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Abstract

Drawing on the work of critical scholars, this study is guided by the idea that systems and structures are malleable, and young people can challenge the conditions and policies which inform their lives. Utilizing qualitative methods, I investigated how nine adult youth workers from three different non-profit organizations supported youth of color as they engaged in social justice activism. I found that participants shared fundamental strengths-based beliefs about youth and their communities; however, their processes of engagement in social justice activism were different at each organization. This paper outlines processes participants engaged to support youth of color on their journeys to develop critical consciousness and to engage in social action.

Keywords: social justice youth development, advocacy, youth activism

Introduction

"The trust of the people in the leaders reflects the confidence of the leaders in the people."
—Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire—activist, educator, and contributor to the body of knowledge we know as critical pedagogy—is well known for his theories and practice of problem-posing education. I spent much of my graduate career working to understand what he truly meant by problem-posing education, and I came to realize that this concept is complex and multifaceted, and the dynamic meaning of problem-posing education shifts with the human experience. Ultimately, to me the essence of reaching praxis means humans have opportunities to engage in deep reflection to understand themselves and their contexts, and as people transform themselves, they can also transform society. This process is ongoing and recursive.

Drawing on the work of critical scholars, this study is guided by the idea that systems and structures are malleable, and that people can challenge the conditions and policies that inform their contexts and lives (Freire, 2010; Wellmer, 2014; Patton, 2015). Using critical theory as a foundation, this paper will highlight findings from one qualitative research project that was guided by this research question, in urban communities: how do youth development workers engage adolescent youth in social justice activism? Social justice activism is defined as "taking action to effect social change" (Permanent Culture Now, 2018, p.1).

Review of Literature

Researchers in the field of youth development use a variety of terms to define youth development practices. There is not a definitive term that defines youth development in the United States, but there are similarities in definitions that include supporting youth as they develop and providing opportunities for them (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Walker, Gambone & Walker, 2011). The community and organizational settings in which youth work is performed, the perspectives and ideologies adopted by youth workers, and the facilitation of different types of youth work add to the diverse nature of youth development. As a result, a variety of youth development practices have grown in a wide range of community settings (Wood, Westwood, & Thompson, 2015).

Youth development ideologies are constructed by principles that inform the discipline. In the field of youth development, recognized ideologies are presented in Table 1 and include: risk, resilience and prevention; positive, civic (Roholt, et al., 2013; Pittman, et al., 2003), and social justice youth development (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, Ginwright, 2006).

Table 1

Practices in the Realm of Risk Resilience and Prevention; and Positive, Civic, and Social Justice Youth Development

Risk, Resilience and Prevention	Positive Youth Development	Civic Youth Development	Social Justice Youth Development
Risk, resilience, and prevention focuses on identifying problems with children and adolescents and intervening with education. Adults are typically responsible for identifying problems and for leading children and adolescents to understand the importance of preventing risky behavior. This model is a top-down approach to youth development. Historically, Risk, Resilience, and Prevention has been the primary ideology of many youth development programs, and is still the foundation of many youth development programs today. This ideology focuses on managing children and adolescents and preventing risky behaviors (Pittman, et al., 2003). .	In 1992, the Carnegie Corporation and the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development published a report that outlined the importance of supporting children and adolescents during out-of-school time. The report focused on youth from families who navigated poverty and who identified as people of color. The report is recognized as a factor in the shift from viewing children and adolescents as "at risk" toward a more positive approach to youth development. Positive youth development is a child-centered and strengths-based approach to youth development (Pittman, et al., 2003).	The additional criterion of engaging youth in meaningful community service is the main distinction between positive youth development and civic youth development. Followers of civic youth development suggest children and adolescents are empowered to challenge mainstream culture and to change society. Civic youth development highlights the development of democratic citizens and supports children and adolescents as they explore civic issues that they find meaningful. Working with groups of peers and adults, children and adolescents build common understandings of topics and make decisions together (Roholt, et al., 2013).	Social justice youth development (SJYD) organizations provide spaces for youth of color to transform inequitable structures and systems that directly impact them. Through investigating themselves and society, young people of color, alongside adult allies, work to understand and change themselves and their communities (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Ginwright & James, 2002; Ginwright, 2006).

Social Justice Youth Development, A Framework

McDaniel (2017) summarized the components of the SJYD model as (a) exploring identity and thinking critically about systems of oppression, (b) finding common ground among differences, and (c) working together (adults and young people) "to take action towards dismantling systems of oppression" (p. 145). The belief that youth are subjects and not objects in the process toward change is an important dimension of SJYD (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Ginwright et al, 2006; Iwasaki, et al., 2014). Ginwright and Cammarota (2002) suggested that as subjects or agents of change, young people work toward progressive change. In keeping with Freire's (2010) definition of praxis in SJYD spaces as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 33), young people work to transform themselves and society by developing critical consciousness and engaging in social action. Specifically, Ginwright and Cammarota (2002) describe the transformative process in which youth engage as follows:

> Through their own praxis, they explore their own and others' experiences with oppression and privilege. Critical consciousness and social action provide young people with tools to understand and change the underlying causes of social and historical processes that perpetuate the problems they face daily. (p. 88)

Ginwright and Cammarota (2002) argued that some current youth development approaches are lacking in their capacity to engage young people in examining complex and inequitable political, economic, and social systems. Furthermore, Ginwright and Cammarota (2002) suggested, "A discussion of these forces is particularly important for youth who struggle with issues of identity, racism, sexism, police brutality, and poverty that are supported by unjust economic policies" (p. 82). Ginwright (2022), in his most recent work, described the interconnection of social justice activism and the healing of racial trauma. Using SJYD as a framework, in this study I explored how nine youth workers from three different nonprofit SJYD organizations described their support of youth activism.

Methodology: Qualitative Sampling, Data Collection, and Analysis

Qualitative methods are particularly suited for understanding the youth work process in context, the unit analysis of my study. Multiple case studies with a cross-case analysis were engaged to investigate my research questions (Patton, 2015). This section outlines the methodology of the study.

Sampling

The qualitative sample used purposeful sampling to identify participants (Bogdon, Biklan, 2007; Clemons, 2020), focusing on youth organizations and youth workers that engage adolescent youth in social justice activism while using pseudonyms to replace participant and organization names. Organizations and participants in this study were identified using three sampling phases: (1) community selection, (2) site selection and (3) participant selection.

Community Selection

One urban center in the United States was identified as the community for my research study, with "urban community" defined as an area that concentrates major financial, cultural, political, and social institutions. Often people from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds live in or near urban areas (Lipman, 2011, p.4). I identified the urban community by locating the cities in the state, and then comparing the free and reduced lunch statistics from each city to determine which urban community would be the study's focus three sampling phases. Free and reduced lunch is a common metric used to identify people who are classified as navigating poverty (Anyon, 2014). The city in which data were collected is home to people of varied demographics and has the largest percentage of students with free and reduced lunch in the state. Specifically, 79% of the youth that attend school in the city qualify for free or reduced lunch (Rhode Island Education Data Reporting, 2016).

Site Selection

Next, I purposefully selected (Bogdon & Biklen, 2007) youth organizations in the community by selecting organizations that engage with adolescent youth in social justice activism. I reviewed a range of organizations in the city that engage youth in social justice activism by (1) reading and analyzing current news to learn which nonprofit organizations have participated in social justice activism in the community, and (2) reviewing these nonprofits' online profiles. This process led me to select three organizations for my study, so I could understand practices at each organization and across contexts.

Participant Selection

I purposefully selected participants from youth development organizations by making direct connections with each organization. Once contact was made, I met youth workers to describe my study. Using a questionnaire, I collected the names, race, gender, income, and years of experience in youth work of those interested in participating in the study. Finally, I reviewed the information I collected, and selected youth workers with various demographics (Guest, Bunce, & Johnston, 2006), including race (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Nieto, 1994), gender (Grumet & McKoy, 1997; Taylor, 2003), income as youth workers, and years of experience (Yohalem & Pittman, 2006).

Qualitative Data Collection

The study used a variety of qualitative research methods, collecting the following data to address the research question: (a) individual youth worker interviews, (b) observations of youth workers in the context of their youth organizations and predetermined public community engagements, and (c) organizational artifacts such as promotional materials and information from organization websites. Data were collected from August 2016 to February 2017.

At each site, I conducted individual, semistructured interviews using open-ended interview probes (Patton, 2015). After each interview, I observed participants in the context of their youth development organizations, taking descriptive and reflective field notes about the interactions between youth workers and youth, the context, and the activities that occurred (Bogdon & Biklen, 2007). Finally, I interviewed each participant a second time to ask follow-up questions about the observation and to ask additional questions about their work with youth, including their responsibilities at work and how they view their role.

Qualitative Data Analysis

To analyze the qualitative data, I first prepared and organized data by creating electronic folders marked with pseudonyms on a computer desktop and in the NVIVO software program. Next came a detailed coding process using NVIVO software. The NVIVO program was used as a data warehouse, and the electronic coding was not utilized. In an approach often referred to as open coding (Bogdon & Biklen, 2007), I let participants frame the coding categories instead of imposing my own ideas of what the categories should be.

The open coding process began with my reading and annotation of each transcript. Then I reflected on the annotations to understand if categories emerged among individuals, organizations and across organizations. I engaged focused coding by supporting each code with data from interviews and observations (Bogdon & Biklen, 2007). This process was recursive, with each transcript coded with approximately thirty different codes that emerged from the annotations and subsequent coding.

After coding was completed, I identified themes in the data, interpreting them through a series of memos (Maxwell, 2013). The memos provided insight about individual participants and across participants, and about organizations and across organizations. Case studies for each organization emerged through coding, analyzing, and writing about data. I engaged triangulation by making sure the codes and the claims in the research report were supported by (1) multiple sources of data and (2) data from different modes of collection that included interviews, observation, and the review of organizational artifacts.

After a draft emerged about each case study, 67% of participants and at least one person from each organization engaged in the process of respondent member checking (Patton, 2015). The comments that participants provided helped to create revisions of the research report. However, one limit of the study is that it included a small sample of participants, nine, from one urban community.

Results

Participants

Participants from three nonprofit youth development organizations—Youth Empowerment, People for Change, and Neighborhood Arts—were led to youth work on account of different identities, life experiences, and life paths. These characteristics are presented in Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4, respectively. Table 5 outlines the demographics of participants.

Table 2
Youth Empowerment Participants

Selma **she/her**	**Mia** **she/her**	**Celeste** **she/her**
When asked why she engages in youth work, Selma said that the work is part of her identity. She responded, "That's a hard question … because I think if you love something as much as I love this, it just comes—it's inherent and it's instinctive…. It's like in my body to do this work."	Mia said she believes in giving young people a space to imagine what is possible: "I think—and, as we know, young people are agents of change. They are the ones— they have always been the ones—to create any kind of social change."	Celeste said she opposes adultism. She described adultism as adults' prejudice toward young people: "It's the idea that adults have more power because they're older and have more experience, and youth are just supposed to kind of sit and listen and learn from adults. Like that we can't learn from young people, only young people can learn from us."

Table 3
People for Change Participants

Nora **she/her**	**Jean** **they/them**	**Dylan** **he/him**
Nora believed that her work with young people, particularly women, was a transformative process, saying, "What excites me the most is when I see young women feeling like they have power to – to make change, but also just lead."	When asked why youth work was important, Jean said, "I think …it's so important to be—to feel empowered and included in your own education…. When I found those people, people who were willing to see me as a person first and not a youth, that really sort of changed the way I started learning and really changed the way I viewed the world."	Dylan believed that young people everywhere sense hypocrisy and that that is the lens through which they view justice. Specifically, he stated, "Any young people I've met have a really strong compass for hypocrisy and inconsistency."

Table 4
Neighborhood Arts Participants

Simone she, her	Anna she/her	Isaac he/him
Simone often engaged in reflection with young people and worked to find new and alternative ways to relate to young people in what she describes as "the various states of chaos in the world."	Reflecting on her work at Neighborhood Arts, Anna stated, "I do this work because young people are some of the most important people in the world. They are the ones who will be change makers long after we are gone. They inherit the world we give them, and I feel that I need to do whatever I can to help them get to the future and navigate the troubles they are inheriting."	Isaac described his view of young people thus: "I'm psyched about young people in general…. [T]hey're fun and cool and smart and thoughtful and interesting. And I feel privileged that I have the chance to hang with them, you know, a chance to be in their world a little bit…. I think the student-based, student-driven environment here is really important."

Table 5
All Participants: Demographics

Participant Race	Participant Gender	Participant Years of Experience	Participant Income	Participant Education
67% of participants identified as BIPOC (Black Indigenous, People of Color). 33% of participants identified as white.	67% of participants identified as female. 11% of participants identified as gender nonconforming. 22% of participants identified as male.	From 2 to 16 years. 33% of participants had between 2 to 5 years of experience. 22% had 6 to 9 years. 45% had 10 + years.	The average income of participants during data collection in the year 2016–2017 was $7,000 for part time, and $30,000 for full time. 67% of participants earned under $35,000 per year. 33% of participants earned over $35,000 per year.	All participants were four-year college graduates by May 2017.

Social Justice Youth Development: Across Organizations

The organizations in which participants work are located within the same community. Participants' dedication to social justice activism and their shared interest in change often positioned their organizations in support of one another. Although participants shared fundamental beliefs—they saw their work as connected to broader societal contexts, they were conscious of political and economic systems that influence their work, and they viewed young people as assets—their processes of engagement in social justice activism were different at each organization. The following section presents case studies of each organization that outline the different processes through which participants supported youth on their journeys to engage in critical consciousness and social action.

Youth Empowerment (YE): The Process

YE Background

Youth Empowerment was a curated youth leadership program in which youth gained experiences and skills in public speaking and making change in the community. Participants provided opportunities for youth of color to understand their identities and social contexts. In the following section, this process is explained.

YE Critical Consciousness

Participants engaged youth in understanding their experiences, identities, and the contexts they navigate through after-school programming. Celeste described one example of discussing identity with youth as follows:

> A lot of what we do here is helping youth kind of figure themselves out and figure themselves out as leaders. And so a part of that is having hard conversations around things like gender or identity or stereotypes…. I feel like conversations like that really help youth understand more about what's going on in the world and going on with themselves, and makes them—helps make them—feel a little more comfortable about whatever they may be going through personally or experiencing.

Through programming around intersectional social justice themes— including gender, race, class, systems of oppression, and identity development—youth participated in hands-on problem-posing projects and discussions. Selma shared her belief that youth internalized dominant narratives—narratives that position social mobility as an individualized feat, for example, and which might be summed up with these words: "If people just work hard, they can pull themselves up from their bootstraps," and "All people are equal, I don't see color." In contrast, at YE, youth learn about structural racism and the societal factors that limit both their progression as individuals and, more broadly, progression toward an equitable society. Selma explained the importance of making sure that youth, particularly youth of color, have space to deconstruct identity, issues of power, and social location so they can understand that they are not the problem; that they have the opportunity to engage in critical discourse and action to help them understand themselves and the world. Through this process, participants hope that young people learn critical consciousness, while developing and understanding their identities as activists.

YE Social Action

As youth explored their identities, they also learned about issues of power and social context. This study defines social context as "the immediate physical surroundings, social relationships, and cultural milieus within which defined groups of people function and interact" (Barnet & Casper, 2001). When youth at YE engaged in social justice activism, they were supported by participants through their processes. One process that emerged was supporting youth to act in their community—by providing them opportunities to plan, facilitate, reflecting, and improve how they wanted to enact change (Table 6). Participants engaged in this process to provide opportunities for young people to learn how to recognize and act on their individual identities as activists.

Table 6

Social Action at Youth Empowerment

Plan	Facilitate	Reflect	Grow
Youth engaged in planning workshops, community events, or meetings with the support of adults from the organization and from the outside community. For example, during one observation, Celeste was facilitating the planning process with youth. She asked youth to break into their initiative groups, and then had each team work on what they needed to get done. During this observation, Celeste made herself available for questions but asked youth to use the knowledge they had gained in previous programming sessions to plan their own initiatives.	Youth facilitated workshops, community events, or meetings, They did so with the support of adults.	Youth reflected on the workshops, community events, or meetings and discussed questions such as: What went well? What to change for next time?	Youth made changes to a workshop, community event, or meeting.

People for Change (PFC): The process

PFC Background

People for Change is a political organizing collective that supports young people in their work uniting youth to fight for education policy change. Youth workers at PFC lead campaigns with young people that make a direct impact in the community with a primary focus of improving education systems.

PFC Critical Consciousness

Through a process called *base building*, participants networked youth and adult supporters with young people of color. To engage in base building, Nora and Jean, the two adult organizers, established school satellite spaces in city schools, called chapters. Chapters were created at seven out of nine public schools in the city. A chapter was the connection between PFC and the school.

Participants understood that they were creating chapters within an educational system that was structured with a *top-down* hierarchy, in which young people were often given less power and privilege than adults. Jean said this approach can be summed up in these words: "This is the narrative we're going to follow." They added that "it silences so many voices and it silences people who have a lot to tell you." Participants created PFC chapters within the existing institutional structure of each school, so young people of color had opportunities to meet at each school. The chapters turned into spaces where meetings were co-led by young people and adults. Young people would attend meetings to discuss the aspects of their schooling experiences they wanted to change in their school community. Youth would also meet at the PFC offices for weekly meetings and to connect with young people from across the district.

Participants built solidarity within the community by supporting community-building activities, such as icebreakers and energizers, as well as engaging in conversations with youth of color about their schooling experiences. For example, Nora discussed questions she asks youth during chapter meetings,

> What I try to do is try to get people to see the big picture in terms of outside of their school. So compare their school to a different school: what are the conditions, like what are people experiencing? How is it different? … What kind of oppression is going on here? Just try to get students to think about experiences beyond theirs and compare.

Base building became a vehicle for youth and adults to work toward change together as a community. The chapters at each school were spaces for young people of color to build relationships, share their experiences, identify areas in which they wanted to enact change, and take action in educational systems.

PFC Social Action

Once campaigns were identified, participants engaged in *action*—social action initiatives—with young people of color. Nora shared, "I think any group of affected people who are affected by problems but then can be the leaders to change it, is a good thing." Nora felt that youth of color were directly impacted by educational policies, so they should be the leaders in making change. Action occurred when multiple young people identified a problem or issue with education policy and began to discuss a plan for action. At times, members of PFC acted at one school, while at other times they took action across schools. For example, action occurred at one school to improve the quality of school lunches.

Action also occurred across city schools when a citywide issue was identified by young people. When PFC engaged in a citywide campaign across different schools, it was a two-step process. First, participants and youth met with members of their individual schools during the week, and second, the youth delegates from each school met at the PFC offices to discuss the campaign and to distribute tasks across schools. Dylan commented, "A seat at the table is not enough: PFC wants to build a powerful youth union, like a teacher's union, to change current power dynamics in policy decision-making" (Clemons, 2020).

Neighborhood Arts (NE): The Process

NE Background

The mission of Neighborhood Arts was to empower young people as leaders and creative thinking artists. Young people and adult artists, called *artist mentors*, engaged in collaboration and self-directed learning. NA engaged youth in creative practice to support their artistic development. At NA, participants *worked with* (McKamey et al., 2021) youth as they engaged in (1) creating art for themselves, defined by Simone as a strategy for self-reflection and individual change, and as they (2) took action through art making.

NE Critical Consciousness

Working with was defined by Anna as being different from *working for* youth. *Working for* was defined as adults doing something for young people and telling them what to do. In contrast, *working with* positioned young people for more shared power with adults. At NA, youth and participants engaged in art-making projects such as screen printing, music recording, sewing, painting, drawing, and writing poetry. For example, during an observation of Isaac, the resident screen-printing mentor, a young person, approached him to learn how to make a screen-printing design for the first time. When reflecting on the observation, Isaac shared the process of introducing screen printing to young people,

> They come in and I'll kind of introduce them to the process if they seem to need it…. So kind of give them a quick list of possibilities, and then try and see them through whatever process they choose. So if they're, like, "Oh, I think Photoshop, I think this, I think the computer, I think"—you know, uh let's try that.

Participants were observed supporting youth in their art-making processes and working side by side with young people on their own art projects. Because the program at NA was a drop-in, driven by youth choice, youth selected and engaged in art-making initiatives and other activities and had agency in the process.

NE Social Action

Participants also *worked with* young people as they created and shared art with others. The transition from art for themselves to art for the world was supported at NA. Events such as gallery openings, fundraisers, and holiday markets are produced to showcase the different types of work that young people create at NA and to provide a space for exchange. Some young people chose to showcase and sell work at holiday markets, while others used their art to engage in activism.

For example, in a conversation about Isaac's support of a youth political protest, he shared his experience supporting a young person who wanted to make a protest sign. Issac realized that screen printing could be a tool for sharing ideas, but only if youth wanted to engage in that process. Specifically, he said, "People can make multiples [when screen printing]. And I definitely don't push, 'Oh, do a political thing,' because that's up to them." The idea for the sign was started by a young person, and Isaac supported her as she discussed and created the sign and reflected on its impact in the community.

Discussion

This research study was framed by the ideas that (1) it is important to understand how young people navigate and respond to oppressive forces that affect their lives, and (2) youth are agents of change, as outlined in Ginwright and Cammarota's (2002) theory of social justice youth development. My research suggests that SJYD is approached in different ways, and that the approaches are supported by youth practitioners. The case studies illuminate the three differences in approaches and support of youth as they engage in social justice activism (Table 7).

Table 7
Critical Consciousness and Social Action

Journey to Praxis	Youth Empowerment	People for Change	Neighborhood Arts
Critical consciousness	Participants supported young people developing critical consciousness through intentional programming that provided opportunities to understand who they were and the contexts they navigated.	Participants at PFC supported young people as they developed critical consciousness by having them name and identify ways in which they wanted to improve their communities.	Participants provided opportunities to develop critical consciousness through art making. Adults *worked with* youth to explore their individual selves and the relationships between themselves and broader contexts through art.
Social Action	Participants then supported youth to reflect on the changes they wanted to see and to act. Knowledge that was discussed and learned during programming was directly connected to authentic work in the community. Young people were given opportunities to reflect on and make meaning of themselves and the world through this process.	Through the process of organizing, which included base building and action, PFC supported young people as they learned about themselves and their social contexts.	Young people had the power to choose how they spent their time, the types of art projects in which they engaged, and whom the art was for and/or to share or to act on it.

Implications

Social justice youth development is different from other youth development ideologies—civic, positive, risk, resilience, and prevention—in that the work is not divorced from understanding the relationship of people and their contexts. This approach supports making fundamental changes to economic or political systems by bringing young voices to the table in an authentic way, and with decision-making power. The case studies highlighted three diverse ways in which SJYD can be practiced, and each approach supports the idea that this work is not a stagnant destination but, rather, an ongoing process of growth and reflection. This study illuminated three major implications.

For SJYD practitioners: Preparation and professional development is important

Coming to this work with good intentions is necessary, but not sufficient. The balance of values, knowledge, and experience of well-rounded SJYD workers is important to creating and sustaining opportunities for youth to explore themselves, their communities, and the world. SJYD centers the humanity of both the youth and the adults. Adult youth workers should also continue to learn about themselves, their communities, and their world as they engage with youth.

Preparation and professional development of SJYD practitioners should include: (1) engaging problem posing methods of education in both content and process, (2) centering care and asset approaches to youth work, (3) exploring values, identity, and social context, (4) building and maintaining positive communities and partnerships within and outside organizations, (5) learning about ways power can be structured in different contexts, (6) developing specific skills in areas related to social justice activism, (7) designing and facilitating learning opportunities that center the development of critical consciousness and engagement in action, and (8) reflection.

For SJYD practitioners: Work in community, not as individuals

Youth are assets who deserve an opportunity to explore themselves and the communities in which they navigate. In this study, each SJYD context asks that youth workers engage in their practice in different ways. Diverse offerings of organizations provide space for young people of color to have options for how they learn more about themselves and the world. Furthermore, diverse offerings provide opportunities to work together, in community, so as to support the young people within and across contexts. Instead of playing into individualism, the takeaway from this study amplifies the need to work together toward common goals instead of putting organizations in conflict with one another or in positions where they are isolated in their efforts to support youth.

For policy makers and organization leaders: Systems need to change

Policy makers and organization leaders need to improve the way they value young people's voices and experiences. Adult policy makers and organization leaders in the fields of education and youth development need to do more than just include young people in policy conversations; instead, young people should have decision-making power and be an integral part of the ongoing conversation and action toward change.

Also, representation in the field of SJYD does matter. Policy makers and organization leaders need to make efforts to recruit and retain SJYD youth practitioners from various race, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds so as to support SJYD for people who likewise represent different identities, social contexts, and lived experiences.

Conclusion

Through the process of engaging in this study, I gained a firsthand and in-depth perspective of the importance of understanding young people in relation to their contexts. Drawing upon Freire's (2010) work, Ginwright and Cammarota (2002) argued the importance of critical consciousness and social action praxis in SJYD spaces. Within the context of SJYD spaces, youth and adults work together to challenge systems of oppression that impact their daily lives.

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