or other youth-driven initiatives within the district. Just as past work by youth advocates has affected their lives for the better, they had a reckoning of their integral and driving force—an active hope and power—for future change. As this youth research team was positioned as leaders, they not only impacted change in the schools, but they also changed themselves. The lessons that YDA team members learned varied, but they all corresponded to the same thought: the work they do today will likely not be shown tomorrow, but rather long after they are gone.

References

- Anyon, Y., Bender, K., Kennedy, H., & Dechants, J. (2018). A systematic review of youth participatory action research (YPAR) in the United States: Methodologies, youth outcomes, and future directions. *Health Education & Behavior*, 45(6), 865–878.
- Beattie, H. (2020). *Roadmap To Agency*. Up For Learning; Up For Learning. <https://www.upforlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/YAPrubric-2018-FINAL.pdf>
- Bell, S., Dong, Z., & Widman, A. (2023). *Report of AmeriCorps YPAR Grant 2022 Survey Data*. AmeriCorps.

- Bertrand, M., & Lozenski, B. D. (2023). YPAR dreams deferred? Examining power bases for YPAR to impact policy and practice. *Educational Policy*, 37(2), 437–462.
- Biddle, C., & Hufnagel, E. (2019). Navigating the “danger zone”: Tone policing and the bounding of civility in the practice of student voice. *American Journal of Education*, 125(4), 487–520. <https://doi.org/10.1086/704097>
- brown, a. m. (Feb 2, 2015). “Trust the people.” Blog. <https://adriennemareebrown.net/2015/02/02/trust-the-people/>
- Coates, T. N. (2015). *Between the world and me*. Text publishing.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2018). Tracing the evolution of student voice in educational research. In R. Bourke & J. Loveridge (Eds.), *Radical collegiality through student voice* (pp. 17–38). Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-1858-0_2
- Conner, J. O. (2016). Pawns or power players: The grounds on which adults dismiss or defend youth organizers in the USA. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 19(3), 403–420. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2015.1083958>
- Cumings Mansfield, K., Welton, A., & Halx, M. (2012). Chapter 2 Listening to student voice: Toward a more inclusive theory for research and practice. In C. Boske & S. Diem (Eds.), *Advances in educational administration* (Vol. 14, pp. 21–41). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. [https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3660\(2012\)000001400](https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3660(2012)000001400)
- Delpit, L. D. (2012). *“Multiplication is for white people”: Raising expectations for other people’s children*. The New Press.
- Domínguez, A. D., & Bertrand, M. (2023). Where are the coconspirators? : Examining performative youth allyship and opposition by educational leaders in K-12 schools. *The Urban Review*, 55(5), 559–582. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-023-00661-w>
- Duncan-Andrade, J. (2009). Note to educators: Hope required when growing roses in concrete. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(2), 181–194. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.2.nu3436017730384w>
- Fielding, M. (2001). Students as radical agents of change. *Journal of Educational Change*, 2(2), 123–141. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1017949213447>
- Finneran, R., Mayes, E., & Black, R. (2023). Student voice, inequalities, and class. In R. Finneran, E. Mayes, & R. Black (Eds.), *Oxford research encyclopedia of education*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1902>
- Fletcher, A. (2015). Definitions Of Student Voice – Soundout [SoundOut]. <https://soundout.org/definitions-of-student-voice-2/>
- Fox, M., & Fine, M. (2015). Leadership in solidarity: Notions of leadership through critical participatory action research with young people and adults. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 148(1), 45–58.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed (30th anniversary ed)*. Continuum
- Garnett, B., Beattie, H., Koller, S., Moore, M., Scott, K., Maseroni, M., & Holmes, B. (2019). Participatory survey data analysis as catalyst for empowering youth as school health change agents. *Health Promotion Practice*, 20(4), 483–488. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839919849029>

- Goncharuk, D. (2018, March 29). *A Student Asks: 'Are Decision Makers Finally Going To Listen To Us?'* TNTP. https://Tntp.Org/Blog/Post/A-Student-Asks-Are-Decision-Makers-Finally-Going-To-Listen-To-Us?Unique_id=60045456921|Kwd-301755774451|354826453129&Utm_source=Google&Utm_medium=Cpc&Utm_campaign=&Gclid=Cj0kcqjw-Mr0brdyarisakefbed2yp3tnz3nlaa1wdrpi2rg_d6uggrvjmiluje5qog_yqxak-f7vnmwaah2healw_wcb
- Hart, R. A. (1992). *Children's participation: The theory and practice of involving young citizens in community development and environmental care*. <http://Www.Vlebooks.Com/Vleweb/Product/Openreader?Id=None&Isbn=9781134172221>
- Hayes, K., & Kaba, M. (2023). *Let this radicalize you: Organizing and the revolution of reciprocal care*. Haymarket Books.
- Highlander Center Instagram, (n.d.). <https://www.instagram.com/highlandercenter/>
- Hipolito-Delgado, C. P., Stickney, D., Zion, S., & Kirshner, B. (2022). Transformative student voice for socio-political development: Developing youth of color as political actors. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 32(3), 1098–1108. <https://doi.org/10.1111/Jora.12753>
- Holquist, S. E., Mitra, D. L., Conner, J., & Wright, N. L. (2023). What is student voice anyway? The intersection of student voice practices and shared leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 59(4), 703–743. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X231178023>
- Johnson, J. R., Little, A., & Holbrook, C. (2019). *Hope in the struggle: A memoir*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Kaba, M. (2021). *We do this' til we free us: Abolitionist organizing and transforming justice*. Haymarket Books.
- Keddie, A. (2023). The difficulties of 'action' in youth participatory action research: Schoolifying YPAR in two elite settings. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics Of Education*, 42(3), 381–393. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2019.1696747>
- Khalifa, M. A. (2018). *Culturally responsive school leadership*. Harvard Education Press.
- Lac, V. T., & Cumings Mansfield, K. (2018). What do students have to do with educational leadership? Making a case for centering student voice. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 13(1), 38–58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1942775117743748>
- Lang, R. (2018). *NASBE - More than 20 state boards of education designate a role for students in policymaking process*. <http://www.nasbe.org/press-releases/more-than-20-state-boards-of-education-designate-a-role-for-students-in-policymaking-process/>
- Levin, B. (2000). Putting students at the centre in education reform. *Journal of Educational Change*, 1(2), 155–172. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1010024225888>
- Lozenski, B. D. (2017). pedagogies of black eldership: Exploring the impact of intergenerational contact on youth research. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 19(2), 65–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15210960.2017.1302337>
- Lundy, L. (2007). "Voice" is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(6), 927–942.
- Minnesota Department of Education. (2022). *Minnesota Student Survey Report 2022*. <https://public.education.mn.gov/MDEAnalytics/DataTopic.jsp?TOPICID=242>

- Mitra, D. (2018). Student voice in secondary schools: The possibility for deeper change. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 56(5), 473–487. <https://doi.org/10.1108/Jea-01-2018-0007>
- The Morris Justice Project. (2011). Video, polling for justice. Public Science Project, City University of New York. <https://vimeo.com/22363812>
- Muhammad, G. (2020). *Cultivating genius: An equity framework for culturally and historically responsive literacy*. Scholastic Incorporated.
- Nelson, E., & Charteris, J. (2021). Student voice research as a technology of reform in neoliberal times. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 29(2), 213–230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2020.1713867>
- Ozer, E. J., Newlan, S., Douglas, L., & Hubbard, E. (2013). “Bounded” empowerment: Analyzing tensions in the practice of youth-led participatory research in urban public schools. *American Journal Of Community Psychology*, 52(1–2), 13–26. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-013-9573-7>
- Ozer, E., Abraczinskas, M., Voight, A., Kirshner, B., Cohen, A., Zion, S., Glende, J., Stickney, D., Gauna, R., Lopez, S., & Freiburger, K. (2020). Use of research evidence generated by youth: Conceptualization and applications in diverse US K-12 educational settings. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 66(1-2), 81–93.
- Robinson, C., & Taylor, C. (2007). Theorizing student voice: Values and perspectives. *Improving Schools*, 10(1), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480207073702>
- Rombalski, A., Forrester, J., Smaller, A. & Oto, R. (2023). The purple room: A YPAR-designed healing space grounded in community-engaged school leadership. *Voices in Urban Education*, 51(1). <https://doi.org/10.35240/vue.25>
- Rombalski, A., & Gora, F. A. (2024). An Ella Baker behind-the-scenes look at youth research and strategic school leadership. *The High School Journal*, 107(3), 229–244.
- Salisbury, J. D., Sheth, M. J., & Angton, A. (2020). “They Didn’t Even Talk About Oppression”: School leadership protecting the whiteness of leadership through resistance practices to a youth voice initiative. *Journal of Education Human Resources*, 38(1), 57–81. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jehr.2019-0010>
- Salisbury, J. D., Sheth, M. J., Spikes, D., & Graeber, A. (2023). “We have to empower ourselves to make changes!”: Developing collective capacity for transformative change through an urban student voice experience. *Urban Education*, 58(2), 221–249. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085919857806>
- Serido, J., Borden, L. M., & Perkins, D. F. (2011). Moving beyond youth voice. *Youth & Society*, 43(1), 44–63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X09351280>
- Shamrova, D. P., & Cummings, C. E. (2017). Participatory action research (PAR) with children and youth: An integrative review of methodology and par outcomes for participants, organizations, and communities. *Children And Youth Services Review*, 81, 400–412. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.Childyouth.2017.08.022>
- Sheth, M. J., & Salisbury, J. D. (2022). “School’s A Lie”: Toward critical race intersectional pedagogy for youth intellectual activism in policy partnerships. *Educational Policy*, 36(1), 100–141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08959048211059478>
- Souto-Manning, M. (2014). Critical narrative analysis: The interplay of critical discourse and narrative analyses. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 27, 159–180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2012.737046>

- Stanton, C. R., Hall, B., & Decrane, V. W. (2020). “Keep It Sacred!”: Indigenous youth-led filmmaking to advance critical race media literacy. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 22(2), 46–65. <https://doi.org/10.18251/Ijme.V22i2.2245https://Ijme-Journal.Org/Index.Php/Ijme/Article/View/2245/1365>
- Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling*. Rethinking Schools; Albany: State University of New York Press. <https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/subtractive-schooling/>
- Warren, C. A., & Marciano, J. E. (2018). Activating student voice through Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR): Policy-making that strengthens urban education reform. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 31(8), 684–707.
- Yonezawa, S., & Jones, M. (2009). Student voices: Generating reform from the inside out. *Theory into Practice*, 48(3), 205–212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405840902997386>
- Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006>
- Zeldin, S., Christens, B. D., & Powers, J. L. (2013). The psychology and practice of youth-adult partnership: Bridging generations for youth development and community change. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 51(3–4), 385–397. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-012-9558-y>
- Zion, S. (2020). Transformative student voice: Extending the role of youth in addressing systemic marginalization in U.S. Schools. *Multiple Voices for Ethnically Diverse Exceptional Learners*, 20(1), 32–43. <https://doi.org/10.56829/2158-396X-20.1.32>

Acknowledgement

This material is based on work supported by the Office of Research and Evaluation at AmeriCorps under Grant No. 22REAMN001 through the National Service and Civic Engagement research grant competition. Opinions or points of view expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of, or a position that is endorsed by, AmeriCorps.

Appreciation from our author team: To Dr. Silvy Un Lafayette, the school district, and the YDA extended family. Thank you for your continuous work to build and sustain a more just learning community. It is a gift to see youth and school leadership collaborating to build a better world today. The time each person takes behind the scenes to tend to an education that is humanizing and to challenge the status quo is truly an inspiration. To dream is the impetus for change, and you make change a reality. Thank you for your continuous work to support young people, their mission, their lives, and their drive to make change. Leading youth, so youth can lead, is a task not many can take on. But the time and effort are worth it, an inspiration to those around you as well to youth themselves.

Author Bios

Abigail Rombalski serves as a lecturer in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. Abby prioritizes youth-engaged research and organizing toward educational justice,

including as co-founder and director of YoUthROC, an affiliate program with the UMN's RJJ Urban Research Outreach-Engagement Center.

Jaiden Leary is an incoming undergraduate student at the University of California, Davis, studying political science with a pre-law focus. A dedicated political organizer, Jaiden also serves as the Director of *The Journal for Youth Voice*, a platform that amplifies the perspectives of young people.

Daniel Brogan is a PhD Candidate in Organizational Leadership and Policy Development at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. Dan is an advocate for youth rights, labor organizing, housing, and public transit. Dan previously served on the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Appendix 1: One YDA Reading from 2023

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Paulo Freire, 1970/2000

excerpts from CHAPTER 2 (p. 72-81, 2000)

1. In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as *processes* of inquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence. The students, alienated like the slave in the Hegelian dialectic, accept their ignorance as justifying the teacher's existence—but, unlike the slave, they never discover that they educate the teacher.
2. The banking education maintains and even stimulates the contradiction through the following attitudes and practices, which mirror oppressive society as a whole:
 - (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
 - (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
 - (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
 - (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
 - (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
 - (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
 - (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
 - (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
 - (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
 - (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.

3. The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed. The oppressors use their "humanitarianism" to preserve a profitable situation. Thus they react almost instinctively against any experiment in education which stimulates the critical faculties and is not content with a partial view of reality but always seeks out the ties which link one point to another and one problem to another.
 4. Indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in "changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them"; for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated. To achieve this end, the oppressors use the banking concept of education in conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus, within which the oppressed receive the euphemistic title of "welfare recipients." They are treated as individual cases, as marginal persons who deviate from the general configuration of a "good, organized, and just" society. The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these "incompetent and lazy" folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality. These marginals need to be "integrated," "incorporated" into the healthy society that they have "forsaken."
 5. The banking approach to adult education, for example, will never propose to students that they critically consider reality. It will deal instead with such vital questions as whether Roger gave green grass to the goat, and insist upon the importance of learning that, on the contrary, Roger gave green grass to the rabbit. The "humanism" of the banking approach masks the effort to turn women and men into automatons—the very negation of their ontological vocation to be more fully human.
 6. Those who use the banking approach, knowingly or unknowingly (for there are innumerable well-intentioned bank-clerk teachers who do not realize that they are serving only to dehumanize), fail to perceive that the deposits themselves contain contradictions about reality. But, sooner or later, these contradictions may lead formerly passive students to turn against their domestication and the attempt to domesticate reality. They may discover through existential experience that their present way of life is irreconcilable with their vocation to become fully human. They may perceive through their relations with reality that reality is really a process, undergoing constant transformation. If men and women are searchers and their ontological vocation is humanization, sooner or later they may perceive the contradiction in which banking education seeks to maintain them, and then engage themselves in the struggle for their liberation.
- ...
7. Indeed, problem-posing education, which breaks with the vertical patterns characteristic of banking education, can fulfill its function as the practice of freedom only if it can overcome the above contradiction. Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers.

8. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on “authority” are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be *on the side of* freedom, not *against* it. Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are “owned” by the teacher.
9. The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own. The role of the problem-posing educator is to create; together with the students...

Appendix 2: YDA Recommendations 2023

Youth Data Analyst (YDA) Summer Internship Recommendations (from District’s Site/School Continuous Improvement Planning Model)

Year	YDA Research Question	YDA Recommendations	YDA Interns
2023	How have teacher-student relationships impacted students’ experience at Lake Public Schools since 2020?	1. PreK-Elem: Encourage more teachers to work with summer programs 2. Middle School: Get rid of room 242 3. High School: Build consistency among advisory teachers 4. Middle and High School: Return to in-person conferences and strengthen relationship with families	Jaiden, Alicia, Ford, Estrella, and Anya
All sites			
		5. Increase opportunities for staff reflection and strengthen CARE/PLC work 6. Increase student voice in the curriculum and encourage students to stay in class by making classes engaging and fun 7. Follow the law (K-3) and use this law to guide send-out decisions (grades 5-12). HF-58 states you cannot send out K-3 students unless: A) They are a danger; B) You’ve collaborated with family, mental-health specialists, or community-based services; C) You’ve created a plan with the parents detailing what the student must do to be in the classroom; D) You’ve provided support services for the student 8. Increase admin transparency by building relationships with students, raising standards for collecting data at sites, and including student voice when making rules that impact students	