

CENTERING YOUTH IN YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

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Youth and young adults in the United States and globally increasingly envision, organize, and lead contemporary movements toward justice across a range of formal and informal contexts within and beyond schools, communities, and university campuses. In doing so, youth demonstrate their participatory, communal, lived civic engagement (e.g., Cohen et al., 2018; Watson & Knight, 2015), extending their intersectional identities across contexts of race, gender, sexuality, immigration status, language, and dis/ability. Youth have focused attention on structural and systemic racism in #BlackLivesMatter activism; urged university officials in #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall protests in South Africa to decolonize curriculum, halt tuition fees, and increase government tuition funding; led marches and demonstrations for justice for International Women's Day in the Zócalo in Mexico City; protested gun violence in the March for Our Lives in Washington, DC; and supported efforts globally toward climate and environmental justice and Indigenous water rights.

Youth critical engagement has prompted educators and administrators to revise curriculum, teaching, and policy across the range of formal and informal secondary and higher-education settings (Barnum & Belsha, 2020; Hall, 2015), notably since 2020 and the killing of George Floyd, and the global coronavirus pandemic raised global attention to systemic racism and social, health, and economic inequities. Yet conventional framings of service learning have rendered less visible the interplay of youths' intersectional identities, along with their social, civic, educational, and political contributions, as youth critical engagement (Brewster, 2019; Donahue, 2018; Lund & Lee, 2021; Mitchell & Chavous, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2012).

This themed section of the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* centers Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) as a promising approach for building with and extending the interplay of voices, perspectives, and intersectional identities of youth—who we identify as individuals age 15–24, aligning with the United Nations definition—as youth enact contemporary movements toward justice in the ongoing work of and quest for social justice (Marciano & Watson, 2021; Richards-Schuster et al., 2019; Watson & Petrone, 2020). Specifically, we welcomed for inclusion in this special section renderings within and across contexts of service learning that foreground such participatory approaches. Such critical teaching and research stances actively engage young people in creating and developing knowledge about the issues that impact their lives and using their knowledge to take action. Such engagements involve youth-led efforts and youth-adult partnership efforts, among others, and in all cases center the meaningful and authentic role of young people within and across the research and knowledge development endeavor. YPAR challenges positivistic notions of researcher objectivity, instead considering youth as producers of knowledge whose lived experiences and perspectives provide valuable

insight for examining issues that matter to them (Aldana & Richards-Schuster, 2021; Caraballo et al., 2017; Malorni et al., 2022; Marciano et al., 2020; Warren & Marciano, 2018; Watson et al., 2020).

The special section includes submissions from school and community-based educators, researchers, and collaborative teams that include youth. Authors co-composed manuscripts with a range of communities, including youth in and out of community and schooling settings; students across secondary and higher education contexts; educators and staff in secondary, higher education, and community settings; teacher educators; youth and adults in community-based organization and community organizing settings; and administrators and policy makers. The manuscripts included in this special section provide multiple opportunities for learning from and with youth perspectives and action across a variety of contexts.

For example, in “Kinship, Being Together, and ‘Belonging Otherwise’ in YPAR Collaborations Within Community-University Partnerships,” Anita Chikkatur and Abby Rombalski examine how the concept of kinship, theorized in the context of a partnership between a YPAR team and university undergraduate course, may guide university-community collaborations in moving away from a history of extraction and exploitation. By extending the YPAR team’s considerations of kinship to center Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) youth, the authors highlight opportunities for creating liberatory educational spaces, pointing to possibilities for reconsidering the roles young people may play in educational and activist spaces.

In “We Got Us: The Process of Engaging Youth as Participants and Co-Researchers,” Erica J. Powell Wrencher utilizes engaged pedagogy and Black space-making as frameworks for considering young Black people as participants *and* community co-researchers. The paper offers a pathway for developing young researchers while also taking seriously the power of intergenerational knowledge sharing as a process for knowledge production, offering onramps into traditional academic processes for young Black emerging scholars while also addressing community-identified priorities rooted in equity and liberation.

The manuscript “‘In the Shoes That I’m In Now’ An Intergenerational Community Archiving Framework Centering Critical Youth Participatory-Action Research” features an intergenerational authoring team comprised of youth and adult researchers across school and community contexts: Isaiah Lawrence Lassiter; Haley Rose Kowal; Karena Alane Escalante; Jahyonna Brown; Ayana Allen-Handy; Qudia Ervin; Jasmine Atwell; Ishmael Burrell; Ronald Ray; Catherine Ann Nettles; Arania (Rana) Goldsmith-Carter; Michelle S. Allen; and Marie Wilkins-Walker. The authors examine their work in *The West Philadelphia High School - Youth Archivists* project, an intergenerational critical Youth-centered Participatory Action Research (cYPAR) project. Specifically, they offer a transformative model for a university-school-community partnership that fosters a sustainable participatory heritage program to preserve the legacy of a predominantly Black high school with a long history of over 100 years.

In “Linking YPAR and Youth Sociopolitical Development: Reflections on a Social Media Photovoice Study With Youth Organizers,” Angie Malorni examines how engaging in YPAR affected the sociopolitical development and community organizing of adolescent researchers/community organizers. The manuscript “A Sacred, Communal Pause: How Racially Marginalized Youth’s Commitment to Healing Expands Understandings of Activism,” authored by Alexis E. Hunter, Chanelle Jones-Ahmed, Ben Kirshner, and Solicia Lopez, shares

findings from a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project comprised of high school and college students, young adults working in youth organizations, community organizers, and multi-generational university researchers. The paper examines what members of the PAR team have learned about the relationship between healing and activism from youth of color through their work.

In “A Descriptive Narrative of a Latinx Research-Practice Partnership to Develop the *Roots y Resistencia* Intervention,” Josefina Bañales, Stacey Cabrera, Bethany Garcia, Jonathan Reyes, Isaiah Irizarry, Alfred Rodriguez, and Adrianna Aldana employ a counter-storytelling approach to make explicit the relationship and team development processes that serve as the bedrock for the early-stage development of a research-practice partnership between youth, students (post-baccalaureate and graduate students) and faculty—all of whom identify as Latinx—in the context of a Hispanic Serving Institution. In detailing the processes and structures that support the team’s development, the authors make the processes, pivots, and promises of YPAR with Latinx young people more explicit, seeking to increase YPAR with Latinx youth, particularly research on youths’ racialized and sociopolitical experiences.

The manuscript “#NoFilter: Exploring the Experiences of BIPOC Students at an HPWI,” co-authored by Danielle Aguilar, Rokaya Abdulameer, Andrea Torres, Nydia Salazar, Taia Hopkins, and Algasimmou Diallo engages a participatory action research framework and employs photovoice to consider how BIPOC undergraduate students leverage community cultural wealth strategies as they navigate barriers across historically and predominantly White institutions. The authors found that photovoice, grounded in a community cultural wealth framework, provides undergraduate researchers a way to affirm their dignity, agency, and expertise. Miguel Abad and Jennifer Renick, in “On Solidarity and Methodological Innocence in Youth Participatory Action Research,” explore solidarity in concept and practice in navigating methodological tensions in YPAR as critical YPAR scholars. The authors examine possibilities for engaging YPAR with youth collaborators while navigating an ethic of care and contexts of adultism in youth-adult partnerships.

In “Taking a Cubist Approach: The Importance of Youth-Produced Knowledge in Multigenerational Communities,” Nastasia Lawton-Sticklor, Zoe Black, and Amira Aderibigbe conceptualize Cubism as a framework for considering multigenerational knowledge spaces. Such an approach extends characteristics of the Cubist genre of portraying multiple perspectives at once on the same canvas, to affirm and reframe the way youth knowledge is valued in relation to adult knowledge in building learning spaces that are welcoming, equitable, and productive. In “‘Facilitar no es Fácil’ Latino/a High School Students as Initiators of Spanish Community Service Learning During the Pandemic,” Teresa Satterfield, Angel Ben-Kí, and Meera Pandey utilize an integrated critical social frameworks centering Latino adolescent community and cultural wealth, language, and race to showcase how youth researchers share results of YPAR that examined community engagement among Latino/a student volunteer book club facilitators. Authors urgently demonstrate how youth leverage cultural capital to engage as empowered community leaders.

Taken together, these manuscripts provide generative starting points from which to consider how youth may continue to be supported in furthering knowledge about the issues that impact their lives, and how that knowledge may be used to take action.

Key Takeaway Questions

We close with key takeaway questions for the range of communities engaging YPAR. Specifically, we invite you, in working with youth in your communities, and as you read and engage the articles in this special section, to engage conversation around such key questions as:

- Why do you participate in this kind of research?
- What approaches have you taken (i.e., what methods or methodologies have you used) when participating in YPAR projects?
- What do you learn with peers when interacting and engaging issues of importance to you in your YPAR projects?
- What approaches do you take to center your voice and the voices of your peers, or how do you encourage adults to center youth voice in your YPAR projects?
- When working with youth and peers in your YPAR projects, what roles or settings support or extend the range of your intersectional identities?
- In addressing issues of importance to you, how do you navigate issues of power with peers and adult collaborators in your YPAR projects?

Examining these questions may support the ongoing work of making visible the process of engaging in participatory research alongside youth and community partners, leading to opportunities that future research engagements might continue to examine:

- Varied research methodologies youth engage in their YPAR work in the range of community-based and schooling settings
- How youth interact with peers and learn alongside one another as they examine issues of importance to them
- Attempts by adult collaborators to center youth voice in their approach to supporting youth enacting YPAR
- Roles and contexts of affirming and extending youths' intersectional identities within and across YPAR inquiries with adult collaborators
- Whether, how, and why youth and adult collaborators navigate issues of power and positionality in their shared attempts at examining and addressing issues of importance to youth

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