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Investing in Critical Consciousness and Civic Engagement in Underfunded Schools

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Abstract

Throughout this thesis I confront inequity in its pervasive and far-reaching form of American K-12 school finance. By analyzing the inequitable school funding practices of funding formulas and debt repayment structures, I explore how past and present-day school funding practices have evolved through the values and modes of racial capitalism and more recently, neoliberalism. Through Critical Action Research, I challenge the hegemonic hold racial capitalism and neoliberalism have on school funding by critiquing the educational practices and relations it helps produce. Despite the pernicious scale of inequitable school funding practices, Critical Action Research allows for imagining and shaping an education otherwise. To challenge school funding inequity includes challenging the academic and social relations it permits in the classroom. Therefore, my plan centers around developing critical consciousness and civic engagement in the face of their educational and economic realities. High school students interested in social justice and community engagement can participate in a U.S. Government course designed to challenge school funding inequity by providing students an opportunity to co-participate as critical researchers in their communities through Youth Participatory Action Research. As a result, the proposed plan intends to provide students with the language, tools, and community necessary for youth to critically engage in more democratic and just communities and schools.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to the little girl we will soon meet in the coming months. May she always know how valuable her own thoughts are, and may she use them to shape the world.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my professors who have opened new possibilities and perspectives for me. Specifically, I would like to give special thanks to Dr. John Elmore, Dr. Dana Morrison, Dr. Jason Wozniak, and Dr. Curry Malott. Each of them has helped me question power in new ways and find my own voice as I navigate my role in education for liberation.

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Most of all, I would like to thank my husband, Adam. His endless belief in me has helped me believe in myself. Countless times he has listened to me, problem solved with me, and supported me. Each time I came away from it wondering how I got so lucky to meet someone who makes me a better version of myself. With all my love, thank you Adam.

Chapter 1

Introduction and Positionality

After a long week of school, tests, and basketball practice, game day was here. My legs were sore from running sprints all week. Coach knew that as a team with a meager win record, we couldn't let it get to our heads that on Saturday we would play an out-of-conference team with an even worse record than us. In that spirit, perhaps the constant sprints and breathlessness would humble our expectations. Squeaking sneakers echoed in the quiet school hallway as we made our way to the gym. The other team arrived late on account of the snowstorm. One of our assistant coaches showed the team to their locker room. In the meantime, another assistant coach pulled me aside to talk strategy.

Game time neared. I noticed the same coach that had just coached the underclassmen games was now their varsity coach. Confidently he directed his team as to which shooting drills they can begin with. Our warmup began. I felt like I could do it in my sleep. I fidgeted with the waistband of my new warm-up pants. Muffled through the speakers, my team's favorite hype songs filled the gym with some much-needed energy. By the end of the warm-up, I noticed the other team did not have warm-up clothes, just their uniforms. They did not have matching shoes like Coach insisted we purchase at the start of the season. I thought back to the start of the season, and how I hated it when I had to ask my parents to spend more money on me. Yet, the guilt would quickly subside once the shiny new shoes and fresh gear arrived. Wearing them on the court together felt like it legitimized our team, allowing me to momentarily forget just how poorly we typically played.

Jump ball. I towered over the girl I was facing and swatted the ball towards my teammate. Quickly she scored an easy layup. Game on. Swish, swish, and … swish. After our win, we never played that team again. The team was from Rhodes High School in Cleveland. My school, North Olmsted High School, was in the suburbs just outside of Cleveland. The conference we played in had towns much wealthier than mine. North Olmsted, compared to the other schools in our conference, was considered "trashy" and "poor," or at least that's what we believed they thought. Yet, when we played Rhodes that cold and snowy Saturday afternoon, it felt like we were the "rich" team.

Besides the shoes, gear, and number of coaching staff, the difference that struck me the most that day was that Rhodes had only black athletes and we had only white. This observation has stuck with me ever since. It wasn't until that moment when I realized I'd been in a sea of white for sixteen years and had just then truly noticed. Most importantly, I was just now questioning *how*. "*How* is this possible?" I wondered, when we only live 25 minutes away from each other.

High School Reflections of the Suburbs

At that time, when I first asked how, I didn't have all the answers. Since then, I haven't stopped confronting the reality of what makes and made this racial homogeneity of the North Olmsted Eagles versus the Rhodes Rams possible. A relatively short car ride from school to school, equal to most people's daily commutes to work, yet our communities and resources looked so strikingly different.

The next year was my senior year of high school. I applied to a unique program at my school called Social Involvement through Education and Service (SITES). The courses explored history and civic engagement in ways specific to our surrounding communities, including Cleveland. We were required to volunteer, so I chose to volunteer at North Olmsted schools. I

loved my time helping students in the classroom and learning from the teachers. From that moment on, I knew I had to become a teacher. Meanwhile, that year marked the first time I went to Cleveland without going to an NBA game or visiting a museum. Instead, our class went to volunteer at homeless shelters and food banks. Problems of food insecurity and homelessness had always seemed like a world apart, yet they were always just next door. I began to question further how communities could be near neighbors with such different lives: those suffering precarity, others struggling to maintain a working class or middle-class life, and those who lived luxuriously and freely.

Teacher Education in a Predominantly White Bubble

Following high school, I continued to live in a predominantly white bubble at Baldwin Wallace University but maintained these unanswered questions. I entered the undergraduate teaching program and eventually we had the opportunity to start observations in schools. I remember hearing a few of my classmates discuss how if they get placed in a Cleveland school, they would demand the professor change their placement. My placement was at an elementary school in Cleveland, and upon its conclusion, I was grateful for the experience. After a few observations at the school, I could clearly see that students, depending on their zip code, will experience vastly different educational learning opportunities. Most striking to me was the physical school environment. From day to day, I saw that there was a struggle to maintain hygienic and fully stocked bathrooms for the students and staff. Later when I became a teacher in a school district just outside of Philadelphia and I'd speak with other Philadelphia area teachers, I realized that inequitable school funding policies have a direct effect on even the most basic of human needs in schools.

My other teaching observation was at Magnificat High School, a private Catholic high school where tuition costs more than the local community college. When I was in high school, my basketball team sometimes played them. My perception of them had always been negative. My teammates and I felt like they were rich, spoiled brats. Now, as the student teacher in training, I saw that they were just kids like I had been. Their parents just had more money than mine. During my observations there, I couldn't help but draw more comparisons to my experiences and observations in education thus far. For example, the library at Magnificat was amazing. The students all had their own laptops and their sports teams had everything they could ever need, and of course their bathrooms were immaculate. It was one thing to play against them in high school, but now seeing what a wealthier environment provided them, especially compared to mine and Cleveland's schools, I felt baffled. I couldn't wrap my head around how all of us could exist so near each other, yet so far in terms of opportunity and equity.

I knew I needed to learn more, so after some googling, I found an internship opening at Cleveland Transformation Alliance, a non-profit organization aimed at education reform for Cleveland's school district. I felt so inspired that evening when I first met their staff. Here I was, on the cusp of deeper, more tangible answers. That internship turned out to be the most enriching experience I had in college, and it wasn't even a degree requirement. Listening to stories from people in communities different than my own helped me analyze the enduring *how* that I'd been wondering since that Saturday morning basketball game. Through their perspectives, I started to understand the larger systems of racism and class stratification undermining the possibility of equal education.

Teaching in Sweden: Similarities and Differences

Flash forward to my college graduation, 2018. I was all prepared to teach social studies for the first school that would hire me, but instead, moved to Sweden to be with my now husband. I wasn't the kind of person to go that far out of my comfort zone, but I suppose love is stronger than your fears. One summer day in Sweden, I interviewed at International English School and just like that, I became a … music teacher. Now, I had never studied music, never even practiced it beyond required classes, and I was fully licensed as a 7-12 social studies teacher. Yet, I was hired as a 4th-6th grade music teacher in northern Sweden. I quickly found out that was my only option. My Swedish fluency was far from sufficient to be eligible as a social studies teacher in Sweden. So, I took the job and quickly watched as many videos as I could on elementary music teaching.

Prior to moving to Sweden, I imagined Scandinavian countries as these rare gems on earth where all people have equal opportunity. You can imagine I was surprised when a Swedish school hired *me* as an unqualified music teacher. Soon I realized the school I worked for had a similar model to American charter schools. A private company owned the school, but the school received public funding. As much as I knew charter schools could be harmful to public education, I now worked for one.

Yet, in many ways, I still felt like I was working in an equal and equitable school utopia. It had its problems, like all schools do, but the benefits students received as part of Sweden's welfare were exceptional, at least compared to what U.S. students receive. Students, 6th grade and under, received free breakfast and "*mellis*" (Swedish for afternoon snacks), and that's in addition to the free childcare they received before and after school. All students and staff received free and nutritious school lunches, including plenty of inclusive options like vegetarian and halal. Letter

grades were not even given to students until 6th grade. Compared to American schools, Sweden's system is far closer to achieving equitable school environments.

However, when I look back on it now, I can draw comparisons to how I worked as a non-qualified music teacher in a Swedish *friskola*, or "free school", just as non-qualified teachers are hired in charter and even public schools across the U.S. So clearly, our problems are not singular. The United States is not an anomaly in capitalistic designs of education, but it is certainly more pervasive in its effects. After three years of teaching in Sweden, the frustration I felt towards privatization of schooling, in both Sweden and the U.S., had swelled. Within that frustration was also hope that Swedish educational environments instilled in me. I noticed just how deeply a nation's laws and philosophical approach to education affected my teaching and my students' learning.

At the Root of Unequal Schools

These personal experiences around education have shaped my current perspective that inequitable school funding practices causes grievous and avoidable harm to America's K-12 students. Students can have equal opportunity, but the implementation of school policies, like school funding, and the philosophy of education that propels those policies, must be transformed. My experiences, in combination with Critical Action Research, has opened my eyes to see that the inequality and inequity of the American school system doesn't miss a beat to America's oldest tune of capitalism. The values and laws which drive capitalism also fuel the systemic inhibitors of opportunities for students of Color and students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Furthermore, the disadvantaged of the capitalist system are not the only ones negatively affected. The advantaged of the capitalist system, including students of mostly white and wealthy backgrounds, are conditioned to believe educational outcomes are the result of student and family

effort, rather than a comprehensive view of the systems which have the power to fund, defund, invest, or disinvest in students' educations. All can fall prey to the myth of meritocracy, including the disadvantaged. Similarly, Sandel (2021) summarizes the myth of meritocracy stating, "In an unequal society, those who land on top want to believe their success is morally justified. In a meritocratic society, this means the winners must believe they have earned their success through their talent and hard work".

Think back to my basketball game with the North Olmsted Eagles versus the Rhodes Rams. In racially and economically homogeneous communities, students are generally neglected the opportunity to connect with diverse groups of people. Perhaps later in life, they choose paths which draw them closer to people with diverse cultures, backgrounds, and languages, but that's the exception, not the rule. This social exclusion, particularly in schools, is predicated upon larger economic structures like school funding. The students I have had from college to today vary in their socioeconomic and racial backgrounds from city to city, but not significantly in the schools themselves. In Cleveland and Philadelphia, my students have been mostly low-income students of Color, but in the Cleveland suburbs and Sweden, my students have been largely middle-class white students.

Chapter 2

Thematic Concern, Conceptual Framework, Critical Lexicon, and Philosophy

Thematic Concern Statement

In this thesis, I will detail how inequitable school funding formulas and practices have undermined education for liberation. While there are numerous routes to take when advocating for equitable school funding, I have chosen to focus on how educators concerned about school funding can consider its impacts to transform the social relations and academic expectations, often tied to curriculum, in their classrooms. Therefore, my proposed intervention is a reconstructed civics curriculum that aims to develop students' potential for becoming critically conscious change agents for democracy in their communities. Embedded in this approach to increasing students' critical consciousness and civic engagement is a framework of Youth Participatory Action Research. This program, called *Community Civics*, challenges critically minded educators and their students to disrupt the effects of inequitable school funding by reconstructing social relations and academic expectations in the classroom.

Conceptual Framework

1. What is my Philosophical Positionality?
    a. To reach my goal of challenging the academic and social effects of inequitably funded schools, I begin with detailing my philosophy of education in chapter two. My experiences within and around education have shaped how I envision the values and purposes of an educative experience. My philosophy of education first identifies the challenges of educating under capitalism and highlights the current purposes and functions of capitalist-driven education. I will explain how school

funding operates within these confines of authoritarian and anti-democratic educative practices. Then, I describe a vision of education grounded in critical pedagogy that aims to liberate students from oppressive social and economic structures, so that their educative experiences nurture their humanity, rather than their potential for economic output. This philosophy of education, centered on students' ability to become critically conscious and act upon their environments, serves as the core from which I seek transformation from school funding's status quo.

2. What historical factors have led to the development and growth of underfunded schools?
    a. Chapter three consists of the remainder of my conceptual framework. I begin with the history of my concern by posing the question: what historical factors have led to the development and growth of underfunded schools? Due to the expansive scope and depth a topic like school funding entails, I chose to narrow my focus to how school funding has impacted communities of Color. Considering the state of education in underfunded and predominantly minority-majority school districts, like the one I currently teach in, this made the issue more salient and relatable. Throughout this inquiry, I detail the origins of underfunded schools, how school funding functions as a tool of racial capitalism, and key events, like *Brown v. Board of Education*, which have shaped the issue of school funding.
3. How do contemporary school funding policies operate in conjunction with racial capitalism?
    a. Following this historical analysis is a contemporary analysis of school funding. In exploring the current state of underdeveloped schools, I describe how contemporary

school funding policies operate in conjunction with racial capitalism. Racial capitalism, previously described in the historical analysis, becomes the main focus in this contemporary analysis. While pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* school funding practices may be more easily described as unequal and exclusionary even without the lens of racial capitalism, I argue that examining post-Brown school funding policies necessitates the lens of racial capitalism. Due to the insidiousness of school funding practices of debt, disinvestment, and standardized testing, racial capitalism is used to explore who benefits and who suffers under these practices. Throughout the analysis, I see current practices of school funding as antithetical to an education that aims to empower and liberate students of all backgrounds.

4. What role can Critical Educational Psychology play in developing Youth Participatory Action Research in underfunded schools?
    a. To conclude my conceptual framework, I recognize the importance of moving from analysis to intervention. As previously mentioned, my proposed curriculum (outlined in chapter four) seeks to transform civic education to challenge the harm inequitable school funding practices have caused to social relations and academic expectations in the classroom. Therefore, I inquire how Critical Educational Psychology can inform my proposed curriculum. In this section, I connect the role of critical educational psychology to Youth Participatory Action Research. Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) will function as an integral part of my proposed curriculum, as it can help students become participants for justice in their communities, rather than objects of institutional oppression like inequitable school funding practices posits them to be. To connect Critical Educational Psychology

and the benefits of YPAR, I analyze childhood development from a sociocultural approach. This includes an emphasis on children's social environments and their autonomy, or lack thereof. Exploring Critical Educational Psychology and how it can benefit a YPAR integrated curriculum is a central part of my praxis, considering it informs how to go from theory to reality.

Statement on Critical Action Research

My experiences as a white, middle-class student, who has taught abroad in Sweden, and currently teaches at an underfunded school district in Pennsylvania, are a key component to my application of Critical Action Research. Critical Action Research is outlined by Carson (1990) as research "*for* education," rather than "*about* education," which dually encompasses subjectivity and objectivity (pp. 167-168). Due to the opportunities and constraints our socially constructed beliefs expose, Critical Action Research bridges the subjective to the objective, through a process of "planning, acting, observing, and reflecting" (p. 168). The intended outcome of Critical Action Research, just as it is in my proposed curriculum shared in chapter four, is like Carson's (1990) belief that true Critical Action Research aims to produce "a new kind of school and a new kind of society" (p. 168).

As Kincheloe (2003) stressed "critical teachers as researchers cannot avoid the political role of promoting critical self-reflection in society" (p. 46). While I do not proclaim neutrality in my concern over school funding and its effects in classrooms, I use Critical Action Research to develop a more enlightened classroom, a classroom in which critical consciousness is valued and nurtured. Simply doing action research would not be sufficient. Kincheloe (2003) reasoned this insufficiency stating: "Uncritical action researchers attempt to provide accurate portrayals of educational reality, but they stop short of analyzing the origins of the forces which construct actor consciousness" (p.

58). Therefore, Critical Action Research requires intensive research into the origins of school funding inequity, its current implications, and how critical pedagogical models can confront it. If the socio-cultural and economic context of school funding is not considered, then alternate realities in the classroom are left unimagined. Through Critical Action Research, I weave my personal experiences in education with this contextual research to propose a curriculum based on the outcomes of my findings.

As detailed in chapter one, my experiences in education have led me to question what can be done to confront inequity in school funding. As a teacher, my greatest concern is my student's well-being, and how that relates to their autonomy and sense of community. However, the economic and socio-cultural obstacles I explore later in chapter three makes me feel like we are flies trapped in the masterful and intricate workings of a spider web. The hegemonic weavings of capitalism and race fixate my students' lives to a web which urges them to accept a facade of meritocracy. The spider, who glides effortlessly across his web, is the one who benefits from this seemingly permanent scene. If my students and colleagues, who work within an inequitable education system, are flies, then who is the poised and compensated spider?

Rooks (2020) describes who benefits the most from inequitable school funding as those who can benefit financially and ideologically from failing public schools. Rooks (2020) contends this privatization of schooling, seen more recently through the charter school movement, as an extension of Jim Crow segregation, and the "New Jim Crow's" war on drugs and mass incarceration. Students in inequitably funded school districts suffer at the pockets and whims of those who feel they have something to lose if equity is in play. These beneficiaries include standardized testing and charter school companies, politicians in favor of privatizing education, and local school boards and voters who have aimed to avoid integration. Inequitable school funding

policies can be viewed as contributing to a monopoly on advancement in educational and wealth opportunities in favor of students who come from wealthier, and often whiter, school districts.

There have been many times I have thought about leaving the teaching profession to work in environments directly aimed at ending school funding inequities, such as non-profits or through education research. However, practicing as a critically reflective teacher allows me to stay, research, and make change where I am. As Kincheloe (2003) described, Critical Action Research unveils how ideology shapes our "self-images" and perception of teacher professionalism (p. 109).

In this sense, Critical Action Research has implored me to reenvision my role in the classroom and what it means to advocate for my students within my current role. Even my students have suggested I find a school district that is "better off" than where I work now, as if they are trying to save me from getting stuck in this web. Although higher funded school districts pay more and provide more resources to teachers and students, I can apply Critical Action Research in my current teaching role to inform a more transformative vision of civics education. As inspiration, there are valuable actions taking place to progress school funding equity in my area. For example, Cohen (2022) described the power of teacher activists, explaining how a retired elementary school teacher from the Shippensburg Area School District, Konnie Serr, spoke at a 2021 rally in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania to advocate for fair school funding. Mrs. Serr spoke beside a visual representation of toilet paper to emphasize that her school district had 75 kindergartners sharing a single toilet. Mrs. Serr reminds me of the power of teachers, and begs the question; can teachers play an effective role in advancing equitable school funding policies? Through Critical Action Research, I can collect the data necessary to design an emancipatory Civics curriculum, rather than waiting for seismic shifts in capitalist-driven education policies and culture.

Critical Lexicon

Throughout this thesis, I will observe, analyze and reflect on the ways in which school funding has hindered education for liberation. In response, I will plan a curricular intervention that aims to challenge modes of structural oppression, like school funding, by empowering youth to be civic leaders in their communities. There may be terms unfamiliar to the reader or unique to the context. This section intends to clarify these terms.

Constitutive Definitions:

Authoritarian education	According to Spring (2006), modern authoritarian education systems "serve the function of sorting individuals into what is supposed to be their proper social place" (p. 8). In this context, school funding is analyzed as a tool to sort individuals based on race and wealth.
Banking model	Traditional education relies on what Freire (2017) refers to as the "banking model" of education in which knowledge is directly transferred from teacher to student, rather than through pedagogical methods of inquiry and connection rooted in problem-posing education (p. 12).
Condition of becoming	Paulo Freire's (1998) humanistic approach to learning in which the human condition is inseparable from the ethical condition. As Freire (1998) suggests, the moral formation of learners cannot be removed from teaching.
Critical Educational Psychology	Critical Educational Psychology (CEP) moves past the foundations of traditional Educational Psychology to ask what bias, misconceptions, or hierarchies may contribute

	to the data collected, questions asked, and outcomes analyzed in educational environments (Vassallo, 2017).
Neoliberalism	Giroux (2004) defines neoliberalism as an economic policy that promotes free-market principles and limited government spending. In terms of education, the embrace of neoliberal school funding policies connects to what Giroux (2004) refers to as the disbanding of the "social contract in the interests of privatized considerations" (p. 52).
Racial capitalism	Historian Robin D.G. Kelley (2017) identifies racial capitalism as a profit driven structure of power and wealth in which race is a primary modality through which people experience class, and thus experience differentiated access to both material and cultural forms of capital.
Youth Participatory Action Research	Youth Participatory Action Research is a framework and practice aimed at mentoring youth to engage in social science by "engaging them in all aspects of the research cycle" to contribute to social issues meaningful to them (Mirra et al., 2016, p. 2).

Operative Definitions

For the purpose of this thesis, the following definitions will apply:

Achievement gap	Disparities in educational performance between groups of students. In this context, socioeconomic status and race are the focus.
Assets-based approach	A method that emphasizes the strengths and potential of students, rather than their perceived deficits.
Brown v. Board of Education	A landmark 1954 Supreme Court case in which racial segregation in public schools was ruled unconstitutional.
Civic engagement:	This refers to individuals' participation in their communities to improve its' conditions or to help shape the community's future.
Community Civics	A redesigned high school U.S. Government course with the purpose to provide students an opportunity to challenge inequitable political, social, or economic structures while developing their community, critical consciousness, and civic empowerment. It embeds Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR).
Critical consciousness	A continuously evolving awareness of one's social and political environment, and the ability

	to critically analyze and challenge power structures and social injustices.
Debt	In the context of school funding, it refers to the financial burden that school districts in low-income school districts face. It acts as a mechanism of intentional underdevelopment that excludes historically marginalized communities from advantages of educational opportunities.
Deficit model:	A perspective that explains a person's behaviors and attitudes based on their perceived deficiencies, often ignoring the complex socioeconomic context that might also influence those behaviors and attitudes.
Economic instrumentalism:	A perspective that sees education primarily to meet purely economic ends, such as contributing to the workforce.
Expropriative taxes	In the context of school funding, property taxes function to disproportionately affect one racial group over another. It is a tool of underfunding that extracts wealth in a way that benefits one racial group over another.
High stakes testing	A form of assessment used to make decisions with consequences for students, educators, and schools.

Inequity in school funding	The unequal distribution of funds to schools. This leads to disparities in the quality of education students receive.
Jim Crow	The time period between the Civil War and Civil Rights Movement in which Black people were segregated in the U.S. through both law and custom.
Neoliberal education system	A term used to describe how schools are heavily influenced by neoliberal ideology, which emphasizes market-driven approaches, competition, and standardized testing.
New Civics	An approach to civics education that transforms traditional civics education to include a wide range of civic activities that contribute to effective democracy and civic engagement.
Performance-based standardized testing	A measure of student performance that can be tied to school funding. It quantifies student performance based on a predetermined standard and may lead to consequences such as less funding or school closures.
Predatory inclusion	The practice of granting access or inclusion to marginalized groups on terms that continue to exploit and disadvantage them, as seen in school funding policies and school integration or segregation.

Property taxes	Taxes paid by property owners based on the value of their property. These taxes contribute to inequitable school funding formulas.
Public disinvestment	The withdrawal of public funds from public schools. This can lead to the privatization of schooling and underdevelopment of schools, particularly in minority-majority school districts.
Reconstruction	The time period following the U.S. Civil War during which the Southern states were reorganized and reintegrated into the Union (1865-1877). New laws aimed to liberate Black people, including through education, were met with resistance by many White communities.
School funding policies	The methods by which schools receive financial resources. These policies, which are often tied to racial capitalism, can lead to significant disparities in the quality of education students receive.
Segregation	The practice of separating people, usually by race. In the context of education, it refers to the exclusionary terms on which Black Americans were brought into public education, such as vocational schools, expropriative school tax policies, and racial segregation.

Sociocultural development	Lev Vygotsky's theory that explains how social interaction leads to continuous and gradual changes in a child's thought and behavior. Their development can vary depending on factors like culture and access.
Sociohistorical approach to development	A perspective that considers the social and historical context in which a person develops.

Philosophy of Education

The Challenge of Educating Under Capitalism

Inequitable school funding and the vast disparities it widens immediately dilutes the humanness of the student– especially students of color and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Students of wealthier backgrounds are also affected as they may normalize their tiered and segregated society. In poorer school districts, students' innate curiosities are reduced to fit the needs of what standardized tests deem worth knowing. With testing tied to funding, numerous stakeholders in public education have called for less demand on testing and more demand for genuine learning. Former National Education Association president spoke towards this concern, stating: “The high stakes obsession of test and punish has only served to widen the gap between the schools in the wealthiest districts and those in the poorest” (Walker, 2015). Parents have cited their concern over testing tied to funding and the harm that does to their children (Walker, 2015).

As a teacher, it is an intimidating task to disrupt the structures which have reproduced inequality in our student populations. To revive the humanness of the learner, educators must ask what do our students dream, desire, and wonder? How can their needs be met beyond the confines of standardized tests and college and career readiness? How can teachers organize the classroom in a way where authoritative hierarchies are unnatural and unnecessary? How can we use education to participate in knowledge building so that students can analyze and reimagine structural restraints like racism and economic equality – structures which have such a tight grip over their lives?

I have found a philosophy of education that recognizes the innate humanness of the learner, and thus nurtures a learner’s curiosities and critical consciousness, as most helpful in navigating these questions. A human-based education, in which students are considered integral, unique, and

subjective beings to discover learning, is antithetical to the current purpose and functions of today's capitalist driven school structures and curriculums. To address concerns as systemic as inequitable school funding and the curriculums which uphold it, a great deal of consideration regarding the purpose of education must be made.

Purpose and Functions of Capitalist Education

To reimagine ways in which school funding can transform students' lives, an analysis of how inequity is legitimized in schools is helpful. The pathways school funding helps provide for its wealthier students and limit its poorer students is dangerously authoritarian. Through maintaining inequitable school funding, despite the documented harm it does to students, schools submit themselves to an authoritarian character. In this sense, the authoritarian character is multiformed and can include anyone who sees school as the catch-all solution to structural inequities like poverty and racism. The authoritarian character helps define the school to be part of a larger unit that ignores institutionalized oppression and legitimizes meritocracy despite all barriers. Erich Fromm (1957) describes how passive authoritarianism inflicts one's psyche and contributes to this notion of legitimizing myths:

> The passive-authoritarian, or in other words, the masochistic and submissive character aims — at least subconsciously — to become a part of a larger unit, a pendant, a particle, at least a small one, of this "great" person, this "great" institution, or this "great" idea. The person, institution, or idea may actually be significant, powerful, or just incredibly inflated by the individual believing in them. What is necessary, is that — in a subjective manner — the individual is convinced that "his" leader, party, state, or idea is all-powerful and supreme, that he himself is strong and great, that he is a part of something greater. (para. 8)

Similarly, Carnevale et al. (2020) describes the insidiousness of authoritarianism in American society, in which those in power "... preserve the appearance of democracy even as they suppress the rights of underrepresented groups and the press". To wield this power, it's maintained by "exploiting knowledge gaps" and "promising certain groups advantages over others" (Carnevale et al., 2020), which is far easier to do under an inequitably funded education system. Public education, if equitably funded, could be anti-authoritarian, but when funded based on a community's wealth rather than the wealth of the state, or country, it is in line with authoritarianism. Unfortunately, in its current state, school funding practices serve authoritarian interests by sorting students into or away from colleges and careers. Spring (2006) asserts "Most modern educational systems serve the function of sorting individuals into what is supposed to be their proper social place" and believe that the job given to you is the "best one for you" (p. 8).

Bowles and Gintis (2011) describe the limitations of our educational system in an authoritarian capitalist America, stating "The educational system serves – through the correspondence of its social relations with those of economic life – to reproduce economic inequality and to distort personal development" (p. 48). My current students are limited in their economic opportunities, and thus in their social relations. As a teacher, this is where I find added struggle within the issue of school funding. I want them to have all the options a student from a well-funded school can have, but the imposing reality often reduces that possibility as unrealistic. So, to do the best for students who have comparatively less economically, teachers often reshape their social relations with students in a way that further dehumanizes the learner. While Bowles and Gintis (2011) identify education as "... historically a device for allocating individuals to economic positions", this relays that teachers are both victims and perpetrators of the social relations which reinforce this autocratic sorting (p. 49). Despite resistance to standardized testing, teachers are

forced to teach to the test. A majority of teachers found state-mandated testing unhelpful to their classrooms, especially amidst the pressure for students to perform well on these exams. Furthermore, 74% of teachers believed the most useful tests in classrooms to be in-class formative assessments that teachers create (Stanford, 2023). Through this survey, teachers are rejecting the hold authoritarian structures like school funding and standardized tests have over their classroom and suggesting more autonomy, allowing for more creativity and choice in the classroom.

Teachers, like students, are also victims of social relations which reinforce autocratic sorting. For example, when I worked at a Cleveland education reform internship during college, I was asked to input data from student surveys about their schools. This data was used to profile schools on the organization's website, creating a school "report card." The report card gave schools an A-F rating based largely on performance on standardized tests. After browsing the report cards, parents are expected to make a choice as to which school their child would go to. I added countless survey entries to the report cards in which students showed sincere appreciation for their teachers. Yet, centered on the webpage was the school rating and state-test performance. It was undeniable that quantification and rankings in terms of test scores meant more than feelings or stories of students. The difference teachers were making was not the main point – the test scores were. One essential way to manage authoritarian expectations in a classroom is authoritarian teaching styles like the banking model.

The Banking Model and Authoritarian Education

All too often, the banking method of education is a teacher's default. Critical pedagogue Paulo Freire saw this as detrimental to human potential and human liberation. Traditional education relies on what Freire (2017) refers to as the "banking model" of education in which knowledge is directly transferred from teacher to student, rather than through pedagogical methods of inquiry and

connection rooted in problem-posing education (p. 12). The banking model, in short, contributes to the dehumanizing of the student as it presupposes the student is an empty vessel to be filled (Freire, 2017). By dichotomizing educational outcomes into the haves and have nots, specifically related to one's race and socioeconomic background, the American education system is most effective when it uses the "banking model" to educate its students.

Freire (2017) argues that traditional teaching, such as employing the banking model, subjugates the poor to a condition of education which perpetuates oppression. Zaretta Hammond, author of *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, shares this concern and explains how culturally and linguistically diverse students experience instruction with lower order skill development than other students (Wright, 2021). As an intervention, both Hammond and Freire suggest the need to develop independent learners (Wright, 2021). Furthermore, Freire (2017) suggests that problem-posing education, which requires reflection and action, initiates a praxis of becoming (pp. 56-57). In doing so, the student can relish their humanity - an ideal I strive towards in an education for liberation.

Even as a progressive minded teacher, I struggle with my students to transcend the confines of the banking method, as it is most aligned with state standards, and the overarching neoliberal school to workforce agenda. Freire (2017) focuses on how human beings can work to transcend the limitations of reality when working in horizontal relationships, engaged in continuous action and continuous reflection with each other. The challenge then for teachers who aim to liberate their students from the limitations of school funding or other structurally imposed restraints, is to redefine their relationship with the students to be a guide towards critical consciousness, rather than another enabler of capitalist-based pedagogy.

In my own teaching experience outside of Philadelphia, where students rarely exhibit the traits of independent learners, and teachers, including myself, can default to the banking method, I struggle with John Dewey's lasting question: "What does freedom mean and what are the conditions under which it is capable of realization?" (Wright, 2021). Like Wright, my philosophy of education aims to answer this question. Wright (2021) shares as a white teacher with privilege, explaining that amidst his diverse body of students, he holds them "awkwardly" and "imperfectly." Wanting to do our best for our students is a continuous struggle. His appreciation and wonder for his students made me feel like he would understand what I feel – that the only time I have seen my students really smile this year is when they share something about themselves and feel heard. These smiles are rarely academically related, yet they offer hope for a more human-based education. Building positive relationships with students offers a reprieve from the oppressive school systems and authoritative teacher-student dynamics for students and teachers. Beyond the power of relationships, however, Dewey's question persists. How can a teacher empower students to be free and what is needed for this outcome?

Philosophy of Education for "Becoming"

My philosophy of education is predicated upon what Paulo Freire refers to as the "condition of becoming" (Freire, 1998, p. 39). Freire (1998) identifies the condition of becoming as inextricably linked to our condition of being. An education rooted in this notion then would be an emancipatory education so long as our "becoming" is nurtured by our political and pedagogical conditions. In our American K-12 education system, the flourishing of human autonomy is stifled by the hegemonic restraints of capitalist-neoliberal policies, especially regarding school funding and school-municipal debt. The political conditions of our capitalist-neoliberal economy are further aided by hierarchical social relations. Both ease the means to decentivize solidarity against

inequality, in turn upholding school finance structures which maintain increasingly private interests over the common good of the public.

A favorite author of mine, Kurt Vonnegut, speaks of the notion of becoming in his novel *Mother Night* stating: "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be. (p. 5)" Leaning into critical pedagogy allows me to be careful of the mask or the role teachers have been socialized to become, and thus consciously or unconsciously "pretend" to be. Teachers who organize around social justice efforts beyond their classroom walls, such as teachers who organize using methods based on "Bargaining for the Common Good," can be demonized in the public eye. Under the "common good" model, teacher unions aim to improve student and teaching conditions by considering the current structures which exacerbate inequality, like housing, minimum wage, and transportation (Martin, 2023). While teachers are pushed by state and national demands to focus most on standards, behavior, and predetermined academic outcomes of students, critical teaching would suggest that the student's conditions be considered central to their capacity of becoming. In that case, it is an ethical choice for teachers to boldly declare as Freire (1998) did: "… though I know things can get worse, I also know that I able to intervene to improve them" (p. 53).

Since its origins, America's public education system mirrors the needs of the economy rather than the needs of the student, but this reality runs counter to my philosophy of education. Education must begin and develop from the *humanness* of the learner. When I refer to humanness, I am influenced heavily by Paulo Freire's (1998) concept of "*ser mais*," meaning to be more (p. 83). According to Freire (1998), we have an ontological duty to encourage our development of "*ser mais,*" as a commitment to humanity from a bioliphic approach. Unfortunately, school is one of the central places that reproduces capitalism as the dominant ideology. As a result, nurturing students'

ability to be more means aiding students' development to identify, describe, evaluate, and reimagine their present societal realities. Doing so would challenge what French philosopher Louis Althusser (1971) refers to as "ideological state apparatus," or the legitimization of state policies reinforced through ideologies like neoliberalism. Rather than encouraging curiosity and autonomy, our reliance on transmitting knowledge (especially in an increasingly standardized academic environment) serves to reinforce the ideological state apparatus, and thus negate the humanness of the learner.

I once asked my 11th and 12th grade government students a simple question: "What do you like and dislike about school?" More students participated than normal. Multiple students expressed frustration that their school does not have an athletic trainer like other schools do, or that our school is chaotic and unsafe. They referenced wealthier nearby towns like Lower Merion to compare what they have, and we do not have. Other students described their disappointment in the unhealthy school lunches and the feeling of constant surveillance. Unsurprisingly, no student answered that they were upset with Pennsylvania's school funding model, where more than half of school funding derives from that city's property taxes, which affects minority-majority communities the hardest, where home ownership is less viable. Their responses still encouraged me though.

In naming their issues, my students inspired me to envision political action that is pedagogical action. I cannot stand to see my students as what Freire (2017) refers to as "beings for others" as opposed to "beings for themselves" (p. 47, p. 134). The idea that Freire (1998/2017) extrapolates, that power creates reality, connected me to my undergraduate historiography class. Scanning through my old textbook, I recognized the similarity between Freire's conception of power and Michel Foucault's, a French post-structuralist literary critic. Both recognized that since power is diffused in our modern, democratic society, it becomes even more difficult to identify the

oppressors. Meanwhile, our society, which favors the "calculable man" (Foucault, 1979, as cited in Gesink & Wilson, 2017, p. 282) allows teachers authoritative power in documenting, describing, and thus marking student "cases" into categories reflective of society's economic needs (Foucault, 1979, Gesink & Wilson, 2017, p. 281). Rather than human-based learning, learning is quantified to the detriment of the student.

Alongside the banking method and the calculability approach to education, more liberal pedagogical approaches do inform our pedagogical realities. Educational progressivism promotes that we can and should build relationships with students, while authoritative evaluative measures on teachers and top-down management by administrations suggests not to the degree that we can radically co-transform the conditions we teach within (Au, 2020). I am tired of pretending -- of being the role of what was prescribed to me as an educator in America today. Drawing on my past experiences, I feel affirmed in my belief that education can and should be a means to reveal what is "pretend," meaning what unjust power relations have the illusion of impenetrability. In this unveiling, we can transform our becoming to be one that nourishes our human capacity to assume ourselves as what Freire (2001) refers to as "Subjects" of our world, rather than "objects" to be acted upon (pp. 45-46).

By reducing the banking model of education and centering human-based education, teachers can help to rewire the social relations that help to maintain authoritative capitalism. Non-traditional pedagogical interventions can serve to this rewiring of social relations for the benefit of students' becoming more. Non-traditional pedagogical interventions circumvent Freire's warnings and my own concerns by allowing students, alongside their teachers, to engage in liberation through praxis. Freire (2017) states, "Authentic liberation—the process of humanization—is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis the action and reflection of men and women upon their

world to transform it." (p. 52). By reflecting upon what it means for students to be educated, I can better practice the role of a critically reflective teacher. In this manner, the classroom becomes a true reflection of society, by reflecting its individuals, rather than the echo of a teacher.

"Becoming" through Critical Consciousness

As hard as teachers work in the classroom, we are still operating within a system where school funding is inequitable. America's historic reliance on funding schools through property taxes has influenced an opportunity gap that is designed through the modes of racial capitalism and neoliberalism (later discussed in Chapter 3). While these structures loom large over the classroom, it is imperative to reflect upon how inequity remains. Antonio Gramsci, like Freire, looked at history and society through the Marxist lens and heavily discussed how power becomes mythicized. Gramsci wrote passionately about how social groups are functions of economic production. He describes the paradox of "spontaneous consent," meaning the internalization and acceptance of the "dominant fundamental group," despite their consent based upon their fabricated confidence, or esteem, for the dominant group (Gramsci, 1949, as cited in Gesink & Wilson, 2017, pp. 130-135). The monotony of working within an inequitable system, without disrupting the foundations which produce its inequity, like neoliberalism and racial capitalism, produces "spontaneous consent" in schooling. The myth of meritocracy is repeatedly narrated to students. So, why do students continue to prescribe to the rules of traditional schooling despite it going against their best interests as humans-first? Why do teachers practice pedagogies like the banking method that are harmful to students' authentic selves?

Freire's (2017) depiction of "fear of freedom" illuminates these difficult questions. Using this concept, the oppressed have adopted the oppressors' values and guidelines, and to achieve freedom means to challenge the oppressor and risk repression (p. 21) While the oppressed have

become a “host” for the oppressor, chartering freedom requires the perception that limiting situations (such as inequitably funded schools) can be transformed (pp. 22-23). By applying Freire’s guidance, critical interventions can be developed to disrupt the monotony of this cruel reality. Students and teachers can create a dialogue which contributes to a transformative praxis and the goal of nurturing students “becoming” for liberation. A central means of this praxis is developing critical consciousness.

Critical consciousness, or what Freire (2017) refers to as “conscientização,” is the way in which people process their historical self to develop their present and future realities (p. 10). In a classroom which nurtures critical consciousness, teachers would co-participate in “co-intentional” education (Freire, 2017, p. 43). Students and teachers would commit to dialogue that unveils, critiques, commits, recreates, and alters their former consciousness to develop a critical consciousness outside the confines of oppressive structures. In accordance with Freire’s (2017) argument, the restraints produced by inequity in school funding today requires the oppressed to “come to perceive these situations as the frontier between being and being more human” to challenge and retransform the status quo (p. 75). It would require then for students, parents, and teachers to be in constant dialogue, maintained through horizontal relationships (Freire, 2017, p. 138). Doing so, while also identifying the critical issues which inform the praxis, is necessary.

As a critical educator, I reflect on the fact that not all are concerned or even aware of school funding inequities, and the effects that has on curriculum and pedagogy. In this light, Freire (2017) offers guidance: “It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their views and ours” (p. 69). I must remember that what I see as the most critical issue may be secondary or even absent from my students’ or fellow teachers’ perspectives. Like Freire, I see that the economic and

cultural hegemonies which oppress students into “objects,” rather than “Subjects,” impedes liberatory philosophies of education from flourishing, but also requires broadened perspectives. So, an education grounded in “becoming more” than the prescribed labors of life, must be a constant dialogue. This dialogue, even when divergent and especially when divergent, is necessary to contribute to the praxis.

Transcending Dominant Hegemonies Through Social Love

While authoritative acts of violence can quickly ignite protests, authoritative acts through education provide more gradual means to indoctrination. There is no neutral schooling (Martinez & Praag, 2013). It cannot be devoid of politics and values because schooling prepares people to play a role in society. These roles are economically and racially motivated in a racial-capitalist, neoliberal society like the U.S. That is why reshaping the social relations in classrooms is so fundamental to issues like inequitable school funding. According to Spring (2006), teachers are highly impactful to students' psyche, and without intention, may place wheels in their heads that negate students' humanity. If teachers can learn more about critical pedagogy, how to help students regain their autonomy and question the dominant ideologies of their society, then perhaps what critical pedagogue Henry Giroux (2004) refers to as “educated hope” can flourish (p. 134). Echoing this frame of hope is philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis who stated that hope is being “part of a broader question creating the pedagogical conditions for producing individual and social agents who are willing to make use of the freedom they have and to acquire the freedom they are told they have not” (Giroux, 2004, p. 134). Without hope, there cannot be freedom to grow despite the hegemonic restraints of a society.

So, what does a critical pedagogical approach look like given this economically and racially driven political reality? How can we organize our social relations to meet students’ needs of

"becoming" more than the roles racial-capitalist-neoliberal schooling has allocated them? The concept of "love as a revolutionary force" inspired by Freire and described by Antonia Darder is essential to this question. Darder (2017) explains the revolutionary ideals of love to establish its political power. She details love as a political force to be authentic, horizontal relationships where the co-construction of knowledge is essential (Darder, 2017, p. 97). Considering there is no politically neutral way to educate people, social love is a transformative and humanizing alternative in need of educators' courageous attention.

Classroom environments that explore critical consciousness and civic engagement through a culture of social love could foster the conditions which help students connect with their communities while maintaining their autonomy. The criticality of social love is rooted in connection, as Fromm (1957) argued:

> Love is the bond and the feeling of being one with the world while keeping one's own independence and integrity. The loving individual is connected with the world. He is not frightened since the world is his home. He can lose himself because he is certain of himself. (para. 4)

Like Darder (2017), Fromm (1957) saw love as a component to reducing the power of authoritarianism. Social love in the classroom comes in several ways, including nurturing students' ingenuous curiosity.

My students have already produced ingenuous curiosity regarding school finance by asking questions like: "Why doesn't our school look like theirs?" as they list neighboring wealthier school districts. Responding to their ingenuous curiosity means co-participating in inquiries to understand themselves as historical beings. My proposed intervention, *Community Civics*, recognizes the need for students to thoroughly question and analyze their surroundings. This process of "living with

democracy and deepening it so it has real meaning in people's everyday lives" is a pedagogy of social love and is central to my curricular intervention (Freire, 1997, as cited in Darder, 2017). Allowing students the space to express concerns about themselves and their communities creates room to transcend their ingenuous curiosity to that of epistemological curiosity – questioning themselves, their surroundings, and then, challenging the rigor of their questions (Freire, 2001, p. 36). Developing their "social responsibility for our world" and creating opportunities for "participation in the co-construction of knowledge" develop social love in the classroom (Darder, 2017, p. 97). This can be done outside of the traditional, standardized civics curriculum, allowing students to research their surroundings with the goal of civic engagement.

As Vandana Shiva, environmental researcher and activist, would say: "No power constructed by man is worthy to be afraid of" (The Seeds of Vandana Shiva, 2023). In that light, social love empowers and expands the choices possible. Through its core relations of dignity, respect, true listening, and co-creation, it can be harnessed as a pedagogical approach with the potential to awaken critical consciousness and encourage students "becoming"– exactly what teachers and students at underfunded schools need to organize for an education that seeks to embody the ethical choices our humanity affords us.

Chapter 3

Narrative

The History of Underfunded Schools

The Century Foundation (2020) indicates that funding gaps cause achievement gaps, and most notably in non-white student populations. School districts with the largest funding gaps have the highest percentage of non-white students, effecting their education outcomes. The majority of Black, brown, and low-income students go to schools with less resources, less money per student, more teacher turnover, and more privatized experimentation on their education, such as charter schools, than their more affluent, majority white counterparts (Rooks, 2017). However, funding gaps are not a modern phenomenon. Rather, inequitable school funding practices have a long and racialized history in the United States. As a result, generations of students, particularly students of Color, have endured school funding practices that limit their potential of growth beyond the structural injustices they face.

The historical context of school funding, specifically how schools have been underfunded in the U.S., can be described through multiple narratives. For the purposes of understanding how underfunding continues to the present day, I will compose this narrative into three parts: origins of public schools and school funding, public schools through Reconstruction and Jim Crow, and the implications of integration through *Brown v. Board of Education.* Detailing the origins of public schools requires a broader lens in which political and economic factors of Protestantism and nationalism are explored. Once slavery legally ends with the passage of the 13th amendment in 1865, my focus on school funding becomes narrowed to the public education, or lack thereof, for Black students. Although this does not address the historical underfunding of other populations,

like indigenous students, this omission is to serve the purpose of concentrated analysis on how underfunding has explicitly evolved through racial capitalism in Black communities. Finally, *Brown v. Board of Education* is chosen as a milestone to highlight the continued struggle for integrated schools and equitable school funding. Through this timeline, the political economic motive of racial capitalism persists to the present day.

Common School Movement

At one point in the United States, the universal and publicly funded education system we have today was not only controversial, but also incredibly rare. Besides Prussia, the United States was revolutionary in its concept of democratizing education through public funding. Our country's founders believed that part of overcoming the republic's initial fragility would be to use education as a tool to ensure citizens could read, write, and participate in its democracy and development (Kober, 2020). Unfortunately, the dominant ideology around democracy in 1790's America did not include a multicultural society (Spring, 2014, p. 29). Rather, most post-Revolutionary leaders desired a monoculture that would strengthen Protestant Anglo-Saxon traditions (Spring, 2014, p. 29). While the creation of the United States brought debate over the future of education, including how loyalty, patriotism, and the Bible would or would not be taught, 16 percent of the population was denied opportunity to education per enslavement (Spring, 2014, pp. 49-56). From its origins, the theory of schooling was exclusive – limited by race, gender, and class.

By the 1830's, Horace Mann, a Massachusetts legislator, sought to widen the range of inclusivity for education. Mann popularized the idea of "common schools." Common schools would be ideologically aligned with Protestant Anglo-Saxon traditions, while being funded by public dollars. Essential to the common school was the idea of positioning education to be a cure for what were deemed social problems: crime and poverty (Spring, 2014, p. 79). As the concept of

common schools gained traction, public schools were seen as an opportunity to mold children into "malleable" citizens, shaping how they think about the Bible and republicanism, as well as how they would later labor, with diligence and modesty (Spring, 2014, pp. 83-86). While Mann and other common school reformers sought to include both rich and poor white children within the same schoolhouse, pushback from the upper class arose. Some wealthy Americans abhorred the notion of paying to educate other people's children, especially children deemed unworthy of a public education (Kober, 2020, p.3). Property taxes were seen as the mechanism to fund public schools, but to this day wealthier communities often reject Mann's proposal. In Texas, for example, a three-decade law "Robin Hood" law meant to redistribute excess property tax wealth to low-income school districts, is frequently sought for repeal in the courts, as well as outright rejection, due to years of pushback from wealthier school districts (Texas School Coalition, 2022; Lehrer, 2023).

The debate over common schools included other class-based influences on what a public education should entail and how it should be accessed arose. 1830's working-men's parties, which reflected working-class ideals and struggles, saw education as central to claiming their rights and acquiring economic and political power (Spring, 2014, p. 89). Their working-class experiences led to more radical proposals of equality through schooling, such as the "state guardianship plan." The state guardianship plan would require children to attend state boarding schools, upon which equal treatment through clothes, food, and education would be implemented (Spring, 2014, p. 91). By the late 1800's common schools became more commonplace across the U.S. Kober (2020) notes "In 1830, about 55% of children aged 5 to 14 were enrolled in public schools; by 1870, this figure had risen to about 78%." In the mid to late 1800's, high school education was rarer, and controlled heavily by middle-class interests. For example, early high schools, including Central High School

in Philadelphia (founded in 1836), were "designed to be socially attractive to the middle class" (Labaree, 1988, p. 9). As a result, middle-class families saw high school as an opportunity to climb the ladder of the marketplace, causing the moral ideals of equality through common schooling (albeit limited to mostly white males) became secondary. Throughout the 1800's common school movement, non-white groups continued to be excluded and as seen in the following section, when included, predatory terms were set.

School Funding and Racial Capitalism

Prior to the end of slavery in 1865, education was illegal for Black people in the South, and extremely limited for Black people in the North. Despite commonly held myths that the North was more progressive towards Black rights, the North offered a blueprint to the South in the form of segregating education based on race. In 1848, Sarah Roberts, a five-year-old African American girl, was required to enroll in an all-Black public school in Boston. Her father challenged the legality of racial segregation, and the case, *Sarah C. Roberts vs. The City of Boston*, made its way to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. By 1850, Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw upheld racial segregation, stating racial prejudice "is not created by law, and probably cannot be changed by law" (*Long Road to Justice*, n.d.). Shaw's words echoed the prevailing ideology of racial capitalism of the time. Shaw describes racial prejudice as innate and necessary in maintaining a segregated society. Doing so provides the legal roadmap for inequitably funding and providing education to Black children pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.

The 13th amendment, which legally ended slavery in 1865, and the 14th amendment, which granted citizenship and equal protection under the laws to all persons born or naturalized in the U.S., opened the possibility of education to be free, equal, and inclusive to all (*Reconstruction Amendments*, 2017). Yet this gleaming opportunity for inclusion disintegrated when confronted

with the political and economic reality of racial capitalism. Historian Robin D.G. Kelley (2017) identifies racial capitalism as a profit driven structure of power and wealth in which race is a primary modality through which people experience class, and thus experience differentiated access to both material and cultural forms of capital. In other words, identity is harnessed as a tool to permit or deny you a stake in the system, even if it is just the illusion of permissibility. Furthermore, Kelley (2017) asserts that essential to maintaining a racial capitalist society is violence and racism. Violence, in its capitalist origin, expropriates control of resources, and in turn, exploits cheap labor to turn profit, while racism acts to rationalize the violence to maximize accumulation and profit. From 1865 and throughout the 20th century, racial capitalism and school funding are inextricably linked. As a result, education for Black students is segregated, underfunded, and sometimes met with physical violence.

Fundamental to a racial capitalist system is predatory inclusion. Predatory inclusion grants access to previously withheld forms of capital on the condition of continued exploitation and expropriation. Many examples of predatory inclusion exist within U.S. history, but for the purposes of school funding, I will examine how the demand for equal education by Black communities following the end of slavery was met with segregated, violent, and expropriative terms. For starters, property taxes, the main funding component of public schools, were most lucrative in wealthy, white areas. Due to segregation in housing, property taxes were a form of predatory inclusion for Black Americans. Rothstein (2018) details the severe degree in which all levels of government maintained white supremacy through housing policies throughout the 20th century. Rothstein (2014) emphasized "living in such high-poverty neighborhoods for multiple generations adds an additional barrier to achievement, and multigenerational segregated poverty characterizes many African American children today" (Abstract). School funding policies then depend on housing policies to

address past and present segregation. Multigenerational segregated poverty, compounded by segregated schooling, was strengthened by the legal blueprint set forth by *Sarah C. Roberts vs. The City of Boston* and later when "separate but equal" was nationally legalized through *Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)* (National Archives, 2021). These cases which allowed public facilities and transportation to be segregated by race left limited opportunities for Black Americans in the wake of a post-slavery United States.

Reconstruction and Jim Crow Effects on School Funding

The opportunity for educating Black children, newly freed from the chains of slavery in 1865, was fiercely contested in the post-slavery South. From 1865 to 1877, the North occupied the South aiming to reinstate order, as well as enforce the new amendments that aimed to liberate Black Americans (Library of Congress, n.d.). Resistance by White southerners, particularly White legislators, to equalizing access to education and other associated rights of citizenship, was severe. So severe that it led one Black veteran of the Civil War to state: "If you call this Freedom, what do you call Slavery?" (Kendi, 2016, p. 235). How education was restricted, particularly through racial capitalist strategies, like predatory inclusion, accumulation by dispossession, and differentiated access, were key features to school funding in the South. These features followed Reconstruction through the Jim Crow era, the time between Reconstruction and the Civil Rights gains of the 1960's, in which a racial caste system was both codified into law and culturally willed. As a result, political rights of southern Black Americans were dismantled and violence towards Black Americans who demanded equal rights were lethal. In demanding these rights, like equal access to state funded education, came the cost of their lives. As Rooks (2017) argued, "The states that most aggressively lynched their Black citizens were also those where the education of Blacks was most consistently contested following the Civil War" (p. 55).

As taxpayer supported and segregated schools expanded in the South following Reconstruction and through the 1930's, school funding for Southern Black communities was provisioned in predatory and expropriative ways. Rooks (2017) emphasized how some Southern states explicitly forbade the use of "white tax dollars" for Black students, while other states or local school districts required Black communities "to pay a double tax if they wanted their children educated—one to educate white schoolchildren and another for the education of their own" (p. 52). Furthermore, federal funding earmarked for Black students was often diverted to White students (Rooks, pp. 52-53). As a result, segregation allowed White schools to profit. Sometimes, Black communities' property taxes were forbidden from being used for their education. Instead, "poll taxes," the amount of money Black people were forced to pay to vote, was used towards Black schools (p. 53). Moreover, in states with supposedly "color-blind" laws for funding education, such as Kentucky, the legal requirement to educate Black children was outmaneuvered by simply providing fewer schools for Black students than they needed (pp. 53-54). As previously mentioned, Black communities' demand for equal education was met with violence including lynchings, burning schools to the ground, assaults on teachers, and destroyed educational materials (p. 54).

Funding Black schools would continue to be set by terms of White supremacy in the South into the 1960's. By the start of the 20th century, White philanthropists of both the North and South recognized the lucrative potential in differentiating access to education for Black students. The legal framework of Jim Crow legitimized the economic, social, and even physical impossibilities of an equal education for Black students, while a push for vocational schools could provide the South with cheap, non-unionized labor (Rooks, pp. 57-61). The General Education Board (GEB), founded in 1902 by the wealthy Rockefeller family, helped set the funding mechanisms for Black schools all the way until the Board dissolved in 1964 (Hoffschwelle, n.d.; Rooks, 2017, p. 59). As a result,

public funding of Black schools was promoted by the GEB to cement Black workers' status at the bottom of the economic ladder. Unlike publicly funded White schools, however, Black schools would be vocational, aimed to train Black students for low-level industrial jobs. Further differentiating funding mechanisms was the fact that Black communities would be required to raise funds for themselves, deed the land where the school building was or would be located, and pay an additional tax for being considered a "separate school system" (Rooks, p. 65). Even though funds raised by Black communities for their schooling were matched by the GEB and other philanthropic foundations, there were many cases in which Black communities paid most of the total money spent (Spring, 2014, p. 234). Not only were Black communities receiving a limited education, but they were also paying more than White communities.

Even though public schools and funding for these schools increased after the turn of the 19th century, funding mechanisms for Black students remained unequal throughout the country. Tyack (1974) finds that "public education rose from 47 percent of total expenditures for schooling in 1850 to 79 percent in 1900" with more than two-thirds of these public funds coming from local property taxes (p.66). Yet these numbers represent majority-White populations, considering that segregated schools often required Black communities to personally finance their education with little state help (Spring, 2014, p. 221). Black communities' demand for integrated schools, especially seen through Black families moving North during the Great Migration of the early 1900's, was also a demand for equal funding (Spring, 2014, p. 222).

Even in 1940, research showed that educational attainment and degrees were increasingly important to employers across various industries (Tyack, 1974, p. 273). Entrance to middle class jobs began to require high school and sometimes college degrees. Tyack details that researchers at the time also observed how school funding affects student outcomes in terms of high school or

college completion. Less school funding, especially for rural and urban students, equated to a lesser likelihood of increasing their future economic status. Compounding this issue is segregation. Tyack states: “Most exploited were the black schools of the states which maintained segregated systems. There the median expense for white classrooms was $1,166, for Negro $477” (p. 273). Unfortunately, segregated schooling was commonplace in the North and the South which meant limited access to well-funded schools, and thus limited access to the middle class. Although segregation in schools becomes prohibited by the Constitution, at least in the de jure sense, maintaining a tiered and unequal system of funding that harms predominantly Black schools continues.

Brown v. Board of Education (1954) and White Backlash

After years of local and state court battles by Black families and lawyers, a collection of school segregation cases was bundled into what would become the landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. As Rooks (2017) asserts, “the case was as much about control of and access to educational funds as it was about states agreeing to educate Black and White children in the same room” (p. 83). Limited school funding and segregation go hand in hand. *Brown v. Board* outlawed segregated schools and prompted the federal government to create federal statutes that required accessible and integrated public-school education (Pendharkar, 2023). Yet, segregation persisted in schools throughout the nation after the court ruling. Many northern states had desegregated public schools during Reconstruction and Jim Crow, but just like the Brown case, these states did not follow suit. Instead, the desegregation laws in both states and nationally were largely ignored (*Desegregation of Pennsylvania Schools Historical Marker*, 2019). Pennsylvania, despite having legally desegregated almost a century before the Brown case, remained and continue

to be de facto segregated. As a result, school funding for school districts with diverse populations is dramatically lower than predominantly White school districts (Slaughter et al., 2016).

Brown v. Board of Education aimed to dismantle public school segregation altogether, but it remains a dream deferred. The unrealized potential of Brown v. Board of Education is merely one marker in a long history of racial segregation's impact on a student's education outcomes and upward mobility. The history of racism in America runs parallel with the history of education and in identifying these tracks, the presentism of the issue can be less distorted. Helpful to understanding this context is Gloria Ladson Billings' article, *Landing on the Wrong Note: The Price We Paid for Brown* (2004).

Ladson-Billings (2004) highlights the decision's implications and unfortunately its' limitations. The limitations of the *Brown* decision that Ladson-Billings describes regards the institutional failure to root out white supremacy, and thus segregation, in American society. While Ladson-Billings (2004) addresses Brown as the right decision, she critiques the lack of federal oversight in desegregating schools from 1954 to the early 2000's (p. 5). Furthermore, Ladson-Billings asks critical questions necessary to questioning the social impact of school segregation. She argues "What if *Brown* had asked what disadvantage do Whites experience as a result of attending racially isolated, White monocultural schools?" (p. 7). With this question, she touches upon the need for critical consciousness to question our nation's assumptions around race and schooling. Beyond the financial harm done to students of color, Ladson-Billings emphasizes there is a level of dehumanization to all students that the history and present issue of school segregation and underfunding contributes to.

The failure and limitations of Brown has led to increased segregation in school districts since the 1990's despite research which proves diverse learning environments benefit students

(Pendharkar, 2023). While the U.S. Education Department has announced grant opportunities to help districts gain additional funding for efforts to "foster socioeconomic, racial, or cultural diversity in schools," there remains no significant effort to address the underlying structural issue of funding schools through reliance on local property tax (Pendharkar, 2023). In the decades following Brown, southern states found ways to divert funds from Black schools, cut funds for integrated schools, create vouchers for all-white schools, (Rooks, 2017, pp. 97-103). Northern schools, and eventually Southern schools, retained segregated schooling through privatized education schemes, like charter schools (later discussed in Chapter 3). Despite this unequal struggle, Black communities continued to demand integration and economic justice.

The Black Panther Party, for example, saw education as a path to liberation. Amidst a highly segregated education system, the Black Panther Party created their own school in Oakland, California. Recognizing the importance of fully funded education, they financed a free breakfast program for all their students, so that students could be better engaged. Their food program inspired 36 other cities and later was an inspiration behind federally funded school breakfasts for low-income students (Peoples & Foster, n.d.). The example set by the Black Panther Party for free breakfast is a reminder to learn from the activism and interventions by people of color in the fight for equitable school funding. Students too were active in resistance. For example, Kitzmiller (2022) describes the 1967 student walkout in Philadelphia. More than 3,500 students walked out of school to draw attention to the need for more Black history courses, Black teachers, and Black administrators. Students also demanded greater access to more rigorous academic programs. Unfortunately, the students were met by brutal resistance from the police (Kitzmiller, 2022). Still, their legacy and those of others who resisted structural oppression serves as a hopeful example of education for liberation. In the section to follow, the historical context provided will be deepened

by an analysis of contemporary school funding practices. Doing so can provide a clearer path towards how educators can intervene in such a challenging web of structural oppression.

Contemporary School Funding Policies and Racial Capitalism

As explained in chapter three, the issue of inequity in school funding can be traced back to the origins of educational systems in the "common schools" movement. Then, just as now, schools were funded largely through property taxes. The stratification of wealth, and thus communities, helped to ensure that the "great equalizer" of public education was never equal from the offset. Today the backbone of school funding continues to be most dependent upon the wealth of a school district's residents, rather than the country, state, or even county. Unfortunately, the tools of underfunding have expanded to include various forms of exclusion from educational opportunities through expropriative taxes, debt, public disinvestment, and performance-based standardized testing. Although public education has significantly expanded its inclusion of all students since its pre-Civil War inception, exclusionary terms based on school funding remain an obstacle to receiving an equitable education.

Understanding the history outlined in chapter three helps to make sense of these findings, considering the exclusionary terms on which Black Americans were brought into public education such as vocational schools, expropriative school tax policies, and segregation. To better analyze the necessity to transform school funding policy, current school funding practices must be understood. As described, the problem of school funding is evident, but how it manifests through exclusionary terms can feel more complex to dissect. Therefore, I will explore the current research on inequitable school funding, arguing that current practices demonstrate the underlying racial capitalist foundation of school funding in the United States. I will outline how expropriative taxes, debt, public disinvestment, and performance-based standardized testing contribute to the

underdevelopment of primarily minority-majority school districts. Based on my review of the literature, these practices have led to debt financing and other methods of expropriation of BIPOC communities and their schools. Due to this evolution of schooling defined by race and class, I will continue to use racial capitalism as a lens through which to analyze how school funding binds the ties between racialization and capitalism, allowing for it to persist into present-day schools.

Racial Capitalist Tools to Underfund Schools

The connection between racial capitalism and education is represented in a growing body of research centering racial capitalism as an economic, cultural, and even psychological mode in which students experience schooling. Melamed (2015) applies Cedric Robinson's definition of racial capitalism to explain that racism and capitalism are unextractable from each other because of the laws and norms of accumulation based in capitalism (p. 76). For example, Melamed (2015) details the avenues of accumulations in which capital moves, like through capitalists and its production/workers, creditors/debtors, and "conquerors of land made property/the dispossessed and removed," all of which require relations of severe inequality (p. 77). In the realm of education, school funding moves capital through each of these avenues. Property dispossession has been highlighted earlier, while capital through production (or education)/ workers (or students), and creditors (or Wall Street financiers)/ debtors (or school districts) will be outlined in the following sections.

Capitalism reflects schooling in which human contrasts are reproduced. Social conceptions of human contrasts like rich and poor, industrious and lazy, "worthy" and "unworthy" are informed by racialized versions of these contrasts (Melamed, 2015, p. 80). In a racial capitalist society, these contrasts are legitimized through laws. School funding policies are legislated through racialized contexts as I will later explain. People of Color, for example, are more likely to attend inequitably

funded schools, yet on emergence from schooling age, are held more accountable for their own past despite the "uneven life chances that are inescapably part of capitalist social relations" (Melamed, 2015, p.77).

Kelley (2017) also draws upon past functions of racial capitalism to understand its extent. Kelley details the forms of racialism which have persisted as far back as western feudal society to explain how racialism informed settler colonialism in 17th century North America. In doing so, I saw how urban education today bears unsettling similarities to settler colonialism of the North American past. According to Kelley, European settlers faced three problems in their goal to take over the land. First, they had to "dispossess indigenous people from the land." Second, they had to "manage coerced African labor," and third, they had to figure out how to "manage an unruly white working class (indentured servants)." The critical solution to their threefold problem was the creation of a settler class that were made "white." White meant that poor, white laborers, often indentured servants, could identify with the ruling regime, rather than the Natives or enslaved Africans. Through this history, I see a similarity in how urban schools are intentionally underdeveloped, as both cases show that if you differentiate access to power, then you can dispossess people from the land and expropriate people, land, and resources for profit, rather than the collective good.

How else can we make sense of the intentional underdevelopment of urban education? Dispossessing Black people through segregation and deeming Black spaces as financially insolvent through racially driven municipal debt sets the course for predominantly Black schools to "fail," and as a result, lose true public ownership. The quality of education dealt to predominantly Black schools is one of subsistence, to manage meeting the minimum of state law while prepping its students for meager wages, poor working conditions, and even incarceration – all profitable

revenues for neoliberal interests. Lastly, just as settler's identities were shaped to hinder collective resistance, racialized deficit narratives evolve to shape predominantly White perceptions of urban education. These are dangerous perceptions which hinder critical consciousness from transforming present day school funding practices.

Expropriation and Debt in School Funding

Expropriation, in a school funding context, is more abstract than its original reference to primitive accumulation of raw materials to dispossess a group from the raw material's capital and social benefits. As I refer to expropriation regarding school funding, I am referencing the extraction of wealth (i.e. property tax) in a way that benefits one racial group over another. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics (2022) reports that public school revenues continue to be driven mostly by local and state sources. The localized nature of funding public schools leaves enormous room for racial and socioeconomic disadvantages. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights centralized this issue in their 2018 report titled "Public Education Funding Inequity in an Era of Increasing Concentration of Poverty and Resegregation." Most of the Commission agreed that many students live in highly segregated and impoverished communities in which their schools reflect the limitations race and class has imposed on them. In addition to the localized nature of school funding, I will also identify how debt operates as an anti-democratic tool to reduce autonomy in low-income school districts.

In Upper Darby, the school district I teach in, these limitations become clearer when analyzing the school district's budget and demographics. Upper Darby school district is composed of a majority of students of Color, representing 82.8% of the student population, and totals 67.7% students with an economic disadvantage (*District Fast Facts - Upper Darby SD - Future Ready PA Index*, n.d.). Within the same county, a nearby school district, Radnor Township, is composed of a

majority of White students, representing 64% of the student population, and totals a significantly lower percentage of economically disadvantaged students at 8.3% (*School Fast Facts - Ithan El Sch - Future Ready PA Index*, n.d.). Despite being a far less wealthy town, Upper Darby's residents are taxed a higher millage rate (the number that sets how much a school district will tax a property) than Radnor's and get less per pupil spending in return (Upper Darby School District, 2022; Radnor Township School District, 2023). This is a form of racialized expropriation that occurs across Pennsylvania school districts. As noted above, the higher-income Radnor Township can have a lower millage rate than low-middle income Upper Darby, yet gain more in return (i.e. spending per pupil) through their wealthier tax base.

Backer's (2020) research regarding school funding offers an antidote to current racial capitalist school funding practices, like expropriative millage rates and racialized real estate and zoning practices. Backer (2020) highlights results of school funding inequity in Pennsylvania stating "schools with predominately white students and fewer students on free and reduced priced lunch receive more per pupil funding. Conversely, schools with students who are predominantly of Color receive less funding per pupil across the board, but also less funding as the number of students on free or reduced-price lunch increases (pp. 38-39). My students' abilities to grow their curiosity, critical thought, and their critical consciousness is stifled under this system considering Backer's (2020) explanation that "Less funding per pupil means fewer educational opportunities" (p. 39).

To those willing to intervene in the status quo of school funding, Backer recommends analyzing the issue using a base-superstructure model. The base-superstructure model encourages its users to analyze society from the bottom up to question how the economic base of society influences social relations. According to Althusser (1970), the economic conditions of the base are

not “all-powerful,” despite their immense influence on the super-structure, or the social institutions and cultures we reproduce, such as the government, legal system, and school (Althusser, 1970, as cited in Backer, 2020, p. 37). Backer (2020) encourages this analysis to prompt educational leaders to pinpoint “foundational economic practices” at the base of the school funding issue, and then directly address these practices. Backer’s call to educational leaders suggests an alliance with housing justice advocates, stating “educational leaders may have to study the history of property markets, zoning, real estate, and taxation and engage in organizing, advocacy, and other forms of social change to address school funding on these terrains” (p. 55). Educators must decide to intervene in the status quo of school funding, and as highlighted later in chapter four, this can be done through Critical Pedagogy in a way that centers and empowers those most affected -- the students.

The economic base of school funding also includes the role of debt. In underfunded schools, debt acts as a mechanism of intentional underdevelopment that further excludes historically marginalized communities of Color from advantages of educational opportunities. The financial weight of debt in predominantly Black and Brown school districts can be described as an “illicit racial advantage” for White capitalists if applying Jenkins (2020) description of illicit racial advantages. To produce more capital in a capitalist system, exploitation, often in the form of labor, and expropriation, by seizing land, is necessary. In the case of schooling, labor represents education, as our society overwhelmingly practices school funding policies that differentiate labor for the economy based on race and socioeconomic status. Moreover, expropriation is reflected in school closures and takeovers detailed in the following section. As a result, illicit racial advantages combine exploitation and expropriation to act as an avenue in which capital can more easily

generate and flow to White America. Debt harms local school districts while an overwhelmingly White population of capitalists on Wall Street profit (Graham, 2020).

To understand how debts accumulate to disadvantage predominantly Black and Brown schools, it is helpful to consider debt and its functions as an instrument of power. Power constitutes access to resources, and thus one's ability to conduct one's life. Debt restricts autonomy and expands authoritarianism in schools, for once a school district is in debt it is easier to control and discipline it. Education researcher, Eleni Schirmer, highlights the power that debt holds over schools by outlining the effects of debt financing in Philadelphia School district. Unknown to much of the public, schools are also funded through debt-financing. Debt-financing schools means each school district receives a credit score that rates the district's creditworthiness and risk. Unfortunately, the history of segregated and underfunded schools means school districts with predominantly Black and Brown low-income students overwhelmingly go to schools deemed a "risk" to credit-rating agencies like Moody's Investor Services. As a result, borrowing money to help fund the school district is borrowed on more predatory terms than wealthier school districts.

As Schirmer (2021) notes, "Funding schools by way of credit scores amounts to little more than operating a system of prejudices which ordains the haves with the capacity to have more, while chaining the have-nots to financial hardship." (para. 6). This financial hardship is evident in the Philadelphia school district in which paying back creditors is prioritized over increasing educational resources, teacher pay, or improving building conditions due to bond covenants, which "give creditors the first right to resources" (Schirmer, 2021). Sometimes, the burden of debt becomes so enormous, schools are forced to close as has happened in Philadelphia and Chicago. Jackie Wang (2018), who analyzes a form of racial capitalism called carceral capitalism, argues that racialized credit worthiness of municipalities leads to financial states of exception (pp. 15-16).

Financial states of exemption, in the case of public schools, empower state governments to close schools, and thus disrupt the opportunities a public good like education can provide. Meanwhile, creditors benefit financially through the tax-exempt municipal bonds offered to these struggling communities, leaving local taxpayers with increasingly expropriative taxes to pay for servicing the school district's debt (i.e. Upper Darby millage rate versus Radnor Township millage rate).

While challenging to face scale of inequity in school funding, Schirmer shares inspiring examples of resistance to debt-financing in the Philadelphia School district. For example, local activists have partnered with groups including Action Center of Race and the Economy, Lilac Philly, and the Debt Collective to "build power to challenge rule by debt." One way they are doing this is to break down complex financial terminology to help make awareness and activism around debt-financing education more politically possible (Schirmer, 2020). These groups offer insight into the critical pedagogical methods that can transform critical consciousness around school funding.

Public Disinvestment in School Funding

Rooks (2020) describes who benefits the most from inequitable school funding are those who can benefit financially and ideologically from failing public schools. She contends this privatization of schooling, seen most specifically in the charter school movement, as an extension of Jim Crow segregation, and the "New Jim Crow's" war on drugs and mass incarceration. Students in inequitably funded school districts suffer at the pockets and whims of those who feel they have something to lose if equity is in play. These beneficiaries include standardized testing and charter school companies, politicians in favor of privatizing education, and local school boards and voters who have aimed to avoid integration. The service industry is also a beneficiary of inequitable school funding policies as underfunded schools help sort future labor. Considering the

service sector requires the most American workers (Desilver, 2019) and that ⅔ of students are affected by the school funding gap (The Century Foundation, 2020), it may not be a coincidence that in most service sector jobs, wages remain remarkably low (Burnley & Semuels, 2019). Inequitable school funding policies can be viewed as contributing to a monopoly on advancement in educational and wealth opportunities in favor of students who come from wealthier, and often whiter, school districts.

By the 1990's, the educational landscape for Black and Brown children had become increasingly impacted by "free market" principles. Public education in communities with majority populations of color experience more educational experimentation through vouchers, school choice, and charters than White majority school districts (Rooks, 2020, pp. 132-137). Many charters schools lobby that their for-profit management boards are necessary to improve innovation in schools (Day, 2021). However, might the most "innovative" experiment be simply to equitably fund public schools instead? Operating as a multi-billion-dollar industry, charter schools siphon public funds into private for-profit management companies (Day, 2021). The lucrative marketplace position of charter schools does not automatically equate to academic success for students. As Burris and Pfleger (2020) explain in their longitudinal study of charter schools from 1999-2017, charter closure rates are "alarmingly high" (p. 6). Burris and Pfleger (2020) highlight notable statistics to emphasize this issue. For example, 50% of charters failed by year 15 of their study (p. 6). In addition, nearly a million students have been displaced by charter closures, and closures are highest in high-poverty areas like Detroit, Tuscon, and Milwaukee (p. 6). As a key feature in the school choice movement since the 1980's, charters have historically symbolized the market-based solution for past racist policies and actions (Rooks, 2020, p. 132). Yet, the high prevalence of charters in low-income communities of Color, despite the charters' overwhelming failure rate,

displays Manning Marable's description of underdevelopment. To Marable, underdevelopment was "not the absence of development; it is the inevitable product of an oppressed populations integration" (Jenkins, 2020). Thus, public education is differentiated through the modality of race and class.

Disinvestment of public schools has impacted American students, as well as Puerto Rican students. Understanding a broader context of disinvestment helps to develop the critical consciousness necessary to intervene in the struggle for school funding. Puerto Rican scholar and activist Rima Brusi discusses the rising tide of neoliberalism facing Puerto Rico's schools in "No savings, just pain: School closures and "reform" in Puerto Rico" (2022). Brusi's (2022) revealing of the deceitful logic behind school closures and the opportunity this creates for charter schools begs important questions.

First, we can question the motives behind government budgetary decisions and ask: which kind of ethics are we serving – an ethics of domination or liberation? Day (2020) highlights how an ethics of domination is formed in public-private alliances, stating:

> ... in most public-school districts you have an elected school board, or you have a mayor who runs the school. If you don't like what they're doing, you can throw them out of office. But the nonprofit boards are all privately appointed boards. You have billionaires sitting on these boards, and they invite their friends and create a chummy inner circle, and nobody else has any idea what's going on. (para. 25)

Unfortunately for many American and Puerto Rican charter schools, this is an accurate reflection of the authoritarian policies which have permeated public education. As Brusi (2022) details, the "economic and ideological package that incentivizes public-private partnerships" leads to an increase in for profit schools. Meanwhile, community schools lie vacant, and students suffer (p. 29).

Despite protests, students and their communities were domineered into an economic and ideological system of subjugation and dispossession. In this ethics of domination, profit-driven backroom deals legitimized the actions of corrupt leadership and an opaque oversight board (Brusi, 2022, pp. 21, 23-24). An ethics of liberation, however, remains amongst those affected, including a former teacher, who in response to the budget cuts that have led to increased, failing, and inaccessible charters asked: "Where are the savings, when all we have here is pain?" (Brusi, 2022, p. 32). What is absent in government and economic policy, may still be uplifted by the people the government is supposed to serve.

Secondly, Brusi's exposé serves as an ardent reminder to check the pulse of our democracy. The pulse of democracy is weakened by anti-democratic education financing decisions that support creditor autonomy over local autonomy. School closures and private-public partnerships, like charter schools, are neoliberal policies which defund public schools. As Karp (2023) points out that even states with progressive funding formulas experience public school disinvestment through charter school payments, voucher programs, and corporate tax abatements (p. 11). For example, Karp (2023) notes that "Pennsylvania districts made $2.6 billion in charter school payments for 2020-2021, with $1 billion going to dubious charter schools" (p. 11). Similar findings have been researched elsewhere in the U.S.

STEM initiatives in Chicago, designed and marketed largely by corporations, have cast effects of racial capitalism upon thousands of Chicago students. Morales-Doyle and Gutstein (2019) apply a racial capitalist lens to describe how Chicago STEM schools led to massive school closures in predominantly Black communities. Yet, the most prestigious of the STEM schools have selective enrollment in which only 3% of Black students attend, while Black students are overrepresented in STEM schools with more limited opportunities (Morales-Doyle & Gutstein, 2019, p. 530). These

findings relate to Saltman's (2024) claim that "Privatization such as chartering and vouchers do not challenge racial segregation and white flight in urban schooling. Instead, they exacerbate segregation and naturalize an apartheid system of education and real estate markets (p. 6). Resistance to school closures was strong and illuminated the need for a framework of racial capitalism to intervene for justice. Amongst many protests against the school closures, one grandmother of Chicago Public school grandchildren declared "closing schools is a hate crime" and went on a hunger strike that ended with the board's decision to keep her local public high school open (Morales-Doyle & Gutstein, 2019, p. 530). These movements and moments of resistance manifest hope and challenge anti-democratic school funding policies.

Debates over charter schools, both challenging their existence and their regulations, are ongoing. Applying a lens of racial capitalism to these debates highlights the narrative of underdevelopment that has plagued primarily Black and Brown schools. Localized research into a community's relationships with charter schools and public funding can broaden debates over the role of lenders, creditors, and capitalists in the funding of public education. To outline new visions of school funding, Karp (2023) recommends public hearings, community speak outs, and alliance with advocacy groups that demand equitable funding, but also equitable conditions in building facilities and curriculum. Perhaps, the pulse of democracy can be resuscitated so long as people come together to demand public goods that do not require racialized, and monetized conceptions of education.

Performance Based Measures in School Funding

In an increasingly neoliberal society, standardized tests in schools have become the norm for measuring students' academic achievements and teachers' job performances. The neoliberal standardization and mass commodification of tests requires what Streeck and Camiller (2014)

describe as “market justice,” or “distribution of the output of production according to the market evaluation of individual performance.” In terms of standardized tests, student performance is quantified based on a predetermined standard, and depending on their results, may face consequences of market-based competition such as less funding or school closures. Incentivized by federal education laws, many states, such as Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Arizona, have experimented with performance-based funding models (Mesecar & Soifer, 2016). Performance-based funding models utilize “social impact bonds” which “set up to direct public funding to those institutions and programs that are clearly demonstrating their impact through rigorous results, thereby mitigating financial risk to the taxpayer, and providing an effective means for state and local governments to scale up successful innovations” (Mesecar & Soifer, 2016), without questioning the financial risk of stipulating underfunded schools to conform to market-based measures, rather than social justice measures.

American University (2022) describes negative effects of standardized tests beyond performance-based funding. For example, standardized tests lead to a devaluing of instruction in the humanities and arts, promoting a one-sized fits all approach despite an increasingly diverse population, and causes undue stress on students. Furthermore, Kohn (2000) asserts that there is pedagogical harm done to students in states heavily reliant on standardized testing. Kohn (2000) details the barriers that standardized testing places upon an education for becoming more critically conscious, stating:

> Standardized tests can't measure initiative, creativity, imagination, conceptual thinking, curiosity, effort, irony, judgment, commitment, nuance, good will, ethical reflection, or a host of other valuable dispositions and attributes. What they can measure and count are

> isolated skills, specific facts and functions, the least interesting and least significant aspects of learning. (para. 32)

Despite the limitations and barriers presented by heavy reliance on standardized tests, the movement for standardized testing has gained both Democratic and Republican support since the 1970's (Spring, 2014, p. 429). By the 1990's it became and remains a central feature in American schools (Spring, 2014, p. 429).

Standardized tests gained their foothold in the 21st century through two major federal policies: No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The No Child Left Behind Act started in 2002 and required standardized testing and new requirements for failing schools. Now, schools would be measured by student performance on standardized tests. If a school was deemed failing because of student test scores, the law mandated failing schools to improve. Schools that did not improve would be "restructured" (Spring, 2014, p. 441). These high stakes tests came with hefty punishments for not meeting the standards. As Au (2015) clarifies:

> NCLB amounted to a federal mandate to require standardized testing in every U.S. state, with the threat that if test scores were not raised across various subgroups related to race, economic class, students with disabilities, and English Language Learners, among others, schools and districts would face a variety of possible punishments including loss of control of federal education monies, the complete reconstitution of a school's staff, takeover by a charter management organization, or school closures. (para. 23)

While these policies favor market justice, they also align with what Au (2015) details as the racialization of economic class. Au (2015) contends that the promotion of standardized tests as neutral, anti-racist bearers of data leads to a deficit mindset of failure in students and schools. As a

result, failure to meet standardized measures deems students and their communities unworthy of meritocratic gains, even though these measures ignore structural inequality (Au, 2015).

In college I worked as an intern for an education non-profit aimed at promoting Cleveland Municipal School District's school choice program. One of my tasks was to input data from student surveys about their schools. Often what the students wrote glowing remarks about their teachers. Yet, what was centered on the program's webpage was school report cards that showed whether a school was failing based on standardized tests. It was undeniable that quantification and rankings in terms of test scores meant more than student perspectives. The difference teachers were making was not the main point – the scores were.

From an authoritative perspective, test scores are used to quantify and validate the sorting mechanism behind school funding. Such mechanisms strengthen Bowles' and Gintis' (2011) argument that education has historically been "a device for allocating individuals to economic positions" (p 49). Once the sorting mechanism of NCLB started to affect predominantly White school districts, traction for an overhaul of NCLB became more widespread. Karp (2016) explains:

> As the schools facing sanctions and intervention grew beyond poor communities of color — where NCLB had made "disruptive reform" the norm—and began to reach into more middle-class districts, the pressure to revise NCLB's unworkable accountability system increased. (para. 5)

Following pushback, standardized testing was reformed by the Obama administration, culminating in Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. While Karp (2016) contends some positive changes were made to testing requirements, such as parents' option to opt-out and an end to the federal mandate for test-based teacher evaluation, there are still cracks in the policy in which racial capitalism can flourish. Unfortunately, ESSA, like NCLB, continues to omit any federal mandate

that addresses inequitable school finance policies which plague more than half of the states (Karp, 2016; Davis Jr, 2021).

Racial capitalism requires market relationships to be shaped by racial status (Simms, 2023, p. 205). In the case of performance-based stipulations for additional school funding, these market relationships are defined by neoliberal policies which emphasize competition and incentivize privatization. Schools which adhere to federally funded competitive grants, as seen in Obama's Race to the Top initiative beginning in 2009, allow for schools to compete for more funding, so long as they meet specific criteria of restructuring their schools and student improvement on standardized tests (*Implementation and Impact Evaluation of Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants*, n.d.). Race to the Top led to school closures of "underperforming" schools, as seen in Chicago. Citing a budget deficit and failure to meet Race to the Top standards, many schools in predominantly Black, low-income neighborhoods were closed despite community resistance (Torre et al., 2015, p. 5). Unlike predominantly White suburban school districts, urban school districts experience a devaluing of their political rights and privileges, which are two key features of racial capitalism (Simms, 2023, p. 205). For example, Scott (2011) describes this devaluing of political rights by explaining how privatized investment entraps urban schools, using performance-based funding, as well as other neoliberal measures. Scott (2011) states:

> In the largely urban school districts in which these efforts are concentrated, a similar reform milieu has emerged: rapid expansion of charter schools; the eradication of elected school boards; the increase in alternatively prepared teachers and school leaders; and the adoption of value-added measures to reward, promote, or terminate teachers. (p. 585)

Cementing the racial capitalist agenda of performance-based funding is the history of standardized tests. The depoliticization of urban education through competitive funding and private

investment as an effect of performance-based funding has its roots in eugenics. Eugenics, an ideology which gained traction in the late 1800's, sought to prove that "humans can be improved through selective breeding of populations" (National Human Genome Research Institute, 2022). Eugenics was grounded in the unscientific notion that intelligence is fixed, claiming that "abstract human qualities (e.g. intelligence and social behaviors) were inherited in a simple fashion (National Human Genome Research Institute, 2022). In a highly racialized society, this left historically marginalized communities, like people of Color, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals, to be determined unfit, abnormal, unworthy, and incompetent. By the 20th century, these views propagated some of the first intelligence tests in the United States. As Stoskopf (1999) explains, "the lower scores of African Americans were regularly used to track Black students into vocational education or for White teachers to explain away any difficulties they might be having with Black students in their classrooms." Rather than analyze the structural inequities, like school funding and segregation placed on Black students, eugenic conceptions of intelligence were used to racially differentiate access to education.

Au (2015) documents how the thread of eugenics continues to run through standardized testing. Referring to standardized tests as a "racial project," Au (2015) contends that standardized testing veils itself as a meritocratic means to measure student performance, aiming to capture how well a student has performed through "hard work" and "individual merit." What standardized tests rely on are deficit models of thinking upon individuals, rather than systems which support or fail a student's academic success. As a result of this structural omission embedded in high-stakes standardized tests, Au and Tempel (2012) explain that "doing well on high-stakes is strongly correlated with income levels and only confirms the educational inequities that have characterized U.S. education throughout the century" (p. 38). Standardized testing within a racial capitalist,

neoliberal context fails to equate to substantive access to equitable education for students, and instead often has adverse effects.

Limitations and Opportunities of School Finance Reform

There is growing research which concludes that state and federal policies aimed at improving equitability in school funding can improve access to resources for schoolchildren and educational outcomes (Baker et al., 2016). However, there are limitations to the success of improved equity in school funding. Due to the vast stratification of wealth in American society, schools will struggle with compensating for the disadvantage socioeconomic status has on children's learning outcomes. A contemporary example of this can be found in Arkansas. Duan et al. (2022) describes how Arkansas' attempts in 2003-2004 to reduce inequity in their school funding system, led to some notable degree of improved student achievement outcomes for poorer and non-white students. However, through the convergence club model, Duan et al. (2022) determines that school finance reforms reduce, but do not eradicate student achievement gaps. Therefore, as a teacher, I cannot assume a singular solution, like reducing school funding inequity, is enough to level the playing field for my disadvantaged students. Rather, advocating for school funding equity, alongside curriculums centered in Critical Educational Psychology can be a more effective intervention. To develop ways in which teachers can engage with students about school finance reform, the necessity of Critical Educational Psychology, including analysis of assumptions behind student learning and exploration of experiences for developing students' critical consciousness will be explored in the following section.

Proposed Role of Critical Educational Psychology in Youth Participatory Action Research

Challenging the status quo of inequitable school funding policies suggests the need to reflect upon which pedagogical theories and practices illicit conformity to the current authoritative,

racial capitalist school system, and which counteract it. As described, both historical and current school funding policies contribute to a racialized, class-based system of education. I will detail how Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) can act as a critical pedagogical intervention to challenge the determinist threads of school funding, standardized testing, and deficit thinking. Youth Participatory Action Research is a framework and practice aimed at mentoring youth to engage in social science by "engaging them in all aspects of the research cycle" to contribute to social issues meaningful to them (Mirra et al., 2016, p. 2). Beyond a research framework, Youth Participatory Action Research also operates as a transformative approach to teacher-student, student-student relationships, and how students conceptualize themselves within their communities. Therefore, YPAR challenges its users to replace the deterministic authoritative approaches to education with a question of destination. Where we are is not where we need to be, but what does "where we need to be" look like for teachers and students engaged in Youth Participatory Action Research?

To explore the psychological and sociological capacities for transformation that YPAR may have on underserved youth, a Critical Educational Psychology lens is imperative. Critical Educational Psychology (CEP) moves past the foundations of traditional Educational Psychology to ask what bias, misconceptions, or hierarchies may contribute to the data collected, questions asked, and outcomes analyzed in educational environments (Vassallo, 2017). By applying Critical Educational Psychology, I will describe how YPAR provides students opportunities to experience their development outside of the traditional assessments, frameworks, and theories that are typically imposed on them. Sociological and psychological foundations will be emphasized to outline the need for YPAR in schools, especially underfunded ones. To support this claim, I will highlight how Critical Educational Psychology can strengthen a YPAR intervention by focusing on the nature of

learning and development within sociological contexts of inequity. First, I will analyze the context of childhood development amidst an inequitable schooling system, pointing to the need for revolutionary transformation. Second, I make the case for YPAR as an intervention in high school civics courses to reimagine schooling despite the limitations fettered by school funding. Although YPAR does not cure the political and economic structures which enable undemocratic school funding practices, a Critical Educational Psychology approach suggests YPAR can at least challenge the social relations and societal foundations which contribute to our unequal schooling system. Ultimately, I hope YPAR can be helpful for developing students' critical consciousness needed to nurture an education of "becoming".

Childhood Development and Autonomy

When one thinks of child development, perhaps motor skills, language, or even height and weight charts come to mind. In our American society, those are all measured and valued, but a key aspect to children's development, autonomy, and empowerment in learning, is especially lacking for students from lower socioeconomic classes. As described previously, inequitable school funding has encumbered access to equal schooling for students of Color and lower socioeconomic statuses since public education's inception. According to Vasallo (2017), a critical lens of developmental psychology allows for educators to teach holistically, recognizing that children "spend a good portion of their lives in schools, which are places that can support, quell, steer, or limit changes for students" (p. 97). Marginalized students have historically and presently been denied an equal education, having had to forge and fight for one that is not only inclusive, but also equivalent (Kober, 2020). Still, these students are largely left out of educational environments where student autonomy in learning can flourish. Critical developmental psychology analyzes where students' needs are to foster an emancipatory environment. In other words, as Vasallo (2017)

contended, teachers must be committed to creating an educational environment that contributes to the "realization" of students' "full potential" (p. 60).

Classroom environments that promote student autonomy, when students make decisions that drive their learning through their personal interests and curiosity, are limited within underfunded school districts. As Lombardi (2016) suggested, in an increasingly neoliberal education system, which encourages race to the top measures, students of Color often experience classroom environments in which lowered expectations and the "Deficit Model" are more likely to be initiated – intentionally or not. In this context, Lombardi (2016) continued, the deficit model relies on individual perspectives of development. For example, if a student just "worked harder, they would succeed" (para. 3). As a result, a student's sociocultural development is devalued, and instead, students are defined as numerical representations for pre-determined benchmarks, through modes like Common Core standards (Vasallo, 2017). To challenge this, student autonomy through YPAR could provide an opportunity, long denied to America's less wealthy majority, that not only improved student autonomy and empowerment, but also strengthened a collective aim towards human emancipation.

Drawing upon the concept of intersectionality, which describes how modalities of identity face discrimination which "intersect to create unique dynamics and effects" (Center for Intersectional Justice, n.d.), there is likely intersectionality between school funding and the concerns students have in their lives. Therefore, to achieve equitable school funding measures, an analysis of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) in underfunded schools is critical. Essentially, developmentally appropriate practice is a more humanistic approach to pedagogy (Vasallo, 2017). When coupled with a sociocultural approach, Vasallo (2017) argued, DAP

emphasizes the need for developing student independence through learning experiences that are "meaningful, relevant, and respectful to children and their families" (p. 102).

Although YPAR does not directly address the inequity behind school funding policies (unless its' students wished it to be), it would provide a developmentally appropriate environment to empower students with the educational tools to disrupt dominant hegemonies like racial capitalism. YPAR in underfunded high schools could strengthen student autonomy and self-efficacy, improving students' abilities to advocate for themselves socially and politically, while enriching their communities in meaningful ways. Mirra et al. (2016) explains the benefit of YPAR in a social justice development model, stating "A concern with helping young people understand and act upon their social and political environment has led us to focus not only on students' academic identity development, but their civic identity development as well" (p. 42). Furthermore, A YPAR model follows a Vygotsky developmental approach in which learning is social and interests are power. As a result, according to Walsh (2018), students and teachers are more likely to engage in an environment of "deschooling," the process in which we work towards "building, weaving, and articulating of educations otherwise" (p. 26).

Sociohistorical Approaches to Development

Modern neuroscience identifies the brain, even throughout adulthood, as far more malleable than past generations have previously thought (Eggen and Kauchak, 2016). In response to experience, the brain can continually remodel itself. As Eggen and Kauchak (2016) describe, "what gets fired, gets wired" (p. 41). In other words, experiences present our incredibly shiftable neurons with an opportunity to connect, and thus learn. From a Critical Educational Psychology perspective, this is cause for optimism. Despite massive challenges within education, our neural networks capacity to be transformed is cause for hope. Although capitalist relations are frequently mirrored

in schooling and school funding, and then exacerbated through class relations, Critical Educational Psychology provides an opportunity to analyze how these relations can be transformed through pedagogy. Disrupting capitalism in education, to benefit student autonomy could be partly realized through collective consciousness building experiences like Youth Participatory Action Research.

Considering "the brain instinctively looks for patterns in experiences and tries to make sense of those experiences" (Eggen and Kauchak, 2016, p. 41), it is reasonable to identify the learning practices or socio-political environments which have hindered student autonomy, and thus education for liberation. For example, high-stakes testing produces "undue stress on students and their performance (American University, 2022, para. 7)," resulting in deficit-modeled profiles of student academic proficiency. Moreover, anxiety and depression in children are on the rise (Mitchell, 2020). Similar findings suggest that members of Gen Z, today's 12–27-year-olds, "are significantly less likely to rate their current and future lives highly than millennials were when they were the same age" (Miller, 2024, para. 3). Part of this disillusionment towards their future is indicated by their present feelings towards school, in which students described feeling overwhelmingly "bored, tired, and pressured" and desired more "hands-on learning" (Miller, 2024, paras. 16-17). These student perspectives reveal the potential that pedagogical environments not invested in developmentally appropriate education can lead to "student disengagement" (Vasallo, 2017, p. 97). For YPAR teachers, this is the zone of proximal development in which many students will be met in.

Approaching students' current educational environments with a Vygotskian emphasis on students' zones of proximal development could be a crucial opportunity for new experiences in learning and development towards liberation. Malott (2019) contends Lev Vygotsky's theories of cognition and development were heavily influenced by class struggles of the early twentieth

century. Vygotsky emphasized that childhood development was not linear, but rather historical, multi-faceted, and malleable. To describe the gap between present abilities and future abilities, Vygotsky created a model called "zone of proximal development." According to Vygotsky, the zone of proximal development developed levels of understanding as "buds or flowers," instead of "fruits," because development is not predetermined, and is in a constant state of potential to become (Malott, 2019, para. 20). For educators interested in YPAR initiatives, the zone of proximal development is critical to understand. To bridge the gap between what is and what can be, Malott (2019) explains that this requires challenging "decontextualized and racialized conceptions of mind because there is a tendency in capitalist schooling to attribute students' actual level of development with innate or biological factors, thereby ignoring the ways unequal and highly segregated educational systems produce unequal outcomes" (para. 19).

In line with Malott's (2019) interpretation of Vygotsky's approach to zone of proximal development, YPAR can further students' autonomy, so long as the "revolutionaries are in tune with the mood of the masses and their ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development) [Zone of Proximal Development]," considering "calling for revolution before the people are ready is equivalent to abandoning and alienating the people" (para. 24). In this case, the "revolutionaries" are educators willing to critically analyze the psychological and sociological effects of capitalism on their students. Breaking from the mold requires "revolutionaries" to lead the way in deconstructing the deficit model which precludes student autonomy and our emerging class consciousness. Therefore, to meet the psychological needs of students today, and thus to better facilitate equitable learning experiences, the revolutionary framework of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development is central to their becoming, or their breaking free from pre-determined molds.

To consider where students are in their socioeconomic and psychological environments is a key step towards disrupting inequity in America's school system. The power of deficit thinking helps to maintain inequitable school practices, such as school funding and hyperfocus on standardized tests. But how does it affect the child in their zone of proximal development? As Valencia (1997) explains, "Deficit thinking is tantamount to the process of 'blaming the victim'. It is a model founded on imputation, not documentation" (p. 10). In terms of schooling, deficit thinking has shifted the blame game between students, parents, and culture over time. The past interpretations of students and parents supposed limitations as the source of school failure, are less popular than they were in decades past. However, the perniciousness of deficit thinking persists in quantified terms through the form of high stakes testing (Valencia, 1997), as also described earlier in Chapter 3. Rather than punishing the structures that contribute to testing pre-determined benchmarks on segregated populations, models of deficit thinking promote what Michel Foucault may refer to as "normalized judgment" and "rankings as rewards or punishments." This kind of thinking is antithetical to meeting students in their appropriate zones of proximal development because it implies what Foucault describes as the "power of normalization" which demands "homogeneity," while "it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render the differences useful by fitting them to one another" (Foucault, 1979, as cited in Gesink & Wilson, 2017).

Rather than evaluate our society on the equitability of education, we micro-analyze students' abilities to fit within the predesigned molds of high-stakes testing. Failure of students to meet the desired outcomes of standardized tests places blame on the students, parents, and teachers instead of the racialized ideologies which got us there. If resources, like school funding, are equitable, then

it is more accurately termed an opportunity gap, not an achievement gap. As economist Robert Haveman explains:

> The education debt is the foregone schooling resources that we could have (should have) been investing in (primarily) low-income kids, which deficit leads to a variety of social problems (e.g., crime, low productivity, low wages, low labor force participation) that require on-going public investment. This required investment sucks away resources that could go to reducing the achievement gap. Without the education debt we could narrow the achievement debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 5).

Therefore, to meet students where they are in their zones of proximal development, systemic factors must be accounted for and furthermore, intervened in by both teacher and student.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter two, I once worked as an intern at an educational non-profit, Cleveland Transformation Alliance, which partnered with Cleveland Municipal School district to "provide families and students the information they need to commit to their best-fit public school" (Cleveland Transformation Alliance, 2023). I would spend hours inputting families and students survey results of how satisfied they were with their current schools. Yet, the webpage for families to choose their "best-fit" school did not highlight these survey results. Instead, and to this day, the website allows the user to compare schools based on "achievement" and "progress" in relation to standardized tests. No where is the polyvocality of school success or school failure. Thankfully the organization has moved beyond their previous comparison of using letter grades for each school, but in retrospect, I wonder how families felt seeing their children's school marked as "F" or "D." The grading revealed none of the structural inequities which led to school failure, but likely reproduced models of deficit thinking which place the blame on students supposed deficiencies, rather than the external ascriptions of school failure. Likewise, Valencia (1997)

explains how deficit thinking is dominant in schools, especially regarding “how schools are organized to prevent learning, inequalities in the political economy of education, and oppressive macropolicies and practices in education” (p. 2).

If we do not consider where students are in their zones of proximal development from a Critical Educational Psychology perspective, then we risk fetishizing students to products of capital. Rikowski and Matic (2020) warn against fetishization, in which you replace the object with the idea of it, and thus discredit its laborious and collective origins. Fetishization of students within our dense web of capitalist society maintains deficit thinking and economic instrumentalism through structural tools like inequitable funding and high stakes testing. In effect, student autonomy is reduced. Moreover, students are narrowed, or fetishized, to individuals consigned to economic value, rather than beings of interests fueled by “the signs and symptoms of growing power” (Dewey, 2013, para. 44). To break through this “psychological lockdown” (Rikowski & Matic, 2020, p. 26), the potential of YPAR from a Critical Educational Psychology perspective must be further analyzed. The goal to increase student autonomy while deconstructing the sociocultural present is necessary in creating equitable, developmentally appropriate education that seeks to reverse the harmful effects capital has on students' psyches.

YPAR as a Sociological Intervention

YPAR, like any transformative intervention, is not a cure-all, but there are aspects to it which help induce the factors necessary for developing students' critical consciousness, and thus raise the prospect of education for liberation. According to Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model of human development, our development is shaped by sets of systems, such as family, peers, and social institutions like schools (Eggen and Kauchak, 2016, Chapter 2). If student autonomy is to flourish, then schools have a responsibility to influence micro- and meso- systems using

developmentally appropriate methods. Haste and Bempechat (2021) explore how YPAR and a participatory curriculum of New Civics, a "wide range of civic activities that contribute to effective democracy" can address the need to develop student's agency and critical thinking to produce more democratic societies (Abstract). By applying YPAR and New Civics frameworks, with an emphasis on Vygotsky's sociohistorical development methods and Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective, students are afforded an opportunity to increase their autonomy and thus reshape their macrosystem, or "the culture in which the child develops" (Eggen and Kauchak, 2016, p. 39). The aim to influence their chronosystem, or "the aspects of our environments that change over time" is always present (Eggen and Kauchak, 2016, p. 39).

Through a Critical Education Psychology lens, YPAR offers an alternative to student's academic development, specifically their critical consciousness, by inviting reflection towards normative educational practices and adjusting those practices to rethink students, learning, and teaching. This aligns with University of California Berkeley's (2023) description of what YPAR can offer, including:

> **Redefine** who has the expertise to produce knowledge to our world — not just professional adult researchers but young people who are living the issues they are studying. **Provide** skills in inquiry, evidence, and presentation that are important to young people's development as students and agents of positive change in schools and communities. **Generate** findings that provides insights into issues faced by young people that they themselves experience, as well as the resources that matter in helping solve those issues. **Promote** young people's sociopolitical development and psychological empowerment such that they understand the roots of problems facing their communities and have the skills and

motivation to take action. **Evaluate** programs, policies, and practices that affect young people.

In an increasingly neoliberal education system overrun by standardization, the capabilities of YPAR to provide students opportunities to meaningfully build their way to higher orders of thinking is a welcomed opportunity many educators and students are yearning for. As a result, YPAR promotes Dewey's child centered approach, by stimulating the "child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself" (Dewey, 2013, para. 2). These social situations include, but are not nearly limited to, schools and educators that are being "defunded, demonized, privatized, and resegregated" (Fine, 2012, p. 421).

Add on the recent COVID-19 pandemic and racial uprisings following the murder of George Floyd, and the call for more critical participatory action research initiatives is further warranted. Recognizing where students' developmental needs are can also include considering their political beliefs as part of their positionality. A recent Common Sense Media survey found that almost two-thirds of respondents aged 12 to 17 expressed that politicians and elected officials did not mirror the needs or experiences of youth (Miller, 2024). Fine et al. (2021) highlights the importance of student positionality in their analysis of their youth oral history project that was conducted by, with, and for immigrant youth of Color and educators. This longitudinal project was designed to be five years and aimed to analyze "generational experiences of schooling inequity, aggressive policing, housing precarity and immigration struggles" (Fine et al., 2021, Abstract). The challenges brought forth by the Covid-19 pandemic, especially on low-income communities, and the racial uprisings after George Floyd's murder in July 2020, altered the student participants course of research. Their results reflect a practice of "polyvocalism" (Vasallo, 2017, p.6), in which multiple voices or perspectives are used to understand psychological phenomena through the

orientation of youth participatory action research. Students created oral history projects at first analyzing the generational experiences listed above, and then reflected on their present moment of unrest in the United States around race, health, and wealth to enrich their findings. The next step for these participants is to educate their communities to further wield their voices as a collective apparatus for social movements (Fine et al., 2021). As the students' research evolved, they aimed to transform their polyvocality to critique traditional power structures (Fine et al., 2021).

YPAR initiatives have existed for years, but perhaps YPAR can be utilized in more social studies classrooms by integrating "New Civics." According to Haste & Bempechat (2021), New Civics is a transformative approach to civics curriculum aimed to "expand the definition and scope of 'participation' beyond elections and voting, to include the wide range of civics activities that contribute to effective democracy" (Abstract). If educators are to meet students where they are, on a developmental level, then they must also reach them where they are in their cultural and political levels. YPAR encapsulates this approach to New Civics by breaking the mold of traditional civics education towards a participatory and action-based approach. Like Freire's (1978) learn from, learn with approach to decolonizing education in Guinea-Bissau (p. 12), YPAR and New Civics begin with capitalizing on the strengths of people's zones of proximal development to overcome alienation and reach greater levels of critical consciousness. Using Fine et al (2021) as an example, the students who participated in YPAR were regarded as potential creators of new knowledge, not despite their hurdles, but in part because of them. Their scaffolded opportunities to become researchers and evaluators within their own sociocultural environments, provided them the opportunity to experiments with language development in naming their worlds, while experimenting with "new behaviors and possible identities" (Freire, 1978, p. 12), or what Alfonso et al., (2008), refers to as a key developmental task.

Elevating students' critical consciousness within their current sociocultural environments is no easy task amidst a highly standardized, capitalistic, and increasingly technological educational environment in the U.S. Kornbluh (2017) highlights a unique approach to technology implementation in YPAR that also embodies social justice efforts in youth environments. Kornbluh produced a Social Network Analysis (SNA) of three school's implementation of YPAR projects to analyze whether sharing a Facebook group amongst the participating schools would increase communication between students, as well as their civic participation. The three schools were in the same school district but had disparities in student racial demographics and state rankings based off standardized test scores (Kornbluh, 2017, p. 1109). To better meet students in their context and development, Facebook was used as a social networking site to apply an "*assets-based approach*." An assets-based approach helps to counter young people's "low levels of participation in formal political spheres," while supporting young people's "growing interest in grassroots organizing and activist forms of civic participation through online mediums" (Kornbluh, 2017, p. 1105).

A perceived challenge to using Facebook as a communication network for YPAR students included *homophily*, in which technology acts as an echo chamber of one's viewpoints and demographics, like race or gender, due to the tendency of people to associate with people they deem to be most like themselves (Kornbluh, 2017, p. 1106). Despite initial homophilic tendencies on the Facebook group, with most students discussing their societal concerns with students from their same school and same gender, heterophilic communication increasingly evolved as students engaged each other in action research (2017, p. 1119). By the end of the YPAR program, most Facebook participants reported feelings of improved communication skills, broader perspectives, and improved critical analysis towards their initial concerns (2017, p.

1114-1117). These are the kind of results that give hope to critically minded educators who dream of supporting student's development to meet the needs of students, rather than the needs of politicians or corporations.

Psychology of Equity-centered and Trauma-informed YPAR

When analyzing how YPAR induces student autonomy and reduces deficit thinking, it is important to remain aligned with a Critical Educational Psychology approach. It is not enough to address students' needs through a therapeutic approach, often manifested in social-emotional learning. Rather, a therapeutic approach is best energized by an emancipatory approach, if the goal is to increase critical consciousness in students and thus, end the cycle of exploitation. In the school district I teach at, a trauma-informed consultant team has been hired to "... combine a trauma-informed understanding of children with a brain-based approach to education" (*Neurologic® by Lakeside*). Despite best intentions, however, no amount of professional development and suggested brain breaks, can account for the structural impacts which can deepen or cause childhood traumas, like poverty or racism. Therefore, embedding Venet's (2021) critical approach to trauma-informed learning could prove most beneficial to YPAR's aims of greater student autonomy and critical consciousness amongst students.

Venet (2021) identifies trauma informed education as inseparable from equity and social justice. All too often, schools focus on visible trauma by monitoring students' behaviors, but Venet (2021) highlights that this narrow perception of trauma omits and exacerbates the trauma inducing harms of structural inequities. By moving equity to the center of trauma informed education, educators can practice both therapeutic and emancipatory approaches to social-emotional and trauma-informed education. This shift towards bilaterally responding to and preventing trauma would likely fail in schools that do not have a commitment to equity. YPAR aligns well with an

equity centered trauma-informed approach considering each emphasizes the need for community building and student-centered learning. An equity centered trauma informed approach provides outlets of hope and tools for advocacy for both students and teachers, just as YPAR utilizes intergenerational relationships to give rise to environments in which young people can lead (UC Davis, n.d.).

From a social development perspective, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development could further solidify an equity-centered trauma-informed approach to YPAR in schools. Each of the aforementioned approaches aims to cultivate environments that maintain a child's whole ecosystem as interconnected to and inextricable from their development. Similarly, educational institutions such as Santa Clara University (n.d.), apply Bronfenbrenner's model to illustrate how individual students are impacted by their environment. Santa Clara University (n.d.) relays this in their essential questions related to each layer of one's social environment:

1. How do immediate relationships affect the individual student **(microsystem)**?
2. What is the relationship and impact between a student's immediate relationships and other external relationships that may have an effect on the student **(mesosystem)**?
3. How do organizations/processes external to the student influence their decisions and direction **(exosystem)**?
4. How does a student's overarching values and beliefs leverage their decision-making process **(macrosystem)**?
5. What effect does a student's year in school have on their growth and understanding of themselves and others around them **(chronosystem)**?

Each of these questions, particularly regarding the *micro*-, *exo*- and *chrono*- systems, situate relationships and structures as frameworks to student's development. Creating a curriculum like

YPAR, but also a culture of equity-centered trauma informed education, would require consistent reflection and action in response to the above questions. Questions like these are best supported when educators commit to developing their "equity literacy" to better meet the needs of their students.

According to Gorski (2018, p. 17, as cited in Venet, 2021), equity literacy is "the knowledge and skills educators need to become a threat to the existence of bias and inequity in our spheres of influence". For educators, their sphere of influence begins in the closest layer to the child – the microsystem. This warrants our work as exceptionally influential, time-sensitive, and best approached as a long-term action research project (Venet, 2021). For YPAR educators, this gives both direction and promise towards developing students' abilities to impact their own environments. Ultimately, centering equity in any educational capacity enriches the capacities of students to impact their personal and collective chronosystems, encased in their social environments that can change over time.

Affecting youth's ability to transform their sociohistorical context seems unimaginable without an equity centered approach. Venkateswaran et al., (2023) illustrates how equity-centered frameworks in research can be used to critically analyze and potentially disassemble systems of oppression to create anew. The frameworks of Critical Educational Psychology, YPAR, Venet's (2021) trauma-informed approach, and the broader equity-centered research framework which Venkateswaran et al. (2023) advocates for, all emphasize action research within an environment that is committed to diversity, inclusion, equity, belonging, with the goal of transformation and liberation. Each is critical of deficit thinking models that blame the child for perceived failures, such as lack of motivation and low attendance. Rather, these frameworks emphasize the need to examine what Venkateswaran et al. (2023) describes as "the manifestations of systems, such as

inequitable outcomes in health or education … that are rooted in structural and institutionalized racism or other systems of oppression (p. 10). Many current examples of YPAR initiatives successfully reflect these frameworks but include some potential limitations.

For instance, Smith and Hope (2020) facilitated an afterschool YPAR program for students of Color who attend an affluent, predominantly White suburban school. The five Black students who participated explored the meanings of race and oppression, as well as internalized or externalized deficit thinking because of oppression, within their suburban school context. Through a sociopolitical development framework and critical social analysis, they worked to understand how systemic inequities shape their experiences. The medium they processed these critical reflections and evaluations was photovoice, a picture taking experience in which participants identify a community problem and take photos which illustrate the problem. Despite the frameworks used to pose critiques to the participant's school, Smith and Hope confess there was frequent resistance to critiquing the school itself. Smith and Hope (2020) explained the participants resistance as challenging, noting:

> Even after discussions where I emphasized the importance of a critique of Lakeside (a large school with ample financial and human resources) instead of Lakeside's Black students (a marginalized student population who should be protected), there was still some resistance to a critique of Lakeside. For instance, Derrick's final photovoice project depicted a group of Black girls on their cell phones and sleeping in class, while seated next to a group of Asian and White girls who were taking notes. He framed the photo, taken during the final period of a school day, as a representation of how students behave in the final hours of school; in the narrative he wrote, "some go harder and some fall asleep." When I questioned him

about the choice of this photo and narrative (given the potential consequences of the image), he said: “This is what it’s really like.” (p. 560)

This is important to discuss, considering YPAR is not a clear-cut path towards critical consciousness in our youth. However, it is a beginning, or a middle, to students' exploration of and discovery of their voices.

Examples of YPAR and their potential for transformation in students' psychological and sociological worlds may not be mainstream, but they are abundant. This is promising for all teachers and students who see student autonomy and social justice as necessary components to child development. Hope et al. (2014) provides another example of Black high school students participation in YPAR to apply critical analysis to their experiences of racial discrimination and inequity within school. Unlike the YPAR participants Smith and Hope (2020) researched, the participants Hope et al. (2014) studied were more initially critical of the structural and psychological barriers to equity in school, such as school funding and low expectations from teachers. Through a critical analysis lens, Hope et al. (2014) contends that exploring with the intent to critique racism is an essential developmental task for Black youth. YPAR enables students to apply such critiques with the opportunity to be change agents within their schools and communities. This Freire-style approach towards critical consciousness attempts to negate the deficit thinking that permeates through our educational institutions, and thus into students’ psyches.

The Way Forward: Assimilation or Transformation?

At the heart of my concern for students' development is that development in schools has been dictated by economic instrumentalism, and thus renders holistic models of development, like Vygotsky’s, particularly challenging for teachers to practice in their classrooms. This foil to

transformative education relates to what Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, refers to as the "destiny effect":

> It is through the 'destiny effect' that the social institution of schooling contributes to the production and reproduction of the overall patterns of social, economic, political and cultural difference, differentiation and distinction. (Bourdieu & Balazs, 1999, as cited in Bills et al., 2016, p. 63)

Bourdieu's (1973) theory of capital regards inequality in education as perpetuated by privileges amassed through forms of capital, including social, cultural, and economic. In effect, striving for these privileges, like higher-education or wealth, aids the reproduction of inequitable schools. Theories like Bourdieu's can be helpful for critically minded educators to question, identify, and navigate power structures which maintain inequitable schooling. However, teachers and students would simply be naming their oppression – a task integral to foundations of critical consciousness, but not enough to transform lives.

Moreover, Bourdieu (1977) makes the case that capital can be exchanged, so that the "destiny effect" is either maintained or dismantled. However, the latter is less likely considering his conception of "habitus." Habitus in Bourdieu's (1977) description refers to "a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class" (p. 86). Without a clear call to action, Bourdieu's "destiny effect" leaves little room for hope within our collective "habitus." Rather, it leaves open a more assimilatory response to producing equitable school structures for students. In this response, deficit thinking prevails.

Working towards democratic education then does not require us to wait. Applying Rikowski's and Matic's (2020) understanding of the "psychology of capital" can be useful.

Rikowski and Matic (2020) describes one's relation to capital as integrated to our inner selves as our thoughts, desires, and dreams. To produce more democratic education, we can start with the education we have as it is. We must struggle within it in order to weaken the ingrained relations to capital that makes us alien-to our intellectual freedoms.

A comparison of the social reproduction of capital by Bourdieu to Rikowski and Matic enlightens the way forward for those eager to practice transformative pedagogical approaches, like YPAR, in classrooms. The creation of knowledge through critical consciousness requires cultivating values that will not mirror the society (or habitus) which already exists. Instead, these refined values will, as Rikowski and Matic envision, struggle through the present moment, towards a continuous countering of the psychological, sociological, and economic pushes and pulls of capitalism. Essential to this struggle is the collective, in which we join each other in humanizing our conditions, and thus changing the trajectory of our development. YPAR embodies the autonomous, yet communal approach to transforming development, and moreover, could provide one of many critical responses necessary to challenging an inequitably funded education system. Considering research shows that "evaluating school finance policies based on equity or adequacy is insufficient," and must also require consideration of "the quality of education, including teachers, curriculum, programs, and social supports" (Martin et al., 2018, para. 16), then transformative measures like YPAR are not only developmentally appropriate, but structurally necessary to produce the kind of equitable education system so many students and teachers dream of.

Chapter 4

Design

Purpose and Curriculum Theory

Throughout this thesis, I have been practicing Critical Action Research to imagine and create pedagogy that confronts the inequity of school funding. Kincheloe (2003) describes Critical Action Research as a process in which teachers can "organize themselves as communities of researchers dedicated to the achievement of their own and ultimately their students' enlightenment" (p. 45). As I described in chapters two and three, I am deeply concerned by the ways in which racial capitalism and neoliberalism have developed and maintained inequitable school funding, leading to underdeveloped schools in which its students have been racialized and inhibited from emancipatory learning. Researching this issue has been a means of practicing Critical Action Research, so that I can develop a curriculum that disrupts the status quo, and hopefully provide an opportunity for education that begins from the humanness of the learner, rather than the economic needs of a capitalist society.

Applying Critical Action Research has required me to reflect in Chapter three as to why Kincheloe (2003) illustrates "some constructions of educational reality" are "embraced and officially legitimized by the dominant culture while others are repressed" (p. 58). While I see school funding as an issue in which educators and the adults in communities must research and broaden solidarity around, I also see an opportunity for students to be participants in reconstructing their educational reality through Youth Participatory Action Research. The intervention I propose is a remaking of a traditional high school Government course. While traditional Government and Civics courses have disconnected the learned content from students' lives, Wexler (2020) argues

that these shallow methods of rote learning have been a cause of student academic decline on standardized tests. Furthering this need for meaningful learning is the fact that the disrupted learning wrought by COVID widened the achievement gaps, or opportunity gaps, especially for high-poverty school districts (Ross, 2024). In addition, the federal funds provided to school districts in the wake of the pandemic only required school districts to attribute 20% of the funds for aiding students' academic recovery loss (Ross, 2024), yet students and teachers remain constantly evaluated on meeting these marks.

My analysis of rote learning, or the banking model of learning, as well as schools' emphasis on standardized tests, in chapters two and three have allowed me to see these as tools of a racial capitalist school funding apparatus. The deficit model of thinking placed upon individuals veils the racial capitalist school funding apparatus which supports underdeveloped schools. As a result, students become disempowered and their potential to be change agents is stifled. When imagining what I can do in my capacity as an educator about such a large and multifaceted issue, I recognize there is no single solution. Nevertheless, teachers must act and start somewhere. So why not start where we are most skilled – in the classroom and teaching our students?

I can see that post-COVID my students' academic skills in Government are not meeting the proposed standards set forth by the Pennsylvania Department of Education based on the curriculum traditionally used in our school. However, I also see that my students are questioning the content more critically asking questions like: "Why do we need this?" and "How does this help me?" Within these needs, I imagine an opportunity for transformative educational practice. In the following section, I will outline a detailed proposal of a transformative U.S. Government course, called *Community Civics*, that embeds Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). Listening to my students needs as well as assessing the research of underfunded schools has brought me to the

conclusion that teachers and students can be co-participants in re-creating learning spaces aimed at liberating and empowering students from oppressive structures like inequitable school funding. Students in Pennsylvania are required to take a U.S. government course in high school (Section 57.31 - Graduation Requirements, 22 Pa. Code), but how that is done is up to the teacher and school district. I propose to make it transformative and student-centered through *Community Civics*.

The course, *Community Civics*, is intended to serve as a redesigned high school U.S. Government course set with the purpose to provide students an opportunity to challenge inequitable political, social, or economic structures while developing their community, critical consciousness, and civic empowerment. In my school, the student population would be 10^{th} to 12^{th} graders, all of whom are required to pass U.S. government to graduate high school. Depending on the school district, grades may vary. In addition, this curriculum could be adjusted to fit the needs of younger students. Youth Participatory Action research will be integrated into the curriculum to meet students' authentic developmental needs: to be heard and empowered. Integrating YPAR aims to dilute the "typical logic of schooling" that negates strong relationships and ignores students' lived experiences (Mirra et al., 2016, p. 43). Moreover, YPAR could serve as a socio-cultural pedagogical framework for students to develop their "civic identity" and a "sense of agency" while addressing inequities connected to their community (Mirra et al., 2016, p. 42). *Community Civics* is essentially Critical Action Research for youth, allowing students to engage in problem-solving research that engages them in being Subjects of their community, rather than objects.

I recognize that the curriculum I propose is not neutral for both intentional and realistic reasons. Redesigning my school's traditional U.S. government curriculum invites criticism from multiple stakeholders, including fellow teachers, principals, parents, community members, and even students. Although critique is welcome as part of a democratic process of curricular design, I

also aim to be explicit with my intentions and intended outcomes to make clear that any criticism must account for three facts: (1) Neutrality in curriculum design does not exist (Posner, 1995). (2) *Community Civics* is a curricular response to the anti-democratic impact that inequitable school funding has on students' ability to access a liberatory form of education. (3) *Community Civics* does not intend to solve macro-economic/political/social issues, but rather aims to provide the opportunity and tools for students to participate in community-based action research so they can develop a foundation for building more democratic communities in their futures.

Considering the purpose and intended outcomes of *Community Civics*, the theories which have influenced this curriculum are reconstruction/transformation and utilitarianism. Each theory aligns with my concern over inequitable school funding as I have outlined throughout my research. For starters, *Community Civics* is grounded in education for reconstruction, recognizing that knowledge is socially constructed. The purpose of this curriculum then is to provide the basic tools through a combination of civics education and Youth Participatory Action Research so that students become empowered to think critically, name their worlds, and imagine their society from non-hegemonic perspectives. Similarly, education for reconstruction takes the "transformation position," as described by the Miller and Seller Model (Miller & Seller, 1985, as cited in Posner, 1995). The transformation position focuses on personal and social change within one's environment. It outlines goals to understand ways in which society is interconnected and interdependent, so that the teacher and learner can work within the curriculum to produce more harmonious relations and inclusive knowledge.

Secondly, the curriculum is heavily influenced by Lev Vygotsky's theory of Sociocultural Development as described in chapter three which legitimizes the implementation of YPAR in *Community Civics*. Likewise, educational reformer John Dewey's emphasis on utilitarianism is also

applied to the curriculum. Dewey emphasized the criticality of utilitarian curriculum design over academic, describing how academic design often leads to banking methods of learning as discussed in chapter two. Unlike transmission, or banking modeled learning, an utilitarian curriculum invites the application of knowledge through student-centered experience. In this sense, YPAR is the student-centered and experiential framework of a utilitarian curriculum in which "everyday individuals must be involved in the remaking of the world" (Mirra et al., 2016, p. 22). A utilitarian approach to *Community Civics* aligns well with the infusion of YPAR, considering YPAR embeds socio-cultural theories of development with action-research design. Both utilitarian design and YPAR frameworks intend to initiate praxis, the application of theory to practice, without rigid conformity.

Content and Method

Considering *Community Civics* will operate as a mandatory credit in high school, it will have to retain a proportion of U.S. Government standards as laid out by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. From my experience as a teacher, it is impossible to teach all the standards within a semester. Therefore, just as I would have with a traditional U.S. Government course, *Community Civics* will focus only on a selection of standards deemed most essential to increasing students' fundamental civics knowledge that can propel their experience with YPAR to develop critical consciousness and civic engagement. As I detail this curriculum's implementation, I will include these standards as a guideline for learning and objectives as a helpful tool and as a mandate to operate as a U.S. Government high school course.

The essential topics of *Community Civics* include a combination of foundational civics knowledge and a YPAR based framework. The topics are based on transforming the U.S. Government civics standards to be applied through a YPAR framework. This means that students

will be exploring foundational civics knowledge such as the three branches of government through an inquiry and social justice-based lens. To better serve this goal, Universal Design for Learning guidelines are applied to each unit. Universal Design for Learning guidelines aim to develop authentic learning experiences for students of all abilities (CAST, 2018). The guidelines are included as a suggestion for the teacher to develop learning activities as meaningful, multi-modal, and inclusive process. One example includes the journal entries throughout the curriculum. Students often have choices as to which question they would like to answer, and can answer in varying ways: written, recorded, or illustrated.

In keeping with principles of YPAR and guidelines by Universal Design for Learning, each segment of civics learning will include introduction to vocabulary and perspectives that are not traditionally in a U.S. government course. Depending on student concerns, each unit can be revised to include related current events to help students develop what issues are of concern in their own communities, and how those may be connected to larger societal issues within government. Throughout the course, students will have multiple open circle discussions to facilitate dialogue around the concepts and inquiries at hand. Readings will be required to deepen knowledge or spark curiosity and questioning. A checklist of research progress can be followed to guide students through participatory research. The end goal will be for students to present their findings in a way which increases attention to their researched issue, as well as empowering them to be engaged in their community.

The most essential content within my curriculum will be the YPAR framework designed to increase critical consciousness and empower students to reach depths of their potential that are unmet in traditional courses. While YPAR is inherently flexible and at times, messy, there is a guideline of steps to follow. The proposed curriculum would follow a helpful outline of YPAR

progression as detailed by *The Youth-Led Participatory Action Research Project* at New York University (n.d.):

1. Political education
2. Identify the problem
3. Preliminary data collection (learning about the context of local settings)
4. Quantitative data collection
5. Qualitative (observation) data collection
6. Pose a question
7. Identify what tools are needed to answer the question
8. Data collection
9. Collective analysis of the data
10. Draw conclusions (Findings)

Each of these steps will be followed throughout the curriculum. Additional resources that will be applied to aid the YPAR framework will be "Introductions," "Team Building," and "YPAR basics" provided by the University of California Berkeley YPAR Hub (*Getting Started | YPAR Hub*, n.d.). By utilizing this framework within a transformative civics classroom, the goal to undertake problem-solving community issues with students, rather than for students, can be more likely realized. Teachers who undertake this curriculum then must be prepared to be student-centered, inquiry-focused, and highly adaptable.

Organization

My proposed curriculum is a balance of student-led action research and teacher guided instruction. In this sense, the curriculum intends to include enough adult involvement to provide the "resources, knowledge, and relationships" necessary to allow students to "reap the full benefits" of

YPAR (Mirra et al., 2016, p. 39). In addition to student-led research, the curriculum will be organized in a manner which emphasizes relationships as key to student success in the classroom and beyond. Similarly, other YPAR initiatives have sought to promote relationships at the core of the curriculum. For example, one YPAR facilitator noted,

> The interplay between forging familial bonds and introducing challenging and complex social issues was consciously and meticulously planned in order to provide the support and trust needed for students to embark upon an educational journey that could be painful at times but was largely characterized by hope and agency" (Mirra et al., 2016, p. 47).

The intentional design to embed student-led research and emphasize relationships requires great flexibility on the part of the teacher. Due to these factors, my proposed curriculum will be organized in a spiral curricular structure.

Popularized by Jerome Brunner, spiral curricular structures are designed based on the developmental theory that concepts are "internalized or represented in different modes by children of different ages, and therefore, must be taught in different ways at different educational levels" (Posner, 1995, p. 126). This concept is applicable to *Community Civics* considering students will have a range of ages and abilities between 10th and 12th grade, but also accounts for the critical necessity of addressing underdevelopment of liberatory education in underfunded schools. The spiral pattern of content allows teachers and students to more fully co-participate in YPAR considering that YPAR recognizes there is not a singular, linear path to elevating critical consciousness. In this sense, the spiral pattern allows teachers and students to be flexible as they navigate action research within the civics classroom. Moreover, the content can be reintroduced through multiple means and representations by utilizing what Posner (1995) illustrates as mixed media structures. A mixed media structure is most conducive to the spiral curricular design

considering it allows for multiple inputs of media (i.e. texts, videos, audio) to converge and diverge as needed to aid students' development towards a higher goal. By implementing a spiral curricular structure with a mixed media approach, an emancipatory model of learning is strengthened over the traditional, deficit-based approaches contextualized in capitalist schooling.

Outline of Community Civics

Keeping in mind that implementing a YPAR framework requires flexibility, I will detail a *Community Civics* course outline that is encouraged to fit the needs of the students and community it is initiated in. *Community Civics* is likely best designed over the course of one school year due to the scope and depth it takes in civic engagement. While some of the traditional government curriculum is maintained (i.e. teaching about the Constitution), it is revised in a way that allows for more student input, reflection, and connection to lived experiences. This is to ensure that civics education transitions from its traditionalist curriculums to better to serve communities of Color by acknowledging "legacies of systemic discrimination ... that influence how youth of color see their country (Watts & Flanagan, 2007, as cited in Mirra et al., 2016, p. 95). In addition, the flexibility of the course allows the teacher to infuse learning material in response to student influences like questions, concerns, and analysis.

Many class activities are focused on developing foundational knowledge of the U.S. government, building and maintaining relationships, addressing positionality, and developing critical analysis to challenge a community issue. Furthermore, the act of literacy is emphasized as a necessity of youth research to act upon, or rename, the world – just as Paulo Freire suggested all those years ago (Mirra et al., 2016, p. 23). One aspect of literacy is developing the vocabulary to act upon the world. Both foundational government vocabulary terms (i.e. Congress) and social justice terms (i.e. institutional oppression) are highlighted throughout the curriculum. Students

interact with the vocabulary through various learning activities, including an interactive word wall, with the goal for the student to be able to teach another person what the word means and means to them. Resources that I have found most helpful are frequently credited in the appendix. These cited resources are a product of other advocate's dedication and commitment to student empowerment. They enhance the curriculum and allow *Community Civics* to meet its purpose and goals more fully. In the following outline, you will see a series of unit plans that includes topics, suggested time frame, goals, state standards, essential vocabulary, learning activities, and assessments. Each unit is not set in stone, but rather a living being that can evolve with each class's participation, suggestions, and possible limitations.

Unit 1: Building Relationships

Topic(s):	Time Frame	Vocabulary:
• Building Relationships • Introduction to YPAR	• 2 weeks	• Youth Participatory Action Research • Co-participate • Resource • Power • Subject vs. Object • Active listening • Adultism • Dialogue • Critical consciousness

Goal(s) / Standard(s)/ Guideline(s):

• **Goals:**
  o I can interact in positive and meaningful ways with my peers.
  o I can recommend different ways to positively interact with my peers.
  o I can analyze my relationship to my peers, teacher, and self in a classroom environment.
  o I can describe the purpose of YPAR and critical consciousness.
  o I can predict challenges and opportunities in YPAR.

- **Universal Design for Learning:**
    - 7.2: Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity
    - 7.3: Minimize threats and distractions
    - 8.3: Foster collaboration and community

Learning Activities

Building Relationships:

- Getting to know each other games
- Icebreakers
- Trust building
- Non-verbal communication (see Appendix F)
- Verbal communication (see Appendix M)
- Journal Entry #1: Relationships and Communication

Introduction to YPAR:

- Pre/Post Course Survey (See Appendix A)
- Introduction to YPAR (see Appendix O)

- Youth as leaders and resources (see Appendix D)
- Youth and adult power sharing (see Appendix E)
- Explore examples of YPAR (e.g. *Spotlights* | YPAR Hub, n.d.)
- Journal Entry #2: Impressions of YPAR

Summative Assessment(s):

- **Pre/Post Course Survey** (See Appendix A)
- **Journal Entry #1: Relationships and Communication** (Choose 2)
    - Imagine you were the *Community Civics* teacher who had to plan the first two weeks of this class. Your goal is to help the students and teacher build positive relationships. With that in mind, what would you keep, change, or remove about what you participated in? Explain your reasoning.
    - Compare these past two weeks to your other classes. What do you feel is similar or different?
    - What makes a good communicator?
    - What are "green lights" and "red lights" to say how you feel?

- **Journal Entry #2: Impressions of YPAR**
    - In your opinion, what will be the most challenging part of YPAR? What will be the most rewarding or exciting?
    - What questions do you still have about YPAR and this class?

Unit 2: Foundations of U.S. Government

Topic(s):	Time Frame:	Vocabulary:
• Founding Documents • Principles of the Constitution • Pennsylvania State Constitution	• 6 weeks	• Colonialism • Declaration of Independence • Republic • Democracy • Popular sovereignty • Separation of powers • Federalism • Checks and balances • Limited government • Rights • Social Contract • Compromise

Goal(s) / Standard(s) / Guideline(s):

Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Civics and Government:

- 5.1.12 A: Evaluate the major arguments advanced for the necessity of government.
    - I can create my idealized version of a social contract.
- 5.1.12 E: Evaluate the principles and ideals that shape the United States and compare them to documents of government.
    - I can evaluate the principles and ideals that shaped the United States Constitution.
    - I can co-assess America's adherence to the principles of the Constitution and support the assessment with personal or societal evidence.
    - I can depict how youth voices could have affected the laws and principles of the making of the Constitution.
- 5.1.12 F. Analyze and assess the rights of the people as listed in the Pennsylvania Constitution and the Constitution of the United States.
    - I can co-assess the right to education in the Pennsylvania State Constitution and propose revisions.
- **Universal Design for Learning:**
    - 2.1: Clarify vocabulary and symbols
    - 3.1: Activate or supply background knowledge
    - 3.3: Guide information processing and visualization
    - 3.2: Highlight patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships

Learning Activities

Introductory Activities:

- Open circle discussion about Unit 1 journal entries
- Interactive vocabulary word wall: Prompt students' prior knowledge of unit's vocabulary words and have students place in 1 of 3 columns (I have more to learn, I have some to learn, I can now help another learn)
- Pre-YPAR activity: Who is my community? (See Appendix G)
    - Analyze Jean Jacques Rousseau's "The Social Contract" / Compare to other interpretations including Trevor Noah's video: "George Floyd, Minneapolis Protests, Ahmaud Arbery & Amy Cooper | The Daily Social Distancing Show"
    - Journal Entry #3: Social Contract

Founding Documents:

- Guided notes on British colonialism and the creation of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution
- Reading of 3/5 clause in Constitution / open circle discussion of reactions and questions
- Co-create a constitutional principles graphic organizer
- Small group evaluation of the state of America's constitutional principles using America's Report Card (see Appendix H)
- Journal Entry #4: Invite to the Constitutional Convention

Pennsylvania State Constitution:

- Small group research of Pennsylvania's state constitution's right to education / Analysis of the right to education

Summative Assessment(s):

- America's Report Card (See Appendix H)
- Small group research of Pennsylvania's state constitution's right to education
- **Journal Entry #3: Social Contract**
    - Describe your ideal social contract. What benefits would your ideal social contract serve? What limitations might it have?
- **Journal Entry #4: Invite to the Constitutional Convention**
    - Imagine you and your *Community Civics* classmates were invited to participate in the Constitutional Convention. At the convention, your voices are heard, but that does not guarantee that your suggestions are implemented. What principles or laws would you suggest to the making of the Constitution? And how would you work with your classmates and the other delegates to encourage your suggestions?

Unit 3: Three Branches of Government

Topic(s):	Time Frame:	Vocabulary:
• Three Branches of Government • Rule of Law • Capitalism & Governance	• 6 weeks	• Rule of law • Institutional oppression • Marginalize • Equity • Interest groups • Legislative Branch • Executive Branch • Judicial Branch

Goal(s) / Standard(s) / Guideline(s):

Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Civics and Government:
• 5.1.12 I: Analyze historical examples of the importance of the rule of law explaining the sources, purposes and functions of law.
  o I can describe the rule of law.
  o I can evaluate the rule of law's historical and current functions in U.S. society.

- 5.1.12 L: Analyze Pennsylvania and United States court decisions that have affected principles and ideals of government in civic life. • Civil rights • Commerce • Judicial review • Federal supremacy
    - I can co-analyze a Supreme Court decision and describe its impact on society.
- 5.3.12 C: Evaluate the process of how a bill becomes the law on a federal, state, and local levels
    - I can co-produce a mock bill and simulate how a bill becomes law.
- 5.3.12 F: Evaluate the elements of the election process.
    - I can describe key elements of the election process.
    - I can
- 5.3.12 H: Evaluate the impact of interest groups on the political process.
    - I can co-evaluate the impact of interest groups on democracy through a structured debate.
- 5.3.12 I. Evaluate how and why government raises money to pay for its operations and services.
    - I can explain how school funding is raised and assess how equitable the process is.

- **Universal Design for Learning:**
    - 5.2: Use multiple tools for construction and navigation
    - 2.1: Clarify vocabulary and symbols
    - 3.1: Activate or supply background knowledge
    - 3.3: Guide information processing and visualization

Learning Activities

Introductory Activities:

- Open circle discussion about Unit 2 journal entries
- Interactive vocabulary word wall: Prompt students' prior knowledge of unit's vocabulary words and have students place in 1 of 3 columns (I have more to learn, I have some to learn, I can now help another learn)

Three Branches of Government:

- Three Branches of Government graphic organizer
- Whole group bill proposal / Legislative process simulation
- Small group case study analysis of a Supreme Court decision (dependent on student interests: i.e. feminism, civil rights, disability advocacy) / Presentations of findings
- Guided WebQuest to learn election process, including youth participation in elections
- Journal Entry #5: Participating in Democracy

Rule of Law:

- Historical analysis of the rule of law in the Civil Rights Movement using "Eyes on the Prize" documentary

Capitalism & Governance:

- Guided notes on interest groups and their role in legislation and elections
- Interest Groups Debate: Are interest groups good or bad for democracy?
- Pennsylvania School Funding – Hunger Games Edition (See Appendix I)

Summative Assessment(s):

- Small group presentation of Supreme Court decision
- Interest Groups Debate
- **Journal Entry #5: Participating in Democracy** (Choose 1)
    - Do you know people who don't care about our government? Or perhaps even yourself? Why do you think they don't care?
    - What can you do to make sure that candidates keep promises they made when they are elected?
    - What is an issue that is important to you? Why is it important to you? How do current candidates or politicians talk about this issue?

Unit 4: Civic Engagement

Topic(s):	Time Frame:	Vocabulary:
• Civic Engagement • Civil Rights • Civil Disobedience	• 6 weeks	• Bill of Rights • Civic engagement • Agency • Social system • Coalition • Bias • Civil rights • Disenfranchised • Discrimination • Civil disobedience • Prejudice • Privilege • Race • Racism

Goal(s) / Standard(s) / Guideline(s):

Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Civics and Government:

- 5.1.12 J: Analyze how the law promotes the common good and protects individual rights.
    - I can describe ways in which the law has promoted and failed the common good and individual rights.
- 5.1.12 M: Evaluate and analyze the importance of significant political speeches and writings in civic life (e.g., Diary of Anne Frank, Silent Spring).
    - I can infer my own position on what necessitates civil disobedience.
- 5.2.12 A: Evaluate an individual's civic rights, responsibilities and duties in various governments. / 5.2.12 G: Evaluate what makes a competent and responsible citizen.
    - I can examine a grassroots movement and co-evaluate its effectiveness in its goals.

- **Universal Design for Learning:**
    - 7.2: Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity
    - 2.1: Clarify vocabulary and symbols
    - 3.1: Activate or supply background knowledge
    - 3.2: Highlight patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships

Learning Activities

Introductory Activities:

- Open circle discussion about Unit 3 journal entries
- Interactive vocabulary word wall: Prompt students' prior knowledge of unit's vocabulary words and have students place in 1 of 3 columns (I have more to learn, I have some to learn, I can now help another learn)

Civil Rights:

- Small group analysis of Bill of Rights / Creation of graphic organizer / Discussion: What would you add, change, or take away from the Bill of Rights?
- Class-led description of what an ideal "common good" and "protection of individual rights" looks like / Viewings of excerpts from Ana Duvernay's *13th* documentary to analyze how laws can fail the common good and protection of individual rights

Civil Disobedience:

- Read *Civil Disobedience* by Henry David Thoreau (1849) / Read or listen to historic and current acts of civil disobedience / Extension: Read and discuss "The Problem is Civil Obedience" by Howard Zinn (1970)
- Journal Entry #6: Civil Disobedience

Civic Engagement:

- Pre-YPAR activity: Grassroots change (See Appendix J)
- Co-evaluate the effectiveness of the Gun Control Student Movement / Read "Kids Rock" by Susan Milligan (2018) *U.S. News – The Report*
- Journal Entry #7: Social Problems

Summative Assessment(s):

- **Journal Entry #6: Civil Disobedience** (Choose 1)
    - Who is ultimately more important: the individual, citizens as a whole, or the government?
    - Can we reach the government that Thoreau advocates?
    - Under what circumstances should your conscience outweigh the law?

- **Journal Entry #7: Social Problems**
    - Identify and describe a social problem that is important to you. How does it impact you or others? Is this social problem (i.e. racism, discrimination, violence, ableism, sexism, etc.) a result of an individual or a social system?

Unit 5: YPAR Phase 1

Topic(s):	Time Frame:	Vocabulary:

• **Investigating a Problem**
  ○ Identify the problem
  ○ Preliminary data collection
  ○ Quantitative/ Qualitative data collection
  ○ Pose a question
	• 7 weeks	• Equity
		• Empathy
		• Hegemony
		• Institutional oppression
		• Intersectionality
		• Social justice
		• Solidarity
		• Hypothesis
		• Qualitative research
		• Quantitative research

Goal(s) / Standard(s) / Guideline(s):
Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Civics and Government: • 5.2.12 B: Evaluate citizens' participation in government and civic life.   ○ I can evaluate my own participation in government and civic life through my participation in YPAR.

    - I can co-hypothesize how to collectively address a shared concern in my community.
- 5.2.12 C: Interpret the causes of conflict in society and analyze techniques to resolve those conflicts.
    - I can co-collect quantitative and qualitative data to interpret the causes of a shared concern in my community.
- 5.2.12 D: Evaluate political leadership and public service in a republican form of government. / 5.3.12 A: Analyze and evaluate the structure, organization and operation of the local, state, and national governments including domestic and national policymaking.
    - I can co-evaluate ways in which the government informs a shared concern in my community.
- 5.3.12 B: Analyze the responsibilities and powers of the national government.
    - I can co-determine the national government's role in my community's shared concern/hypothesis.
- 5.3.12 G: Evaluate how the government protects or curtails individual rights and analyze the impact of supporting or opposing those rights.
    - I can co-determine the government's role in protecting or curtailing individual rights that are connected to my community's shared concern/hypothesis.

- **Universal Design for Learning:**
    - 7.2: Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity
    - 3.2: Highlight patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships
    - 6.3: Facilitate managing information and resources
    - 8.3: Foster collaboration and community

Learning Activities

Introductory Activities:

- Open circle discussion about Unit 4 journal entries
- Interactive vocabulary word wall: Prompt students' prior knowledge of unit's vocabulary words and have students place in 1 of 3 columns (I have more to learn, I have some to learn, I can now help another learn)
- Reading and open circle discussion of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Where Do We Go From Here" (1967) with emphasis on collective action towards systemic injustices

Identify the Problem:

- Photovoice activity: Students take 5-10 pictures of their community that show the community's assets/hope/beauty and challenges/struggles, then respond to Journal Entry #8
    - Photovoice roundtable: Share pictures/Journal Entry #8 and determine common themes amongst the photos/analysis

- Dream community vision boards
- Vote on issue to move forward as the focus of participatory action research project

Preliminary Data Collection / Pose a Question:

- Journal Entry #9: Gathering Information and Making Decisions
- Reflective walk discussing Journal Entry #9
- Defining the research question (See Appendix K)

Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection:

- Student division of research into focus groups
    - Interviews, surveys, internet data collection
    - Share findings through Triangulation lesson (See Appendix L)
- Journal Entry #10: Role of Government in Social Problem

Summative Assessment(s):

- **Participation in Investigating a Problem --** YPAR project rubric (See Appendix B)
- **Journal Entry #8: Photovoice**

- Describe at least 3 photos using the SHOWED method: What do I **S**ee here? What is **H**appening in this photo? How does it impact **O**ur lives? **W**hy is it happening? What can we **D**o about it?

- **Journal Entry #9: Gathering Information and Making Decisions** (Choose 2)
  - Reflect on the process of gathering information and making decisions by answering at least 3 of the following questions:
    - Why is information important? How do you decide if information is true?
    - What are some benefits to gathering information before making a decision?
    - How have you been previously taught to determine if a source of information is credible?
    - What are some obstacles you have faced when completing research projects in the past?

- **Journal Entry #10: Role of Government in Social Problem** (Collaborative)
  - Based on the findings from the Triangulation lesson, what is the target policy or practice that this project aims to achieve?

Unit 6: YPAR Phase 2

Topic(s):	Time Frame:	Essential Vocabulary:

• **Strategizing for Action:**
  o Identify what tools are needed to answer the question
  o Collective analysis of the data
  o Draw conclusions
• **Project Implementation**
  o Implement project
  o Reflect
	• 7 weeks	• Assets-based approach
		• Critical consciousness
		• Civic engagement
		• Policy
		• Allies

Goal(s) / Standard(s) / Guideline(s):

Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Civics and Government:

- 5.2.12 G: Evaluate what makes a competent and responsible citizen.
    - I can evaluate the success of our YPAR intervention based on my progress with critical consciousness and civic engagement.
- 5.2.12 E: Analyze how participation in civic and political life leads to the attainment of individual and public goals.
    - I can reflect on the effectiveness of our YPAR intervention in meeting its proposed goals/outcomes.

- **Universal Design for Learning:**
    - 7.2: Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity
    - 5.2: Use multiple tools for construction and navigation
    - 6.3: Facilitate managing information and resources
    - 8.3: Foster collaboration and community
    - 8.4: Increase mastery-oriented feedback

Learning Activities
Introductory Activities:

- Open circle discussion of Journal Entry #10
- Interactive vocabulary word wall: Prompt students' prior knowledge of unit's vocabulary words and have students place in 1 of 3 columns (I have more to learn, I have some to learn, I can now help another learn)

Identify Tools Needed:

- Students create a community asset map
- Apply research findings (See Appendix N)
- Public speaking and presentation skills practice

Collective Analysis of the Data / Draw Conclusions / Implement Project:

- Student-led choice and implementation of proposed action research project
- Journal Entry #11: Critical Consciousness and Civic Engagement
- Pre/Post Course Survey (See Appendix A)

Summative Assessment(s):

- **Journal Entry #11: Critical Consciousness and Civic Engagement** (Choose 2)
    - How has your participation in YPAR influenced your understanding of power dynamics within your community or society at large?

- Reflecting on your YPAR project, in what ways did you observe or experience the intersectionality of social issues, and how did this impact your approach to addressing them?
- How has your involvement in YPAR deepened your sense of agency and responsibility as an active citizen, and what actions do you envision taking in the future to continue advocating for positive change in your community?

- Pre/Post Course Survey (See Appendix A)
- Teacher Evaluation Survey (See Appendix C)
- YPAR project rubric (See Appendix M)

Implementation

The challenge of inequitable school funding propelled me to develop a curriculum that aimed to transform the social relationships which develop under systems of oppression. These systems, like racialized school funding methods, contribute to learning environments that alienate both self and community, while disempowering students' abilities to develop critical consciousness and solidarity. Integrating YPAR to a U.S. government course offers a bridge between the standards demanded of teachers and the needs of students that are unmet in our current system. However, *Community Civics* is not without limitations and challenges. According to Posner (1995), sharing curriculum includes sharing its limitations, or "frame factors" (p. 183). In creating *Community Civics*, I have identified four frame factors that should be considered when this curriculum is implemented. As Posner (1995) emphasized, frame factors "vary in the degree to which we can manipulate them (p. 183)," so the suggested frame factors may not be applicable to all school districts, but nevertheless, offers insight.

First and foremost, there is a temporal challenge to implementing *Community Civics*. I have planned the curriculum for two semesters, but many high school classes operate on a single semester schedule. My decision to design a two-semester curriculum was out of the necessity of scope and depth that integrating YPAR with Civics requires. However, the curriculum is merely a template that can be adapted to fit any school's needs. The curriculum could be scaled down so long as the goal to develop students' critical consciousness and civic engagement remains at its core. Beyond allotted school time, there is also an anticipated challenge in chronic absenteeism. For Community Civics to be successful, the amount of time spent with students should be consistent and daily. Community Civics was geared towards underfunded school districts with a majority of students of Color, so as to empower those most affected by inequitable school funding. However,

the share of U.S. students who are chronically absent has dramatically increased since the pandemic, and especially in low-income communities (Mervosh & Paris, 2024). A school that would succeed in Community Civics is likely a school district that is instituting proactive and restorative measures to reduce chronic absenteeism. Both temporal aspects serve to elevate or challenge the proposed curriculum.

Second, there is an economic frame factor to be analyzed. For Community Civics to be approved as a new curriculum in a school district, the "bottom line," as Posner (1995) refers to it, must be considered (p. 188). The "seed money" necessary to operationalize Community Civics could be used for outside YPAR organizations to lead professional development for the district's social studies teachers. In low-income school districts, this comes into conflict with its already limited funds and debt repayment (as outlined in Chapter three). Posner (1995) stipulates those economic factors, like the one just described, often cause schools to revert to traditional curriculums. This is exactly the pitfall Community Civics aims to avoid. Accounting for this frame factor may require assessing ways community support can be garnered for transformative curriculum, and then using that support to advocate the school board to implement YPAR-based learning.

One frame factor, the physical environment, is also connected to the financial footing of the school district. For *Community Civics* to work, it must be collaborative. This means that students have the physical space to work in groups, and easily interchange these groups as needed. In many school districts, including my own, the physical space reflects school funding or lack thereof. Desks in my school district are run down and difficult to move. They are designed for the classroom space to be single rows which discourage student collaboration. Ideally, the physical environment would have easy to move desks that are inviting and comfortable for the students. It

would reflect a space of engagement and discussion. However, even bleak and underfunded classroom environments serve as a place of hope, as some students may use Photovoice (see Unit Plan 5) to highlight the challenges in their community. Similarly, Philadelphia teacher Freda Anderson (2023) empowered her students to go on a photo scavenger hunt around their school, based on the question "What happens when a school district is forced to prioritize their debts over their students" (p. 21). As a result, students took pictures of "broken sports equipment, kids waiting their turn outside of the counselor's office, crumbling ceilings, and a schoolyard filled with no trees or plants, just asphalt" (Anderson, 2023, p. 22). The school environment itself, despite its financial limitations, can become the center of students' concerns, civic engagement, and eventual YPAR project.

Lastly, *Community Civics* initiates a potential cultural debate, or frame, that can challenge its operation. As noted, this curriculum is not neutral but embodies deeply rooted values of youth participation in social justice and critical consciousness. If the local community's values conflict with these curricular values, then Posner (1995) suggests examining both sets of values to make each explicit to each other. Doing so could create an opportunity for dialogue in which concerns can be addressed and ultimately a compromise can form. Anticipating cultural values of the community, or the school, that conflict with the curriculum is recommended. For example, if a predominantly White and conservative community were to offer *Community Civics* in their high school, some community members might negatively equate the purpose of the curriculum with Critical Race Theory and assume that the curriculum will suggest guilt to their students, rather than engagement, community, and responsibility. Critical Race Theory as an academic framework aims to teach how systemic racism is embedded into law. Its similarity to parts of my proposed curriculum could cause communities and their school boards to unify against it. Cases like this are

on the rise, and the effects can be seen in places like Temecula Valley Unified School District in California. For example, in December 2022, they passed a resolution banning "critical race theory and other similar frameworks" (Lambert, 2023).

In addition to surveying the culture of the community or school, the culture of the society can also be examined. I developed Community Civics to challenge the social relations permitted under authoritarian and racially capitalist modes of schooling, through the perpetuation of inequitable school funding. These challenges promote a culture of individualism that operates as a hidden curriculum within traditional civics courses. Hidden curriculum refers to "implicit academic, social, and cultural messages" intentionally or unintentionally present in students everyday learning experiences (Boston University, 2020, para. 1). In connection, Bell (2023) describes the hegemonic model of civics education that assumes "a position of neutrality that tends to privilege the experiences of political actors from dominant groups" (para. 16). As a result, Bell (2023) recommends what Community Civics entails, stating: "we need to treat the histories and lived experiences of historically marginalized communities as a necessary part of civic knowledge" (para. 16). By challenging the hidden curriculum of traditional civics courses through social-justice oriented civic skills, a values debate may ensue. Awareness of this is vital to operationalizing Community Civics for the benefit of the students.

Keeping in mind these potential frame factors allows users to best adapt *Community Civics* to their student's needs and broader communities. Although considering frame factors is an essential step to analyzing curriculum viability and success, so too is defining assessment rationale. As seen in the next chapter, I will outline ways in which assessment can benefit the curriculum's effectiveness. The rationale of the assessments can even have a positive, negative, or neutral impact

on the frame factors previously listed. In this sense, the curriculum is a living organism, constantly evolving due to its surroundings.

Chapter 5

Assessment and Evaluation

Approach to Assessment and Evaluation

As outlined in chapter four, *Community Civics* follows similar YPAR structures which have made YPAR successful in many parts of the United States, including New York and Chicago, as well as other parts of the world, like Brazil and Guatemala (Berkeley, n.d.). The structure of YPAR helps students build five critical skills to transform their community: (1) redefine, (2) provide, (3) generate, (4) promote, and (5) evaluate (Berkeley, n.d.). In doing so, students break down barriers and misconceptions which may have prevented them from seeking to impact their communities through civic engagement. To develop this process of critical action and research, students and teachers will need modes of evaluation aligned with the curriculum's goals. For students, evaluative tools will be used to measure how Community Civics impacts students' critical consciousness and civic engagement, and their success with their YPAR project. For teachers, an evaluative tool will be used to inform their role in future courses. Evaluative tools are essential throughout *Community Civics* to help its students and their teachers engage in a meaningful attempt at civic action and research.

Community Civics teachers must actively avoid the well-intentioned approach of many leaders who try to carry out transformation for people, instead of with the people. In the spirit of Paulo Freire's work, this is critical. Freire (2017) asserts leadership is most effective for transformative change when there is an active horizontal relationship with the oppressed – in this case the students. Moreover, he stipulates that intercommunication is necessary to revolutionary action (p.102). Considering this, varied methods of authentic evaluation and how these evaluations

are communicated, is necessary for the teacher to avoid hierarchical management. Like any classroom, teachers will use summative and formative assessments to analyze student progress towards their learning targets. However, unlike most traditional classrooms, the choice of what is assessed and how it is assessed is more unique to informing critical pedagogy.

Before I outline how students will be evaluated, it is important to highlight the need for evaluation in any curriculum, including *Community Civics*. Posner (1995) described the need for evaluation in curriculum to justify its value, especially in public funded institutions like schools. To make decisions about individuals and curricula, Posner (1995) pointed out that evaluation is used. In *Community Civics,* decisions about individuals can consist of what Posner (1995) deemed "instructional management" (p. 224). The purpose of instructional management in my proposed curriculum is to assess the student's growth towards critical consciousness and civic engagement, so that the teacher can provide tailored diagnosis and instructional feedback. Meanwhile, Posner (1995) illustrated that curricula decisions are informed by formative and summative evaluations (p. 224). Formative and summative assessments have been outlined in chapter four, but in the following sections the rationale behind the assessments will be clarified.

In *Community Civics,* the rationale supporting my proposed evaluative measures are based on what Posner referred to as the "educational experiences afforded to the students" and the "actual outcomes of the educational process" (p. 225), the two of which are deeply intertwined. Keeping in mind the purpose and philosophy that has shaped this curriculum is imperative to assessing its success. While I will outline outcomes-based evaluative tools, there is a large degree of measuring the intrinsic, or experiential, value of student's experiences in this class. As Dewey (1938) suggested, educative experiences are "those that are democratic and humane, arouse students' curiosity, and strengthen their initiative" (Dewey, pp. 34-38, as cited in Posner, 1995, p. 231).

Although these democratic experiences are more elusive and controversial to the traditional measurements afforded to capitalist schooling, evaluating students' YPAR and civic engagement experiences is essential to the integrity of the course.

Evaluation through Critical Action Research Lens

Considering the goals of *Community Civics*, evaluative tools had to be developed from a critical point of view. As described in chapter three, the academic and social impacts of inequitable school funding that this curriculum confronts is heavily anti-democratic. Therefore, for this curriculum to be successful it must take careful measures through evaluation to avoid reproducing such inequities. Similarly, Kincheloe (2003) warned that top-down standards rely on the banking model, effectively limiting the evaluation of "more sophisticated aspects of learning and teaching" (p. 4). Rather than the technicist, positivist tradition of knowledge, which seeks to produce unequivocal truth, teachers of *Community Civics* should aim to embrace the methods of a critically reflective teacher. As Kincheloe (2003) suggested, critically reflective teachers should develop their curricula and methods to transcend the "reductionism of formal knowledge" recognizing the "role of power in all aspects of the pedagogical process" (p. 7).

Furthermore, the racialized context of schooling (as described in chapter three) also demands a reconstructive approach to evaluation. According to Kincheloe (2003), reductionist evaluation hinders students of Color and low socioeconomic backgrounds from more holistic epistemologies, stating:

> ... it is obvious to many that when the methods of evaluation of advocates of the competitive, top-down standards curriculum are employed, non-white and working-class students do not generally do well—their performance is interpreted as a manifestation of slowness, of inferior ability (Kincheloe, Steinberg, and Gresson, 1996). Researchers devise

> tests to evaluate school, student, and teacher performance, forgetting throughout the process that evaluation is based on uncritically grounded definitions of intelligence and performance. (Owen and Doerr, 1999)

By anchoring evaluation on less tangible, more holistic measurements like critical consciousness and civic engagement, there is a risk that traditional powers, like the principal or school board, may challenge the validity of the course. However, the rationale of each prescribed assessment tool aims to clarify its use and how it best aligns with the course goals, albeit less traditional goals.

Evaluation Tools in Community Civics

For the sake of clarity and simplicity, I have developed a table of evaluation tools that can be used in Community Civics. As mentioned, each of these evaluation tools influences decisions about individual students and the curricula, including the teacher. The table includes a description of the evaluative tool, whether it is a formative or summative assessment (or both), and the assessment rationale. This table serves as a starting point for teachers interested in implementing Community Civics but by no means is an exhaustive list. Rather, it can be adjusted to best fit the needs of the teacher, learners, and the school environment.

Evaluation Tools in *Community Civics*

Evaluation Tool	**Formative**	**Summative**	**Rationale**
Pre-Course Survey (See Appendix A)	X		• Aligns with measuring the intrinsic quality of the proposed educative experience • Serves as an "antecedent" to determine "conditions existing before students interact with teachers and subject matter" (Posner, 1995, p. 229)
Capacity Building Activities (i.e. "interactive vocabulary word wall"	X		• To build students ability to name their worlds through a growth mindset • Key process of building critical consciousness and civic engagement
Open-circle journal discussions	X		• Aligns with measuring what Posner (1995) referred to as "transactions" between students and teacher • To develop community and data that enriches the process of critical consciousness and civic engagement
Consensus Building Activities (i.e.	X	X	• Developed to progress key goals through co-participation

Triangulation Lesson [see Appendix L])			• Feedback provided throughout the course to strive for mastery on criterion referenced YPAR Project Rubric
Journal Entries	X	X	• Dependent on the journal entry prompt, it can function as reflective "transactions" between the student and their classroom community, and/or provide intrinsic insight into their development towards course goals • Feedback provided throughout the course to strive for mastery on criterion referenced YPAR Project Rubric
Post-Course Survey (See Appendix A)		X	• Aligns with measuring the intrinsic quality of the proposed educative experience • Serves to determine current success or shortcomings of the program

Teacher Evaluation Survey (See Appendix C)		X	• Functions as an anonymous data source for teachers to improve their methods and curricula • Student grade not impacted by responses
YPAR Project Rubric (See Appendix B)	X	X	• Functions as a formative tool to guide students learning, and then becomes a summative tool to assess their learning • Purpose to assess students overall progress towards the criterion-referenced goals

As detailed in "Evaluation Tools in *Community Civics,*" there are varying ways to assess the teacher and students. These ways are grounded more in experiential learning than traditional. However, more traditional evaluative tools can be adapted to assess the goals in *Community Civics* if any relevant authorities, such as a principal or school board, require it. For example, considering the course is designed to offer a course credit in U.S. Government, some schools may call for more traditional modes of evaluation like recall of facts. Although this can dilute the course's goals and integrity, there are creative means to ensure that the facts are still relevant to students' process of critical consciousness and civic engagement. Additionally, if traditional multiple choice or fill in the blank assessments are required to measure students' civic knowledge, those assessments can be chunked, to ensure teachers are not reproducing the same expectations of inequitable schooling that

inspired *Community Civics* in the first place. Traditional assessments may even serve as a discussion point with students if their community concern revolves around frustration towards what is taught and how it is taught, like so many of my own students have voiced.

Limitations and Opportunities

Most challenging of the evaluative process is how to determine long-term success of the program. Considering *Community Civics* aims to evaluate students' growth in critical consciousness and civic engagement, it would be helpful to the program to determine whether students' perceptions and actions within their communities are influenced by the course years later. One way of doing this is to ask students to complete a reflective survey at least three years following their completion of the program to assess the program's influence, or lack thereof. However, there are logistical issues to arise in reaching out to students who have likely graduated from high school by then. Certainly, developing a more concrete plan of how to assess long-term success is an area of growth that would be helpful in employing a curriculum like *Community Civics*. It is important to keep in mind, however, that traditional courses offer little in terms of gauging the long-term success of their curriculums. Beyond the percentage of pass or fail, or the measurement of standardized tests, there is little data drawn from the curriculum's evaluation tools that shows if a traditional Biology course, for example, leads its students to be more likely to observe nature, propose hypotheses, or even become biologists in the future. Perhaps then, there is a significant opportunity for all educators to challenge the traditional modes of evaluation perpetuated through capitalist schooling.

Beyond designing evaluation tools to gauge long-term success of *Community Civics*, there are other opportunities for further preparing this curriculum. Due to the transformative nature of the curriculum, it would be necessary to first determine teacher "buy-in" to it. Do the civics teachers

desire a change of methods that promotes student engagement, collaboration, and critical thinking and if so, how far are they willing to go to make that happen? If teachers are interested in implementing this curriculum, some professional development would likely improve the program's viability. Many teachers, like me, are required to spend outside time on professional development to maintain their certification or teaching position. If a school district is not offering professional development on civic engagement or Youth Participatory Action Research, the teacher can take the matter into their own hands, and benefit from a variety of free training online. Many universities, such as the University of Virginia, participate in Youth Participatory Action Research initiatives and offer free training to interested educators. These hours spent learning about critical pedagogy may even count as the professional development hours required of teachers. Another method of recruiting interested teachers and other stakeholders could involve inviting fair school funding advocates and organizations to highlight the need for structural change in our public policy, but also our classrooms. While there are certainly challenges to implementing *Community Civics*, the benefits afforded to the students and teacher could outweigh the risks.

Conclusion

In my Youth Participatory Action Research driven intervention, students challenge the typical capitalist-based logic of schooling by developing critical consciousness and civic engagement, while bringing about a sense of freedom that dilutes the fear of risk-taking and replaces it with empowerment. More specifically, action research in the hands of students, who are affected most by inequitable schooling, revitalizes change in the present and hope for the future. Although this curriculum may be adjusted based on the developer's specific needs, its purpose, goals, content, and evaluative tools should always maintain its original inspiration – that students deserve to have learning experiences that aim to challenge structural oppression, rather than

reproduce it. Considering this intention, I ask that Paulo Freire's assertion to challenge power is essential to any adaptations this curriculum may take, as Freire (2017) reasoned:

> Human existence cannot be Silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection. (p. 61)

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

COMMUNITY CIVICS PRE/POST SURVEY

Purpose: This survey is a tool to assess your current opinions or feelings towards ***critical consciousness*** (your ability to self-reflect, feel empowered, and make change) and ***civic engagement*** (your ability to participate in improving your community).

Directions: Read each statement. Reflect on the statement by assessing if you strongly disagree, disagree, feel neutral, agree, or strongly agree. Draw a check mark in the box that corresponds to how you feel. Remember, there is no right or wrong answer! This is simply a tool to reflect upon your current feelings towards critical consciousness and civic engagement.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I am often a leader in groups.					
2. I would prefer to be a leader rather than a follower.					
3. I would rather have a leadership role when I'm involved in a group project.					
4. I can effectively organize people to get things done.					
5. I am comfortable sharing my opinion with a group.					
6. It is important for me to learn from my classmates' opinions and experiences.					
7. I participate in my school or community because I want my views to be heard.					

8. I can identify important issues facing my school or community.					
9. I can participate in school or community decision making.					
10. My opinion is important because it could make a difference in school or community decision making.					
11. There are many ways for me to have a say in what my school or community does.					
12. It is important for me to participate in local issues affecting young people.					
13. Most school or community leaders would pay attention to me if I shared my opinions.					
14. I feel that I have the tools to make a difference in my school or community.					

*Survey adapted from Christens et al., 2016, p. 535

Appendix B
YPAR Project Rubric

Criteria	Exemplary (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Emerging (1)
Identify an Issue of Community Concern **(Unit 5)**	Clearly identifies a relevant and pressing issue related to local, state, or national government, demonstrating depth of understanding and relevance.	Identifies a relevant issue related to local, state, or national government that is of concern in the community, with some understanding of its significance.	Identifies a somewhat relevant issue related to local, state, or national government, but may need clarification or additional context.	Begins to identify a relevant issue related to local, state, or national government, showing potential for further exploration and understanding.
Investigate / Research Issue **(Unit 5)**	Conducts thorough research using a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data, demonstrating comprehensive understanding of the issue.	Conducts research using a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data, demonstrating a solid understanding of the issue.	Conducts research using a variety of methods but may need to deepen understanding or explore additional sources.	Engages in research to gather data but may need support in selecting appropriate methods or sources.
Strategize for Action **(Unit 6)**	Designs an intervention that directly addresses the issue and has a measurable impact on the community.	Designs an intervention that addresses the issue and demonstrates a measurable impact on the community.	Designs an intervention to address the issue but may need to evaluate effectiveness or adjust implementation.	Begins to design an intervention to address the issue, showing potential for positive impact on the community.
YPAR Project Implementation **(Unit 6)**	Communicates findings and intervention outcomes clearly and persuasively to a broader audience in the community, effectively conveying the significance of the project's impact.	Communicates findings and intervention outcomes clearly to a broader audience in the community, demonstrating effective communication skills and articulating the project's impact.	Presents findings with clarity, but may need to enhance organization or persuasive presentation skills.	Begins to communicate findings to a broader audience in the community, showing potential for effective storytelling and impact.
Collaboration **(Units 1-6)**	Actively engages in collaboration with peers, community members, and stakeholders throughout the research and intervention phases, contributing effectively to the group's goals.	Collaborates effectively with peers, community members, and stakeholders, demonstrating leadership and communication skills.	Demonstrates collaboration with peers or stakeholders but may need to strengthen communication or teamwork skills.	Begins to engage in collaboration with peers or stakeholders, showing potential for building effective partnerships.
Journal Reflections **(Units 1-6)**	Consistently reflects on each journal entry topic thoughtfully, using evidence from their own lives as well as what was learned in class, regardless of the format chosen for journal production (written, video, illustration or audio).	Reflects on most journal entry topics thoughtfully, using evidence from their own lives and class learnings, demonstrating understanding of the reflection process, regardless of the chosen format.	Demonstrates some reflection on journal entry topics but may lack depth or consistency in using evidence from personal experiences and class learnings, regardless of the chosen format.	Shows minimal reflection on journal entry topics, lacking depth and consistency in using evidence from personal experiences and class learnings, regardless of the chosen format.

Appendix C
Teacher Evaluation Survey

Purpose: This is an anonymous survey to provide feedback to your teacher so that your teacher can continuously improve their methods and the course itself.
Instructions: Read each statement. Reflect on the statement by assessing if you strongly disagree, disagree, feel neutral, agree, or strongly agree. Draw a check mark in the box that corresponds to how you feel. Remember, there is no right or wrong answer! Optional: Respond to the comments box at the end of the survey for more detailed feedback.

Criteria	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The teacher effectively helped students identify relevant and pressing issues related to local, state, or national government.					
The teacher provided thorough and diverse research resources to support students' understanding of the course material.					
The teacher facilitated innovative and effective problem-solving strategies to address the identified issues.					
The teacher supported and encouraged collaboration among students, community members, and stakeholders throughout the course.					
The teacher provided opportunities for students to reflect on course topics thoughtfully through multiple journal entries.					
The teacher's feedback on journal entries was helpful and contributed to students' understanding of the reflection process.					
The teacher demonstrated a commitment to improving their teaching based on student feedback and course outcomes.					

Optional: On the back of this page, please provide any additional comments or suggestions for how the teacher could improve their teaching for future Community Civics courses.

Appendix D

Lesson Plan: Youth as Leaders and & Resources

GET STARTED: YOUTH + ADULTS: YOUTH AS LEADERS & RESOURCES

By Stanford University's Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning (YELL) Curriculum - 90 minutes

OBJECTIVES

To examine a "youth as resource" perspective

To think about youth and adult relationships in organizations and communities

MATERIALS

Butcher paper/flip chart paper

Tape

Markers

Paper

Pens

Clipboards

"Youth as Objects, Recipients, Resources" handouts (1 per participant, see below)

PREPARE BEFORE

Write the numbers 1 through 10, each on its own piece of paper, and hang them up as a continuum placed along a wall. Leave enough room if possible for several people to stand at each number.

WARM UP

Have each participant think of someone their age that they feel has a lot of power. In what settings or circumstances does this person have power?

EXPERIENCE

Tell participants to go stand next to the number that represents where they think the statement falls on the continuum of youth inclusion: 1 represents youth being completely excluded, and 10 represents youth being fully included, encouraged, and welcomed. Ask the participants the following questions: To what extent are young people involved in the planning, operations, and evaluation of programs and organizations that exist to promote their well being (in other words, how much influence do youth have) at the:

National level?

Community level?

State level?

School level?

In this program or group?

After everyone is standing at one of the numbers, ask a few participants what made them choose that number and why. Make sure that participants understand that there is no right or wrong answer – it is their opinion of what exists. Ask participants how they would like it to be, ideally. The next section of the lesson gives participants a chance to role play. Divide into small groups and ask participants to do the following: (1) Brainstorm a list of situations in which youth tend to feel

powerless and to come up with some specific examples from their experience. Prepare a skit to demonstrate a situation where a young person feels powerless simply because he or she is young. Each role play should be two to three minutes long. Suggest that the groups use real-life experiences for inspiration, and encourage them to use a clear situation with clear characters. Bring groups back together, have each group present their list of examples, and then perform its role play. After every group has presented, ask:
What similarities were there among the skits?
What themes about youth experiences can be identified from the skits?

REFLECT
Distribute the "Youth as Objects, Recipients, Resources" handout. Ask if there are any questions about these three styles of youth participation. Ask participants to identify how the styles are different and to name an example or two for each area.
Break participants into small groups and assign each group an area — objects, recipients, or resources. They have 10 minutes to work together. Give each group one piece of butcher paper and markers, and ask them to write examples from their lives of their assigned style. Ask each group to discuss the following:
What kinds of organizations and systems operate in this fashion? What are some of the feelings youth might have in this style?
What are some of the behaviors for youth and adults in this style?

SUMMARIZE
Have groups share back the themes of their brainstorm.

DEMONSTRATE
Have each participant name a time when they have felt respected and powerful.

Appendix E

Lesson Plan: Youth-Adult Power Sharing

GET STARTED: YOUTH + ADULTS: YOUTH-ADULT POWER SHARING

By Stanford University's Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning (YELL) Curriculum - 60 minutes

OBJECTIVES

To develop a working model of the youth and adult relationships for your program or project

To increase awareness of power and who makes decisions

MATERIALS

"Structures of Organizations Scenarios" worksheet (1 copy, see below) Butcher paper

Tape Markers

Two sets of prepared index cards with words for Pictionary Race with words such as leader, community, student, activist, principal, park, friend (see Warm Up)

PREPARE BEFORE

Copy and cut out the different "Structures of Organizations Scenarios" worksheet.

WARM UP

Have each participant share: Where in my life do I have the MOST power to make decisions?

Pictionary™ Race: Divide the group into two teams, and have each team go to a different side of the room. Each team should have a few sheets of butcher paper and markers or pens. Stand in the middle of the room with two sets of index cards (about five cards in each set), each card labeled with a secret word. When the facilitator says "go," each team sends a representative to see the secret words. The representative then returns to the group, draws (without talking), and the team has to guess the word. Once they guess it, they send another team member to read and draw the next word. If you are using the same sets of words for both teams, remind them that if they don't want the other team to hear their answers! Whoever finishes first, wins.

EXPERIENCE

Youth and adult power distribution exercise:

STEP 1: Remind participants of the three styles of youth involvement:

Youth as Objects: Adults know what is best for young people and control situations in which youth are involved.

Youth as Recipients: Adults allow young people to take part in decision making because they think the experience is good for youth.

Youth as Resources: Adults respect young people as having something significant to offer, and youth are encouraged to become involved.

STEP 2: Explain that there is a range among the three frameworks. Many organizations are not just one of the styles but a combination. Describe three common styles of youth and adult organizations:

Youth led: Youth make all of the decisions and run all aspects of the program.

Youth and adult partnerships: Youth and adults make decisions together and share responsibilities of the program.

Adult led: Adults make all of the decisions and run all aspects of the program. STEP 3: Hand out five slips of paper with the example organizations from the *Structures of Organizations: Scenarios* and have participants read the slips out loud. Tell participants that they will be forming a line, with the program that is most youth led on the right and the program that is least youth led on the left. Have participants without slips help others line up. Once participants have begun forming their line, encourage them to double check with the person to the left and right to make sure they are where they think that they should be. After everyone has lined up, ask them to go down the line and read the slips of paper.

REFLECT

Ask the following questions:

Why did you line up in that order? At what point does it turn into a youth-led program? Youth-adult partnership? Adult-led?

Which organizational structure do you like best or think would work the best for this group? Why?

In what ways does this group currently match this structure of organization? In what ways is it different?

SUMMARIZE

Refer back to the objectives and how youth-adult power sharing relates to YPAR. Highlight the following definition and points if you see fit:

Youth-adult partnership is the practice of: (a) multiple youth and multiple adults deliberating and acting together, (b) in a collective [democratic] fashion (c) over a sustained period of time, (d) through shared work, (e) intended to promote social justice, strengthen an organization and/or affirmatively address a community issue.

Experience vs. age

Youth culture validated and respected

Shared decision-making and accountability

Commitment to learn from one another

Examples:

Public action

School hiring committees

Governance council for youth organization

Program evaluation

The assignment of roles and division of labor is not determined by age, but instead, is based on the specific motivation, skill, and network that each individual brings to the endeavor.

DEMONSTRATE

Have each participant share: “I would like to see more youth involved in…”

Handout: Youth as Objects, Recipients, Resources

YOUNG PEOPLE VIEWED AS OBJECTS

Adults know what is best for young people and control situations in which they allow them to be involved.
Adults feel that young people have little to contribute and may work to keep young people in relatively powerless positions.
Youth are not included in the design of the program or opportunity.
Adults believe that the responsibility of the young person is to take advantage of the program or opportunity designed by the adult.

YOUNG PEOPLE VIEWED AS RECIPIENTS

Adults allow young people to be valued in the design of the opportunity but the primary emphasis of this adult attitude is on how the young person will benefit from participation, not on what the young person has to offer to the design process.
Adults are still well in control of the conditions under which the young person participates.
Adults allow youth participation because of the value of the experience to the young person.
Adults want to prepare young people for the future as responsible decision makers.

YOUNG PEOPLE VIEWED AS RESOURCES

Adults view young people as resources and respect the contribution young people can make to planning, operation, and evaluation.
Leadership and decision-making roles involved can be shared by adults and young people.
Both young people and adults may need to learn skills and attitudes necessary for shared decision making.
Youth and adults both have strengths to contribute.

Handout: Structures of Organizations - Scenarios

Structures of Organizations was adapted from an activity created by Youth in Focus of Oakland, www.youthinfocus.net

In this project, youth staff serve as project directors and are on the board of directors or leadership team. They are responsible for everything. They are in charge of creating the project's vision, setting goals, raising money for program costs, planning the year, creating lesson plans, organizing activities or events, facilitating meetings, hiring and training all new employees or members, supervising new employees, and reporting back to the sponsoring organization or funder. There are no adult employees except at the sponsoring organization.

In this project, youth create the mission of the project, set goals, plan for the year, create lesson plans, run meetings, organize activities or events, and hire, train, and mentor new youth members on their own. Adults are responsible for raising money for program costs, reporting back, and hiring any adult staff to help with fundraising or research.

In this project, the board of advisors for the project, or leadership team, is made up of both youth staff and adult staff. Both adults and youth get to vote on decisions. This board makes the major decisions and planning for the project, like the goals for the year or the research topic. They also evaluate how the program is going. Youth staff supervise and mentor new youth members, who can make smaller decisions. Youth staff are in charge of small projects and have to report back to the leadership team. With the support of youth staff, adults create daily activities to meet decided goals, raise money and report back. Adult staff supervise and mentor youth staff.

In this project, there is an advisory board of youth staff, but youth can't vote, just give advice. Adult staff make all of the final decisions. With the advice of the youth staff, adult staff create the vision, set goals, raise money, and hire or fire employees. Adults run all of the after-school meetings and work with youth to organize activities or events. Adult staff tell youth what do and how to do it.

In this project, there is an advisory board of youth staff and adult staff, but only youth staff can vote. This leadership team makes all of the major decisions for the project and evaluates whether the project is meeting its goals. Youth staff facilitates after school meetings with the support of adults. Adults support Youth Staff in making lesson plans and planning activities, giving youth choices about what to do and how. Adults make suggestions and give constructive feedback instead of telling youth what to do, and the youth make the final decisions.

Appendix F

Lesson Plan: Non-verbal Communication

GET STARTED: TEAM-BUILDING: NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION
By Youth in Focus' Youth Research Evaluation and Planning: Step by Step Curriculum; Stanford University's Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning (YELL) Curriculum - Time varies

OBJECTIVES
To practice communicating without words to become a stronger team

MATERIALS
FOLLOW THE LEADER
TRUST WALK
Random small objects (e.g., lollipops, pencils, water bottles)

PREPARE BEFORE
Varies by activity.

EXPERIENCE
Choose 1 (or more!) of the following activities:

FOLLOW THE LEADER (10 MINUTES) Assemble participants into a circle (facing in). Ask for a volunteer to be the guesser. This person will then step out of the room and out of earshot. Once that person is outside, pick someone in the group to be the leader. Her or his role is to lead the group without the guesser figuring out that he or she is the leader. Have the leader start a motion that everyone else must follow (e.g., clapping hands, waving, rubbing belly). Once everyone is doing the motion, ask the guesser to come back in and stand in the middle of the circle by the guesser, and try to guess who is initiating the motions. The leader must change motions when they think that they are unobserved. The rest of the group tries to follow as quickly as possible to make it harder to guess who is leading. Once the person in the middle guesses correctly, repeat the process with a new guesser and leader.
Debrief: What does this say about leadership? Is it always easy to tell who is leading? Ask participants to think of examples of leaders who led by supporting others and keeping a group focused. Are there other different kinds of leaders?

TRUST WALK (10 MINUTES)
This activity focuses on understanding aspects of effective communication. Before session, prepare a clear, safe area for this activity and gather objects for participants to collect (e.g., lollipops, pencils, water bottles). Place participants in pairs or small groups, and have one member put on a blindfold. Once a member of every pair or group is blindfolded, place the objects randomly around the area. The blindfolded person must gather as many objects as possible, solely based on the verbal instructions provided by his or her partner(s). “Seeing” partners cannot touch the blindfolded person or the objects and can only communicate verbally.
Variation: Take away the verbal communication – the seeing partners can no longer talk but can make sounds.

Debrief: Stress the importance of safety while also taking positive risks. After participants complete the activity, discuss why they did or did not trust their partner when they were being led. What would have made them trust each other more? What communication methods worked and what didn't for the group? What was difficult for the individual who had to complete the task? What was difficult for the group? What aspects of communication did this exercise demonstrate?

Appendix G

Lesson Plan: Who is My Community?

GET STARTED: COMMUNITY SUPPORT: WHO IS MY COMMUNITY?
By San Francisco Peer Resources – 55-70 minutes

OBJECTIVES

To define your community
To recognize communities that you are and are not a part of

MATERIALS

Whiteboard/chalkboard
Dry erase markers/chalk
Pens or pencils
Paper
Markers or crayons
Drawing paper
"Community Venn Diagram" handout (1 per participant)

PREPARE BEFORE

N/A

WARM UP

Ask the participants, "How do you define "community"? What community or communities do you think you are a part of?"

EXPERIENCE

In groups of 3-6, have the participants go around and share their answers. Once they have shared, in a large group, have them discuss these questions:
What makes up a community?
Who is a part of a community?
Who decides who is part of a community?
Do you have to live in a community to be a part of it?
Who are the experts of the community?
Who decides when there is a problem 'in the community'?

REFLECT

Have you ever experienced a time when you were clearly out of the community? How could they tell? How can you tell when you are in a community that is not your own? What would someone need to know about a community in order to be a part of it?
When you first came to this school (or organization), did you feel like you were a part of the community? When did you feel that this school (or organization) was "yours"? What helped you to feel this way?

SUMMARIZE

Communities are defined in many ways by different people. Communities have unwritten rules and norms. If you are not a member of that community, you may not know what the norms are for it. Just because a person may live in the same 'community' as another doesn't mean that they will agree on the way in which the community needs development or progress, help, etc.

DEMONSTRATE

Give each participant a Community Venn Diagram worksheet. They will use this to draw images of two communities that they are in. One should be their school if this activity is being done in a school. They should choose what the other community is and label it at the top of the other circle. On the worksheet, they should draw pictures that show the differences and similarities of the two communities. Anything the two communities have in common should be drawn in the intersection of the two circles. Things that are unique to one community should be drawn in their individual circle.

Display all the community drawings as a gallery walk.

Have students look at all the drawings and look for connections between people's drawings.

What do you see that is similar in this community compared to another? What seems positive about this community in the drawing?

What seems as if it needs improving about the community?

Appendix H

America's Report Card

Directions:
Follow along with this presentation Goals of the Constitution Presentation as we evaluate how well the United States is living up to its goals. For each goal found in the preamble of the Constitution, we'll be answering a "Connection to Today Question", and then be giving a score out of 5 in terms of how well the United States is living up to its goals. At the end, follow my instructions on how to give the US a final grade, and a final evaluation.

Preamble Goal	Connection to Today Answers	Score out of 5 (1 worst, 5 best)
Form a More Perfect Union		3
Establish Justice		2
Insure Domestic Tranquility		1
Provide for the Common Defense		5
Promote the General Welfare		4
Secure the Blessings of Liberty		3
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	Total: 18
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	Total divided by 6: 3
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	Percent: (divide number by 5) 0.6 = 60%

Final Evaluation:
Look at the overall score you gave the US in achieving its goals in the Preamble of the Constitution. Do you believe that you gave the US a fair score? What is the cause of America's high/low score? Even if the score is high, what can America do to improve?

*Created by Jon Privado

Appendix I

Grades 9-12 Social Studies Lesson 1: The Pennsylvania School Hunger Games

Lesson Plan Authors: Tom Quinn, Laura Boyce

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:
Is Pennsylvania school funding adequate and equitable? How is PA's school funding system designed? Who benefits and who loses from the current system?

LESSON OBJECTIVE:
Students will be able to explain how Pennsylvania schools are funded as well as the root causes and disparate impacts of the state funding system.

STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

- PA 5.1.12.D - Evaluate state and federal powers based on significant documents and other critical sources (Pennsylvania Constitution).
- PA 5.1.12.E - Analyze and assess the rights of people as written in the PA Constitution and the US Constitution.
- PA 5.3.12.I - Evaluate tax policies of various states and countries.
- PA 6.1.12.A - Predict the long-term consequences of decisions made because of scarcity.
- PA 6.3.12.A - Evaluate the costs and benefits of government decisions to provide public goods and services.

LESSON DURATION:
90-120 minutes

MATERIALS:

- Projector and speakers for showing videos
- School Funding Presentation
- PA School Funding Article Worksheet (one copy per student - electronic copies strongly suggested to access links)
- Student devices with internet access

DO NOW (5-7 MINUTES)
Project slide 1 of the School Funding Presentation, Signe Wilkinson's political cartoon "If school funding is already fair...let's trade!"

Give students two minutes to respond to the questions on the slide: What issue does this cartoon deal with? What is the cartoon's message? Support your answer with details from the cartoon.

After students have reflected independently for two minutes, have them share their responses with a partner, and call on a few students to share with the full class.

Review the essential questions and lesson objective.

PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION: PA'S SCHOOL FUNDING SYSTEM (30-45 MINUTES)
Project and present the remaining slides in the School Funding Presentation. See slide notes for additional prompts and resources. If time is limited, you may choose to cut certain slides and activities.

TEXT-DEPENDENT ANALYSIS (15-20 MINUTES)
Have students read the article "Pa. schools need an additional $4.6 billion to close education gaps, new analysis finds," linked in the PA School Funding Article Worksheet.
Prior to students beginning to read, encourage them to review the text-dependent questions on the overview worksheet and review any close reading or annotation expectations you have taught previously. You may choose to print the article and worksheet or have students access one or both electronically, based on your preferences for annotations and close reading. You may also adapt this activity to have students work in pairs to analyze the article and respond to the

questions. There are also additional sources linked in the worksheet that could be utilized to differentiate this activity or turn it into a jigsaw, where different small groups explore different sources and report back to the whole group.

Suggested responses to each of the questions can be found below:

1. Specific causes cited in the article include Pennsylvania′s heavy reliance on local property taxes, exacerbating disparities between high-wealth and low-wealth districts; inadequate levels of state spending on education; and the state′s abandonment of adequacy or spending targets. If students explore other sources, they also may include the hold harmless provision, which leads to almost 90% of overall state funding being distributed based on outdated enrollment numbers instead of based on the more equitable basic education funding formula, which would direct dollars based on student need.

2. Groups that benefit from the current system, according to the article: students in school districts with stronger tax bases, white students (this is not implicitly stated but implied by who loses). Groups that lose: students in poor school districts, Black and Latino students, 86% of all public school students whose districts are underfunded. Students should include specific statistics from the article, including but not limited to the overall $4.6 billion shortfall in education funding, the $7,886 spending gap between the poorest 20% of districts and the richest 20% of districts, and the specific per-pupil shortfalls in individual districts. Students might make additional inferences about groups that benefit or suffer under the current system.

3. How advocates are attempting to change the system, according to the article: suing the state to fix the system, calling for disparities in spending to be addressed, calling for greater levels of state spending to meet adequacy targets.

DATA ANALYSIS AND VISUALIZATION (15-20 MINUTES)

Students will now complete a data analysis and visualization activity on the second page of the worksheet. Before they begin, it is recommended that you model the process for them using Berks County as an example (Teachers in Berks may want to choose another county).

1. In the article, scroll to the table of school districts. Point out that it is sorted by the shortfall per student, from largest to smallest. This is the amount each student's education is underfunded in that school district.

2. Point out that students in Reading, Berks County, are underfunded by $8,592. Record the percentages of students that are low income (95%), English learners (26%), receive special education (22%), and are Black and Latinx (93%)

3. Click on "County" to re-sort the table.

4. Click the arrows at the top right until you get to Berks County on page 4. Notice that the school districts in Berks are still sorted by shortfall.

5. Scroll down to view each district. Ask students to make observations. They may notice that most districts in Berks are also underfunded, but not by as much. (Example: Wilson, $2,188 shortfall per student, 32% low income, 4% English learner, 18% special education, 29% Black and Latinx).

6. Go to page 5. Which districts are fully funded? (Brandywine Heights and Kutztown) What observations can students make about the student populations? (The districts have much lower percentages of low income students than Reading, though not different from Wilson. There are also lower percentages of English learners and students of color compared to Reading and Wilson. There is not a clear pattern in percentage of students receiving special education.)

7. Choose 3-5 districts: Low, medium, and highly underfunded districts. Create a table that includes their shortfalls and demographics (you can use the table in the worksheet). Ask students to describe what the table reveals. Is there a correlation between the demographics and the severity of the shortfalls? (There is a strong correlation between underfunding and poverty, and also a fairly clear correlation between underfunding and race.)
8. Why do you think these correlations exist? (Answers may vary - direct them back to the article and allow them also to bring in other relevant background information)

After modeling with the Berks County example, give students 10-15 minutes to conduct a similar analysis on page 2 of their worksheet with their home county.

EXIT TICKET (5 MINUTES)
Give students a few minutes to answer the exit ticket prompt in a notebook, on loose leaf paper, or in a Google Form or other digital participation platform: “Is Pennsylvania's school funding system equitable? Provide at least three specific pieces of evidence to support your response based on today’s activities (7-10 sentences total).” If time allows, ask volunteers to share their responses.

Appendix J

Lesson Plan: Grassroots Change

GET STARTED: YPAR BASICS: GRASSROOTS CHANGE
By Center for Education in Law and Democracy's pARTicipation Curriculum – 60 minutes

OBJECTIVES

To learn about historic success stories of grassroots organizing
To draw out lessons that can be applied to your work
To craft a mission, vision, and name for your group

MATERIALS

Video of a successful grassroots organizing campaign/group

PREPARE BEFORE

Choose examples of successful grassroots organizing the present to the participants. If possible, invite a local grassroots organizer to participate in the discussion and share their experiences.

WARM UP

Is it ever right to break the law? If so, under what circumstances do you think breaking the law is the right thing to do?

EXPERIENCE

Present one or more examples of successful grassroots organizing. These may include Cesar Chavez's "Sí Se Puede" effort to organize farm workers or civil rights groups' effort to establish racial equity (e.g., the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, NAACP), groups' efforts in the 1970 Earth Day movement, the National Organization for Women's efforts for feminism, or groups' efforts to oppose U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

If possible, have a local grassroots organizer present about their experiences. Facilitate a discussion between the organizer and the participants. If you do not have someone to speak, show a video of successful grassroots organizing.

REFLECT

Discuss as a class how these groups organized themselves and made change. What was successful? What was unsuccessful? What can we take away from their efforts to use in our project?

SUMMARIZE

Following this introduction, have participants split into small groups. Each group should craft a mission statement, a vision, and a name for the group. The larger group can then come together and vote on the options as a class.

DEMONSTRATE

Why did your group pick this mission and name to represent? What do the mission, vision, and name represent?

Appendix K

Lesson Plan: Defining the Research Question

DEFINE ISSUE: CHOOSING SPECIFIC ISSUE: DEFINING THE RESEARCH QUESTION
By Institute for Community Research's YPAR Curriculum - Time varies

OBJECTIVES

To identify the issue of interest to be researched

MATERIALS

"What Makes a Good Research Question?" handout (1 per participant)
"Identification of the Issue" handout (1 per participant)
Relevant data (optional)
Scrap paper
Pens or pencils
Flip chart paper
Markers

PREPARE BEFORE

N/A

WARM UP

Let the participants know that you are about to decide, as a group, what the topic for research will be. It is important for everyone to participate in this activity so they can have a say in the project, which the group will be working on for the remainder of its time together. Start by walking the group through the "What Makes a Good Research Question?" handout. Discuss that answerable questions only address one idea:
They look at relationships and not causes and effects.
They are clear and concise.
They can be easily understood.
They are manageable to answer in a couple of months.

EXPERIENCE

STEP 1: Deciding what the research topic will be
Present the question to the group, and have participants write down three answers individually on a piece of paper. Your question can be very general, such as "What are some issues that are important to teens?" or can be more tailored to the purposes of your program or funding requirements, such as "What are some
physical health issues that are important to teens in Oakland?" or "What are some education issues that are important to Oakland High School students?" It is important to keep the question as open as possible so that teens can come to an issue that is truly theirs to research, rather than adults telling them what the problem is. This is crucial to establishing youth ownership of the project and getting teens invested in the process of research. Note that you can use data or school or community assessments (e.g., Oregon Healthy Teens data) to help the group identify priority issues.

STEP 2: Suggesting research topics
Ask the participants to share one of the topics identified on their list. Go around the room, listing each topic, exactly as they are said, on a flip chart, whiteboard, or chalkboard. Once you have gotten a contribution from everyone in the room, ask people to share any other topics that have not yet been listed. Next take a few minutes to try to combine any topics together. Ask for suggestions from the group and make sure that whoever thought of the initial suggestions agrees with the way it is being renamed or incorporated into a broader category, to ensure that no one's thoughts or ideas are lost.
STEP 3: Selecting the research topics
Once you have a list of topics that everyone agrees on, split the group into teams of two. Have each team select the two topics it feels are the most important from the list. Have the team fill out the handout "Identification of the Issue" for each item they choose.

REFLECT
Have each team present the two topics chosen, explaining to the rest of the group why the team members think the issues they chose are the most important. Once a topic has been chosen, have any other team who chose it report on it as well, so that you can have a running record of each topic selected. Once all the groups have shared their selections, create a new listing of the topics chosen by teams in Step 3.

SUMMARIZE
The final step is to negotiate and decide on a topic for research. There may be choices that seem fairly obvious because a majority of people selected them. The facilitator should try to get the group to think about how easy or difficult it will be to research certain topics. There also may be relationships between items on the list that the facilitator should point out. It is recommended that each group work on one topic/problem even if it is difficult to get resolution or agreement within the group, because:
It builds group identity.
There are more people to work on different facets of the problem.
It doesn't split the staff between two projects.
It is easier to schedule learning activities.
It is much easier to identify enough key adults for youth to interview if there is only one topic to consider.
If the group can't come to agreement through discussion, voting can work. Ways to vote are:
Hands up for one versus the other topic
Written secret vote
Youth participants generally find it more important to work with their peers than to compete over topics and are satisfied with the resolution no matter what process is used to arrive at it. A useful way to deal with disagreement in the group is to show how a topic members want to include may be an important part of the research model as an independent rather than a dependent variable. In other words, it can be a cause of the problem rather than the problem itself. This means that to change the problem, the cause itself has to be changed or improved.

DEMONSTRATE

Once the group has come to a decision on the final research questions, congratulate everyone! Thank everyone for their openness, honesty and willingness to work together. They have just completed a very important step in the research journey!

Appendix L

Lesson Plan: Triangulation: Compare and Contrast Data

INVESTIGATE: EXISTING DATA: TRIANGULATION: COMPARE AND CONTRAST DATA
By Institute for Community Research's PAR Curriculum for Empowering Youth and San Francisco Peer Resources – 90 minutes

OBJECTIVES

To compare and contrast data from different sources
To find patterns of similarity and discuss their meaning
To find patterns of difference and discuss their meaning
To summarize the main points of similarity and difference
To synthesize information from different research

MATERIALS

Flipchart paper
Markers
"Triangulation for a Single Cause" handout (several per participant)
Summaries of main points from analyses
Materials prepared based on the data collected during the YPAR project

PREPARE BEFORE

This lesson should be taught once/if you have data through multiple data collections. Be sure that you have looked over the results of the data collected and prepared in each of the topic areas. Let the participants know in advance what the data have to say about the root causes and how they connect to your issue.

WARM UP

Which research method do you feel you have the best understanding of the process and the results (e.g., surveys, focus groups, photovoice) ? Why?
Which research method did you enjoy the most? Which research method did you enjoy the least? Explain.

EXPERIENCE

Today we are going to start to synthesize what we have learned from different research methods. Assign smaller groups to work on each cause (independent variable). For each cause, you are going to fill out the Triangulation handout where they will list the products (what research and how many), the summary findings and most importantly, what the findings mean.
The results do not have to agree – in fact, it would be unlikely that your results will all agree with each other. You are just looking to summarize what you have, to notice the differences and the similarities, and to use all this information to move forward.
Note: The research group may not have selected all the methods; and not all the methods apply to each of the topics. That's okay. Also by this time, the results of the information collected by each data collection method should be available. If they are not available, youth researchers will

have to obtain those results first. Also, this might be easy to do on chart paper rather than worksheets so the information can be displayed.
Give each data collection group the Triangulation handout, and ask them to complete the form or create one on chart paper.

REFLECT
What was difficult about summarizing the main points of the various research methods? Which research method was difficult to review and create a summary of main points?
What was easy about summarizing the main points of the various research methods? Which research method was easy to review and create a summary of main points?
Did you identify any patterns between the main points from the various research methods? Similarities? Differences?
Were you surprised by any of the results from the various research methods?

SUMMARIZE
Data analysis is about putting the whole picture together.
Triangulation means bringing together different sources and types of data on the same topic to see whether the results that come from one type of data collection confirm or contrast with the results from another type of data collection. In other words, how do the results from the surveys compare or contrast with the results on the same topic from the focus groups? The information does not have to agree. We will use all of it to determine our next steps.
Researchers use triangulation to determine if their research is "true" (that the findings accurately reflect the situation) and "certain" (that the findings are supported by evidence).

DEMONSTRATE
Ask the participants to return to their groups, and respond to the following questions on a large sheet of poster paper:
What are the main points that can be drawn from all of the research methods?
According to this information, does our original hypothesis hold up? Why or why not?
Does this research accurately reflect the situation? Is it "true"? Why or why not?
Are the research findings supported by evidence? Is it "certain"? If yes, how? If no, what is the evidence telling us?
Gather any supporting research data that you can use to support your statements during your presentation (i.e. survey summaries, charts, graphs, photos, etc.)
Each group will report out what they've found to others.

Appendix M

Lesson Plan: Verbal Communication

GET STARTED: TEAM-BUILDING: VERBAL COMMUNICATION

By Youth in Focus' Youth Research Evaluation and Planning: Step by Step Curriculum; Stanford University's Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning (YELL) Curriculum - Time varies

OBJECTIVES

To improve verbal communication skills

MATERIALS

ISLAND PARADISE?
Clay
Paper
Pens
WIDGET ASSEMBLY
A large roll of craft/butcher paper
An additional empty roll
Tape
Large collection of assorted LEGOs
Blocks
Small containers
A medium-sized table
Partitions (optional)
NEWSPAPER DOG
Stack of newspaper
Masking tape
WACKY SPEECH
Index cards or paper (1 per participant)
Pens
GROUP SCULPTURES
None

PREPARE BEFORE

Varies by activity.

EXPERIENCE

Choose 1 (or more!) of the following activities:

ISLAND PARADISE?* (1-2 HOURS)

*Requires at least 16 people

Divide into groups of about eight, creating at least two but preferably three or more groups. Give each group a football size lump of potter clay with the task of creating an island that all would inhabit. Proceed through the exercise as follows:

The first part of the exercise will be done silently. In this portion, each member of the group will silently construct their idea of the island on paper, complete with geographical features and shelter for themselves. Allow about 10 minutes.

Have the group members talk amongst themselves and determine a concept for a community island. Elements to discuss include how their island will operate, such as health care, education, commerce, defense, food production, transportation, and governing structure.
Though all of these cannot be modeled in clay, discussion can still occur and be facilitated by advisors. Allow about 40 minutes.

Once group islands have been established, then inform the groups that other islands exist (the other groups) and that if they want, they can interact with them. The groups have to figure out how interactions will occur – attack, commerce, trade rules? Allow about 20 minutes.

Debrief: Facilitate an assessment of the activity and issues that arose. Allow up to 20 minutes or as much time as is available or needed. Topics to direct conversation include:
Leadership – did someone take charge in each group?
Decision making – did any systematic decision-making process occur? Was it effective?
Communication – what methods were used within groups and between groups?
Planning – what was good planning and what was not?
Morality and Integrity – did these issues arise? If so, how and what was the outcome?
Culture – did islands create their own culture? If so, what was it? When allowed to interact with other islands, did an island's original culture change? If so, how?

WIDGET ASSEMBLY (1 HOUR)
The goal of this activity is to appreciate the challenges of articulating one's vision and goals to others. A widget assembly line is used to convey this idea. Before the group arrives, set up the roll of craft paper on one end of a medium sized table and affix the end of the paper to the empty roll on the other end. Affix in such a way that the paper can be rolled from the full roll to the empty one. This will become the assembly line.

Divide into groups of five to seven people. Prior to briefing the group on the activity, have one person designated as the leader or manager. This person will receive the actual briefing from the facilitator regarding the specifics of the activity and what widget the assembly line must make. This is the only person who is aware of the entire scope of the task. Ideally, he or she does not see the layout of the assembly line, but does receive an explicit schematic and a list of the component LEGOs and blocks available. This individual is provided with a sample of the widget to make and must organize the group and convey to them what needs to be accomplished. A box at the end of the assembly line and a partition would be useful so that the leader/manager can see only the end product and make adjustments from there. They cannot go onto the assembly line and show the rest of the group how they want the final product to look; they can only affect change verbally. Once the leader/manager has given instructions to the group, the facilitator will turn on the assembly line by beginning to roll the paper from the full roll to the empty roll.

The widgets need to be complicated, and details of organization and sequencing should be left to whomever is designated as the leader/manager. A number of aspects will need to be considered, which can drive discussion at the end of the activity. Given the final product, the manager must decide how it should be constructed on the assembly line and inform the builders what components are needed, along with other organization issues. Have multiple widgets available for construction so that all members in the group have an opportunity to be the leader/manager. Time the task to see how long it takes the group to successfully complete a widget or to make a specified number of correct widgets.

Depending on site capabilities, another way of doing this activity is to have the assembly line and builders in one room and the leader/manager able to view the proceeding through a window. Based on observation, the manager can then relay messages to the group on how to fix any issues. This may be an easier task for the group to start with and then proceed to the format where the leader/manager is completely blind to the assembly line. This can depict the evolution of trust and confidence that the leader/manager has in the group as they begin to understand his/her way of conveying information.

Many adaptations and extensions are possible with this activity, so be creative as the group begins to master the basics of working together and effectively conveying their widget vision.

Debrief: Ensure that time is left at the end so the group can discuss what worked and what didn't regarding how the leader/manager conveyed information. Also have them reflect on whether the task became easier after several iterations and why this may or may not be so.

NEWSPAPER DOG (10 MINUTES)

Break participants into groups of five, and give each group a stack of newspaper and a roll of masking tape. Each group must create a dog out of the newspaper and tape in five minutes. Afterwards, ask each group:
What was your group dynamic like?
Was there a dominant leadership style within the group?
What are your strengths as a group?
What does each of you bring or contribute to the group?

WACKY SPEECH (20 MINUTES)

In a circle, have each participant write down something they expect from adults, then pass their paper or index card to the person on their left. Below what is already written on the paper they have received, have participants write their favorite animal or song, and again, pass the paper to the left. Next, have participants write what they would wish for if they had one wish. Pass the paper one more time. Now each participant should have a piece of paper with three things on it. One at a time, have participants create an argument or "case" from the statements on their card or paper. The argument must meet two criteria: It must be expressed with real concern or passion, and it must ask for the group to do or think about something specific that includes all three items. Encourage participants to be as creative and silly as possible. Their argument does not need to make sense!

GROUP SCULPTURES (15 MINUTES)

Have participants walk freely in the center of the room until the facilitator says stop. Participants must quickly make groups of three or four. Each small group then has three minutes to select an object and devise a plan to create the object using the bodies of all group members. For example: Participants can make a telephone by having two people on their knees with their hands out as the numbers, another person as the receiver; the final member can "make a call." Each group has a chance to show their object to the other teams, and everyone tries to guess what they are. Repeat the process for two or three rounds as time allows. Alternatives: Participants stay in the same group while the facilitator names specific categories (e.g., common household items, appliances, something you would find at an amusement park, a type of food).

Debrief: What were the different approaches taken by different groups to decide which object to create? How did you decide what role each group member would take? Did the decision- making process change from round to round?

Appendix N

Lesson Plan: Applying your Research Findings

By Institute for Community Research's YPAR curriculum – Time Varies

OBJECTIVES

To apply research findings to make positive change in a situation or condition

MATERIALS

"Using the Data for Change" handout (1 per participant)
"Using the Data for Change Example" handout (1 per participant)
List of key findings from your project

PREPARE BEFORE

N/A

WARM UP

Pass out the blank "Using the Data for Change" handout to the group. Explain the format of the grid and then go through each category, discussing with the group the following questions:
Who needs to hear the information we have collected? What is the best way to get the information to them?
Which strategies would work well to disseminate the information collected to the targeted audience?
What is the final result we are seeking? What change do we want to see as the outcome of our action/dissemination?
Do we have any special skills or talents within the group to use in this part of the project?
Do we have access to any resources we could use in this part of the project (e.g., recording studio, an auditorium)?

EXPERIENCE

Have the group brainstorm to fill in a chart with their ideas.

REFLECT

Once they have finished, pass out in the filled-in chart. Have the group compare the two charts to see if there are any ideas the members have missed any ideas they might want to consider for their project.

SUMMARIZE

Once the group has finished it's listing, go through the list together and determines which of the ideas are possible according to the time, financial and human available resources.

DEMONSTRATE

Decide how the group will get to action and make a plan.

Appendix O

Lesson Plan: Introduction to Participatory Action Research

GET STARTED: YPAR BASICS: INTRODUCTION TO PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH
By Rebecca G. Kaplan, CU Engage, University of Colorado - 55 minutes

OBJECTIVES

To co-construct an informal definition of Participatory Action Research
To assemble an initial idea of the process your group might follow during your PAR work

MATERIALS

Butcher paper/flip chart paper (3 pieces)
Markers
PAR Process Cards (see below)
Notecards (1 per participant)

PREPARE BEFORE

Write "Participatory" on the top of one piece of butcher paper/flip chart paper. Write "Action" on the top of another. Write "Research" on the top of the last one. Place all three on different walls in the room. Print and cut out the PAR Process Cards, including 5 blank ones.

WARM UP

Break down the PAR definition, starting with "Research" chart paper. Ask the following questions and have a volunteer record ideas generated.
When you hear the word "research," what do you think of?
Who do you picture doing research? What does a researcher look like?
Where do you picture research being done? What does it look like?
After generating ideas and listing them on the paper, explain how PAR re-defines who does research and what counts as research.
Then move to the wall with the "Participatory" chart paper. Ask the following questions and have a volunteer record ideas generated.
What do you think of when you hear the word "participatory?"
What does it mean to participate?
Who are the participants on our team? Who else might be a part of our work?
How can our participation add to or change our original thoughts about "research?"
Last, move to the wall with the "Action" chart paper. Ask the following questions and have a volunteer record ideas generated.
What do you think of when you hear the word "action?"
How can "action" add to or change our original thoughts about "research?"

EXPERIENCE

Pass out PAR process cards to each participant. Designate a part of the room that will be the beginning of the process, and show how the process will form a circle organized

clockwise. Have participants silently arrange themselves in the order that makes most sense to them. Participants can communicate with hand motions but not words. Stop everyone where they are after about 5 minutes.

Discuss the steps and their order. Start with the person standing at the beginning of the process. In order, ask each person to read their step and describe why they put themselves where they did. Ask the group if anyone disagrees or would want to put that step somewhere else. Discuss as a group. When the group suggests additional steps or repeating steps, ask a participant to write the step on a blank card and add it in. Participants may move themselves as the discussion illuminates places where moves make sense to the group.

Have everyone set their papers down in order, and have a volunteer type or write the list, so the group may come back to it at future meetings.

REFLECT

Facilitation a discussion using the following reflection questions:
What did you notice during the PAR process activity?
What steps do you think might be the most new to you?
What are you most excited or nervous about?

SUMMARIZE

Participatory Action Research sounds like a mouthful, but when we break down the term and look at assumptions and ideas that come up around each word within the term, we can begin to construct a shared definition of what PAR means to us. Similarly, the research process can feel daunting. As we arrange the steps in the process and discuss each one in relation to the rest, we can begin to see that as a group we already have intuition about how to go about the work.

DEMONSTRATE

Everyone write down a definition of PAR on a notecard, or draw a picture or symbol to show how you are thinking about PAR. Read definitions aloud in a go-around (if group is small) or have several volunteers read their definitions.

PAR Process Cards

Form a strong team	Analyze data
Reflect on prior experiences	Decide key findings from data
Develop critical perspectives on "what could be"	Discuss implications of data – "so what?"
Figure out what you know and don't know	Map who has power in relation to the problem
Identify research questions	Select action steps – "now what?"
Meet with key players	Engage in dialogue with adult personnel about your findings
Design research protocols	Evaluate whether you achieved your goals
Collect data	