American Museum of Natural History
Museum of Science, Boston
Children's Museum of Pittsburgh

Engaging Youth as Co-Researchers:
Exploring Collaborative Methods Aimed at Foregrounding Youth Voices

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KEY VALUES

Co-researching with youth requires an "epistemological commitment toward reframing" (Caraballo et al 2017, p. 313) who gets to conduct research by, for, and with youth *about* youth, as well as an understanding and centering of youth as individuals who can produce viable and usable knowledge.

Not about us without us

METHODS

- Cross-case analysis of 3 research teams (adults and youth); each implemented a research or evaluation study within the context of a science museum or visitor program
- Qualitative dataset included interviews with youth and written reflections by both adult and youth researchers aimed at exploring similarities & differences among:
  - conceptualizing success
  - preparedness and support
  - perceptions of impact on identities, research process and studies.

Engaging youth as collaborative research partners in professional education research and evaluation requires careful attention to the complex power dynamics that emerge in the context of adult and youth partnerships (Teixeira, Augsberger, Richards-Schuster & Martinez, 2021). Recognizing youth as capable of investigating issues relevant to their lives and producing usable knowledge (Caraballo, Lozenski, Lyiscott & Morell, 2017; Tilley & Taylor, 2018) requires researchers to consider how and in what ways adult and youth enactment of participatory research methods could reify dominant approaches to educational research that limit youth voice and authority.

This poster describes our exploration of this collaborative co-research process with youth co-researchers from three research studies aimed at centering and amplifying youth co-researcher perspectives and expertise within the context of two science museums and aims to contribute to our understanding of methods that support youth involvement in the research process.

CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

	Case Study 1: Staying in Science	Case Study 2: APPRAISE Youth Advisors	Case Study 3: APPRAISE Youth Interns	Case Study 4: Teen Science Research & Communication
Study Objective	Research study of NYCSRMC alumni's college and career pathways	Pilot project designing a research protocol about youth identities and experiences with museum exhibits.		Evaluation study about the science identities of program participants.
Number of youth co-researchers	6	20+	2	12 (2 cohorts of 6)
Youth ages	16-22	10-17	16-17	16-19
Recruitment approach	All program participants were invited to apply; competitive hiring process	Coordinated with community partners; all interested youth could participate	Competitive hiring process through museum's internship program	All program participants were invited to apply and all chose to participate
Youth Compensation	$22/hr	$25/hr	$13/hr	What here?
YOUTH ROLE				
Planned initial study				
Developed instruments	★	★	★	★
Gathered data	★		★	
Analyzed data	★		★	★
Disseminated findings	★		★	★

MANIFESTING CARE

How does the concept of *care* manifest in the collaborative co-research process?

- Committing to partnering with youth
- Centering youth voice
- Recognizing youth as capable
- Investing in supports for youth and adults to work together
- Co-creating structures for co-researcher success
- Attending carefully to power dynamics
- Valuing audiences impacted by the research

The senior researchers showed that you're okay with having feedback and constructive criticism, so I didn't feel too bad about it.
-Xavier, APPRAISE

An example was when we had meetings with KT and Sarah and the team and everyone would say our perspectives and take notes and we made actual changes. That made me feel like, wow, they're actually listening to us.
-Jackie, APPRAISE

CROSS-CASE SYNTHESIS: CONSIDERATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Learning to work together

- Invest time for adults/youth to get to know each other and develop trust
- Articulate each person's assets/strengths related to contributing to the work
- For the youth researchers, make time to review basic tenets of social science research (justice, beneficence, respect) and rationale for commonly used data collection tools to create shared language and lay foundation

I always had a second adult research partner with me during youth advisors calls, so they could jump in and ask new questions or engage youth advisors in new ways when needed.
-Sarah, APPRAISE

I felt prepared/supported in the work that I did because we often had work we did outside of meeting times that helped me come back to the group and have something meaningful to contribute or share.
-Lucie, Staying in Science

Structure, resources, and tools: Supporting youth co-researcher success

- Co-create ways of meeting/working together that honor's everyone's other commitments
- Create shared work spaces that youth can access
- Maintain consistency with meetings
- Use videoconferencing to accommodate different schedules/locations of youth and adult researchers.

Power dynamics in youth-adult co-researcher relationships

- Both project design and meeting agendas need to center youth contributions/voice
- Project activities/timeline need to have built-in flexibility if youth contributions lead to shifts from original plan
- Article the "titles" and roles each member of team has and the associated tasks/responsibility/power it carries.

REFERENCES

Caraballo, L., Lozenski, B. D., Lysiscott, J. J. & Morrell, E. (2017). YPAR and critical epistemologies: Rethinking education research. Review of Research in Education, 41, 311-336; Teixeira, S., Augsberger, A., Richards-Schuster, K., & Sprague Martinez, L. (2021). Participatory research approaches with youth: Ethics, engagement, and meaningful action. American Journal of Community Psychology, 68(1-2), 142-153; Tilley, S., and Taylor, L. (2018). Qualitative methods and respectful praxis: Researching with youth. The Qualitative Report, 23(9), 2184-2204.

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