

Using Youth Participatory Action Research to Support BIPOC, Working Class, and Working Poor Elementary School Students' Conscientización

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Abstract

This talk draws together two decades of research designed to center BIPOC children as they discuss and continue to develop what a productive school culture means to them. All studies are presented to address a framework to better understand the process of change/conscientización as a theoretical guide. I engage two research questions: What are the characteristics of liked school places, and how do they differ from disliked places? and How does the developmental process of conscientización unfold (prospectively)? The first research question, based on a long-term collaboration at one elementary school, sets the stage for another long-term youth participatory action research project at another elementary school. The second research question is addressed through a series of studies where children decide how they want to make decisions as a group, how they discern a problem to focus on, and how this affects their relational empowerment in the school. Children's critical consciousness and actions are highlighted across these studies.

Keywords: working class children, schools, conscientización, empowerment, youth participatory action research

Introduction

I'd like to start out with a land acknowledgement for where I am currently situated. The land I am on is the traditional and unceded territory of the Uypi Tribe of the Awaswas nation. Today these lands are represented by the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band who are descendants of the Awaswas and Mutsun nations whose ancestors were taken to Mission Santa Cruz and Mission San Juan Bautista during Spanish colonization of the Central Coast of California.

Today the Amah Mutsun are working hard to fulfill their obligation to the Creator to care for and steward Mother Earth and all living things through relearning efforts and through the Amah Mutsun Land Trust. I do my best to work in solidarity by questioning how Mission Santa Cruz is represented to the public and pushing for a more accurate representation, working against violence in my own community, and learning about and teaching decolonial philosophies.

Today I'm going to be talking about youth participatory action research to support Black, Indigenous, and people of color who are also working class or working poor elementary school students, as well as supporting their conscientización.

Elementary school contexts

I'd like to begin by talking about elementary school as an important place. It's widely known that in the North American public school context students of color and working class and working poor students are by and large having negative schooling experiences and this, of course, is pre-pandemic as well. Seymour Sarason (1997), an important community psychologist in my field, points to the disenfranchisement of both students and teachers as a main issue related to negative schooling experiences. Because of structural inequities in our society, working class and working poor children of color are more negatively impacted by this disenfranchisement. Apple's (1992) conception is that power is unequally distributed in society and is reproduced in the classroom via teacher control, the visible pedagogy, and the invisible pedagogy, which are introduced via the content of schooling, or the curriculum, and the process of schooling, or how the curriculum and other lessons are taught. The underlying message is that what is considered important is determined by nation states, districts, schools, and to a limited extent teachers, but not so much by students.

Community, organizational, and school psychologists, as well as educational theorists have tried to facilitate sustainable, system level change, but they often come to the conclusion that it's extremely difficult to change the culture of schooling (Kozol, 1991; McMillan, 1975; Ouellett, 1996; Sarason, 1972, 1995, 1997). It's no mistake that pre-pandemic, almost any public classroom you walk into in any state in the U.S. will look largely the same. Desks are in rows or groups, students sit in desks, and there's a front to the classroom. The teacher talks and asks questions and the students answer questions and work independently. I've come to the conclusion that the reason most interventions have not produced change is because they tend to be quite "top down," and they do not create second order change or change that alters the role relationships among people in the school (Perkins et al., 2007).

Furthermore the change is not based on the culture, needs, and strengths of the community, but instead on what people outside of schools via policy makers and/or researchers think is a good idea. So with this in mind, I'd like to propose this alternate theory of change. I'm interested in thinking about change that makes schools better for students in them and I think this needs to happen by drawing upon what Luis Moll and colleagues (Moll et al., 2005) call, "funds of knowledge" (p. 3) or the strengths, conditions, and cultural traditions of a community. And I think this needs to be "bottom up," such that those who are more affected by schools, in this case students, have more of a say in what school change can and should look like.

Because of these interests, the construct that I'm most attracted to is conscientización. The definition is that, with others, the joining of personal consciousness with the social, political, economic, and historic—essentially a structural analysis—that facilitates reflection and

action so that groups have control over the boundaries of their participation or the psychological and material resources affecting their lives (Berta-Ávila, 2003; Freire, 1970/1988; Martín-Baró, 1995). This work needs to be done with others in groups, and we join lived experience with something structural in a way that facilitates reflection and action, and in a way that also facilitates empowerment.

This then brings me to a particular theory of change that I've pulled together from Marita Montero (1998) and Mark Zimmerman's (2000) separate work. Here, we have a scholar activist or an organizer who can serve as a resource. The group then forms and what we want in terms of group formation is for there to be an emphasis on the culture of growth, support, and community building. Also, the community groups assess their own needs and resources and set their priorities. Leadership is developed in these spaces, but there are meaningful and multiple roles for people. There's shared decision making about work in action, and the group can plan and take action. When the group is working in this particular way, then we can begin to also see changes in collective and individual consciousness, identity, and behavior, and also changes in the environment, the community groups, the individual, and then finally changes in social and cultural life circumstances, which includes material and psychological resources. This feeds back into the group formation and this becomes a very iterative process (see Figure 1).

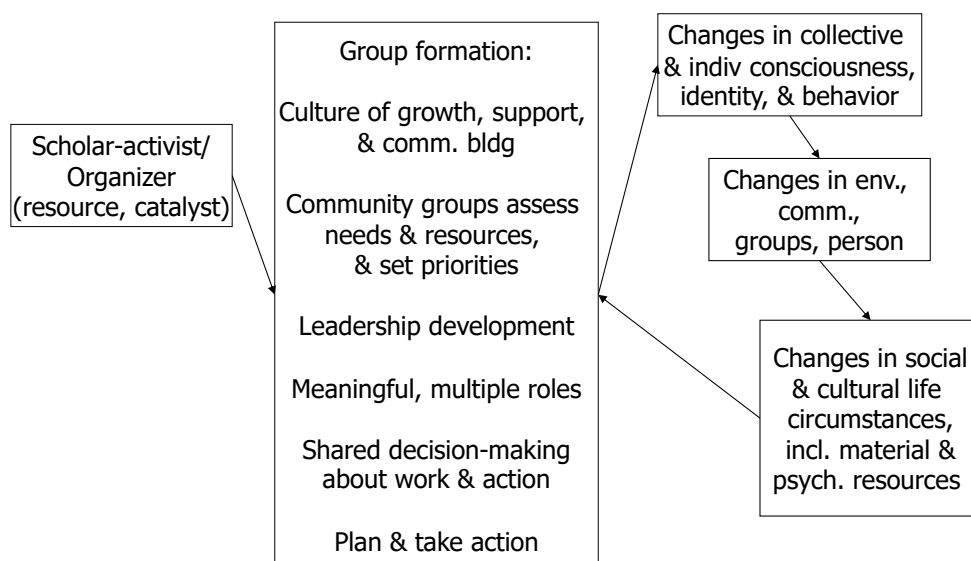


Figure 1: Process of change/conscientización (adapted from Montero, 1998 & Zimmerman, 2000)

This brings me to two research questions: "What are the characteristics of liked school places and how do they differ from disliked places for mostly Black working class and working poor children?" After addressing this I will delve into this next question, "How does the developmental process of conscientización unfold prospectively for mostly Latinx working class and working poor children?" These research questions are important to me because I'm somebody who is first in my family to attend college and also I've had many family members in my extended family who have essentially been pushed out of school and have ended up in jail or prison instead of going on to higher education. I think that these

family members are smart intelligent people and what I saw was them being pushed out. So this question around what education looks like is one that is really important to me and what it looks like for working class and working poor children. Also, me realizing that my family has white privilege means also thinking about what this means for students of color as well as white working class students is of great importance to me.

Study 1: Liked vs. disliked school places

First we need to have a sense of school places that students actually want to be in to really start to think about how schools could operate in these ways. What is it that young people are asking for and how does this differ from places that they are not as interested in being in? This brings me to the the context for the first study. I'm calling this Carter G. Woodson school (this is a pseudonym). Carter G. Woodson is on what's called the North end of town, which is the predominantly and traditionally African American/Black and working class/working poor area of town. This is a neighborhood school and approximately 70 percent of the students attending this school are Black and working class or working poor.

The group doing this work was called "Partners for Progress," and we were connected to a Land Grant University (Rappaport, 2000). The work that we did followed an educational pyramid model, which essentially means that there were a few faculty who then supervised several graduate students and those graduate students then supervised several undergraduate students each (Seidman & Rappaport, 1974). With this model, we could think about providing a lot of support and saturation to this particular school. In terms of our research team at this point it was approximately 60% white graduate students, 70% white undergraduates, and with a very large social class range.

For this first study, I conducted an ethnographic examination of eight children. In terms of choosing these eight children, my research team, who were undergraduate research assistants, and I thought hard about behavior and academic engagement as two separate dimensions. What I've sometimes noticed in schools is that when kids are behaving, they're also considered to be academically engaging, but I think it's possible for kids to be behaving in ways that are different from perhaps what teachers or administrators want, but still be academically engaged in the space. I therefore wanted to disaggregate these two dimensions and to choose children via consensus from these different dimensional spaces of academic engagement and behavior. The methods that I used for this study were ethnography, interviews, multi-dimensional scaling, and social network analysis (Langhout, 2003, 2004).

In terms of these results, when children were talking about the places that they liked to be in school, one of the themes that came up was family involvement. For example, Alena says that she likes the gym. She says, "when we're here we see my friend's Auntie, I see parents come here and talk with the gym teacher" (Langhout, 2004, p. 119). For her, seeing an Auntie was really important because most of the teachers in the school were white and middle class and didn't live in the surrounding neighborhood. For her, the school didn't feel like it was part of the neighborhood because there was this huge distinction between the adults in the school versus the adults in the broader community. For her, seeing adults in the school who looked more like her was something that was important.

Another theme that children discussed was leadership and helpfulness. For example, Michelle says of the playground, a place that she likes, "I help the other kids because most of the shorter kids play on that," and she's calling it a hang glider. It is a mechanism that's part of a playground where you step up on a platform and then you can grab onto a handle

and then slide across the next platform. So that's what she's talking about. She says, "and they can't get that because of their height so I have to make them get that hang glider thing so that makes me feel good" (Langhout, 2004, p. 119). Children are playing together across age groups and the older children have some kind of role that's important to them, so they have a leadership role or they're helpful in the space.

Another aspect in the liked places that children mentioned was that there was shared decision making. Children might say things like they liked the classroom because when they were in the classroom, they got to pick rewards for good behavior (Langhout, 2004). They got to, for example, choose a newspaper article for a report. They got to pick their science experiment that they were going to conduct out of a book that was given to them, or they might have 5 or 10 minutes of free time in the morning. Notice there were definitely boundaries and around what the children could choose. Therefore, they weren't saying that they could do anything they wanted, but rather they had some say in the activities that they were going to participate in. All of these aspects (family involvement, leadership/helpfulness, and shared decision making) were really important for the young people.

In terms of multi-dimensional scaling, I wanted to get a sense of the way that young people were cognitively construing these spaces they liked that were part of school. In terms of the overall results, some of the important organizing dimensions were if they were engaging in academics, if there was shared decision making in that space, and if it was a space where they received emotional support (Langhout, 2003). Figure 2 shows these results for one of the children who I'll call Daniel. He had a three-dimensional solution. The circles are the different places that Daniel has mentioned that are a part of school for him. After naming these places, I had asked him, for example, how similar is the restroom from the lunchroom? How similar is the restroom to the gym? How similar is the restroom to the basketball hoops? etc.

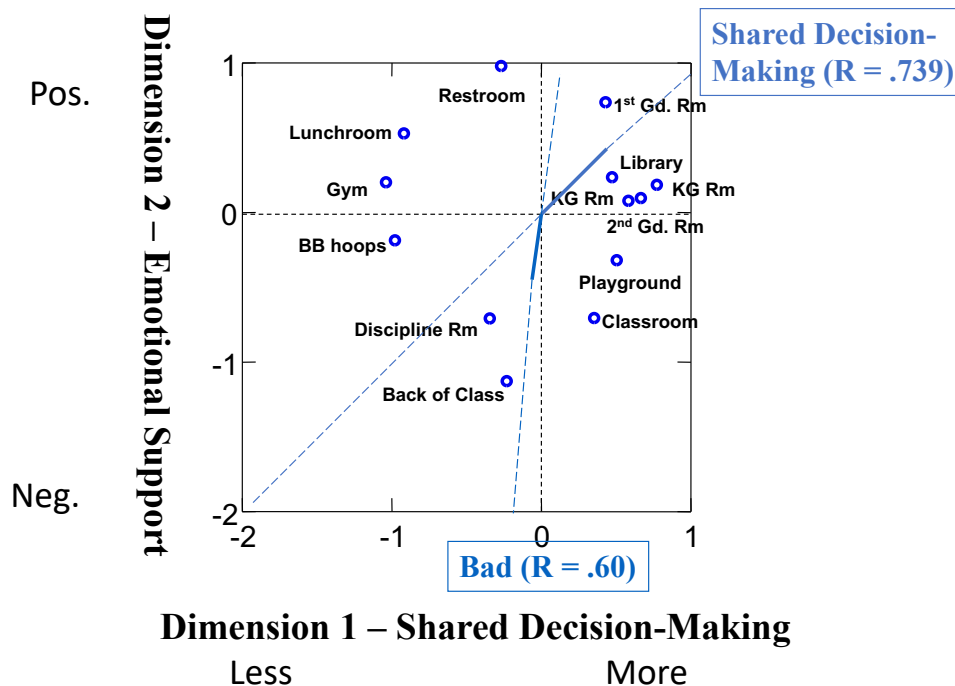


Figure 2: Daniel's first and second dimension scatterplot

The figure is a representation of that space for him—that cognitive construal. The circles that are closer together are more similar for Daniel than the circles that are further apart. Another thing to note is that once he had named all of these places and once he had told me how similar or dissimilar they were from one another, we had also gone to those places and I asked him, for example, "how do you feel when you are in the back of your classroom?" Then he would tell me some feelings, such as good, bad, happy, or sad. We would then go to another place he listed and I would ask, for example, "How do you feel when you're at the basketball hoops?" He would list some feelings.

For each of these places, I then asked each individual child how often they felt a specific feeling in that particular place for all of those feelings that they had listed. I also asked some questions about shared decision making. Figure 2 includes these vectors. For Daniel, the feelings (of "bad") and shared decision-making were a good fit to reconstruct that space. Note the names that I'm giving these dimensions are determined also by the children, and not only me.

The first dimension for Daniel is shared decision making. He experiences more shared decision making when he's in his first grade classroom, the restroom, the library, the kindergarten classrooms, the lunchroom, etc. and less shared decision making when he's in the back of his classroom, and the discipline room. This perhaps might not be that surprising. This first grade classroom is their reading buddies first grade class. As a third grader, it was part of his job and responsibility to go to this first grade classroom and to read to a first grader a book of his choosing from the classroom. There's some shared decision making. Also, for example, in the library, Daniel was an avid reader and the library was a place where he could choose whatever book he wanted to read, and read it.

His second dimension is emotional support. In this case, the vector that fit well into the space is how bad he felt in these different spaces. You can see, for example, that Daniel tends to feel bad when he's in the back of his classroom, in the discipline room, and in his own classroom. He feels less bad when he is in the restroom or in that first grade classroom. One might say, "gosh, what's happening in the restroom?" Daniel also had a leadership job in the restroom where it was his responsibility to make sure that his classmates would come into the restroom, use it, wash their hands and leave so that there was a good flow and all of the students could use that space. This is opposed to, for example, the back of his classroom, where he might get sent for some kind of disciplinary reason and where he might be separated from the other students in the classroom.

The final aspect of this study is the social network analysis, and how this relates to the places that were liked (Langhout, 2003). The results were consistent for the boys, but did not hold for the girls. For the places that the boys liked, these networks tended to be more egalitarian and the students had many ties in these spaces. This pattern is in contrast to the places that the boys didn't like. In this case, the networks were more centralized and there were fewer ties among the young people. Let me give you an example of this. For Daniel, the gym is a place that he liked (see Figure 3). This network is called an egocentric network. I've asked Daniel, "who are all of the kids that you see when you're in the gym?" or, "who are all the people you see in the gym?" Daniel would list the people he saw here. The people in the figure were all the students. Then I asked him, "do you get along with person A?" "Do you get along with person B?" "Do you get along with person C?" etc. Then I asked, "Does person A get along with person B?" "Does person A get along with person C?" etc. This entire network is based on Daniel's perception of the network within that space. If there's a

line between people, that means that he considered them to be friends and if there's no line then they weren't friends. For Daniel, all of the lines are present in his liked space so this is essentially an egalitarian network with many ties.

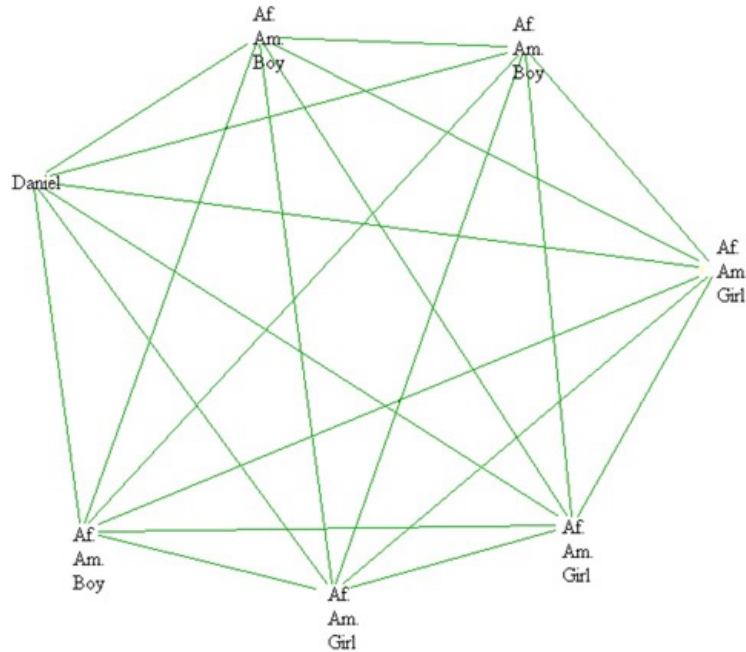


Figure 3: Daniel-Gym (liked)

This is in contrast to Daniel's classroom, a place that he didn't like (see Figure 4). Figure 4 looks really different. There are kids who are in the center of this network but there are also kids who have very few connections. I want to draw your attention especially to the white boy in the upper right hand corner who has no ties to anyone. He was always placed in the back of his classroom with a paraprofessional. I think Daniel's perception is fairly accurate about this particular kid's relationship to other kids in the classroom. Figure 4 also shows that there are cliques by race, such that many of the African-American or Black kids are connected and then the White kids are a little bit more on the periphery. In the classroom, Daniel experiences more cliques, fewer ties, and a non-egalitarian network.

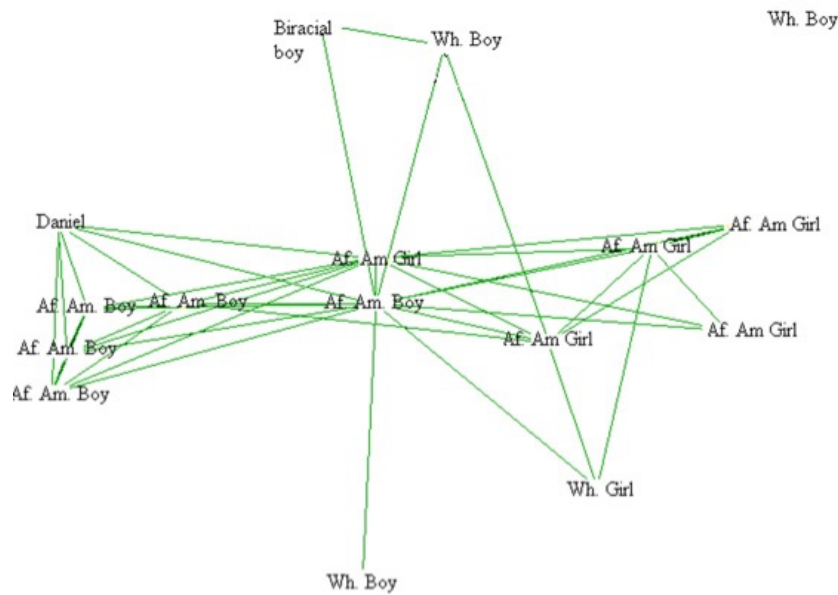


Figure 4: Daniel—Classroom (disliked)

In summary, in terms of this first research question, the implications are fairly clear about the places that young people like in their school. These tend to be places where there is a culture of growth, support, and community building. These are places where children felt that there was some emotional support, where they felt that they could do things like develop their leadership skills, and where they were called on as leaders. There was also a sense that the community groups could assess their needs and resources and set priorities, so this has to do with shared decision making. Young people were able to say what they wanted to work on or choose their own library book. Children also had meaningful and multiple roles like being a buddy or a reader to a younger student, or making sure that everyone had access, in terms of the restroom.

Turing back to Figure 1, I've already mentioned leadership development, in terms of young people having the opportunity to help out younger children in the school, and shared decision making about the work that they were doing, whether that be which decision, which science project they wanted to work on, or other aspects. As I thought about this, I started thinking about ways that we could work on facilitating these kinds of spaces for young people in schools and what that might mean in terms of these other aspects of the model (Figure 1) that I was interested in testing. One way to get here in terms of the formation of these kinds of groups is through participatory action research.

Participatory action research

Participatory action research is both a paradigm and a method (Dutta et al., 2023). It's an ontological and epistemological space in which to conduct work. The way that I consider it is more than a method—it is not only a method. It should not be separated from its ontological and epistemological roots. Yet it's also a method because there are people who treat it more as a method, so I feel it's important for me to note this. Participatory action research is a collaborative ontological perspective, one where we work together to democratize knowledge to bring in more people as knowledge producers, or knowledge

makers. This perspective creates a different kind of science and can facilitate more socially just change. When folks are engaged and involved in research who are typically left out of it, they will often have different ideas about what the problem is, what kind of action needs to be taken, and that really matters. So in this way, we work toward epistemological justice because we're not ignoring groups of people who are marginalized in a space (Dutta et al., 2023).

It's important to point out that participatory action research is built from and grows from activists in the Global South including people like Orlando Fals Borda (1999), Paulo Freire (1970/1988), Francisco Vio Grossi (1981), and more. I want to make sure that I'm engaging in epistemological justice by pointing out these roots. This is not something that started in the U.S. although many in the U.S. draw roots to U.S.-based academics. But in my learning, this is not the case.

Study 2: Latinx students' group decision making

Now we'll delve into the second research question, which was, "how does the developmental process of conscientización unfold prospectively for mostly Latinx working class and working poor children?" Now we have a new setting and this will be the setting for the rest of the studies that I will discuss. This study took place over 12 years at "Maplewood Elementary School." This school is in an unincorporated area, so there's no municipal government. It's a neighborhood school. Approximately 62 percent of the students in the school were Latinx and about 51 percent of were labeled as English Language Learners. About 70 percent of the students are considered working class or working poor. The teacher and the principal who I started this relationship with were both White and both involved in the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) which is an organizing model that starts out of Chicago, through Saul Alinsky (1971).

The second principal who was at the school during our tenure was not involved or affiliated with the IAF, the organizing group in the local community. Our team was called the Community Psychology Research and Action Team. This is a group that was and is at the University of California at Santa Cruz. About 40 of the graduate students were White, about 50 percent of the undergraduates were Latinx, and about 70 percent of the entire research team identified as working class or lower middle class.

In terms of the method, we taught action research to fourth and fifth grade students. We would have 20 students at a time in our after school program. About 50 percent of the students were identified as female or girls, and about 95 percent as Latinx. Our team took ethnographic field notes and also interviewed the students at two time points near the beginning of the project and near the end of their time in the project (2 years). We also conducted teacher interviews at the end of each academic year.

In terms of the curriculum, we worked with the young people to decide how the group would work. This is a really important step that is often missed in this work. In the U.S., the assumption is that we should be deciding things via direct democracy, for example, or a majority rule. We wanted to first work with young people to think about how they wanted the group to work, and how they would make decisions as a group. Then we taught them social science and action research methods. We went through ethics, we talked about different methods that they could use, different methodological paradigms, and also how they could collect data. Then we determined a problem definition via photovoice as the

research method. We then turned problems into issues, determined an action to take, took the action, and evaluated the action (Langhout, 2014; Langhout & Fernández, 2015).

This way of thinking about participatory action research is a little bit more built out than a model of: assess the problem, determine the action, and act. For this first study, I'll focus mostly on a culture of growth, support, and community building, and shared decision making about work (see Figure 1). In this study, we were focused on how the group was going to make decisions. As I already mentioned, we thought that this is important to do because we need to think about civic action in civil society and how young people are learning about this in school.

So one thing that schools could be more focused on, according to researchers such as Henry Giroux (2005) and Seymour Sarason (1995), is teaching about civic action in civil society. One way this can be done is by having the group discuss, debate, and decide how the group will make decisions. This is obviously consistent with a participatory action research and a conscientización approach because it's about how decisions are made. Therefore, what we did in this research—as the adults—is that we first described and discussed, with the young people, different ways that groups could make decisions. The options we discussed were: (a) majority rule, or majority vote, (b) coming to consensus around a decision to be made, (c) random choice, where we could put people's names into a hat and whichever one gets drawn out of that hat gets to make the decision, (d) delegation of responsibility, where they perhaps elect a small subgroup of students who make the decisions, and (e) authoritarian rule, where just one person makes the choices. Through discussing all of these, including the pros and cons, what the young people decided that they wanted to focus on, which surprised us, was random choice (Langhout et al., 2011).

We spent some time as a research team, as the adults on the team, asking, "Can we really move forward this way? Does this make sense?" After much discussion, we decided that we needed to be true to what we said we were doing. They made this decision just before we were slated to do a round of interviews, so we were able to ask them some questions about this. We asked them why they had chosen random choice, why they saw this as the best fit for them. They tended to talk about things like procedural and distributive justice, or put another way, reduction in power hierarchies. For example, the interviewer asks, "Okay, do you agree that random choice is the most fair?" and Andy says, "I do think because, it's like you don't just pick someone, and if you pick someone they're gonna like think they're the best student or something... whoever you picked and if you pick out of a hat it's better because it's just random" (Langhout et al., 2011, p. 302). Procedural justice is facilitated by transparency and neutrality. Random choice flattens power hierarchies among the students, making it a more procedurally just process. With respect to distributive justice, many students said that all students would likely eventually have a chance to make a decision and therefore this was a better way to move forward.

Children also discussed emotional justice or reductions in interpersonal tensions. In this example, the interviewer says, "Can you say more about that about why random choice is fair?" John replies, "because you don't get to, like, people don't have to vote and stuff. And then you just have a random person, it's not like, 'oh I want to choose him' 'cuz then it will make the other person feel bad about that. So, and if you just do random choice you just get, and then whoever wins it's just like, 'oh'" (Langhout et al., 2011, p. 303). In random choice, one does not have to pick friends or hurt other people's feelings, and everybody has a chance—an equal chance—of being chosen. This relief of pressure to pick one's friends or

to pick their ideas may reflect concerns over how they are valued and by whom when they are chosen or not chosen. These concerns for others' feelings and children's uneasiness around systems that require them to behave in non-neutral ways are aligned with their definitions of fairness and help explain their random choice preference.

In terms of this study, it's important to remember that the students are primarily Latinx and possibly immigrants. They're being raised within a broader socio-political context that questions their place in the community because of their status as children and also their status as Latinx. These subordinated statuses co-occur within a backdrop of living in an unincorporated area where even adults have limited democratic representation related to local decisions and decision making (Fernández & Langhout, 2018). Given these students social positions, it's not terribly surprising that their critique is leveled at systems that are not designed to hear their voices.

Finally, beginning youth participatory action research with determining how decisions will be made can provide an immediate issue for the group to examine, that is, how power, privilege, and oppression operate within their lives and how they could design a system that works differently and better for them. Attending to these issues can facilitate a more structural analysis, which provides a strong basis for the participatory action research cyclic process of reflection and action.

For this next study, I'm going to move into these areas of community groups assessing their needs and resources and setting their own priorities, planning and taking action, and then what this meant for changes in collective and individual consciousness (see Figure 1).

Study 3: Latinx students' visions for change

In this case, what we were interested in is examining how the young people were using photovoice and how they were able to use it to turn a problem into an issue (Kohfeldt & Langhout, 2012; Vaccarino-Ruiz et al., 2022). We gave children the prompt, in this particular case, to go into their school and take pictures of things that they liked about their school and things that they would like to change about their school (Kohfeldt & Langhout, 2012). They also wrote narratives to go with these photos and then we taught them how to discern themes from their photos and narratives. They then came up with four themes that were all about the bathroom.

These themes were: (1) that there was trash on the floor, (2) that there was writing on the walls in the restroom, (3) that not everybody was washing their hands after they used the restroom every time, and (4) that unfortunately there were some toilets that were unflushed (Kohfeldt & Langhout, 2012). We worked with the children through a process called "the five why's," which helps get to a root cause. This is important because all of the kids in the school know, for example, that they could go into the restroom and they could pick up the trash off of the floors in the bathroom. And the next day or two days later, there would be trash on the floors in the bathroom again. Why is that? It's because you haven't gotten to a root cause of why there's trash on the floor in the first place. What we did is we used this technique called "the five why's" that we learned from the Community Network for Youth Development. It was adapted from Toyota (Ohno, 1978), the car company Toyota.

We took each of these four themes and they each became a "Why." I'm going to talk you through one of these whys. This one is, "why are the toilets unflushed?" What needed to happen is the young people need to list at least five reasons why this might be happening,

and they could be things that are true for them or for somebody they know. All that matters is that it's something that is based in lived experience. They come up with some potential reasons of why, in this case, the toilets might be unflushed. They list them out, and then they have a conversation around which one they think is the most likely or the most interesting.

In this particular case, the one that the children wanted to focus on was the laziness of students. You can see this reason it's deficit oriented. That reason then becomes the why. Why are the students lazy? The next reason they want to focus on is "because they don't care about school property." Again, very deficit oriented. "Why don't students care about school property?" "Students don't feel like school property is theirs." Now the children are starting to go somewhere else. Now they're starting to think a little bit about, "Gosh, who owns this property? What does that mean? And why does that matter?" Next is, "Why don't students feel like school property is theirs?" They said "Students don't feel in control of school property." Well, now they are getting at another interesting aspect because they're thinking, "Gosh, if the things that are here are things that should matter for students, why don't we feel like we have any say or any control of it?" So from there, they asked, "Why don't students feel in control of school property?" The brainstorm they ended up choosing was that "Students don't have a lot of freedom at school." Now we're at something pretty darn structural.

What happens is this (i.e., Students don't have a lot of freedom at school) becomes the issue to focus on, and what we want to do from here is plan some kind of action. In this case, what we did with the young people is we said, "Okay, there are actions that you can just take because you're a human being and you can do that. There are actions that you could take but because of the way that the school is set up, you need to get permission before you just go out and do it. And then there are some things that you would like to have done but again because of the way the school is set up, they're not things that you can do but you could advocate for somebody else to do them."

The children came up with actions for their issue, or their problem that students don't have freedom in school. They said, "(1) Students should be able to just sign out to use the bathroom and just have one student go at a time. (2) Students should be able to borrow things they need, like books and computers, so they could do their schoolwork and their homework. (3) Students should be able to use the computers in the library for research projects." Now we're getting at this idea of, what do children have control over? The resources at the school—can they actually use them? "(4) Students should be able to do homework in the library during recess if they want." Again, can they use the school spaces in the ways that make sense to them and as they wish? "(5) Students should have their home involved in school more." So, what is that connection between home and school? And finally, "(6): Students should have a packet of homework due on Friday rather than individual homework for each night." The idea that they should have a little bit more control over their schedules. This came up because a number of the kids might have sports practice or different activities on different nights and they wanted to be able to get their work done and have some control over when they were able to do it.

You can see also that these ideas all seem, at least to me, fairly reasonable and if we think about empowerment or part of conscientización being about people having control over the boundaries of their participation, then we're starting to see that with these ideas. This is what young people are saying: they want to be able to use the computer, they want to be able to

use the library, they want to be able to determine when they're going to complete their homework for that week.

In terms of action, children presented these ideas to the principal and had a concrete list of what they were calling demands, or potential actions that could be taken. The principal also thought that they should present their ideas to the third through fifth grade teachers because some of their ideas pertain to the classrooms, such as when a student might be able to go to the bathroom. Through this process, children were able to negotiate with the principal and the teachers a list of ideas that were then approved by the school leadership. What they were then able to do is present these ideas to the entire school. They presented, for example, a pen pal buddy program as an action that came up from another group (based on the 5 Whys activity), designing and creating murals at the school, and other kinds of activities such as these.

After getting feedback and having the school assembly, the young people decided to create a mural that would address students' feeling like they don't belong or have ownership over the school. To create this mural, they collected data from the school. Data collection took different forms. They conducted another photovoice project that was a more focused on this question of belonging, and they put butcher paper in the cafeteria so that any student could come and write ideas or draw an image that they thought was important to have in the mural. Then they took that butcher paper, their photovoice project, including their photos and their narratives, and they analyzed these data to discern themes.

They determined their themes and from those themes, they came up with a list of some possible symbols that they might use within their mural. Then they presented these ideas to the principal and received district approval. You can see (Figure 5) that there are some links back to young people feeling emotionally supported in school as part of the first study, in terms of young people feeling like they belong and have some ownership over the school as well.

This mural is called "We Are Powerful." They worked with a critical muralist to create this mural, but they did a fair amount of the painting. I'm going just read to you a few things that they said about these images because I think it's important for you to hear their voices. Considering the chains, one student said, "I designed the chains on the mural to stand for the history of slavery. They connect to the word 'freedom' to show that we have made a lot of progress but we also need to remember what has happened and work on the problems that we still have, even though slavery is over." In considering the robot, the student said, "this represents the past and changes we make for the future. It says 'si se puede' and that means, 'yes we can,' because everyone can help make changes." Regarding the bridge in the mural, the student said, "This bridge that connects the two areas of the mural is to show that a lot of people who come to the United States wants the opportunity for education. It says *conexión*, which means connection, to show that even though people come from many different places, they are still connected to their culture."



Figure 5: “We are powerful” mural

I'm going to share a few of the subsequent murals that they created. Figure 6, Maplewood Stories, is about the stories in their community. Children decided to create this mural after the previous one because they conducted a set of focus groups with children in the school after completion of the first mural, to see about their connection to the mural. The other young people did not necessarily feel connected to that mural. I think that makes sense because most of the themes came from the subgroup of students who were involved in the photovoice project. To create this second mural, they conducted focus groups with other students and parents in the school, and with a few teachers, to devise the themes for this particular mural. After they created the Maplewood Stories mural, they conducted a survey of the school to see how connected people felt to this mural. What they learned is that the young people, the students in the school, felt connected to this mural, as did the parents, but the teachers didn't feel as connected to this mural. This makes sense because the teachers feeling a sense of connection and belonging was never part of the identified question.

by the grade cohort that we're in." Really, they were talking about their role relationships to one another in the school and how these could look otherwise.

Study 4: Relational empowerment

For this fourth study, I will talk a little bit about the scholar activist or organizer, culture of growth, support, and community building, then changes we see in the community, in groups, and also changes in social and cultural life circumstances, including material and psychological resources (see Figure 1).

This study focuses on relational empowerment (Langhout et al., 2014). What the young people talked about was the importance of them building collaborative competence. By collaborative competence, I mean how they developed teamwork and created a positive social climate. For young people, here's what this looked like: Vanessa, for example, said, "We decided that we wanted to paint the mural together. We were going to go through with that if, even if we had to do it through the summer, that we were still going to do it" (Langhout et al., 2014, p. 373). Vanessa's saying that being able to do this work was important. They decided they wanted to do it and that teamwork was important, even if it meant coming to the school over the summer.

Fatima said, "there were rules for everybody so that when one person would be talking they would listen to you so it made you feel, basically made me feel safe and that people would actually listen to me not just whisper to each other and things" (Langhout et al., 2014, p. 373). This is a positive social climate where Fatima is saying that everybody is listening and we have a way of being with one another where we are showing one another respect and treating one another with common decency. You can see descriptively how they're building collaborative competence through this project, through this after-school program.

We wanted to show what bridging social divisions looked like for a group this young. Children talked about building trust and reciprocity among groups. For example, Fatima said, "my favorite thing to learn was how people gather information. We did the house meetings or the focus groups and we gathered information to make the mural" (Langhout et al., 2014, p. 374). Fatima's talking about how she's built trust within groups and how they collected information from other groups. Edmund said, "We wrote a speech to tell the stories in the mural," and Mercedes said, "We made a book about the mural - the whole history" (Langhout et al., 2014, p. 374). The children are talking about making sure that everybody felt included and making sure everybody knew what the process was.

Edmond discussed the mural unveiling ceremony and what it meant to be at the front of an assembly to tell the other students, parents, and elected officials what this mural was about and how it was created. Children are narrating how they showed their reciprocity, to show how they were creating bridges among the different stakeholders who are part of the group. Mercedes is also saying something similar; if people couldn't make it to the mural unveiling and they wanted to know about the mural, they could read the book. "We wrote a book so that everybody who would read the book could know how we created this mural."

Another important aspect of this project was facilitating empowerment. In this case, we were interested in shared decision making and joint knowledge construction. Vanessa said, "we decided on what we were going to do next together and we decided that doing things together always made it easier. We decided that we needed to make a change and we decided on what we were going to make the change on together" (Langhout et al., 2014, p. 374).

Vanessa is pointing out the joint decision making that happened, or shared decision making. Mercedes said, "We thought out ideas together. We saw different things happen that we used together" (Langhout et al., 2014, p. 374). What is visible here is joint knowledge construction. They're working together to figure out what they want to do. For young people who are not positioned as being powerful, what this looked like was the research team creating conditions where the children could take more control over the boundaries of their social participation and then them actually doing work.

So young people also became much more adept at mobilizing their networks. Figure 8 is another kind of social network analysis. In this case, young people named all of the worlds that they were part of. Those worlds are listed in the figure, in the blue squares. These worlds include things like the school world, friends world, sports world, etc. Then they named all of the helpers—the people who helped them to achieve their goals in those worlds—and the people who hindered them or made it challenging for them to achieve their goals. What we see is that at time two, young people were able to draw on many different worlds to help them to achieve their own goals for themselves for school. Now they're not only drawing on people from school, but also drawing on their friends, and drawing on people from the after school program. Now their helpers are their brothers, their friends, their parents, their teachers, and many more people.

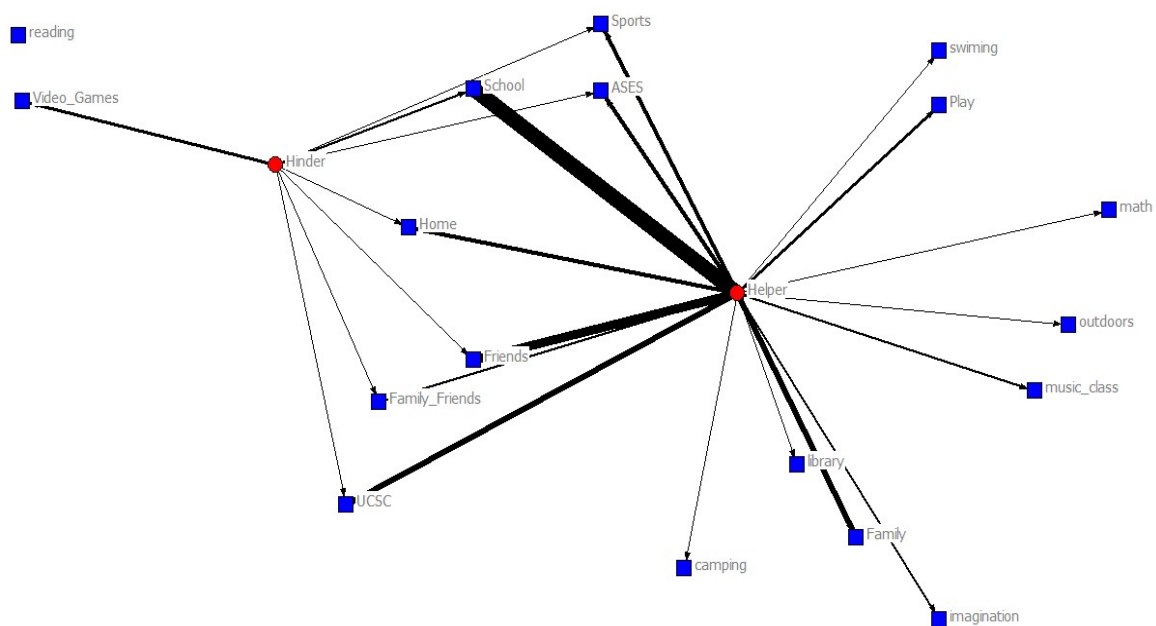


Figure 8: Mobilizing networks

In terms of relational empowerment, young people were involved in passing on a legacy. How did they do this? Through making change and capacity building. For example, Mercedes said, "I wanted to make a sign of change, which we did last summer through the big mural" (Langhout et al., 2014, p. 375). Luis said, "I knew that if I didn't do this, I wouldn't really get a chance to help our community" (Langhout et al., 2014, p. 376). The 'this' was working on the mural. Finally Fatima said, "The program changed my image of the school because I used to probably think, well, I thought that school wasn't that important.

But then this program made me feel that I belonged in the school and I made a change. So I had to go to school because it helped me and it helped the school a lot" (Langhout et al., 2014, p. 376). Overall, children expressed several ways that they engaged in relational empowerment through passing on a legacy. Many discussed the guidance they received through the program, guidance that helped them to learn deeply about their community and create change, trust in themselves and other students, and change their relationships to the school. We categorize these activities as passing on a legacy because students have learned how to create change and have left their mark—literally—on the school, which is a legacy in and of itself.

Conclusion

In terms of implications for this research, children can engage in conscientización with the right support. Also, developmental psychology and critical childhood studies need to be in better communication with one another. Especially in the U.S., as the only UN member country that has not ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the ways that we think about decisions that children can make, and what spaces children should be in is really behind the rest of the world at this point. So in the US, having these different disciplines being in communication with another is important.

Finally, we must take into account how conscientización and empowerment theories need to change when the population of interest is children, especially Latinx children due to social positioning. This is important because if we don't have empowerment with young people, I would argue we don't have empowerment with anybody. The ways that we are connected is much clearer when we are working with young people than it is when we're working with adults because of the ways that adults can sometimes in this country prioritize freedom to mean having individual choice and being able to do whatever you want, whereas children are not in that position. Therefore, if we really want to think deeply about conscientización, empowerment, and what freedom means, we need to be working with young people because they are the case in point.

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