

CUS

Research Brief



Welcome to the seventh edition of the Research Brief published by the Centre for Urban Schooling. The Centre is proud to be involved in a number of projects that feature critical practitioner research, youth participatory action research and arts-based research. In this issue you'll read about three of our current research projects that support both teacher and student equity work in schools.

Rob Simon and Will Edwards write about the Centre's Toronto Writing Project which has teachers studying their use of writing as a mechanism to address equity issues in their classrooms. Leila Angod, a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre for Urban Schooling, shares a reflection of her and Professor Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández's work facilitating yPAR with students at an independent school affiliated with the University of Toronto. Cristina Guerrero discusses the research she is currently conducting with Gaztambide-Fernández on the impact of youth participatory action research (yPAR) with Latin@ and Black students at two Toronto public school boards.

All three articles will give you an excellent idea of the exciting research that is being undertaken at the Centre for Urban Schooling. I hope you enjoy them.

Tara Goldstein, PhD
Acting Academic Director, Centre for Urban Schooling



Our Mission Statement

The Centre for Urban Schooling was established in 2005 to connect OISE to urban schools and communities. The Centre conducts research on and advocates for critical practice that is focused on how to better serve historically marginalized and racialized children and youth in public schools.

The Toronto Writing Project: Supporting educators to address equity issues in their classrooms through writing

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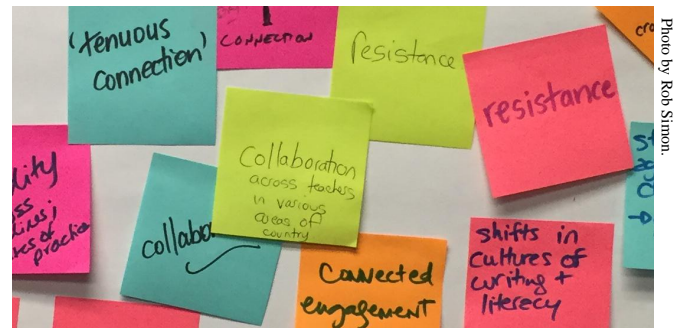


Photo by Rob Simon.

The Toronto Writing Project (TWP) in the Centre for Urban Schooling (CUS) at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) supports activist educators to conduct inquiries into their own classroom practices and share knowledge with peers who may face related issues teaching diverse students in urban schools. Composed of teachers, activists, and researchers who view writing as a mechanism for addressing equity issues across subject matter, across core subjects, TWP encourages formal and informal research opportunities for youth and teachers working individually and collaboratively to address equity issues in their classrooms, schools, and communities.

Starting with the idea that teachers are well positioned to generate knowledge about writing and equity, and then use this knowledge to create peer to peer professional

development networks that are tied to local and trans-local issues, the Toronto Writing Project is committed to building inquiry around teaching and writing. This project draws inspiration from well-established research collectives such as the National Writing Project (NWP), the largest research network by and for writing teachers in the world, and the Philadelphia Writing Project (PhilWP). A significant dimension to this collaboration resides in the work of teacher consultants who are central in actively shaping the project and growing the network (Lieberman & Wood, 2003). For instance, PhilWP teachers are actively involved in a program designed by project teachers whereby they visit, are visited by, and consult with other teachers not in the project (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990). The cross-visitation program constitutes practitioner research in that teachers can conduct classroom inquiries across educational contexts and schools, meanwhile a smaller research group is documenting the evolution of the program as a model of peer to peer

professional development (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This arrangement allows teachers to develop a broad range of perspectives on what goes on in their own classrooms and larger educational communities. In addition to drawing inspiration from some of the central tenets of NWP and PhilWP, the Toronto Writing Project focuses on the following five priorities:

- 1. Creating a community of inquiry through monthly meetings that explore issues in teaching writing for social justice.**

Monthly meetings invite members to lead in-depth seminars framed around a specific issue of research and/or practice. These inquiry-based seminars encourage members to investigate aspects of their current teaching contexts through exploring research questions, dilemmas, student relationships, and problems of practice. These sessions inform individual's ongoing research and practice, and may also inform

publications or presentations to the broader field.

2. Developing a network of critical educators in the GTA through a spring institute related to writing and equity.

Members of TWP will work together to plan and direct a two-day spring institute for educators funded by The Ruth and Alexander Dworkin Tolerance Fund. The institute will be a space for teachers to engage in sustained inquiries into how writing can be a means of exploring issues of culture, context, and identity in urban classrooms. Sustained co-investigation in the institutes can foster connections and collaboration across communities of practice, from the Centre for Urban Schooling, to the Toronto District School Board, the Toronto District Catholic School Board, community-based programs, community colleges, as well as teacher education programs such as the Master of Teaching Program at OISE.

3. Developing opportunities for educators to engage in cross-visitation.

Members of TWP will be encouraged to teach and learn

together by engaging in cross-visitation, which may include observations in classrooms, collaboration, sharing resources, and developing opportunities for collective research.

4. Linking with national and international networks of critical educators.

TWP intends to develop connections with other local communities and networks of educators concerned with critical research and practice in urban schools. This may involve formalizing a relationship with the National Writing Project in the US. Using the Knowledge Innovation Technology Lab (KITL) at OISE, TWP can develop video links with urban sites of the National Writing Project to share research, issues, and insights in critical writing pedagogy. Possible sites to develop connections with include the Manitoba Writing Project, led by Drs. Michelle Honeyford and Wayne Serebrin at University of Manitoba and Philadelphia Writing Project, led by Dr. Diane Waff at the University of Pennsylvania. These connections to other urban communities of critical educators can be a means of sharing our knowledge and experiences, and developing collaborative research possibilities across national and international borders.

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Youth participatory action research at University of Toronto Schools: Co-constructing knowledge and communities for social justice

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As a facilitator and researcher, in these pages I am negotiating my desire to tell a happy story about yPAR. Certainly, my first year “doing” yPAR has been exhilarating and a way to collectively open new worlds for everyone involved, as suggested by the comments from youth and practitioner researchers that I share throughout this essay. At the same time, it is in the interstices of the complexities and contradictions that some of my most intense learning is being catalyzed.

In the pages that follow, I share a bit about how this project came to be, what it looked like this year, as well as some of my thinking-in-progress about facilitating the first year of a youth participatory action research project with secondary students at University of Toronto Schools. Admittedly, the ethics of this approach is, in some ways, messy given the youth-centered politics of yPAR; I have not authored this article together with youth co-researchers or practitioner participants, and have rather sought permission to draw from their words and work for the purpose of offering you a story about our project-in-progress. While addressing this limitation does not resolve it, my hope is that what follows reveals something of the youth researchers’ fiery pursuit of answers about their worlds, as well as a few of the questions, tensions, and insights that punctuate my process of being/becoming a school-based yPAR facilitator, as someone who is a researcher of Canadian elite schools¹ using critical race theory and transnational feminist approaches (Angod, 2015).

¹ <https://utoronto.academia.edu/leilaangod>

A bit of background

University of Toronto Schools (UTS) and the Centre for Urban Schooling (CUS) came together through a shared commitment to school-based research for social justice to create a youth participatory action research project that launched in the fall of 2015. UTS and CUS enjoy an ongoing relationship. This latest collaboration is made possible by a \$133,333 grant by the Newton Foundation, led by Richard Ingram, a UTS alumnus who is passionate about school-based research. Associate Professor Dr. Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández and CUS Postdoctoral Fellow Dr. Leila Angod (that's me) lead the research project in collaboration with Rosemary Evans, Principal of UTS, and in co-facilitation with Graduate Assistant and PhD student Karima Kinlock.

Given that both projects are based at CUS, a relationship is growing between the UTS project and the Youth Solidarities Across Borders class. We began to foster this relationship this year by working together to plan the annual Youth Research Celebration, an event that shares the youth researchers' findings and action components, and we hope to continue to grow this relationship between youth in Toronto.

Approach / negotiations

As a tool for social change, youth participatory action research “provides young people with opportunities to study social problems affecting their lives and then determine actions to rectify these problems” (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 2). The UTS yPAR project engages the complexities and contradictions of studying and rectifying

social problems in an elite school context where students enjoy plenty of educational advantages and opportunities, one of which is the opportunity to conduct research. This surfaces several questions for me (which I have not answered but rather continue to explore):

- How do we theorize and engage the intersectionality and simultaneity of the multitude of ways in which we enact and experience domination?;²

“Thanks for leading us through this social science research experience – it has been most interesting and has really been significant in my reflection about my teaching now and for next year. It has made me look at my approach and teaching delivery in a way I haven't before and this is exciting for me – I'm inspired to dive into curriculum – which I have always loved – but do so from a changed lens – and I know this experience will be most valuable to my M.Ed.”
– UTS teacher Kris Ewing

² *Intersectionality* originates in Black feminist scholarship. In my emphasis on the spatial (intersectional) and temporal (simultaneous) facets of the “matrix of domination” (Collins, 2000, p. 227 – 228), I have in mind scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), Sherene Razack (1998), and Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016). These scholars insist on the interlocking nature of axes of oppression and attend to how capitalism, heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and colonialisms mutually constitute our bodies as marked/unmarked, legible/illegible, and free/unfree. *Intersectionality* is an approach that holds together the ways in which we are at once subjugated by and complicit in relations of force.

- What gets unsettled when we unsettle institutional inequities in elite school contexts?;
- How might we make an intervention into processes of exclusion at the school and in practices of oppression more broadly?;
- What does it mean to engage in social justice when the moral distinction that this work produces may reinforce elite subjectivities and generate material and symbolic capitals³ for the researchers?;
- How might students engage their schooling experiences as an entry point for analyzing and disrupting the micro and macro processes of global racial capitalism and heteropatriarchy, two dimensions of power that the youth researchers identified as important to them?

These questions, which animated many of our conversations throughout the year, resonate with some of the issues raised by scholars such as Stoudt, Kuriloff, Reichert, and Ravitch (2010) who facilitate and research yPAR in elite American secondary school contexts.

For example, students were invited to interrogate how advantage and inequality are socially constructed, and how we participate in this construction. By unsettling the naturalness of power we emphasize changeability and the ability of young people to transform hierarchical relations that articulate through interlocking axes of race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, and language.

By exploring the nuances of moments of pleasure, anger, and disappointment, we emphasize how power is lived through the body. To understand how schools institutionalize power, our approach cultivates a shift from interrogating intentionality to analyzing both conditions of possibility and material and symbolic effects. These conversations and related community building activities are shaped by concepts from critical race theory, transnational feminism, and decolonial theory.

The [circuitous] process

Sixteen UTS students in grades 10 to 12 completed the 2015 – 2016 yPAR project. The project is organized as a co-curricular commitment that meets regularly to explore issues related to social justice at University of Toronto Schools.

The program invited students to become researchers of their schooling experiences. Youth researchers learned how to design and carry out a research project with the objective of making a positive impact at their school and beyond. Students learned several research methods including interviews, Theatre of the Oppressed, mixed-media collages, and Photo Voice.



³ These might include the moral distinction effected by *doing good*, (cultural capital), resulting student leadership positions (social capital), and the conversion of these symbolic capitals to financial capital through enhanced CVs and university applications that help fashion a pathway to desirable employment.

Our class comprised students who bring knowledge from diverse backgrounds and experiences. By creating a supportive space within which to explore this *background* knowledge that is often elided in traditional schooling contexts, we engaged in data collection activities that included free-writing, theatre, comic strips, and body maps to co-construct and analyze data for the purpose of building a *foreground* of knowledge about the youth researchers' schooling experiences. To help us think about the broader context of schooling in Toronto, CUS Postdoctoral Fellow Gillian Parekh visited to share her findings on how gifted programs contribute to racialized streaming in the TDSB. Drawing from Eve Tuck's [problem tree approach](#)⁴, we identified themes in the data, and created and mapped trees for several problems in which students were interested. Through this process we arrived at a research question around which students then worked in groups, with each of the three groups researching a different facet of the overarching question.

The youth researchers' overarching research question was: how do institutionalized forces including merit produce the ideal UTS student? One group examined the construction of the category of *merit* through the admissions process, analyzed how *merit* shapes the applicant and student pool, and considered the UTS admissions process in relation to Parkeh's data on the relationship between gifted programs and racialized streaming in the TDSB. The second and third group explored discourses of student excellence and how they move through institutional space, are negotiated,

embodied, and refused. The second group investigated administrator, faculty, and staff members' perceptions of the ideal student in order to uncover the form that these perceptions take, and where and how we might locate them in school life. The third group researched students' perceptions of the ideal student to uncover how students negotiate and co-construct the meaning of excellence, and the embodied effects that these perceptions have on students' experiences, health, and wellbeing. These three research projects intersect and overlap. What makes them distinct are the particular processes that they aim to uncover and the groups that the youth researchers strive to "speak back" to: how did we get here? (admissions); how do staff members envision who we are? (staff perceptions of excellence); how do students negotiate who we are supposed to be? (student perceptions of excellence). One area of growth for next year will be to spend more time debriefing between the groups, since these processes are intertwined, and the insights of each group shed led on each of the other projects.

"I have never really looked at the school like that before [yPAR]. I have never looked at things critically... and it's really interesting to see different people's perspective of it, like all of the different things that are shaping people in our school, I mean, it's not about just how my world is shaped, it's about everyone else and it's about looking at what is happening; these are the institutionalized things we've all accepted, but why have we accepted them and how can we change this..." – UTS youth researcher

⁴ See <http://www.evetuck.com/problem-tree/>.

In February, the youth researchers successfully defended their research proposals in front of a panel of graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, teachers, and professors. In May, together with the Youth Solidarities Across Borders class discussed in the next selection, the youth researchers shared their findings and their ongoing plans to make a contribution to equity at UTS. The youth researchers are working on staff workshops to share their findings and recommendations in the fall.

Tensions / insights

I briefly explore three tensions in the work and a few insights that are emerging from them.

The first is the difficulty of revealing and disrupting the (naturalized) power hierarchy between staff (teachers and administrators) and students, particularly in a school context where students' research identified a deeply hierarchical relationship between staff and teachers that often demands obedience, a demand that is in conflict with the call for students to be critical thinkers. At the outset of the project, staff members wished to be involved in the yPAR project and I sought ways to create conversations between staff and students until I realized that this was just not going to work. The tendency for the adults to assert their/our teacher role as the knowledge holders in the room was powerful. The shift to seeing youth as co-constructors of knowledge was going to take some time to effect. I had to insist on the "y" (youth) being at the front of yPAR, and created a separate critical practitioner research group to explore questions of

knowledge and power within the staff group.

Our staff research group studied texts such as Stoudt's (2008) article on how to analyze discourse to reveal power relations in elite schools, and Gaztambide-Fernández's (2011) article on how students use bullshitting as a strategy to manage their workload and to legitimate socioeconomic status in elite school contexts. Two staff members recorded a student meeting and produced a transcript for the purpose of analyzing the nuanced moves that the adults made to direct, enable, and limit student expression, which was an incredibly powerful exercise and one that we will build on next year.

Similarly, in our school-based context, I was continually negotiating being interpellated by students as a teacher. It was clear that when (younger students in particular) felt I was their teacher, they were unable to share that they were having difficulties negotiating group dynamics or understanding a particular topic. I underestimated how quickly and completely grade 10 students tended to regard me as a teacher (rather than a researcher or facilitator) even though our sessions were voluntary and not for a course credit, and I was not assessing their work or assigning grades. This experience demonstrates for me the tremendous, ongoing vigilance and care that school-based yPAR demands of facilitators in order to create the conditions for the co-construction of knowledge and to enable young people to enter into the space as experts of their social worlds.

Resonating with this tension, the challenges of inviting students with a range in ages spanning grades 10, 11, and 12 where older students

occupied student leadership positions were significant. Structuring participatory methods so that they do not favour those with the greatest social capital is as crucial as it is challenging, and requires what can be for students an uncomfortable subversion of relationships.

Outro

There are no easy answers about doing social justice work in elite school contexts. What I know without a doubt after this year is that yPAR is a powerful methodology that takes on a life of its own and produces meaningful effects for students, schools, and the participants/researchers engaged in co-constructing knowledge and interventions. I invite you to follow our work and to reach out to grow the conversation. Our yPAR @ CUS website www.ypar.ca launches late-July 2016.

You can find more photos from our recent Youth Research Celebration on our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/yparcelebration>

"[T]he biggest thing I gained was like the language to talk about [inequities], 'cause I talked about the issues that we researched with my friends and now I find it easier to talk about, and I have the thoughts to support it"

– UTS youth researcher

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Youth Solidarities Across Borders: Collaborative equity work through youth participatory action research

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Led by OISE professor Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández and research associate Dr. Cristina Guerrero, the SSHRC-funded study Youth Solidarities across Borders (YSAB) builds on several years of exploratory and pilot research centred on the schooling experiences of Latin@¹ students attending Toronto public high schools. While adult educators have offered multiple approaches to address these circumstances in and outside of the school context, rarely have youth been given the opportunities to examine them and develop solutions to the issues affecting their education (see Cammarota & Fine, 2008). The objective of the YSAB initiative is to engage young people with youth participatory action research (yPAR) and facilitate youth-centred spaces for knowledge creation and mobilization in schools. This year's yPAR work, which was co-facilitated with OISE graduate students Rebecca Beaulne-Stuebing and Diana Barrero, entailed a credit course program within which Latin@ and Black students co-constructed knowledge about the social and educational issues that are important to them.

Three key principles informed our yPAR approach throughout the years. They are: 1) youths hold valuable knowledge and expertise about their lives and the social conditions that affect them; 2) youths possess enormous leadership potential that they can apply in their work and alliances with each other and others in their communities; and 3) youths have vast potential for collective organization and action across the intersecting domains (school, government, family, etc.) in their lives (Cammarota, 2008). In consideration of these key notions of yPAR, in both the Proyecto Latin@ and Youth Solidarities initiatives we sought to provide the students with a collaborative and community-based forum and the tools to explore the issues they deem relevant to their schooling experiences and work towards meaningful personal and educational activism (Guerrero, Gaztambide- Fernández, Rosas, & Guerrero, 2013).

Our informing model:**Proyecto Latin@**

The Youth Solidarities initiative is informed by our previous work with Proyecto Latin@, a two phase research initiative implemented in response to the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) data that revealed disproportionately high rates of early school leaving among Latin@ youth. In the first phase of Proyecto Latin@, which took place in 2008 and 2009, we sought to explore how Latin@ students explained the processes and factors influencing their decisions to stay in or leave school. In order to understand these processes, we also considered the students' conceptions of student engagement and disengagement as well as their identification of the ways in which the school system could better support their educational needs. In addition to sharing their experiences, the students made suggestions for the ways in which the school system could better serve their educational needs at the board, school, and classroom levels, including the request to more closely work with the researchers so that they could further explore the issues they identified as important to their schooling and social experiences.

To address this student demand, we designed the second phase of Proyecto Latin@ as a school-based youth participatory action research (yPAR) initiative through which the youth would identify their own areas of inquiry and conduct their own research projects. Introduced in the Spring of 2011, this yPAR phase entailed a senior social sciences credit course. Participating students were eligible for one of the following: Grade 11 Introduction to Anthropology, Sociology and Psychology (HSP3M), Grade 12 Challenge and Change (HSB4M), or Grade 12 Philosophy: Theories and Questions (HZT4U) credit. Course placement was determined in consultation with the host school's Student Success department and was also contingent on each student's grade level and credit accumulation history. The program was housed at a central Toronto high school, which has been identified by the TDSB's Urban Diversity Strategy as a high-needs school with a large population of underperforming and racialized groups (TDSB, 2008). The school also had the highest number of Latin@ students among TDSB high schools and, importantly, a supportive principal and Student Success teachers who were eager to allow space for new and innovative opportunities. In collaboration with the students, a team of four adult facilitators designed and implemented the yPAR course: Principal Investigator and Associate

Professor Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, TDSB teacher Cristina Guerrero, who was a Ph.D. student and OISE graduate assistant at the time, TDSB teacher Mónica Rosas, and Elizabeth Guerrero, who served as the Undergraduate Research Assistant. All four facilitators were fully bilingual, which allowed them to accommodate the learning and language needs of all students, regardless of whether they were bilingual, English-dominant, or Spanish-dominant.

In the project conceptualization stage, the students expanded their engagement with social science issues and theories to reflect upon, devise, and revise research questions. The students then began the process of learning multiple modes of data collection, making connections between their research questions, different methodologies, and analytic approaches.

¹ I use the term Latin@ rather than Latina, Latino, or Latina/o as a political means of simultaneously denoting different variations and gendered forms of the word. This orthographic form is not my own; I have borrowed the spelling of "Proyecto Latin@", the joint OISE/University of Toronto that informs this piece.

As the project evolved, students put together research proposals, engaged in the process of obtaining approval from the “Research Ethics Board,” and began to collect data. They processed the data through transcriptions and data entry, which they then categorized and analyzed, identifying important themes and coming up with key findings. The final stage of the course involved identifying dissemination strategies and organizing a public event during which the students presented their research findings to an audience of more than 100 people, including fellow students, teachers, parents, and other members of the community. Through Proyecto Latin@, the students engaged with multiple processes in their own quest to proactively “speak back” to the issues that were important to their daily lives as Latin@ youth. In addition to learning about social science research, they learned that personal and systemic change is possible when they actively participate as makers of their own curriculum. Indeed, the yPAR work from Proyecto Latin@ not only laid the foundation for subsequent work with Latin@ youth at the host and other schools but also as a model for other groups of racialized students in TDSB schools, including

students from the Portuguese-speaking and Black communities.

Expansion to Youth Solidarities across Borders

The Youth Solidarities across Borders work this year marked the 5th time that the TDSB and OISE collaboratively offered a credit-granting program based on a yPAR framework. This year’s class involved a group of 18 students who self-identified with either the Latin@ or Black communities. These youth, who attended different schools from across the Toronto public and Catholic school systems, represented Grades 11 and 12. They were eligible for either a Grade 12 Equity Studies (HSE4M) or an Interdisciplinary Studies (IDC4U) credit upon successful completion of the 110-hour class requirements. Like previous iterations of our yPAR work, course placement was contingent on each student’s credit accumulation history. Several students already had a relationship with OISE and Dr. Guerrero through their previous involvement in earlier yPAR course offerings. As the students came from different schools, Dr. Guerrero liaised with their Student Success departments to facilitate the appropriate course placement and registrations.



Photo by <http://cromwell.com/>

The weekly class meetings took place at OISE on Wednesday evenings, and Dr. Guerrero served as the course instructor. Graduate students Rebecca Beaulne-Stuebing and Diana Barrero co-facilitated the course and contributed their expertise in community education. While Rebecca's self-identification and sharing as a member of an Anishinaabe community provided the students with insight on Indigenous peoples' experiences in Canada, Diana's experiences working in Nunavik and South Africa provided the students with insight on inequities in other world contexts. Diana's identities as a Spanish-speaker from Colombia also provided additional supports for the students who wished to draw upon their experiences with immigration throughout the semester.

The first course meeting began in December 2015 with an introduction to the concept of youth participatory action research. Students were asked to read a chapter from the 2008 book *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action in motion* and consider their own roles as young researchers. We reconvened after the winter holiday break and collectively decided on

fundamental course requirements like the evaluation structure, which included journal writing, a take home test, and their research projects. Given the organic nature of our work together and to further provide students with equitable opportunities for success, we collectively re-assessed and adjusted our evaluation framework to include a peer seminar assignment that is described later in this piece.

The semester entailed a variety of conversations framed through discourses of critical race theory and curriculum studies. In one of our first activities, we collectively examined TDSB student achievement data and looked for recurring patterns. The students identified various disparities among racialized and less affluent students, like higher rates of suspension as well as overrepresentation in non-Gifted special education and non-academic programs of study. This data-based dialogue set the stage for further conversations about a variety of other equity issues like micro-aggressions, Islamophobia, as well as sexist and racist media representations. Between classes, the students took to our class Facebook page to share video clips and articles that they felt were pertinent and of interest to the group. This sharing often continued during subsequent class meetings. The peer seminars allowed the students to further explore equity

topics of interest in smaller groups and share their findings with the rest of us. This assignment involved an opening activity, a presentation, and whole group discussion. One group became interested in the topic of environmental racism during a March Break excursion to the New York City and Boston areas. As we were leaving Manhattan, two students observed stark aesthetic and socio-economic differences between each side of the bridge we were crossing. This observation inspired them to learn more about the water crises in Flint and Kashechewan and their effects on Black and Indigenous peoples. The students connected their concerns to the Toronto context and consequently also engaged with secondary research on the effects of gentrification in parts of the city that included their own neighbourhoods. Another group comprised students from the previous year's course offering and opted to extend their earlier work on gender roles in schools. This group wanted to raise greater awareness on the implications of language and attitudes learned in social contexts at school. It was interesting to learn about the origins of some of these projects originated and the ways in which they informed the students' final research projects.

Similar to the process in Proyecto Latin@, the primary research project conceptualization stage involved an engagement with social science issues and theories to reflect upon, devise, and revise research questions. Through references to Weenie (2000) and Tuhiwai Smith (2012), we revisited the colonialist implications of research on Indigenous and other marginalized peoples and asked the students to think deeply about the what, who, how, and why of their research. The how and why were emphasized as integral components to their action research and future social justice endeavours. The students then learned more data collection and research methods vs. methodologies. Using transcriptions from Proyecto Latin@, Professor Gaztambide-Fernández walked the students through a data analysis exercise through which they categorized and analyzed the data to identify important themes and recurring patterns. As they worked through their own projects, the students assisted their peers as study participants and audiences for developing ideas. The final stage of the course involved identifying dissemination strategies and organizing a public event in conjunction

with the UTS yPAR group also featured in this research brief. During this event, which was held on May 25 at University College, some of the students took the opportunity to share their research findings – the knowledge they constructed – to an audience that included their teachers, peers, and parents. The youth presented on topics which included the effects of gentrification on racialized communities in Toronto, access to arts programs, racism in schools, and bullying. As per their collective decision regarding evaluation, the students also wrote and submitted research briefs outlining components like their project rationales, theoretical framework, methodology, and discussion of findings.

Reflections and Future Directions

In this work we found that the yPAR process provided the students with the opportunities to critically and collectively think for themselves and view their social context with “different eyes and open eyes” (Cahill, Rios-Moore, & Threatts, 2008, p. 89). Through Youth Solidarities across Borders, the students co-constructed a semester of collaborative learning with and about each other. In addition to learning about equity issues and social science research, they learned that actively speaking to the issues that matter to them can bring about greater awareness and change on the personal and systemic levels. One student shared that:

“[T]he class ... really helped me open my mind to so many things that I was oblivious to before. I really hope to be a difference in today’s society. Thanks!”

Such experiences underscore the powerful ways in which different aspects of yPAR changed students’ perceptions of themselves, their social roles, and their capabilities (Canella, 2008). One important question is whether and how projects like Youth Solidarities across Borders can be sustained in the longer term across the TDSB and in other school districts, so that students in many other schools and communities can benefit from the experience. While we acknowledge that no two yPAR projects are the same, even if lesson plans were to be replicated, it is important to underscore the importance of flexibility so that the conversations come from the youth in organic ways. As the school year comes to a close, we are continuing our conversations with the youth, the TDSB, and OISE to co-develop next steps. We are excited that we will have the continued support of the TDSB and OISE, and look forward to continuing to engage youth with the issues that matter the most to them.

Indeed, the following student feedback points to the

importance of sustaining such work:

"I am mentally out of breath; however, thank you for all the challenging work - I know it is bound to be of use in the near future."

"I want to say thank you to every single person here. It was an amazing experience. I wish the best for all of you and I want you to know this class helped me achieve more in life than in any other class I have ever taken. The thoughts and memories of this class will change the world ... Overall, what I took from the class was not just a higher understanding of social equity issues, but I learned more about myself and how I am going to apply my strengths into the adult world. The class was life-changing ... I know I might work in education."

We are excited about the next year's work, which includes the continued support of the TDSB and OISE as well as planning for a potential Steps to University program that will allow students to obtain university credit while

working on their Grade 12 course. We look forward to continuing to engage youth with the issues that matter the most to them.

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