

Evidence Brief

Five Good Practices to Engage Racialized, Newcomer & Refugee Youth in Participatory Action Research (PAR)

How Did We Compile This Evidence?

We searched YouthREX's Library for Youth Work and searched online databases using the following key terms: "youth engagement," "newcomer youth," "racialized youth," "refugee youth," and "youth participatory action research."

Summary of Evidence:

Five Good Practices to Engage Racialized, Newcomer & Refugee Youth in Participatory Action Research (PAR)

1. Use Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) to facilitate activism and critical consciousness.

Many newcomer, racialized or refugee youth want to talk about the issues affecting their lives, but schools and educators may shy away from, or shut down, these conversations. Organizations can facilitate *critical consciousness* – “the ability to perceive and interrogate the various forms of oppression that shape one's life, and to take collective action against the status quo” (Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013, p. 1701).

Herr (2017) shares how Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) can be used “as healing practices toward activism” (p. 458). She describes her experience of supporting youth of colour to organize a YPAR project that eventually took action to change some of their school's troubling policies. She notes that the YPAR process can foster critical consciousness and healing in youth when they come to recognize injustice and learn how social change can be brought about through activism.

2. Integrate a critical consideration of race, power, and oppression throughout the research methodology and in the research questions.

Research teams can more effectively engage racialized, newcomer, and refugee youth in research by infusing a critical awareness of race, power, and oppression into the research design. Researchers can integrate a critical, anti-oppressive approach with YPAR by designing a project “that asks questions and seeks knowledge at the intersections of

everyday lived experience and intricate social systems” (Torre, 2009, p. 118). Research projects can integrate critical approaches to race and identity by asking “questions that require historical re-memory; questions that allow people to engage and transform the injustices they collectively live (albeit differently) rather than continuing individually to ignore, resist, cope with, or simply benefit from these arrangements; questions that frequently demand to be answered collectively through research and action” (Torre, 2009, p. 118).

3. Recognize the complexity of youth research participants’ identities and lived experiences.

Researchers should resist seeing youth solely, or even primarily, in terms of simplified ‘racialized’, ‘newcomer’ or ‘refugee’ identities. Instead, the research team and research process should “allow individuals to remain complicated...to hold multiple, even opposing, identities” (Torre, 2009, p. 117). For example, the research design and research questions should anticipate and allow for this nuance, rather than expecting (explicitly or implicitly) that youth will fit neatly into boxes. Within the research team and throughout a research study, team members should recognize that “that each of us carry particular interests and social justice agendas; that we are each differently situated and that we each have varying relationships power and privilege” (Torre, 2009, p. 117).

4. Develop youth participants’ research proficiency and skill.

Organizations and research teams can mitigate power differences by actively increasing youth participants’ research proficiency and skill. Referring specifically to YPAR, Cahill (2007) argues that skill development matters “because it helps to equalize the power relationship between the facilitator and participants (and between participants with varying levels of experience) in the PAR process” (p. 301). This enables youth to advocate for their own interests and perspectives within the research process, which can improve the research process and results.

5. Offer youth participants meaningful and equitable engagement throughout the research process.

Researchers should choose YPAR as a research approach with the genuine intention of sharing power with youth throughout the research process. YouthREX developed a factsheet (*Engaging Youth in Research and Evaluation: Benefits for Youth & Organizations*) that can orient team members to the benefits of meaningfully involving youth throughout the process. Hart’s Ladder of Youth Participation (see Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, n.d.) can be a useful tool to help team members or partners reflect on the level of youth engagement in a research project. The Ladder shows a range of youth engagement levels,

ranging from manipulation to youth-led initiatives where decisions are made in partnership with adults.

Team members may benefit from having conversations about their assumptions about knowledge and research methods. What kind of knowledge is counted as ‘credible’? Based on these assumptions, who benefits and who gets left out? What concerns do team members have, if any, about sharing power with youth throughout the research process? A team that adopts a genuine commitment to YPAR may need to educate, or push back against, funders or partners who do not share or understand this approach to research and youth work. Resources on the YouthREX Library for Youth Work may be helpful in answering these questions internally or with orienting partners or team members to the benefits of engaging youth in research and evaluation (Houwer & Barleben, 2016; Zeldin, Bestul, & Powers, 2012).

References

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