the short list: recommended reading for field practitioners

Brown, Kelli R. McCormack; McDermott, Robert J.; Bryant, Carol A.; Forthofer, Melinda S.

Youth as Community Researchers

Community Youth Development Journal, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2003

■ This very brief article pointedly outlines the benefits of youth involvement in research, the challenges of youth as researchers, and concludes with lessons learned during the Sarasota County Demonstration Project. The goal of the project was to reduce tobacco and alcohol initiation among middle school students in the county. The Community Advisory Committee wanted the youth to have an active role; however, one challenge they encountered was working with adults reluctant to relinquish control. Other challenges related to working with youth, such as the logistical issue of transportation for youth and students' availability, are described as well as things that worked well, including role playing, training on confidentiality, and paying researchers for their time while training and interviewing. Clear implementation lessons from this project included: have an enthusiastic coordinator, involve youth from the beginning and train them on research skills.

Chen, PeiYao; Weiss, Faedra; Nicholson, Heather Johnston; Girls Incorporated®

Girls Study Girls Inc.: Engaging Girls in Evaluation Through Participatory Action Research

American Journal of Community Psychology (2010) 46:228-237

■ This is an excellent article that provides insight into several challenges as Girls Incorporated® conducted research across five affiliates to discover the meaning and impact of Girls Inc. environments. The article clearly outlines their steps in training, data collection, and data analysis and presenting results, with an emphasis on girl and adult roles. The paper also enumerates lessons learned in the areas of: using technology to attract participants, managing the differing abilities of participants, training before getting started, collecting a realistic amount of data, supporting the team efforts through behind-the-scenes staff, and having organizational leadership for engaging stakeholders.

Foster-Fishman, Pennie; Law, Kristen M.; Lichty, Lauren F.; Aoun, Christina

Youth ReACT for Social Change: A Method for Youth Participatory Action Research

American Journal of Community Psychology (2010) 46:67-83

■ This relatively long article provides detailed descriptions of the methods used to engage youth in problem identification and qualitative data analysis with particular attention to research stages throughout the project. This article provides an excellent example of using Photovoice for problem identification and messaging games for learning to do first and second order analysis and theming. The article concludes with an analysis of the challenges: data reduction, time constraints, maintaining youth involvement, and managing group dynamics. Feedback and community dialogue culminated in a booklet "A Guide to Youth Voices" and a traveling exhibit.

James, Taj

Democratizing Knowledge: The Role of Research and Evaluation in Youth Organizing

Community Youth Development Journal, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2003

■ This article is primarily about youth-empowerment and outlines the steps for knowledge production: gathering information, analyzing, interpreting and framing the data and then linking the information to power and putting it to use. In the author's own words it, "examines the relationship between knowledge and power and provides examples of knowledge production in the context of real-life campaigns where youth are using information as a tool for social change."

Kohfeldt, Danielle; Chun, Lina; Grace; Sara; Langhout; Regina Day

Youth Empowerment in Context: Exploring Tensions in School-Based yPAR

American Journal of Community Psychology (2011) 47:28-45

■ This is an excellent article for anyone working in a school setting attempting to make changes through youth empowerment. The researchers learned about hierarchies in schools and their experience illustrated that the project is not made up of only the "researchers" and the "participants," but other stakeholders such as teachers, parents, principals, etc. For example they learned how some teachers had more influence than other teachers and far more than the students. The research identified three areas of tension: assumptions about youth's ability to have a say in school rules, structural challenges including the invisible structure of power within the setting, and conflict over what kind of goals the project should have (winnable goals versus critical consciousness).

Kirshner, Ben; O'Donoghue, Jennifer; McLaughlin, Milbrey

Youth-Adult Research Collaborations: Bringing Youth Voice to the Research Process

Chapter 7 of "Organized Activities as Contexts of Development: Extracurricular Activities, After-School and Community Programs" by J. Mahoney, R. Larson and J. Eddies (eds.)

■ This chapter describes a framework for understanding youth-adult research partnerships and that framework is used to examine two research projects. The author's framework lists six dimensions that are discussed across the different methodologies, beginning with the question, "What will the interaction between youth and adults look like?" Included in the chapter are the two examples of Youth Adult Research Collaboration that are examined. Using the six dimension the authors characterize one strategy as "youth as research assistants" and the other strategy as "youth as research partners." The chapter concludes with a discussion of the benefits, challenges and implications of youth-adult research collaboration.

London, Jonathan K.; Zimmerman, Kristen; Erbstein, Nancy

Youth-Led Research and Evaluation: Tools for Youth, Organizational, and Community Development

New Directions for Evaluation, no. 98, Summer 2003

■ This chapter provides case studies and discussion about the ways that youth-led research and evaluation can help link youth and community development goals and outcomes. Youth REP (Research, Evaluation and Planning) includes "strategies to put the youth 'voice' into the community ear and ultimately into action." The chapter provides a table of Youth REP benefits to youth, organizations and communities that could be of value to someone trying to initiate a project and convince stakeholders of the value of youth involvement. Included are sample projects whose outcomes demonstrate the benefits; however, their methodology is not described. Youth IMPACT, a program of the San Francisco Dept. of Children Youth and Families studying 40 community-based organizations, had findings that were distinctly different from adult-led processes. For example, youth found that "trust" was an indicator of a successful youth-serving organization and yet the idea had never been considered previously.

Mead, June P.

Map It! And Turn Up the Volume of Youth Voices

Community Youth Development Journal, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2003

■ This article describes the unique approach of using photography to identify community assets and community deficits in Buffalo, NY, through youth taking pictures of what's working and what's not working, or needs fixing or improvement. The two lists were further broken down. Assets were listed as people or places and deficits defined as things that the youth could do something about and things they could not. From this process two major projects evolved: a riverfront park clean-up and improvements to the playground. Although adult facilitators planned the photo mapping project, the youth made many gains. Overall they gained a sense of empowerment. Their motivation to succeed was increased as was their self-confidence. They developed skills in leadership, problem-solving, planning and decision making. The article closes with suggestions for adopting the community mapping process.

Ozer, Emily J; Ritterman, Miranda; Wanis, Maggie G

Participatory Action Research (PAR) in Middle School: Opportunities, Constraints, and Key Processes

American Journal of Community Psychology (2010) 46:152-166

■ In this very detailed article the researchers describe their experience using Participatory Action Research in a Middle School setting, making it another good resource for those working in a school environment. The intended outcome was to provide disadvantaged students an opportunity to participate in school governance and shape school practices based on their research. After a range of issues were identified the teachers and researchers helped narrow the issues, ultimately choosing two issues they felt were most "winnable." The article spends considerable time discussing the features of the school setting that affected their research. In this setting they found numerous constraints: climate and culture (schools tend to be adult-driven and behavior focused), policy and structure (academic calendar and competing demands), school social network (necessary to have teachers interested and able to collaborate on the issues), space for non-academic activities (very few electives are provided in middle school which is where this work was conducted), student development (issues of social maturity in students and inadequate physical space) and teacher development (the need to share power with students and have ongoing technical support regarding research and advocacy).

Strack, Robert W.; Magil, Cathleen; McDonagh, Kara

Engaging Youth Through Photovoice

Health Promotion Practice, January 2004, No. 1, 49-58

■ This article focuses on one photovoice project in Baltimore; however, it clearly outlines the method from site selection and equipment to exhibiting the project. The authors provide recommendations including a curriculum outline. Other specific recommendations include: selecting the right site with support for the project, a youth to adult ratio of 5:1, and having at least 20 weeks to conduct the project. The paper concludes with measures to be taken to ensure youth empowerment through photovoice. Included here is a discussion of the role of power and the recommendation that adults involved (with power) must find the appropriate places for youth to express themselves to influential adults.

Zimmerman, Kristen; and London, Jonathan

Getting to Go: Building Organizational Capacity to Engage in Youth-led Research, Evaluation, and Planning

Community Youth Development Journal, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2003

■ This article provides an overview of Youth in Focus. Youth in Focus helps organizations to develop capacity to integrate youth-led research, evaluation and planning into their programs, organizations and community initiatives. Highlighted in the article is a group they worked with, Youth

IMPACT (described in more detail by London, Zimmerman, and Erbstein in Youth-Led Research and Evaluation: Tools for Youth, Organizational, and Community Development, New Directions for Evaluation, no. 98, Summer 2003). The article continues with a list of obstacles and questions to ask before taking on participatory research with youth.