Youth Participatory Action Research and School Counseling Practice:

A School-Wide Framework for Student Well-Being

Laura Smith, Katharine Beck, Erinn Bernstein, and Pasha Dashtguard
Teachers College, Columbia University

Abstract

The professional school counseling literature has proposed innovative frameworks for practice including social justice/multicultural approaches, school-wide counseling initiatives, and school-community partnerships. In this article, we propose a programmatic intervention that can be a vehicle for all three: the implementation of school-based youth participatory action research (YPAR). In this article, we profile the use of YPAR in schools, link it to components of school counseling, and identify obstacles in the initiation of YPAR by school counselors.

Keywords: participatory action research, adolescents, school-wide program

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School-community collaborations hold promise for the multifaceted enhancement of school counseling practice as they simultaneously promote student well-being: they can potentially "create prevention and intervention programs that foster educational resilience in children; bridge cultural gaps among schools, diverse families, and communities; address students' academic, personal, college, and career concerns; and promote empowerment of students, their families, and their communities (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2010, p. 1). In this article, we present our contention that youth participatory action research (YPAR) projects are a vehicle by which school counselors can initiate such collaborations within schools. Participatory action research (PAR) itself comprises collaboration at its core: it is an approach to the creation of knowledge by which professionals do not conduct studies *on* community members or youth. Rather, they partner *with* community members and youth to identify issues of local importance, study them in their socio-historical context, select methodologies together, co-own and co-interpret the results, and collaboratively develop prosocial action plans based upon the results (Kidd & Kral, 2005). Not only are these ventures fully collaborative, they also comprise ongoing dialogue and self-reflection on the parts of all members of the team, so that members have the opportunity to learn about themselves and develop new skills in a respectful, egalitarian context. PAR and YPAR are both, of course, characterized by these statements; YPAR is simply PAR when the co-researchers are youth.

The development of the school-wide YPAR model to be presented here emerged from our experience within two related strands of research. First, as a team of

researchers interested in learning about participatory approaches, we conducted a content analysis of the PAR literature published between the years of 2000 and 2010 (see Smith, Rosenzweig, & Schmidt, 2010 for a description of this analysis). Working from the results of that study, we were able to learn about the ways that counselors and others have employed PAR and YPAR to create new knowledge about social issues that represents the wisdom and perspectives of those who are most often included in research only as subjects. Second, our team has put this learning to work in 17 different participatory projects, with 11 of them taking place in schools (e.g., Smith, Davis, & Bhowmik, 2010). During this time, members of our research team have worked as co-researchers alongside middle school and high school students to study issues of the students' choosing – issues that ranged from the development of a high school sexual health curriculum, to images of women in the media, to colorism in underserved communities. The actions by which our student co-researchers conveyed the results of their studies have included presentations for school administrators, photographic exhibitions, spoken word performances, and the organization of community meetings.

In the short space of a single article, our goal is *not* to offer a "YPAR how-to;" details regarding the step-by-step unfolding of particular YPAR projects can be found in the publications that will be cited along the way. Rather, by sharing our approach to school-based YPAR, we hope to convey its complementarity to the work of school counselors and its potential benefits for students, as well as some of the lessons that we have learned along the way. As a backdrop for the discussion, we will begin by profiling the extant literature on the implementation of YPAR in school settings. Next, we will outline the conceptual correspondences between school counseling practice and

YPAR initiatives. Next, we will present key elements in the implementation of school-based YPAR, and finally, we will discuss specific practical considerations and obstacles in that process.

Participatory Research in Schools: A Look at the Literature

The inherently flexible and inclusive nature of PAR and YPAR makes these approaches both practical and visionary tools for school-based practitioners. School-based YPAR and PAR have been implemented for the study of individual student outcomes, including youth empowerment and development of critical consciousness (McIntyre, 2000; Smith et al., 2010; Stewart, Riecken, Scott, Tanaka, & Riecken, 2008), for program and curriculum development (Gosin, Dustman, Drapeau, & Harthun, 2003; Leff, Costigan, & Power, 2004; Stein et al., 2002), for community-level outcomes (Morsillo & Prilleltensky, 2007), and for professional development and reform for school personnel (Dick, 2011; Luck & Webb, 2009; Rowell, 2006). This section will profile schools' use of PAR and/or YPAR in each of these areas, along with other aspects of school-based participatory practices.

PAR and Individual Outcomes

School-based PAR and YPAR projects frequently incorporate goals that relate to students' well-being in academic, emotional, cognitive, and social domains. Such goals have included youth empowerment and critical consciousness, often with young co-researchers who live in poverty and/or in other marginalized contexts (McIntyre, 2000; Ozer & Douglas, 2012). McIntyre (2000), for example, conducted a YPAR collaboration with youth in the context of urban violence. Through the creation of a safe space for dialogue, students were able to share their personal narratives and perspectives and

gain a better critical understanding of the sociopolitical and historical factors contributing to the issues in their community. Together, these university and youth co-researchers brainstormed ways to improve their surrounding neighborhood, and by doing so became active agents of change. McIntyre (2006) later suggested that by allowing students to actively participate in their education and in their community, YPAR interventions can be a tool for students to develop feelings of individual and collective agency, particularly in low-income schools where opportunities for student agency may be absent.

A number of YPAR projects, including the aforementioned project by McIntyre (2000), have utilized *photovoice* (Wang & Burris, 1997), or community photography, in the participatory process. By taking photos of their own community, youth are encouraged to engage in critical conversations about their community, often resulting in feelings of empowerment (McIntyre, 2000; Smith, Bratini, & Appio, 2012). Using photovoice and other media in YPAR projects is also a means by which young people can share their knowledge and experiences with other community members (McIntyre, 2000; Foster-Fishman, Law, Lichty, & Aoun, 2010). Stewart et al. (2008) utilized videography in their collaboration with indigenous youth, in order to encourage a critical understanding of health issues affecting their community; likewise, youth in Arizona used poetry and photography in their participatory action research as part of Cammarota and Aguilera's Social Justice Education Project (SJEP) (2012).

PAR and School-Community Outcomes

Morsillo and Prilleltensky (2007) suggested that YPAR can lead to increased wellness at individual, group and community levels, describing YPAR as a *psychopolitically valid* approach to research with youth. That is, the YPAR approach

"take[s] into account power dynamics in psychological and political domains affecting oppression, liberation, and wellness at the personal, group, and community levels" (Morsillo & Prilleltensky, 2007, p. 726). Such an increase in community wellness has occurred in several past YPAR projects, where youth used research to conduct actions such as the creation and dispersal of a booklet concerning how youth and organizations can work together for community betterment (Foster-Fishman et al., 2010); the development of a community clean-up program (McIntyre, 2000); and planning a conference about local environmental concerns (Mordock & Krasny, 2001).

YPAR has facilitated school-based program development, with school-age youth helping to create and/or evaluate school based programs, targeting areas such as bullying prevention (Leff et al., 2004), drug use prevention (Gosin et al., 2003), and improving the mental health of immigrant children (Stein et al., 2002). Several authors have also described PAR and/or YPAR groups aimed at strengthening parent-school-community relationships and improving communication between key school stakeholders (Ditrano & Silverstein, 2006; Ho, 2003; Snell, Miguel, & East, 2009). Leff et al. (2004) asserted that collaborative research with school community members, as seen in PAR, is vital when developing school-wide interventions. The authors note that practices developed through such collaboration may be more socially valid, and thus more likely to be implemented successfully over time (Leff et al., 2004).

Who Is Doing School-Based YPAR?

Many PAR and YPAR partnerships in school settings involve university researchers, students, and/or other school community members, with university researchers often facilitating the process. These collaborations have frequently included

graduate students in programs of psychology or education working independently or alongside faculty supervisors (e.g., McIntyre, 2006; Ozer at al., 2008; Ozer, Ritterman, & Wanis, 2010; Smith et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2012). McIntyre (2000) suggested that graduate student participation in YPAR is one way to better prepare future educators and to address what McIntyre described as the "deficiency" (p. 148) of higher-educational institutions in preparing educators for working in low-income and urban settings. In addition to partnerships of university researchers and youth, other PAR collaborations have included university researchers and teachers. Rhodes and Camic (2006) described a PAR project where university researchers worked with middle school teachers to study and improve school climate. The authors asserted that pedagogical reform based on community psychology tenants, such as the sharing of power and a move away from the top-down approach of most educational institutions, "has special meaning for teachers, upon whom school interventions are often thrust with few opportunities for input" (Rhodes & Camic, 2006, p. 44).

YPAR-based pedagogy has also been proposed, featuring at its center research collaboration between teachers and students in the classroom (e.g., Lewis, 2004; Stovall & Delgado, 2009). Lewis (2004) conducted a long-term environmental education project in an alternative New York City school, entitled Project Grow. In this initiative, teachers, community members, and students created and sustained a YPAR project for the purpose of environmental education. Lewis, a school social worker, explained that students were positioned as equals to teachers and adult community members in order to help develop students' personal agency, and to "[help] students learn how to make tangible, physical changes in the world" (p. 98).

As for school counselors' involvement with PAR, Ho (2002) discussed the potential for action research to enable school-based mental health workers to highlight their leadership positions in the school system; similarly, authors have suggested that school counselors should view action research as a professional tool, as school teachers often do, to increase accountability and professional standards for the school counseling profession (Rowell, 2006; Dahir & Stone, 2009; Luck & Webb, 2009). A small number articles indicate that counselors in school settings are beginning to consider YPAR among the programming tools at their disposal (e.g., Smith, Davis, et al., 2010); one of the few examples includes Zeng and Silverstein's (2012) application of a YPAR framework to help youth cope with natural disaster. The scarcity of literature in this area suggests that school counselors have not yet envisioned YPAR as a means to encourage the positive emotional growth and well-being of students.

In the next section, we advance the case for YPAR's place in the school counseling toolbox. We present YPAR as a growth oriented, developmental counseling intervention that has the potential to facilitate wellness, feelings of agency, critical consciousness, and empowerment, and that can, in fact, provide a framework for such development throughout the school community. Following the presentation of the conceptual foundations of this argument, we outline a model for school-based YPAR programming, and finally, we anticipate practical considerations regarding school counselors' implementation of YPAR.

Conceptualizing YPAR and School Counseling Practice

Given that participatory approaches are most often discussed as research methodologies rather than as counseling or developmental programming, many school

counselors may wonder how YPAR fits into their professional repertoire. Some of the relevant linkages can be expressed via multicultural approaches to school counseling practice, the developmental benefits of providing opportunities for students to find their voices and express their own perspectives, the opportunity for school counselors to interact with others in a power-sharing collaboration, and facilitation of the transition to college and beyond.

YPAR and Multicultural/Social Justice Expansions of School Counselors' Roles

The case for YPAR as school counseling programming is rooted in multicultural (e.g., Ponterotto, Mendelowitz, & Collabolletta, 2008), and social justice/empowerment (e.g., Hipilito-Delgado & Lee, 2007) approaches to school counseling practice. These approaches feature the promotion of multicultural awareness, critical-consciousness-raising, and social activism as part of school counselors' roles, in keeping with the premise that oppression itself is a mental health pathogen. According to such models, the role of school counselors should ideally include facilitating school-wide social justice interventions while expanding the role of school counselors to include a focus on environmental or sociocultural forces. Such emphases are ideally to be interwoven with the traditional school counseling focus on individual issues that may affect students' development and wellbeing (Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahon, 2010). YPAR offers a framework for this endeavor, providing a vehicle by which students can combine civic engagement, critical thinking, and problem-solving along with a forum to vocalize daily frustration. These possibilities have been demonstrated via youth-led learning and projects (Garwick, Kristine, Peterson-Hickey & Hellerstedt, 2008; Ho, 2002; McIntyre 2000), in which students were allowed the content areas that interested them the most.

Through school-based YPAR projects, school counselors can also more fully realize the roles specified by multicultural and empowerment theories of school counseling practice, while also adhering to the social justice counselor-educator model described by Green, McCollum, and Hays (2008). The paradigm presented by these authors encourages school counselors to include in their practice "not only an ideology of multicultural competence, ethical standards, and social advocacy, but the social action necessary to achieve advocacy competence" (p. 26). In this way, YPAR provides a roadmap by which counselors can invite students to experience their own agency and citizenship by guiding them from thoughtful discussion to action. Through such action, students, school counselors, and participants throughout the school can create opportunities to serve students' communities – all of which can facilitate students' self-efficacy and civil engagement (Greenhalgh, Russell, Dunkley, Boynton, Lefford, & Chopra, 2006).

Social justice and empowerment models of school counseling practice also suggest that school counselors can promote well-being and empowerment in students by facilitating their ability to understand and analyze the world around them (Hipiloto-Delgado & Lee, 2007). Counselors can help facilitate this ability – to which Freire (1970) referred as *critical consciousness* – by providing historical and social analyses from diverse cultural perspectives. Freire explained that "people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (italics in the original; p. 252). As students develop critical consciousness, they are better able to consider the complexity of the social forces at

work in their lives. In turn, this awareness allows students to begin to understand the relationship between social forces and individual and community ills, which may reflect the impact of oppression rather than inherent deficits in their communities. By providing students with a process by which to dispute internalized notions of inferiority, YPAR offers therapeutic as well as educational benefits. By facilitating YPAR teams, school counselors can impact relatively large groups of students, creating opportunities for them to empower themselves, teach each other, and affect their communities.

YPAR and the Creation of a Space for Student Voices

One of the mechanisms by which systemic oppression damages the emotional well-being of people and youth in marginalized groups is by effectively silencing them within mainstream cultural and political life. This silencing is accomplished at a number of levels: young people in communities of color and poor communities are frequently represented in the media as chaotic and dangerous (Sanchez, 2010, Dorfman & Schiraldi, 2001; Mastro & Greenberg, 2000; Rodriguez, 1996; Yosso, 2002), and are largely physically excluded from full democratic participation as citizens (Smith, in press). It stands to reason, therefore, that emotional well-being might be strengthened by interventions that counteract the effects of oppression, specifically these forces that silence youth in marginal groups. YPAR constitutes such an intervention, in that it provides a platform for young people to discover and use their own voices, and be heard by others.

Youth PAR co-researchers have indeed reported such benefits. Smith et al. (2012) described a photovoice project in which students documented everyday experiences in their community. The university researchers interviewed their youth co-

researchers at the end of this project, at which time the teenagers described such benefits as observing their own strengths and finding a voice. One co-researcher reported, "Now, when I have something to say, I say it!" (Smith et al., 2012, p. 9). Gosin et al. (2003) also reported on the benefits of YPAR for students. In this project, the authors worked with students to co-create a drug prevention curriculum for their school in which students designed logos, wrote/directed/acted in videos promoting awareness, and researched drug- and alcohol-related information. The project appeared to be beneficial to the student body, with data suggesting that the co-created curriculum led to a 16% reduction in alcohol use, as well as a decrease in the perception that drug/alcohol use was pervasive among their peers (Gosin et al., 2003). Thus, these youth co-researchers effectively contributed to their school community while also ostensibly acquiring the developmental benefits of YPAR for themselves.

YPAR and Power-Sharing

Counselors who are influenced by social justice ideals can find it difficult to identify appropriate programming and/or research vehicles by which to enact these social justice commitments. In particular, theories about the colonization of research and scholarship (L.T. Smith, 1999) illuminate the operations of mainstream research itself to reproduce systemic power-over dynamics – an aspect of critical theory that is as relevant in a school setting as anywhere else. YPAR offers school counselors and others a pathway to subvert those systemic dynamics to some extent, bringing to life Freire's (1970) educational paradigm of the teacher-student among student-teachers. That is, YPAR corresponds well to Freire's vision of vibrant, culturally-relevant learning that is co-created and co-enacted by empowered collaborators who respect what each

person brings to the endeavor. In a YPAR project, students, counselors, teachers and other possible co-researchers choose together a subject for group inquiry, and as they proceed to develop their project, both youth and their co-researchers learn from each other. Experiences and perspectives that counselors and teachers may lack are invited into the discussion by students. By sharing power in this way, school counselors expose students to a new learning experience that runs contrary to the passive, "banking" models of education (Freire, 1970) that characterize many conventional classrooms.

YPAR and the Transition to College and Beyond

Even when the opportunity to gain necessary skills is available, some students do not envision themselves attending college and/or pursuing professional careers. YPAR is an intervention that inherently encourages students' aspirations by providing a venue in which students assume a forward-looking responsibility for their own learning. Through YPAR, youth can eventually see themselves as consumers and producers of knowledge, and thus may begin to imagine themselves as someday being members of a university campus community. A fundamental aspect of YPAR is the instruction in and practice of research, a set of skills that can help prepare students for the college admission process itself. Students are taught about the gathering of data, the synthesis and interpretation of results, and the presentation of findings in a clear and precise fashion. In the process, students not only learn these valuable skills, but are given the opportunity to see themselves as successes in a school context. As one of the youth researchers who collaborated with Smith, Davis, et al. (2010) reported,

> Having to do it yourself is... it gives you more experience than somebody telling you to do it. When I came here, it was like, you guys are giving me an opportunity

to be what I want to be and to do what I want to do in the way that I want to do it ... to get to where I want to go. (p. 179)

School-Wide YPAR: Key Elements and Questions

Our work has demonstrated that school counselors can facilitate YPAR groups in a number of different ways within their school communities. As we will explain, the precise configuration can be amended flexibly depending on what arrangement works best for a particular school. Moreover, a single school counselor need not directly facilitate every YPAR team. Once the model has been implemented in a school, a school counselor can co-facilitate YPAR projects with teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, parents, or school counseling trainees; later on, these co-facilitators can work together with ongoing input and consultation from the school counselor. YPAR thus has the potential to infuse the practice of school counselors as it infuses the life of the school community. Elemental aspects of initiating YPAR programming are indicated by the four overarching questions below.

Is Your School Right for YPAR Infusion?

Different schools obviously have differing missions and cultures. For YPAR to be successful, the values that underlie YPAR need to coincide with school administrators' vision for the school – or at least, not be precluded by it. Even when the school environment is not initially conducive to YPAR, we have discovered that many members of the school community will be excited by the potential of YPAR once they have the opportunity to see it in action. School counselors may already have ideas about which of their colleagues would be likely allies for an early YPAR undertaking. Having begun an initial collaboration, this first project can be foundational for others to follow. We have

discovered that when the school community is exposed to the frequently eloquent, sophisticated, and far-reaching results that young people create, many are moved to support it.

Where Will YPAR Live in the School?

As mentioned, we have configured our school-based YPAR projects in a number of different ways. We have conducted YPAR with an entire high school social studies class; the teacher allowed us to use one class period a week for the activity. We have offered YPAR as an after-school activity and as a "lunch bunch" meeting group. At one school, it was added to a menu of activities that students attended during a once-weekly club/organizational period. At a middle school, it was listed as one of many community service-learning projects from which students could choose. The number of students in these YPAR groups has varied widely: the classroom groups included approximately 25 students, one of the after-school groups included only five, and the others were all somewhere in between. School counselors should explore, then, which combination of such venues might offer the most possibility at their school.

How Will YPAR Be Co-facilitated?

In our model, YPAR is always co-facilitated by a pair of counselors, teachers, and/or other professionals who work with a group of students for at least one school year. We refer to all these members of the YPAR team as co-researchers; sometimes we differentiate between student co-researchers and counselor (or other) co-researchers. We find that a pair of co-facilitators is able to work most effectively with the group: they can support each other, help each other process group and/or student dynamics when necessary, and also model for the group important skills, such as giving

and hearing feedback. In particular, co-facilitators can model an ability to speak and receive commentary about their own sociocultural identities. The dialogue within YPAR teams usually spirals from broad social, cultural, and civic themes to local school/community issues to individual concerns, and back again. As such, co-facilitators need to be able to take part in conversations about race, ethnicity, and other aspects of identity. Co-facilitators can demonstrate the skills involved in these discussions through their dialogue with students and each other. Obviously, this description makes clear the need for a high level of multicultural competence on the parts of YPAR co-facilitators (see Smith & Romero, 2010).

How Will YPAR Be Administered?

We envision school counselors as the ideal initiators for YPAR infusion within the school community. The school counselor, however, cannot fully implement this programming on his/her own. We propose an eventual committee of school-wide YPAR facilitators that includes school counselors along with teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, parents, and interested others. This committee could establish a meeting schedule whereby they could share experiences, provide peer supervision, and solve problems together. Staying true to the philosophy of YPAR, the committee should furthermore include student representation.

Practical Considerations for the Implementation of YPAR

Identifying and Selecting Co-Facilitators

The identification (and eventual invitation) of co-facilitators for YPAR begins with school counselors' knowledge of their colleagues' training, skills, and interests. Individuals in various roles within schools have the potential to contribute in important

ways to YPAR projects, and counselors should accordingly forge and foster these partnerships. Reporting on their own school-based YPAR work, Gosin et al. (2003) commented that creating a "horizontal working relationship among teachers, schools and curriculum" can "help to create a non-threatening environment in which teachers, students and other collaborators feel confident taking ownership of the curriculum" (p.377).

Optimizing the Contributions of Other School-Based Counseling Professionals

A YPAR facilitator within a school should ideally be knowledgeable about research methodologies and YPAR theoretical principles, and also be able to facilitate joint collaboration and solving problems with the stakeholders (Ho, 2002). Many of the schools in which PAR projects have been conducted have also benefited from a facilitator's experience in the local community and/or the specific student population (Stein et al., 2002). Given these parameters, school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and guidance counselors are likely to have the training and the experience to effectively facilitate YPAR: all have advanced degrees that typically require some training in research methodologies, multicultural work, and group and individual counseling (Flaherty, Garrison, Waxman, Uris, Keys, Glass-Siegel, & Weist, 1998). School counselors should welcome and utilize the skills and expertise that other human service professionals at the school can provide as co-facilitators. For example, psychologists and social workers are trained in process-oriented approaches; social workers specifically may be able to garner outside support and resources, and can help mobilize the resources of a community to achieve goals (Flaherty et al., 1998).

Teachers as Co-Researchers

Needless to say, not all teachers will have the interest or the schedule flexibility to develop and implement projects outside of a set curriculum. Gosin et al. (2003) found that the traditional hierarchy that has existed within school systems, in which "governing boards, superintendents and principals have the final say in decisions regarding their schools" (p. 376) can disempower teachers, potentially leaving them unaccustomed to and/or wary of the flexibility and organic developmental path that a YPAR project follows. Similarly, teachers may feel constrained to adhere to traditional teaching practices until they receive their licenses and/or tenure (Lewis, 2004). Nevertheless, teachers can be important allies in implementing PAR projects. Teachers obviously include many creative individuals who are attracted to the autonomy and expressive opportunity afforded within lesson development and cross-curricular projects. YPAR offers similar outlets, and its open-ended nature can be empowering and exciting for teachers. Moreover, teachers have access to classroom space that can comfortably accommodate a group, while psychologists, social workers, and counselors often have limited space that may only fit a few people. Other advantages are teachers' existing rapport with their students; their training in social justice issues, particularly among those with English, social studies, and history specialties; and the potential relevancy of PAR topics to the courses they teach, which can be used to reinforce their students' learning goals (Lewis, 2004).

Barriers and Pitfalls in YPAR Implementation

Power Dynamics Within Schools

Any school-based collaboration such as YPAR can present challenges. To name

only a few, conflicts may emerge around a) competition for rank, status and limited resources; b) clashing backgrounds, perspectives, priorities, and expectations; c) differing systems of evaluation and authority; d) language and terminology; e) the time and space to meet; and f) traditional values of working alone within schools (Adelman & Taylor, 1993; Dryfoos, 1994; Koeske, Koeske, & Mallinger ,1993; Lewis, 2004; Waxman, Weist, & Benson, 1999). Each of these limitations has the potential to restrict communication and to limit the success and scope of a YPAR initiative. Flaherty et al. (1998) suggested developing project descriptions that underscore the collaborative nature of YPAR and the roles within it, with the object of defining the roles of each member to create complementarity rather than competing goals. Gosin et al. (2003) noticed that researchers must address the power structure of the school community before they can adequately incorporate the voices of teachers, students, and others. Certainly, one of the first hurdles that school counselors will face is gaining approval for the from the school's administration (McIntyre, 2000). Anticipating such challenges will not prevent them from hindering the implementation of YPAR (or of any new programming initiative), but it will allow school counselors to approach the project as strategically as possible.

Accountability

With schools frequently being graded according to inflexible state and national curriculum standards, principals and other administrators may be hesitant to sign on to a project in which clear outcomes cannot be specified in advance. Such formal, pre-planned measures of accountability contradict the fluid and open-ended nature of YPAR curriculum, which should begin with an idea and a commitment to a process that must

be allowed to unfold in keeping with students' arc of learning and interest (Lewis, 2004).

Such a process is substantively different from other collaborations that allow for the

input of multiple stakeholders. For example, Stein et al. (2002) described a project in

which university and school partners collectively created an evidence-based clinical

intervention to incorporate the values and needs of the administration. Adherence to a

pre-established project goal raises questions about the extent to which a project actually

constitutes PAR or YPAR, in which students actively co-create the research questions,

the study, and the resulting action (rather than providing input into a project proposed by

others). McIntyre (2000) found a compromise by developing a preliminary framework

that allowed her to begin a process of dialogue with teachers, participants, community

members, and colleagues without restricting the eventual project.

Clearly, the unfolding, student-driven nature of the YPAR process can present a

problem for decision-makers who want specific, targeted goals in advance. For that

reason, YPAR projects that have taken place are often located in schools where

principals are known for their open-mindedness, and who understand that the ultimate

goals of the project cannot be certain until students co-create them (Deslandes, 2006).

In our experience, most (but not all) administrators have been responsive to our

explanation that it was impossible to describe in advance precisely what a project would

entail, since our student co-researchers would be creating the answer to that question

along with us.

Time Constraints

Time constraints among counselors and teachers alike can limit their ability to

implement any new programming, much less an ongoing activity such as YPAR. The

issue of time allotment can be controversial at any stage of the project, including the early stages when school counselors are attempting to propose YPAR to the administration, educate the school community about YPAR, and recruit participants. At these times, YPAR researchers felt discouraged by the isolation they felt when members of the school community did not appear interested (Lewis, 2004). Successful YPAR projects have taken place in communities that are characterized by high levels of volunteerism among administration, staff, parents, and community (Deslandes, 2006). Creating and maintaining a school-wide collaboration requires a substantial amount of time and energy for counselors and requires "willingness among all participants to not only become educated about the priorities of other stakeholders, but also to work to achieve compromise that will allow all participants to gain from participation in the project" (Stein et al., 2002, p. 324).

One way that project facilitators have attempted to avoid the time and room-scheduling conflicts that exist with school-day meetings is to hold YPAR meetings after school. This plan is often favored by principals, since classrooms are more readily available and students do not have to miss class to participate in the meetings. However, Stein et al. (2002) found that participation declined sharply when meetings were no longer held during mandatory school hours, and attributed this decline it to potential competition with other after-school programs, family responsibilities, and the necessity of travelling home later in the afternoon. Finally, additional meeting time is often necessary, as facilitators may need planning time and/or to process their own personal responses to the experiences encountered in the group. As McIntyre (2000) observed, the YPAR process comprises being mindful of one's personal history and life

experiences as they pertain to and interact with the group's topic, and time to reflect upon critical YPAR dialogue can easily go neglected with the busy schedules of school workers.

Age of Co-Researchers

YPAR projects have special value during the formative period of adolescence as they transform students into young researchers, constructors of knowledge, and change agents, and the process can be an exciting one for everyone involved. At the same time, teenagers can be expected to occasionally lose focus, prompting some YPAR facilitators to provide occasional structured activities and resources. This approach can be tremendously helpful to the process if used judiciously; at the same time, overreliance upon structured activities dilutes the YPAR process by positioning the counselor as the orchestrator of the team's process and agenda. Other roadblocks related to researchers' youthfulness include the garnering of permission for field trips and/or permission for outside parties to participate in project implementation, depending on school rules and policies.

Summary

YPAR collaborations present both challenges and rewards for school counseling professionals. Our experiences have persuaded us that YPAR merits consideration by school counselors as a promising programmatic intervention that provides for the enactment of many of the goals and values currently under discussion in the school counseling literature: a) YPAR is a close fit with multicultural/social justice approaches to school counseling; b) YPAR dovetails with conceptions of school counseling practice as incorporating school-wide interventions for student development and well-being

(Sink, 2011), c) YPAR can comprise beneficial partnerships among schools, parents, and communities (Bryan & Griffin, 2010; Holcomb-McCoy, 2010); and d) YPAR allows for the building of bridges between academic attainment and emotional well-being (Bailey & Bradbury-Bailey, 2010). As importantly, the observations of our youth co-researchers continue to bear witness to the potentially transformative effect of YPAR in their lives as they experience what they have to offer the world:

> Now I look at, I look at the big picture. Instead of just seeing a bunch of trash bags that haven't been picked up in like three days, I see a problem that needs fixing—and then through that problem, I see a solution. (Smith, 2010, p. 13x)

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