



COALITION FOR
COMPASSIONATE
SCHOOLS

“It Was Honestly Like Magic”: Youth Participatory Action Research as an Intervention in Traditional Service Learning Programs

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Service Learning



Nationally, 25% of universities have service learning programs.

Traditional vs. Critical Service Learning

- Shifts in overall goals of project
 - Who benefits?
 - What is the goal?
- Shifts in power dynamics
 - Who leads the project?
 - Who has power?
- Shifts in program structure
 - What resources does university provide?
 - Who engages and for how long?
- Shifts in undergraduate experience & outcomes
 - Do undergraduates reflect on their experience?
 - What is their takeaway?



How can a YPAR project move toward
a critical service learning model?

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)

- Critical, community-engaged research methodology
- Gives youth tools to identify issues in their environments, research these issues, and create solutions
- Positions youth as experts
- Youth collaborate with adults in scientific inquiry, expanding the sphere of knowledge production



(Anderson, 2020; Call-Cummings, et al, 2022; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Ozer et al., 2012)

7 undergraduates

- 3 universities
- 4 Black, 2 white, 1 Latina

18 middle school students

- 3 schools
- 15 Black, 3 Latinx
- 13 girls, 5 boys

Participants

Methods & Analysis

- 98 undergraduate journal entries
- Undergraduate focus group
- Student focus group
- Final student presentations

Results

Shifts in Undergraduate Experience & Outcomes: Pedagogy

“I had to...basically create the classroom, the environment that I want the students to have. So what do I think they need next? Really tailored to them... this is your class, these are your students, you have to make it for them.”

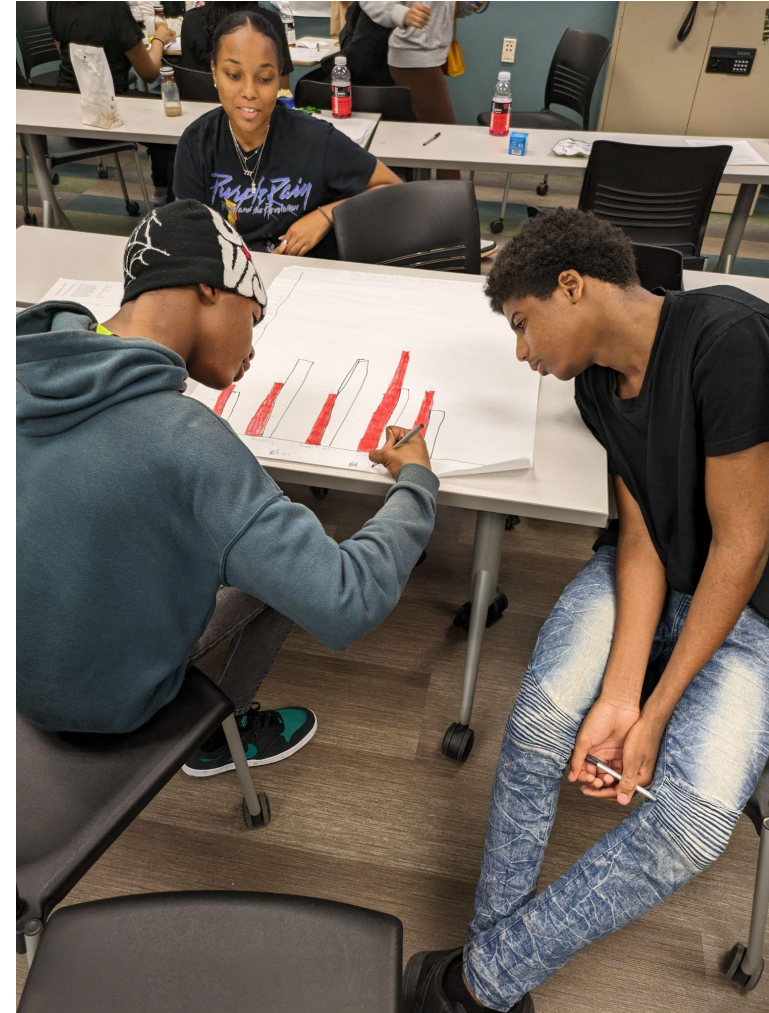
Undergraduate Focus Group

Results

Shifts in Undergraduate Experience & Outcomes: Critical Thinking

“The students’ responses highlighted the emotional toll of stereotypes about their intelligence (not being ‘smart’) and perceptions of staff turnover. This reshaped our research focus... The students’ candidness emphasized the importance of centering our study on their experiences.”

Undergraduate journal entry



Results

Shifts in Program Structure: Responding to Student Feedback



“We particularly noticed a heated discussion about cartoon shows and anime so we decided to do a mock focus group based on cartoon shows.”

Undergraduate Journal Entry

Results

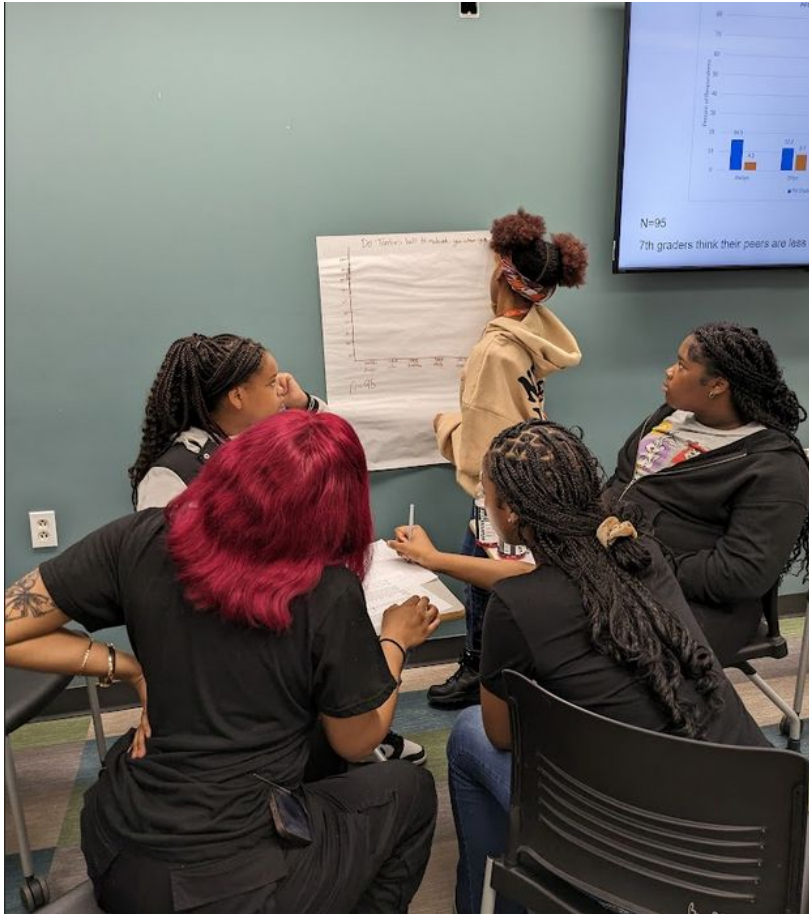
Shifts in Program Structure: Focus on Emotional Wellbeing

“[A student] wasn’t there Tuesday, since he was suspended. Thursday he seemed upset. I asked him if he was alright and he said yes.... I plan to follow up with him this week, because I think the suspension really impacted him.”

Undergraduate Journal Entry

Results

Shifts in Power Dynamics: Power Sharing



“I’ve learned the importance of listening to students’ authentic voices and adapting research strategies accordingly. Moving forward, I’m eager to delve deeper into their experiences and explore avenues of support for a more comprehensive study.”

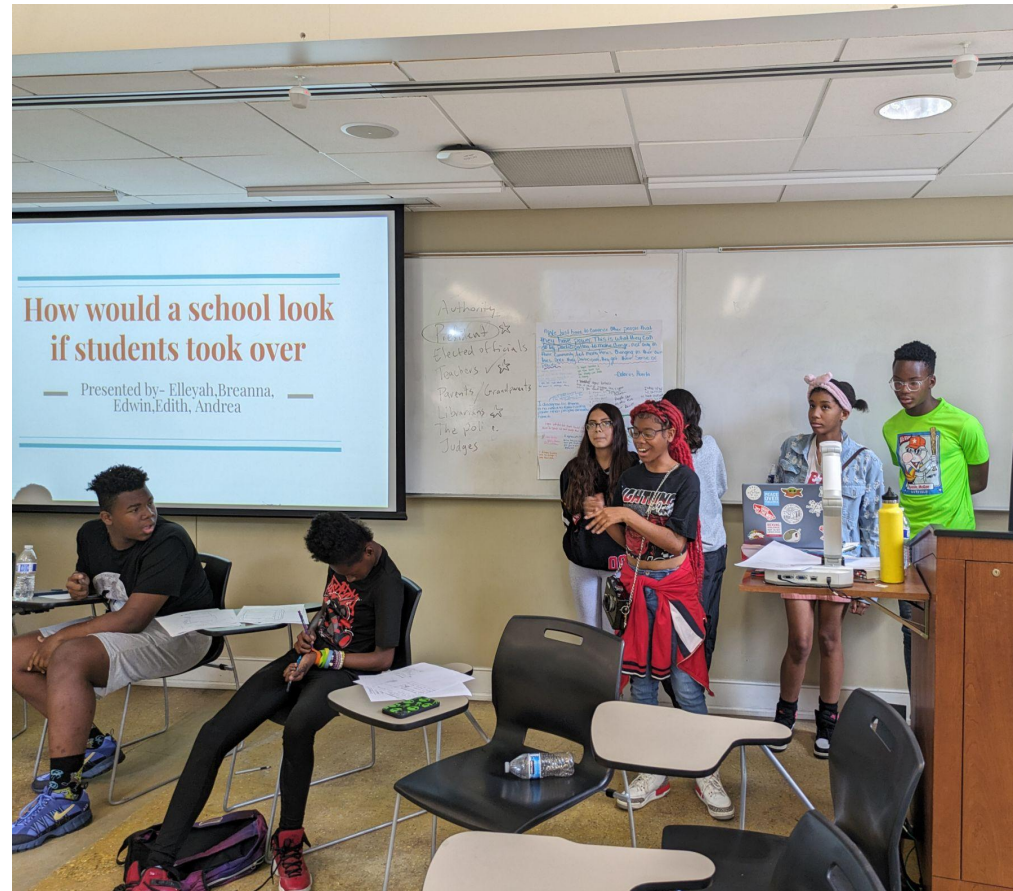
Undergraduate Journal Entry

Results

Shifts in Project Goals: Transformation

“Ideally, it would go further, and extend into the schools, and then spread from the schools that... Not just ones we’re working with, but other schools in the New Orleans area, and [those schools would] make these changes with the research that we’ve done in mind...”

Undergraduate Focus Group



Results

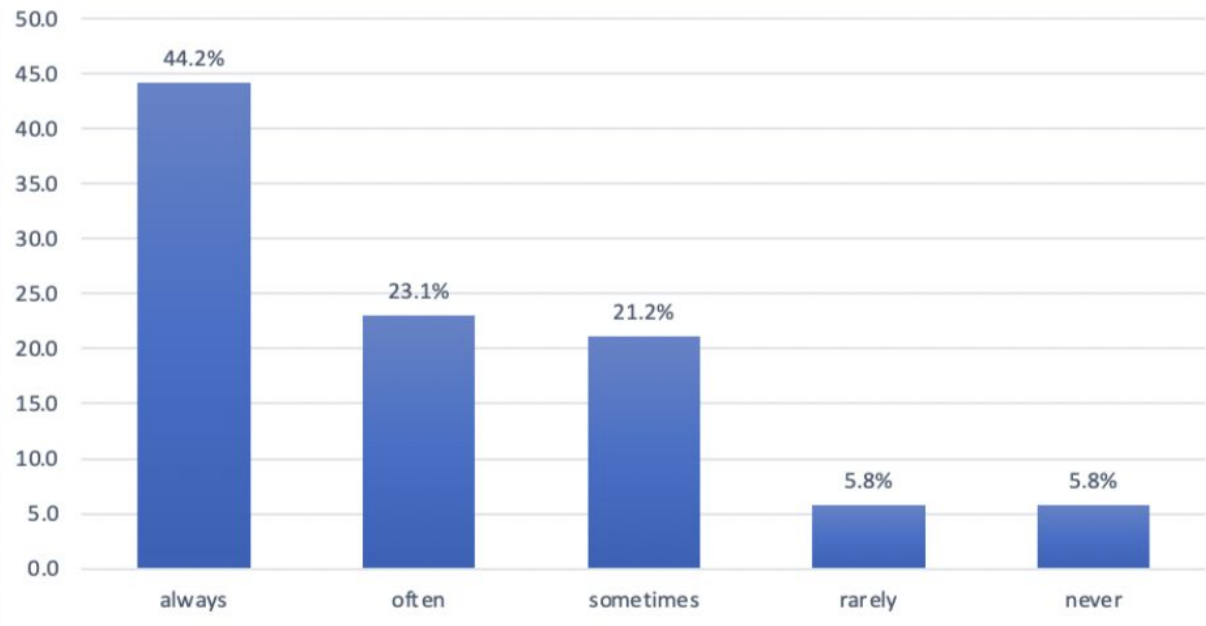
Shifts in Project Goals: Transformation

8th Grade

The majority of the students that took our survey think that school punishment causes them or other students to be unmotivated.

We focused on this question because we think this is, or could be, a great reason of unmotivation at our school.

Do you think school punishment causes students to be unmotivated?



Results

Shifts in Project Goals: Transformation

“In school, they teach us math, science, history, social studies, ELA, but [at YPAR] they taught us about the different power systems, racism, sexism, adultism, there are a lot of isms, ableism.... So, like, yeah, they would never teach us about any of that at school.”

Student Focus Group



Implications

- YPAR offers a path toward critical service learning by:
 - Shifting undergraduate experience and outcomes
 - Shifting program structure
 - Shifting power dynamics
 - Shifting program goals
- Challenges
 - Resource-intensive
 - Undergraduate limitations
 - Unpredictability of students' lives
 - Partnership with schools

Future Research



- How could YPAR programs lead to substantive changes in school environments?
- Can these programs be sustained over time?