

BOOK REVIEW:

Albright, T., Brion-Meisels, G. (Eds.). (2025). *Critical Thinking on Youth Participatory Action Research: Participation, Power, and Purpose*. Routledge

Birdette Scott

As a child, I remember my mom sharing the story about my grandfather waking up early with her to work on their farm in Opelousas, Louisiana, so that she could finish in time for school. My father also spoke with pride about my grandmother and grandfather as educators in Monroe, Louisiana. These family narratives deeply influenced my journey into education, instilling in me the value of empowering youth. *Critical Thinking on Youth Participatory Action Research: Participation, Power, and Purpose* reflects the tradition of passing down intergenerational stories to inspire transformative action.

This text authentically shares the narratives of elders in Participatory Action Research (PAR) while compelling PAR educators, activists, and scholars to embark upon the transformational and sacred work of engaging with youth in critically addressing the issues most meaningful for them in their communities.

Thomas Albright and Gretchen Brion-Meisels provided a space for readers to engage in ten interviews where PAR elders vulnerably shared their experiences, reflections, and insights. Moreover, the elders went beyond their research journeys and honored other members of the participatory action research community, forming a diverse tapestry of voices, insight, and wisdom for the reader. The themes of connectedness, intentionality, and empowerment reflected throughout the book perhaps serve as a model of the culture that participatory action researchers can strive to foster when collaborating with youth in their communities. Using interview transcripts, Albright and Brion-Meisels weaved together the themes of participation, power, and purpose in Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) while maintaining the authenticity of the voices of each interview participant.

The framework of participation, power, and purpose serves as a cohesive thread linking the experiences of adult and youth PAR participants. Albright and Brion-Meisels address participation by discussing the delicate balance of openly engaging youth and students in participatory action research while navigating different youth and adult recruitment and selection models. Interview participants shared how youth may become PAR participants through medians such as past participant referrals, course enrollment, adult recommendations, social media responses, or hearing about PAR in the community. Moreover, in Chapters 8 and 9, Nicole Mirra and Limarys Carabello highlighted the practice of apprenticeship as an entry point to participation. In Chapter 8, Mirra addressed the importance of providing adequate time to acclimate adult apprentices to PAR's culture

and historical contexts and the foundational trust and relationship building required to do the work. Also, in Chapter 9, Carabello described how facilitators empower youth apprentices to prioritize key issues, explore the prospect of knowledge generation within their community context, and then transfer that knowledge to advocate for change and act. Addressing the process of apprenticeship has implications for current and future members of the PAR community as they seek to strike a balance between “getting to work” and ensuring that those familiar with the work adequately prepare youth and adult participants to engage authentically.

The interview participants addressed the role of power in PAR. The concept of power has foundational implications for practice as adults engage with young people to take action in their communities. In Chapter 2, Jeff Duncan-Andrade addressed ethics in YPAR and cautioned against exploiting youth. Also, in Chapter 7, Kathryn Herr emphasized being a non-expert. When working with youth, adults may position themselves as experts. Still, Herr challenges adults to shed the “expert” role and instead embrace mutual learning with youth as co-researchers. This flattening of power dynamics can counteract adultism in educational settings. In Chapter 5, Elizabeth Hubbard illustrates how a school-based YPAR experience compelled school leaders and teachers to value students’ voices and meaningfully include them throughout the decision-making process. Moreover, Emily Ozer linked this experience to the epistemological question of who has the power to be an expert and create knowledge. The discussion of power is core to engaging adults and students in the collective work of PAR.

The theme of purpose served as the heartbeat of each interview. The participants graciously shared their origin stories and explicitly named their purpose for engaging in the work emphasizing the critical praxis that underpins YPAR. In Chapters 4 and 6, Ben Kirshner and David Stovall emphasized the critical origin of YPAR. Kirshner referenced the critical origins of the work and its link to South America. Stovall reiterated the political nature of the work and expressed the assurance that youth possess the capacity to engage critically through PAR. While critical engagement is the desired approach, there are implications for educators engaging within school-based settings. In Chapter 1, Albright and Brion-Meisels discussed the complexities of empowering student action and voice within the hierarchical structure of schools. Moreover, they named the risk of the critical purpose of PAR being forgone to achieve other school-based outcomes. However, throughout the text, the interviewers highlighted the importance of navigating the tensions of engaging students in schools as this is where youth spend a significant amount of time.

Albright, Brion-Meisels, and the interview participants motivate the research community to reflect on YPAR and even push us to determine if YPAR is the best nomenclature for the work. In Chapter 3, Jennifer Ayala inspires us to reflect on the fact that PAR with youth is both intergenerational and critical as they engage with adults to take action in their shared communities, thus causing the reader to consider the terms Intergenerational Participatory Action Research (IPAR) and Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR). The decision to name the participatory research lies in the hands of those carrying out the work. However, when choosing to engage in the sacred work of PAR with youth, it is important to constantly reflect on a question that Duncan-Andrade referenced while paying homage to Cherokee culture: “Is it good for the children?” (Albright & Brion-Meisels, p. 44).

Through their thoughtful curation, Albright and Brion-Meisels inspire readers to honor the intergenerational, participatory, and transformative spirit of YPAR, reminding us that this work has the power to reshape communities and lives.

Albright and Brion-Meisels utilize authentic narratives to engage the reader in an intergenerational YPAR journey. As the reader learns from the journey of elders, they may be empowered to engage with youth in this transformational work of CPAR.

References

Albright, T., & Brion-Meisels, G. (Eds.). (2025). *Critical Thinking on Youth Participatory Action Research: Participation, Power, and Purpose*. Routledge.

Author Bio

Birdette M. Hughey Scott is a PhD student in the Educational Leadership Policy & Law Program at Alabama State University. Her research focus is understanding the relationships between Black girls' mathematics persistence and mathematics placement policies. She is in the early stages of founding an organization dedicated to empowering youth and youth research. Birdette is entering her sixteenth year in education where she has served as a teacher, data coach, math coach, curriculum implementation coach, resident principal, and PhD student. Birdette served as the 2012 Mississippi State Teacher of the Year and was honored to represent Mississippi at the state and national levels.