



Carleton College

Using Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Insights to Transform School Policies & Practices

What is the background for this study?

This Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) study investigates how youth can generate changes in their schools, districts, and communities. The study uses YPAR to not only encourage young people to see themselves as civic actors, but also to explore how to translate youth research findings into change. Specifically, the study explores whether youth and supportive adults can push for change by connecting insights from youth research to professional development for educators and by including youth in decision-making structures in schools.

What are the research questions?

The overarching research question is: how can YPAR help bridge the gap between youth and adults with decision-making power? Additional questions include:

1. What structures, policies, and practices in each school site encourage students to participate in YPAR/youth-led initiatives? How successfully do these sites engage students who are the least engaged with traditional/existing school structures?
2. What are similar insights and findings about school/learning environments across school sites, and what are unique to their particular contexts?
3. What can adults learn from young people at their school sites about changes necessary to create robust, supportive, joyful learning environments for all students?
4. What supports the ability of school staff to connect YPAR or youth-generated insights and findings to their processes of change at their sites? What are the barriers and challenges?
5. How can formal and informal civic structures across school sites within a state create learning opportunities for school personnel and students that would have otherwise not been possible?

Who are your community partners?

The study is co-led by community partners at five school districts—Brooklyn Center Community Schools, Faribault Public Schools, Rochester Public Schools, St. Anthony-New Brighton Independent School District, St. Louis Park Public Schools— and a university/community YPAR team, YoUthROC/University of Minnesota.

Study At-A-Glance

Study Title
Using Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Insights to Transform School Policies & Practices

Researcher
Anita Chikkatur, PhD

Grant Cohort 2022

Timeline 2022-2025

Study Location Northfield, Minnesota

Study Topic Area(s)
Community Development
Education Across the Life Course
Social Equity
Youth Development

How are community members engaged in the research to action process?

Each community partner works with youth researchers to design or deepen their YPAR studies and make the connection between their YPAR teams' insights and systemic changes to school practices, policies, and cultures. Community partners convene to discuss their research at regular meetings, including at the 2023 YPAR Youth Summit, co-planned by adults and youth. These meetings enable community partners to learn from each other and generate useful findings for other schools and districts looking to engage their students in their processes of transformation.

What data and methods are used in this study?

A key principle of YPAR studies is that they are context specific. As each partner designs their YPAR study, they use data and methods tailored to the research needs and interests of their youth researchers. Methods may include observation, open forums or discussions, surveys, literature reviews, and primary and secondary data analysis. Carleton College conducts a baseline survey of adults at the five participating school districts on their views on YPAR and student-centered pedagogies to provide important context to the study.

How does this research translate to community action?

This research aims to build and strengthen relationships between youth and adults within their schools, districts, and communities. This study provides youth and adults opportunities to collaboratively identify and research issues that most affect their community and translate insights into action and policy. Through research and regular knowledge sharing, this study promotes youth representation in community decision-making structures and aims to provide more opportunities for youth community and civic engagement.

What are potential opportunities to apply study findings and/or build on this research?

This research can provide insights and lessons on how to center youth in community decision-making and identify best practices for strengthening relationships between youth and adults within schools and communities.

For more information on the study:

Study Website	2022 AmeriCorps YPAR Grant			
Study Contact	Anita Chikkatur, PhD	Professor of Educational Studies	Carleton College	apchikka@carleton.edu

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