

Executive Summary: YPAR Evaluation 2019-2021

What did we learn about YPAR?

1) YPAR is a framework, not a curriculum or linear process. YPAR in practice is flexible and adaptable to many settings but it needs consistent engagement (among facilitator and youth members) with adequate time and resources.

- YPAR is perceived by some facilitators as a “big binder” that is overwhelming. When sharing their activities, facilitators would often preface by saying “well, we aren’t doing ‘full YPAR’” or “I’m not sure we are doing it right”. As evaluators and technical assistance providers, we often found ourselves reflecting back to the facilitators how they are actually following the core components of the model, even if they didn’t use that particular lesson from the binder.
- The evaluation demonstrated how YPAR is democratizing the research process for youth and adults. Some facilitators and youth reflected that the research process “slowed things down” when they were eager to jump into their passion project. At the same time, both facilitators and youth reflected on the benefits of taking time to make a plan and consider their issue from multiple perspectives.
 - The YPAR activities and modular approach is intended to make research more accessible and honor many kinds of knowledge and wisdom

Supporting recommendations

Be intentional with YPAR messaging and framing YPAR as additive and not restrictive or burdensome

- Move away from a “curriculum” and toward a “framework” that supports reflection and inquiry

Elevate the roots of research justice in YPAR activities and materials

- Create activities to explore how racial and gender justice are linked to research justice
- Identify and summarize past YPAR projects that explicitly incorporated racial / gender justice (e.g. Bend High Design Justice dress code project and menstrual equity project)

Build materials to support flexible implementation in multiple settings

- Offer examples of past OHA-funded YPAR projects, highlighting how they were implemented at different aspects of the research process (e.g. designing a survey or presenting data to policymakers)
- Create and disseminate materials to support implementation across age groups (middle school and high school) and in classroom as well as community or afterschool settings
- Create more stand-alone activities (and connect to the Berkeley YPAR Hub) for groups and communities that are doing youth-led research and social change activities at various points in the YPAR Model.

The YPAR process is relational so YPAR might not be a great fit for groups with limited time or inconsistent engagement

- Youth and adults need time and consistent engagement to build connections and trust and facilitate reflection and inquiry
- Acknowledge when YPAR might not be a great fit. For example, doing a YPAR project with a group that meets inconsistently for 20 minutes over lunch. But that group might be a good recruitment site for a standalone YPAR class or an opportunity to use a specific YPAR activity.

2) YPAR strengthens youth **social emotional learning skills (communication, empathy, problem solving, emotional regulation, cooperation), and offers “**real-world**” **skills** to plan and manage projects and conduct research.**

- We saw a significant increase in SEL scores. Also in qualitative data, youth focused on a range of SEL skills they gained.
 - This is consistent with findings from the 2018-2019 Deschutes County evaluation.
- Real world skills appear to fall into two categories
 - Project management kinds of skills like making an action plan, communicating with adult decision-makers, and prioritizing resources
 - Research-related skills like asking unbiased questions, thinking about what factors influence behaviors and attitudes, and policy development
- We did not initially have these relevant and meaningful skills as an outcome we would measure but youth kept emphasizing these skills as part of their YPAR experience
 - Not included in the student assessment for 2019/20 and we didn't do the 2020/21 student assessment due to the pandemic

Supporting recommendations

Confirm that the current SEL scales and items assess all of the SEL constructs we have identified in the past three years of evaluation data

- Update the quantitative youth assessment tool with refined SEL items as needed

Identify validated scales and/or develop items measuring project management skills and research-related skills

- Incorporate scales and/or new items measuring “real-world skills” in the quantitative

Continue to collect qualitative data on how YPAR increases and expands youth skills around social emotional learning, project management and the research process

3) Relationships and connections between adults and youth and between peers are critical for YPAR implementation and measurable as an outcome.

- Relationships and connections are a key factor throughout the YPAR cycle, both for building Youth-Adult Partnerships and as an important measurable outcome for youth participating in YPAR projects
- We saw a significant increase in school relationship scores overall as measured by relationships with teachers and positive peer relationships.
- In their reflections and during the Photolanguage exercise, youth in YPAR classes also focused on how they expanded their relationships and connections to each other and the adult facilitators
 - These findings are also consistent with the 2018-2019 Deschutes County evaluation

Supporting recommendations

Confirm the current School Relationship scales assess the important constructs around relationship-building and connection that we have identified in the past three years of evaluation data

- Update the quantitative youth assessment tool with refined relationship and connection items as needed

Create materials and resources for onboarding and supporting new YPAR facilitators to facilitate relationship-building with youth

- Youth-adult partnerships come naturally to some adults and others need more support and coaching so build mentorship options and activities to support new facilitators

Continue to offer a range of technical assistance and training opportunities for OHA-funded grantees who support youth-led data and research activities (whether they are explicitly naming YPAR or not)

- Continue the monthly facilitator “Tea Time” gatherings to build connections across adult facilitators
- Engage youth in YPAR / research / Youth-Adult Partnership training opportunities so youth are receiving content alongside adult facilitators

Develop a set of minimum criteria or expectations for schools / grantees conducting YPAR to ensure adequate organizational support, resources and FTE for facilitators

- Develop a set of questions to ask school / organizational leadership around supporting YPAR facilitators (e.g. communication systems, support systems, onboarding, training, dealing with organizational hierarchy and decision-making, identifying facilitators)

4) Though the evaluation was focused on youth outcomes, YPAR appears to have an impact on adult facilitators as well as schools, organizations, programs and communities. This finding expands the lens for implementation and evaluation.

- We didn't set out to measure outcomes for adults and the impact on schools or organizations, but are not surprised. Layered impact on youth, adult and system/community aligns with previous literature in both YPAR and Youth-Adult Partnerships.
- Implications for supporting implementation as well as building evaluation systems and what questions we ask in our evaluations.

Supporting recommendations

Incorporate outcomes for adults and schools / organizations in future YPAR evaluation plans to assess impact at those levels

- Similar to assessing youth outcomes for YPAR, consider using at least two data sources for assessing YPAR outcomes for adults, such as a survey and a Photolanguage activity
- Include youth perspective when identifying impact at the school / organizational level to ensure outcomes are meaningful to youth

Create an adult assessment tool (e.g. a retrospective pretest survey similar to the youth survey) that collects outcomes data for adults facilitating the YPAR process

Create a structured observation tool that reflects the key principles in Youth-Adult Partnerships to use for observing YPAR implementation

Where could we go next with YPAR?

As a process of inquiry grounded in youth-adult partnerships, **YPAR can be transformational for youth and adults and the settings where they live, work and learn.**

- Outcomes observed in youth are persistent and powerful. Youth are expanding social emotional skills around communication and cooperation, empathy and emotional regulation. They are also strengthening relationships and connections to other youth and trusted adults, which are important protective factors for youth. Students are also gaining relevant and meaningful skills they might not be getting in other classes or out-of-school activities around critical thinking, research and inquiry, and project management.
- Adults also appear to benefit from engaging with the YPAR framework and partnering with youth. Adults create sustained connections to youth through a shared sense of purpose as they support youth-led projects, sharing power and building meaningful relationships with youth. And adults are also gaining research-related skills that are meaningful to their everyday lives and grounded in research justice.
- The schools, programs and organizations where YPAR occurs can also benefit from youth-led projects focused on social change. School systems may benefit from the fruits of the student-led projects that focus on changing policies, practices and programming to build supportive equitable environments for youth and adults.

The potential multi-level benefits of YPAR make it a worthwhile investment of time, energy and resources.

Its flexibility, roots in anti-oppression and liberatory practices, and focus on relationships and skill building makes YPAR a prime strategy for multiple cross disciplinary and public/private partnerships (i.e. schools and school districts, community based organizations, afterschool providers, and prevention-related efforts at state and local levels).

YPAR in practice continues to offer opportunities for skill-building, learning and evaluation.

The more we learned over the past two years, the more questions we generated. Continue to knit the training/on-going support and evaluation together -- this model of learning works well. Continue to explore mechanisms to compensate youth as training and evaluation team members and advisors.