Researching in Community: Youth-Adult Alliances for Authentic SEL Development

AGENDA

- Introduction to YPAR

- Our Students' Experience with YPAR and SEL

- Reflecting on Our Experiences

- Youth Voice and the Ladder of Participation

- Adult Mindsets and Communities of Practice

- Where We Are, Where We're Headed

But first...

On a piece of paper, respond to the following prompt:

As a young person, when did you feel your voice was heard and valued? What people, places, or situations made you feel empowered or disempowered?

When you're done, crumple it into a ball and put it to the side (for now).

What is YPAR?

Young people conduct research to **improve their lives,** their **communities,** and **the institutions intended to serve them**.

YPAR emphasizes the:

1. **Collective** investigation of a problem.

2. Reliance on **local knowledge** to better solve a problem.

3. **Questioning of power** and structures present in the context.

4. **Taking action** for collective wellbeing.

YPAR CYCLE

INFORMATION GATHERING
What is happening in my community?

ACTION STEPS
What action steps do we want to take based on what we learned?

PROBLEM DEFINITION
Define research question: What do we want to learn about? And from who?

COLLECTIVE INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS
Analyze collected data: What stories does it tell? What patterns are we seeing? What are we learning?
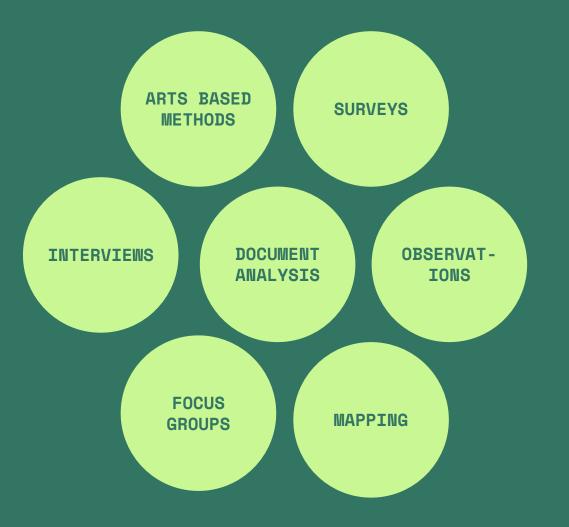
INSTRUMENT DESIGN
How are we collecting data? When are we doing it? What are we asking of participants? Pilot the study to revise protocols as need.

DATA COLLECTION
Interviews, surveys, focus groups, etc.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH DESIGN IN KAHNAWAKE. CHATTAWAY, 1997

RESEARCH METHODS

YPAR utilizes quantitative and qualitative mixed methods that centers the lived experiences of the people directly affected.
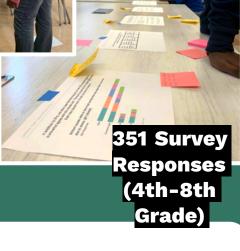
ARTS BASED METHODS

SURVEYS

INTERVIEWS

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

OBSERVATIONS

FOCUS GROUPS

MAPPING

YPAR at CACPCS

YEAR 1 | 2023-24

3 Focus Groups (Students + Teachers)

351 Survey Responses (4th-8th Grade)

The Research Question

What makes scholars feel happy, healthy, and safe at school?

What gets in the way of feeling this way at school?

Students decided on three areas of change:

Build scholar self-esteem—both inside and outside the classroom.

Create **scholar classroom engagement** through **relationship-building**.

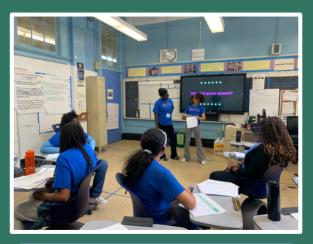Have more opportunities for **scholars to be part of decision-making**.

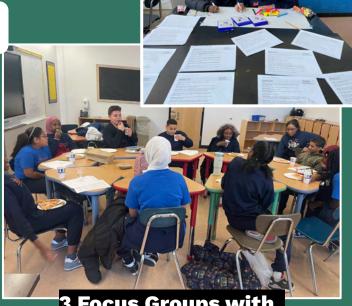PD with K-8 Staff

MS School-Wide Presentation

Workshop at NYC Youth Summit

YEAR 1 | 2023-24

YPAR at CACPCS

YEAR 2 | 2024-25

3 Focus Groups with Students

110 Survey Responses (6th-8th Grade)

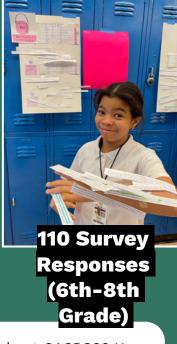**The Research Question**

How can we better understand the impact of bullying on young people at CACPCS? How can those experiences help us learn about coping techniques, conflict intervention and prevention, and relationship-building at school? How do students describe the impact of CACPCS school culture, rules, and policies on bullying prevention?

Students decided on these recommendations:

We want a safe space where **scholars can talk to each other about sensitive topics.**

In addition to this, we want a **supportive group specifically for scholars currently being bullied**.

We want to see a group or class that educates scholars on the impact of bullying, but a**lso what to do when they see it happening**.

As part of this, **we need more DEI/BCYF classes to support understanding and belonging**.

We want **CACPCS staff to do more** to prevent and intervene in bullying situations.

We want **teachers to be better trained** on how they talk about students in front of others **in order to prevent bullying**.

YEAR 2 | 2024-25

The Action

Scavenger Hunt

Role Play

Lunch and Learn

Poster Walk

WHAT IS SEL?

SOCIAL SKILLS
- Navigating social situations
- Resolving conflicts
- Cooperating and working on a team
- Self-advocating and leading
- Showing respect to others
- Asking for help when needed

COGNITIVE SKILLS
- Focusing and paying attention
- Setting goals
- Planning and organizing
- Problem solving
- Thinking critically

EMOTION SKILLS
- Recognizing and managing emotions
- Understanding the emotions and perspectives of others
- Showing empathy

ATTITUDES, BELIEFS, & MINDSETS
- Expressing confidence in your ability to improve
- Approaching challenging situations with optimism, positivity, and hope
- Staying open to unfamiliar ideas and experiences
- Identifying your strengths, weaknesses, and passions
- Believing in your own self-worth
- Expressing gratitude and appreciation for everyday things

CHARACTER & VALUES
- Making ethical judgments
- Accepting differences
- Following through on commitments & responsibilities
- Engaging civically
- Participating in your community (e.g., volunteering, sharing responsibilities)

HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

EASEL lab

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"I felt like I developed my skill of **understanding**.

Before, I used to think **that the teachers were all against us** and students needed more freedom.

But now I understand that **teachers are their own complex people** and have their own factors that participate in the student experience. **Their own experience as a student also influences how they treat the kids now.**"

- 7th Grade YPAR Student

"What I took away from YPAR is that many students just **want to be heard, and felt, and comforted**.

They just want to be **understood**, because **they might not have someone they look up to or someone that they want to talk to all the time**.

It's good to have their **voices heard** and for them to **feel seen.**"

- 8th Grade YPAR Student

"I used to think YPAR was going to be like youth council at our school–we never had any meetings or did anything to change the school...

...and now I think that I can **actually make a change with me being a kid and having a voice**."

- 7th Grade YPAR Student

"I feel like I've changed somewhat [from YPAR], because I feel like I got somewhat of a **confidence boost** after this and a little bit, **I was able to, like, speak my mind. I wasn't too afraid to speak out**.

And I feel like I **got a better perspective on my classmates**...I used to think that they just act up because they wanted to, but now I understand, like, oh, there's certain reasons for this stuff. It gave me **an empathy boost**."

- 8th Grade YPAR Student

As a young person, when did you feel your voice was heard and valued? What people, places, or situations made you feel empowered or disempowered?

DISCUSS:

- What is a common theme these reflections share?

- How is this similar or different from your own experience?

- How do you think this is similar or different from the experiences of the young people you work with today?

Students come up with a need or a plan. They convince adults to support and or finance. Together they decide and realize.

8 Student-initiated. The decisions are shared with adults.

Students have an idea and voice it. They take the initiative and bring their plans to a result.

7 Student-initiated and directed.

A new school yard is planned. Students are not only consulted but can also decide on some of the details.

6 Adult-initiated. The decisions are shared with students.

Before a decision is taken, adults consult with students. Their opinion and proposal are taken into consideration.

5 Students are consulted and informed.

A task (for instance community work) is given to students with no choice to agree or disagree. But they are informed and know the cause.

4 Students are assigned but informed.

A selected group of students (maybe a minority) is given a possibility to represent 'their cause' without having a say, without preparation. They serve to show political correctness.

3 Tokenism: Symbolic integration (of minorities).

Students are prepared to appear maybe in costumes carrying flowers or flags. They make an adult event (even a student's rights day) look nice or student friendly.

2 Decoration: Students are used.

Students are part of a political event. They might carry placards with paroles. They wear the colours of a party or a movement.

1 Manipulation: Students are misused.

• Where do the experiences you discussed fall on the scale?

• What about your experiences as a young person—where do they fall the scale? (Did change happen? Did you get to do anything? What made it so you felt you were heard / had an impact?)

• Where do you think the experiences of the young people you work with at your organization fall on this ladder?

Ladder of Participation, Living Democracy
Based on Hart's "Ladder of Children's Participation"

YPAR Student #1, 7th Grade:

"**The teachers are supposed to try to see from the point of view of the student and respect their opinions, but the student is also supposed to respect your [the teachers'] opinions, because respect is a two-way street**.

So creating a good bond with the student would help that two-way street. **Because when a student and a teacher don't get along, a student might fail**. Some teachers are old fashioned and say 'a student can't talk to me like that' and I understand respect, but we're all growing and maturing at different rates, so you have to understand that they might be a child, but they still need to be understood."

...

YPAR Student #2, 7th Grade:

"**Maybe the students that don't really participate a lot, they may be struggling with the work but they don't want to communicate with the teachers,** so...the teachers to try to do their best to, like, help them as much—I know that might be difficult, but you still gotta, like, help them."

Middle School Teacher:

"Yeah, so, there's a lot going on there, and the thing about research is you try to answer a question, but then you open up a whole lot of other questions while you're doing it. So I want to address a few points. **You're saying how teachers don't understand. Well what does that mean, right?**...

Respect...Respect is kind of a two way street. Well, it's a little different, it's not exactly a perfect two way street when you have adults and children, right? A lot of children think they deserve the same kind of respect as an adult with a family, who pays bills, who has degrees, who has struggled. Right?

And then you also say, well, we respect our parents. Well your parents punish you. Your parents take things away. That's not exactly respect just yet—I am not saying that you don't, but your definition of respect is different than our definition of respect. So, how do we get to a place where you understand that even though you don't like what we're doing, it is coming from a place of respect because we want you to succeed. We only have three seconds, so let's stew on it."

Community of Practice

CONTINUUM OF ADULT MINDSETS ABOUT STUDENT FEEDBACK

Fear	Dismissiveness	Tolerance	Curiosity	Welcoming
Defensiveness	Wariness	Ambivalence	Warmth	Grounded
Retaliation				Uplifting

The Adult Journey (at CACPCS)

PART I
SELF-REFLECT

Reflecting on childhood and schooling experiences.

PART II
EXPLORE ASSUMPTIONS

What don't I know about young people's experiences today?

PART III
COMMIT TO SHIFTS IN MINDSETS + PRACTICES

Parallel mechanisms of growth for young people and adults.

"Then vs. Now" Activity

Co-Defining Common Words

YOUTH

ADULTS

Tableaus

How do you listen?

Side A

A space where you felt safe and seen as a **<u>young person</u>**.

Side B

A space where you feel safe and seen as an **<u>educator</u>**.

Where are we now?

Where are we headed?

Where are YOU now?

Where are YOU headed?

DISCUSS:

- Where do you think you or your organization falls on these scales?

- What barriers to growth can you identify in your own setting?

- How do you want to grow, and what steps do you think it will take for that to happen?
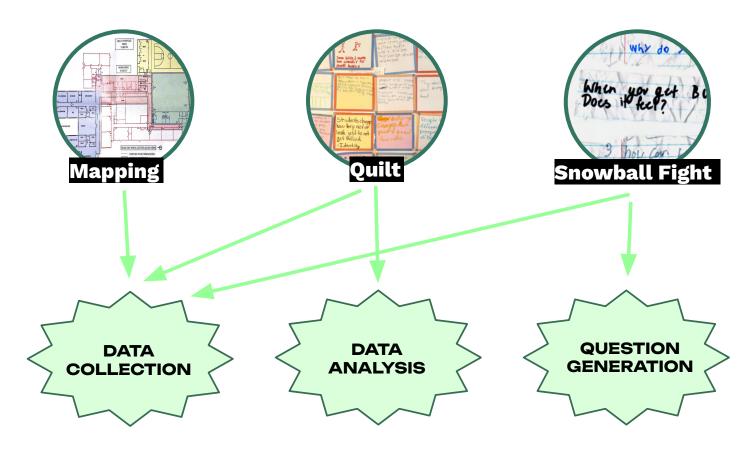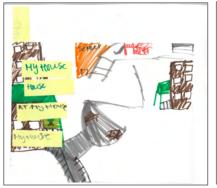
APPENDIX: YPAR RESOURCES

→ [Community Futures, Community Lore](#) from the University of California, Davis
→ [Cycle of Socialization and Cycle of Liberation](#) by Bobbie Harro
   [JMR's Participatory Journalism Playbook](#) from jesikah maria ross. A field guide for listening and
   reporting with communities.
→ [Ladder of Citizen Participation](#) by Sherry Arnstein
→ [Ladder of Participation Illustration](#) by Judith Young
→ [PAR Map](#) from María Elena Torre (2009)
→ [Power and Play-Doh](#), an activity developed by Gretchen Brion-Meisels.
→ [Research Lab,](#) a repository of creative action research techniques, from Recrear.
→ [Snapshots and Stories: My Voice, My Community Photovoice Guide](#) from the Network for a Healthy
   California—Children's Power Play! Campaign. A guide to championing elementary school children as
   community advocates.
→ [The Public Science Project](#) at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY)
   collaborates with communities to design research that examines the impact of policy and structural
   injustice.
→ [The WhyPAR Podcast](#) explores issues of co-leading YPAR projects, building relationships, power
   dynamics, and sharing our work together.
→ [Theater of the Oppressed](#) guide from www.collabchange.org.
→ [Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning (YELL) Handbook](#) from Stanford University's John W. Gardner
   Center for Youth and Their Communities
→ [YPAR Hub](#) from the University of California, Berkeley's Innovations for Youth Center and San
   Francisco Peer Resources

APPENDIX: DATA COLLECTION + ANALYSIS RESOURCES

Mapping

Quilt

Snowball Fight

DATA COLLECTION

DATA ANALYSIS

QUESTION GENERATION

APPENDIX: DATA COLLECTION + ANALYSIS RESOURCES

Community Mapping

Mapping exercise from YPAR at CACPCS, 2023. © Bianca Farrow

APPENDIX: DATA COLLECTION + ANALYSIS RESOURCES

School Mapping

Adapted from Samuel Straus and Whitney Benns' course, "Fugitive Negotiation: Negotiating Power, Space and Purpose with/in Educational Institutions."

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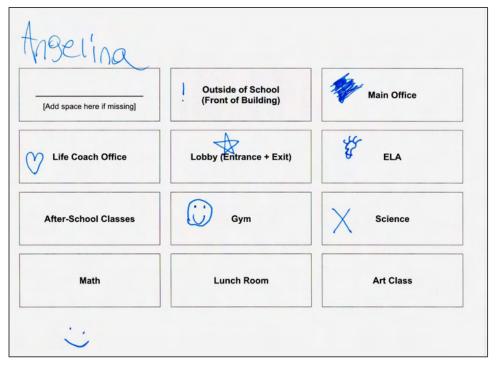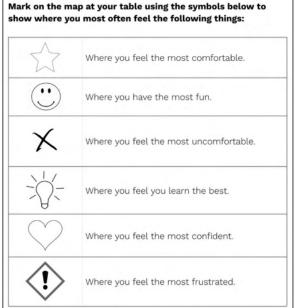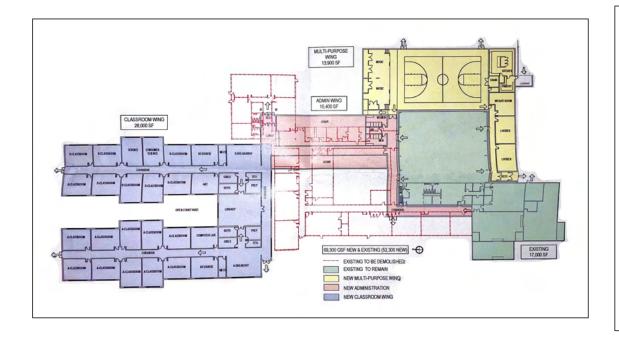
School Mapping

You can use the blueprint or draw a map of your school. Choose either elementary, middle, or high school.
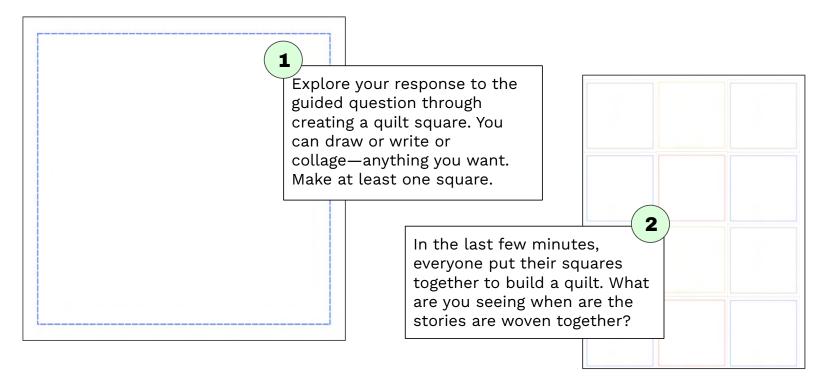
- Where did you feel seen?
- Where did you feel empowered?
- Where did you feel like you had agency?
- Where *didn't* you feel these things?

Adapted from Samuel Straus and Whitney Benns' course, "Fugitive Negotiation: Negotiating Power, Space and Purpose with/in Educational Institutions."

APPENDIX: DATA COLLECTION + ANALYSIS RESOURCES

Data / Analysis Quilt

Quilt exercise from YPAR at CACPCS, 2025. © [Bianca Farrow](#)

Data / Analysis Quilt

1 Explore your response to the guided question through creating a quilt square. You can draw or write or collage—anything you want. Make at least one square.

2 In the last few minutes, everyone put their squares together to build a quilt. What are you seeing when are the stories are woven together?

Quilt exercise from YPAR at CACPCS, 2025. © <u>Bianca Farrow</u>

APPENDIX: DATA COLLECTION + ANALYSIS RESOURCES

Question Snowball Fight

1 Write <u>one</u> question per piece of paper.

<u>Pro Tip</u>: The more questions you write, the more snowballs you get to throw.

2

3

Everyone collects snowballs! On the back of each paper, answer the question that was asked.

4

? ? ?

The next step is up to you!
You could:
• Discuss the answers.
• Do another round!
• Select + revise 5-10 of the most effective questions.

6 (You know the drill.)

5

Scribble scrabble.

Adapted from Community Futures, Community Lore (UC Davis) by Bianca Farrow

APPENDIX: DATA COLLECTION + ANALYSIS RESOURCES

Arts-Based Methods

Arts-based research methods reminds us that not all research methods have to be about spoken or written information. This method allows participants to think creatively about expressing their experiences and about what "could be" possible.

This could include:

01 Visual art through drawing, painting, photography, collage making, video-making;

02 Performance art through dance, drama, role-plays, music;

03 Writing through any story, prose or poetry based activity

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