

Youth Participatory Action Research and the Four C's of Productive Group Work

Praxis Project Thesis: Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts — as part of the Community, Youth, and Education Studies Major at Clark University

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Abstract

This study analyzed the experiences of Clark University Students' in Professor K's Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) class in collaboration with a Claremont Academy high school class. The research examined how Clark Students and Claremont Students were able to form collaborative relationships in order to create "burning questions" and conduct research together on an online platform during a worldwide pandemic. I investigated the factors that enhance relationship building and the factors that hinder relationship building by analyzing instances of collaboration, communication, cooperation, and community in YPAR through the varied experiences of members of this class.

Introduction

My Fall 2020 semester at Clark was a rollercoaster of ups and downs, changing plans, and busy schedules sitting behind a computer. COVID-19 threw a wrench into my praxis ideas, plans, research, and more. I wanted my site to involve the recreation department that I had been working at for the past few years, but because of the pandemic, I decided that it would not be the best place to conduct research. After weighing my options and figuring out what I found interesting, I reflected on my experience taking a participatory action research course with Professor Sarah Michaels and how I enjoyed doing research in collaboration with high school students. This led me to my role as PLA in Professor K's YPAR class¹. As a white person growing up in a rural town in Northeastern Connecticut, I have been given an education tailored to my needs my whole life. I never really needed to think about inequities in public education regarding language and multilingual classrooms before coming to college. Since attending Clark, I have had countless opportunities to work with the surrounding school systems and work in various classrooms with students from varied backgrounds. Through Professor K's class, my classmates and I dug into research questions surrounding language, engaging in research with youth from Claremont Academy. This semester, while several things changed throughout, I was able to learn so much about what it means to be an emerging multilingual student in the United States.

At the beginning of the semester, my Claremont student partner Andrea, fellow CYES classmate Jenny, and I engaged in conversation about what language meant to us and theorized an important question that we found interesting regarding language. First, I felt that it was important for us to get to know each other, even though Jenny was unable to join us because of

¹ All participants names are pseudonyms.

their concussion. Nonetheless, we chatted on Zoom our first session about what interested us and shared background information about ourselves. We found, shortly after talking, that we both really liked playing video games and that we both played Call of Duty: Warzone. I found this especially interesting and valuable because we are both female-identifying students that both enjoy playing a game predominately used by men and found that we had many commonalities. While we worked and discussed our project, she would often mention the cool add-ons she got in the game and we would chat about life and how things were going in general, not just directly related to the project. We talked about education, where we were from, and transitioned into talking about language shortly after. Specifically, we talked about how people use many different languages on online platforms like video games but remain connected to each other through the game. We also spoke about why we would want to learn new languages.

During that semester, I was also taking a Spanish class and explained that I was interested in learning Spanish and that I sing in a few other languages because I am a music major. She then talked about her past, where she was from, what languages she spoke, and how she was also really interested in learning so many other languages. We decided to make our project question “What are some main motivations behind learning new languages and what helps people learn new languages?” She found this question interesting because she learned English when she moved to the United States because she needed to for school and wanted to look into what helped other people learn languages who had similar experiences to her in life. She also thought it would be great to hear about new tips to learn different languages because she wanted to learn Mandarin, Arabic, Portuguese, and a few other languages to be able to talk to some of her friends in their home languages and to travel. I thought that this question was very interesting because I

had started learning Spanish and have always been interested in learning new languages, so the research question was a good fit for the both of us.

However, because of internet problems and out-of-school issues Andrea was unable to continue with our project. My most important take-away in the few weeks we did work together, was that despite only working together for a few weeks, Andrea was able to give me insight into what it was like in her experience to grow up with English as a second language navigating Worcester Public Schools and we were able to form a productive and collaborative working relationship. This also encouraged me to think deeper about how COVID has been affecting Worcester Public Schools students over the past few months and how education inequality must be at an all-time high right now.

While I wish that Andrea and I were able to continue our research, this gave me another unique opportunity. I was then able to use class time to dive into my research and pay closer attention to what was happening in class in other groups. While my original research project was going to revolve around my experiences working in a group with Andrea, I shifted my project to look at the yPAR class as a whole. I joined my Clark classmates in their groups during our Thursday class session and listened in on the formulation of the research projects as they worked with their Claremont students. While observing the other groups I was able to see how my classmates were facilitating their group work. Some differences I noticed were that some groups chose to begin with an ice breaker or to talk about what they had done in the week since they had last met, while others chose to start working on their projects right away and saved chatting about their weeks for the end. Some groups had their cameras off and were talking in the chat while others had cameras on or were speaking with their microphones on. This was different based on the group members and the culture created in the group.

This led me to form my research questions.:

- 1.) How do college and high school students create collaborative relationships to do research with each other and across differences in age, education level, race, and socio-economic status?
- 2.) What were the challenges of forming relationships on an online platform?
- 3.) What was the overall experience of the yPAR course for Clark students, and how can it be improved for the future?

Through interviews, class notes, and surveys sent to both Clark students and Claremont students, I dug into these research questions to try and discover how to make yPAR more equitable for future students and how my fellow classmates were able to authentically represent youth voices.

Review of the Literature on Participatory Research

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is a process of research that places value on equitable collaborations between community members and academic partners with shared decision making throughout the research process (Jacquez, Vaughn, and Wagner, 2013). Although literature often focuses on issues affecting youth, it is relatively unusual for youth to be included in the research process (Langhout and Thomas, 2010). Researchers have found that youth are largely excluded from the discourse around schooling (Intrator and Kunzman, 2009). By partnering with youth to identify research questions and help with data collection, researchers can help to increase the chances that the research findings will be more applicable to the lives of the youth involved (Jacquez, Vaughn, and Wagner, 2013).

Students' pre-project attitudes and experiences toward group work can also relate to the quality of the research outcomes (Leeder and Shah, 2016). Finding "burning questions" seemed to be a key in the introduction to the course. Questions that were important to the youth that

mattered to them, so in turn they would be interested in doing the research (Harter 2006). The metaphor of the “burning question” seeks to help individuals – and groups – to take ownership of their inquiries, beginning with their research questions (Conrad, C.F., Johnson, J.L., & Gupta, D., 2007).

Most importantly, the ideas of Brindley, Walti, and Blaschke’s (2009) highlight a continuum of involvement providing a useful framework for thinking about learners to create an effective working group. In a collaborative learning environment, knowledge is shared among learners as they work toward a common goal. Student-to-student learning interactions can be viewed as four pillars: communication, collaboration, cooperation, and community, (Brindley, Blaschke, and Walti, 2009). Important factors highlighted are also the timing of group formations and “meaning making/relevance.” Time given in order for group members to discuss their shared interests and get to know each other is crucial in order to form relationships that allow collaboration and communication to occur before the task is assigned (Brindley, Walti, and Blaschke, 2009). They highlight how the group assignment is an opportunity to apply their individual real-life knowledge to their projects making their work meaningful and relevant.

However, it is important to recognize that a common factor in youth-partnered research is the shift from the typical student-teacher (or college student to high school student) power dynamic relationship to including youth as active participants in the research process (Flicker, 2008). Notions of power are important when forming relationships and creating a sense of community. Additionally, in the United States, BIPOC have long been excluded from opportunity pathways and upward mobility (Kijakazi, Brown, Charleston, & Runes, 2019). Discriminatory policies and institutional practices have created deep inequities across economic sectors including education, employment, political representation, health, and the justice system.

These inequities have been multiplied by the COVID-19 pandemic (Mitchell, 2020). BIPOC students disproportionately experience learning loss due to the pandemic, which is amplified by policies already in place that leave students of color with fewer resources, (Hancock and Sarakatsannis, 2020). Many home environments were not prepared to or able to provide a comparable learning environment to school (Slay, 2021). Power dynamics and inequity are important to consider when discussing collaboration, communication, cooperation, and community in a group research project.

Conceptual Framework

At the start of my project, I just wanted to see how group members were able to make relationships with each other or if they were able to create relationships. After a few weeks, I found that the collaborative aspect of doing a group project together while still balancing a friendly relationship was more interesting to me. The concepts that became salient for me in my investigation were communication, collaboration, and cooperation, which are factors that foster a greater sense of community and that I drew from Brindley, Walti, and Blaschke's study in 2009.

Brindley, Walti, and Blaschke's (2009) framework highlights the interpretation of collaborative learning that occurs in communities of common interest, through group tasks, and in social circles. In this collaborative learning space, students learn from each other as they try and reach a common goal. In our case, many Clark students and Claremont students had to first create a working relationship to enhance the social aspect of doing work collaboratively before they could really try and reach a common goal. They also write that this student-to-student relationship on an online platform can be seen in four pillars: Communication, Collaboration, Cooperation, and Community.

Essentially, this means that people begin by talking (communication), go on to share their ideas and work together (collaboration), do things together but each with his or her own purpose (cooperation), and then reaching a common goal together (community). When considering communication, I wanted to look at the different pathways by which group members were talking to each other both in class time and out of class time. While coding for collaboration, I chose to analyze it through the research questions and how the questions were chosen. I really enjoy the format of these four terms, but I am interested in interrogating the meaning of “cooperation”. In my framing of my data, I have come to identify cooperation as linked to delegation. While they “do things together”, they are also breaking up the work in ways that work for them and grasping at their roles in the group as compilers, facilitators, partners, or helpers. These four concepts are described as interdependent. They describe that they can all occur simultaneously, one at a time, two at a time (in variation), or three at a time (in variation) depending on the group.

While I agree with the categorization of the pillars, I challenge the framework and instead pose that communication, collaboration, and cooperation can lead to a greater sense of community. In my definition of community, I describe community as group members utilizing communication, collaboration, and cooperation in order to reach a common goal while developing a working relationship. I am interested in analyzing how we can see communication, collaboration, and cooperation in our group projects, what hindered the ability to make relationships, and what enabled relationships to be formed in order to create this community towards a larger goal. What I believe to be missing from the original framework is notions of power, inequity, and how this impacts relationship building. There are many unbalanced power dynamics at play in this research including student-teacher dynamics, College student-Claremont

student dynamics, and my role PLA-classmates dynamic. Additionally, inequity can strongly impact these pillars considering language differences, socio-economic status, and accessibility to technology. These power dynamics and inequities can potentially hinder communication, collaboration, and cooperation which can affect the sense of community within a group.

Methods

Methodology

The method I used in this research was a qualitative inquiry. Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing data to further understand the experiences of others. Qualitative research can be used to try and understand how people experience the world through different lenses. I believe that this method of research is a good fit for my project, as I am seeking to understand the different experiences of those in our yPAR class and make sense of how I fit into my roles within the class. By interviewing and collecting survey data, this will help me draw conclusions based on the opinions and experiences of those involved. I will be using the framework of Brindley, Walti, and Blaschke to see how students in our class communicated, collaborated, and cooperated in their individual groups, in order to create community and build relationships.

Epistemological Stance

My research will not be generalizable in a traditional and positivistic sense. However, I will specifically attempt to uncover how past PAR student's feel PAR could be made better, how the class processes supported and hindered relationship building, and offer insights for the construction of more equitable and effective relationship building in future YPAR classes. I will be able to make claims based on the experiences of my classmates and based on my own

experiences in my group and observations in class. By seeing and hearing about the ways by which my Clark classmates attempted to form relationships, I will know what worked for them and use that information to see commonalities between the methods other students used to create connections with their Claremont students. I will also be looking at how the Claremont students felt about doing research with Clark students and if they felt like their voices were heard in their projects.

Site Description

My site was Education 153 with Professor K. This was an online class because of the pandemic, so it was a virtual site. The 10 college students met in person on Mondays from 1:25-2:40 in order to learn the concepts and research tools we would be using in order to conduct our research with youth. During class time on Mondays, I would participate in class discussions about readings and small group activities. I also made myself available outside of class time to meet with any of my classmates that needed assistance. On Thursdays from 1:25-2:07, 10 Clark students and 16 Claremont students met all together online in breakout rooms. During class time on Thursdays, I jumped around to different breakout rooms to observe the conversations occurring in the other groups, took notes, and answered questions that occasionally popped up. From 2:07-2:40, the Clark students would reconvene on our class Zoom link separate from the Claremont students and continue with class discussion, reflecting on our experiences from that day with our youth partners. In the past I took Social Justice Participatory Action Research with Professor Sarah Michaels, where we did research in a 10th grade math class at Claremont Academy. I really enjoyed doing research in this class, but I especially enjoyed forming

relationships with different students and talking to them in class. This sparked my interest in relationship building in research.

Positionality

As PLA, not only was I an outsider coming into the classroom as a person in a position of power, but also as a white, English speaking college student in a multi-lingual classroom at Claremont Academy. I come from a place of privilege in that I have always been in educational settings that were tailored to my social location. Several classmates of mine voiced their concerns about Participatory Action Research at the beginning of the term. We worried that we would not be able to uplift the high school youth voices and that the idea of PAR itself could be problematic. We were concerned about how there is often a white savior undertone to the research in that primarily white academics enter spaces of primarily Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) youth. In YPAR, lived and academic knowledges are supposed to be equally measured, but they rarely are in practice. Additionally, it is typically assumed that the youth have only lived experience and not academic knowledge and that the academics are the ones who get the credit for writing the papers in academia. We, as a class, wanted to break this down and ensure that we were not trying to impose our knowledge on the high school students and let them come to conclusions and analyze data on their own terms. Throughout the semester, I heard my classmates struggle with the idea of doing research with youth while balancing the research goals of the project and forming relationships with their Claremont student group partners with the added barrier of an online platform. As a PLA for Prof. K's course, I was able to work with one Claremont student in a small group and go around in the different breakout rooms of all the groups to observe and take notes. In the breakout rooms, I was able to see the

different relationships my classmates had been able to create over the course of the semester and I came to know more of the Claremont students in the smaller breakout room setting, where the stakes were lower. I sat and took notes on the different tools my classmates were utilizing to help their partners think deeper and more critically. My positionality shaped the type of data I was able to collect. Clark students were more willing to speak to me in interviews, while Claremont students preferred to fill out the surveys.

Participants

The participants of my research are my classmates from both Clark University and Claremont Academy. There were 10 Clark students and about 16 Claremont students. The Clark class members were primarily white female Community, Youth, and Education studies juniors. The Claremont student participants were primarily people of color, in eleventh and twelfth grade, and emerging multi-lingual students. Demographics are extremely important for this project because the Clark student classroom consisted of 7 white women and one white man, as well as two Clark student that identified as BIPOC. The Claremont students are primarily BIPOC and emerging multi-lingual students. I see life through the lens of my lived experiences, and the project focused primarily on issues surrounding language that were relevant in the lives of the Claremont students. It was our job to encourage the Claremont students to voice their opinions and discover answers to the questions that were important to them.

Data Collection

The types of data I collected were surveys, interviews, and field notes. The interviews took place at the end of December and beginning of January and soon after I transcribed

everyone's answers. I sent out the surveys the week of December 15th and they had until mid-January to complete them. Ultimately, I ended up receiving survey answers from nineteen participants of the class. This included six out of the ten college students and thirteen out of the sixteen high school students. I was able to interview five classmates, Professor K, and took field notes during class. The interviews were on average 30 minutes long and I sought to uncover a deeper understanding of other people's experiences within the class and compare that to the experience that I had. The interviews were structured with pre-determined questions to discuss their projects from beginning to end, talk about what went well for them and what could have gone better, and what they did that helped them build a relationship with their Claremont youth partners.

Data Analysis

When I first began looking at my data, I separated my findings through the four conceptual lenses of communication, collaboration, cooperation, and community. To find markers of communication, I looked at how students were speaking to each other and on which platforms: texting, email, social media, Zoom chat, in person, etc. Whenever participants spoke about talking to one another, I separated it into a category to analyze how students communicated with each other in order to create a relationship.

Similarly, when students mentioned their ideas that they were offering to their group members or about their research questions, I separated that information into the collaboration section to show that by coming together and offering ideas to each other as a group that would be categorized as collaboration. To find markers of cooperation, I asked participants about their roles in the group. Whenever students talked about their responsibilities and the tasks that were

delegated to them, I coded that data as cooperation. Compared to the original conceptual framework by Brindley, Walti, and Blaschke, I wanted to take communication, collaboration, and cooperation and show how those three pillars can lead to a greater sense of community. To look at community, I used data that showed group partners striving towards an end goal, their final projects, and reflections on their experience in the class. There were some instances where there were markers of two or three pillars within one data point, adding to the idea that these pillars are not dependent of one another and can all be working together, one at time, or in variation.

The Course: Coming Together

Pre-Claremont Introduction

Clark students and Claremont students are no strangers to one another. Clark students often do volunteer work, field work for Clark classes, and sometimes even become Claremont faculty themselves post-graduation. This course, however, brought these two communities together in a unique way. Essentially, we were put into small groups (typically one Clark student with two Claremont students) to discover language-based research questions of importance to our assigned Claremont partners and then create a plan to collect and analyze data about these questions. In describing the intentions of the course, Professor K explained:

“The theory of change very much centers the youth. So, not the Clark students as much as the high school youth and the idea that, ... for the young people, it is that by creating opportunities where they can draw on what they know and what their experiences are [we] can facilitate a process by which they come to see

themselves as the powerful young people that they are” (Interview, Professor K, 4/29/21, p. 1).

During Monday’s class time, Clark students were introduced to research tools needed in order to help facilitate the small group conversations with our youth partners. We engaged in discourse about relationship building, read articles about yPAR, coding, and other research methods, explored the bigger picture of this research, and were told where to begin with our youth partners. Very few Clark students had worked with high school-aged students before and were nervous about their effectiveness working with students that were not elementary-aged, never mind high school students that were emerging multilingual students. Personally, I had never worked with students over the age of 10, so it was very easy for me to empathize and feel this nervousness as well, going into my small group. We had talked as a class of college students for weeks about why it was important to form a relationship with our groupmates and putting this into practice seemed daunting. We discussed icebreakers and trust, but most importantly, we were told not to worry about the outcome and to focus on the process. The importance was placed on this process of learning how to conduct research, rather than worry about the final product of our research projects. As Prof. K noted in my interview with her, “My theory of change for the college students is that the college students need to experience first-hand what I know I talked about a lot in the classroom which is, you know, how do you support the young people to showcase their brilliance” (Interview, Professor K, 4/29/21, p. 1).

Despite this repeated guidance from the students, one of the challenges that emerged in this study, that I take up below, was the tension between focusing on the process vs. the final product.

The Process

Starting from the beginning, there were many difficulties and changes of plans to the original set-up of the class. Originally there were more Clark and Claremont students but because of a combination of two Claremont classes into one and a small amount of Clark students switched out of the class, we became a group of ten Clark students and 16 Claremont students after the first classes. Groups were rearranged and this shift pushed back our original timeline. Many groups were forced to go back to the beginning or hadn't yet been able to start because of attendance issues. At this point, a college classmate and I were assigned to two Claremont students to begin our own research in addition to my role as a PLA. This group dissipated quickly. One of my Claremont students stopped coming, one did not ever come, and my classmate left Clark for the remainder of the semester due to personal issues. This left me to seize the opportunity to jump around to different groups to see what everyone else's experiences were like. Groups met in individual breakout rooms and Clark students began facilitating conversations about language with groups deciding on research questions that were important to the youth. Research questions that were posed include, "How do students express themselves in languages other than English at school?" "How do people who are ESL students feel about what help they get while applying to college and once they are in college?" and "What do people who speak more than one language think are the best ways to learn language?" After discovering a research question that was important to the Claremont students, groups were able to dive into the research creating surveys, conducting interviews, and then eventually analyzing data to create final presentations.

The Four C's of Productive Group Work

Communication

Diving head-on into these research questions proved difficult starting with the first class. Balancing Claremont student involvement and relationship building while setting objectives and completing tasks was a frequent topic of conversation. What do you do when you are worried about creating a relationship with a youth researcher while also staying on task and getting work done?

How do I work with individuals who have different priorities than I do?

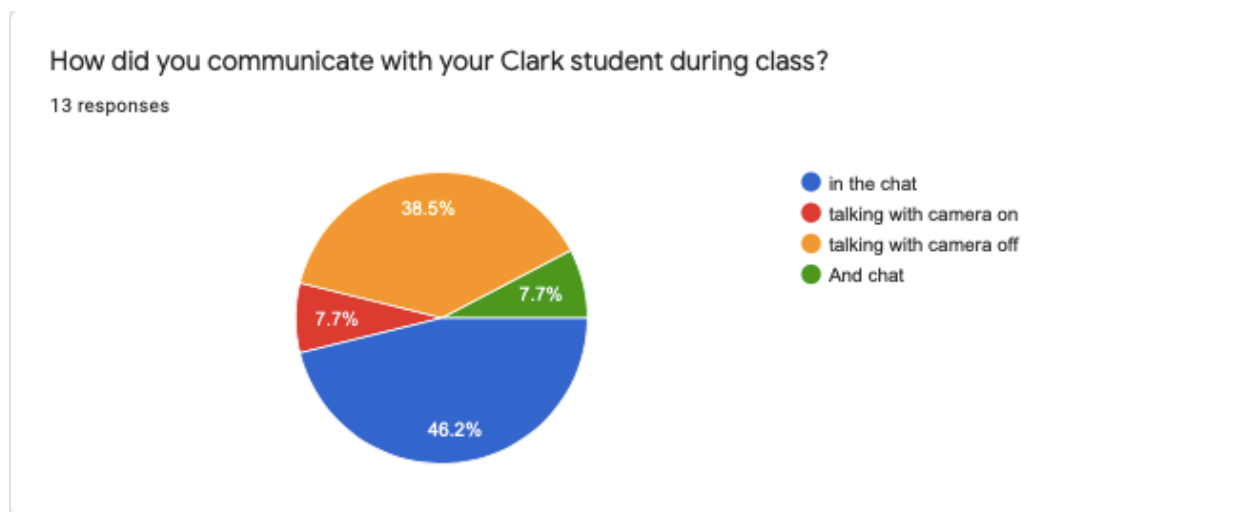
The priorities of college students can be very different than the priorities of high school students when it comes to academics, personal problems, and maintaining social lives. This can be influenced by technology issues, accessibility, familial situations, or even friendship problems that students face in high school and college. Additionally, online classes are difficult and attention spans are very easily thwarted due to ample distractions. Because of this, a supportive classroom culture with open communication and understanding must be created. We cannot automatically expect high school or college students, to be completely present in an online class when they are working from home under unknown conditions, with potentially unstable Wi-Fi and technology (or both).

How do we create this environment that encourages open communication?

According to Brindley, Walti, and Blaschke's (2009) framework, communication is a pillar of the "continuum of involvement" and is the step before collaboration, cooperation, and community. In class there were many different means of communication. While Clark Students

came to class with their cameras and microphones on, Claremont students would typically have their cameras and microphones off. There is a certain level of trust and comfort that is built when you turn your camera on in an online class. There are different types of online classroom cultures. While having cameras on during class time has been a norm in many of my college classes, it is common for cameras to be turned off in Worcester Public Schools. As college students, having our cameras on during class time is less of a choice. We pay to attend the institution and there are certain expectations of engagement that come with attending a collage class, even on Zoom. Moreover, Claremont students were not required to have their cameras or microphones on at any time, often utilizing Zoom's chat feature to facilitate conversation.

We were encouraged to use forms of communication that were accessible to both Clark and Claremont students in their individual groups. Despite differences, Clark students entered the classroom optimistic with the hope that they would be able to create a communicative relationship with their group partners, however, this proved to be difficult. According to the responses of thirteen Claremont students, 46.2% of them communicated with their Clark student exclusively through the chat function, while 38.5% of students indicated that they communicated via talking with their cameras off. While the chat function is a useful tool, it is extremely difficult to have a conversation through it. It takes time to type in order to respond, which can result in 2-5 minutes of waiting for an answer before the conversation can continue.



Claremont Student Survey Figure 1

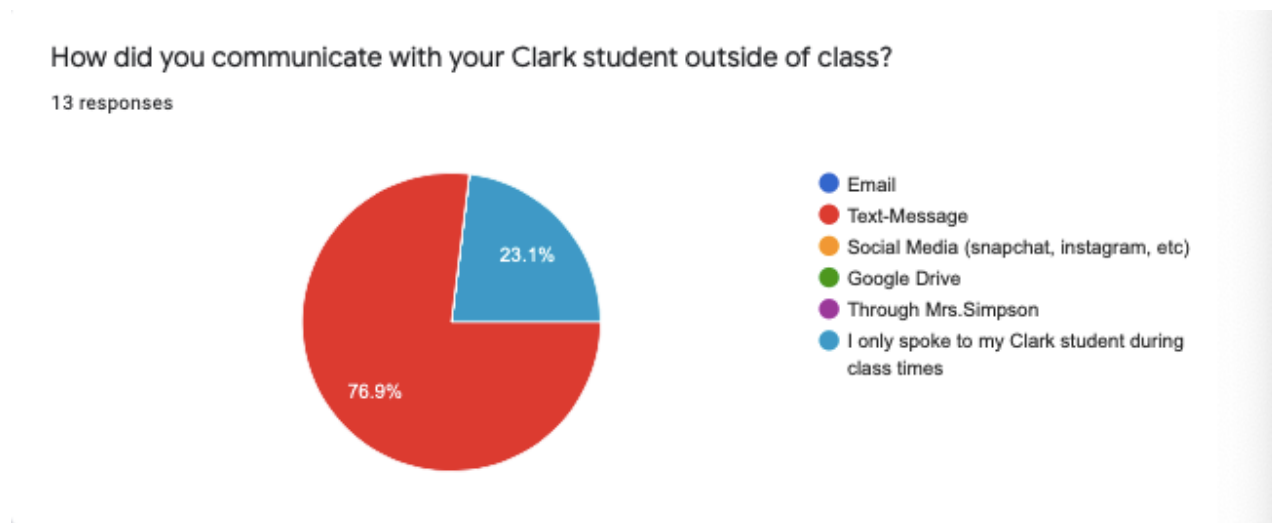
Similarly, it hinders the ability to create a relationship with this type of communication because of slow internet and technical difficulties. When asked the question “what were the biggest issues you faced?” Clark students responded with answers about technology and communication difficulties indicating “time and absence constraints,” “internet issues mostly,” “I struggled with [Claremont Students] keeping their cameras off, it felt like I was often talking to myself,” and “technology.” Alternatively, when asked “what do you find most valuable about doing research with you,” there were many positive communication-based answers like, “learning to] constructively push conversations — to help them to continue and not remain stagnant,” and “Communication! Being able to talk freely was necessary.” While the online chat function was a hindrance to some, it also enabled other forms of communication and helped other Clark student’s learn more about their communication style and what worked best for them.

In class, there were many tools that Clark students used in order to create this sense of open communication such as: check-in questions and general conversation. Four of the Clark students who completed the survey indicated that they used these strategies to foster more

meaningful conversation. For example, one Clark student wrote, “A very intentional one [strategy to foster conversation] was starting off each meeting with some check-in question that got everyone to share some detail or trait of theirs,” (Clark Student Survey Response) and another stated, “I tried to keep the conversation flowing and I asked them a lot of questions about themselves. I always made sure we had time during the last few minutes of session just to talk. I also tried to be very positive, at the end each session I would tell them what great progress we were making and recap all that we accomplished that day” (Clark Student Survey Response). Additionally, conversation was also important for communication. When speaking about getting to know each other, one Clark student wrote, “A lot of it was just having conversations about different topics and just getting to know each other/ each other's point of view that way,” (Clark Student Survey Response) and another wrote, “I facilitated meaningful conversations and engagement with the material” (Clark Student Survey Response). This conversation led to getting to know each other better, further engagement and meaning for these Clark students.

These conversations about life and getting to know each other ultimately enabled students to create a sense of open communication. When Claremont students were asked about their favorite part of the class, answers often included the “talking” aspects of doing research. For example, one Claremont student said their favorite part of the class was, “When we talked about native languages with the college students,” (Claremont Student Survey Response) another said, “[my favorite part] was like going into our groups and talking to our group and asking questions,” (Claremont Student Survey Response). This shows the shared interest between Clark and Claremont students in wanting to talk to each other to get to know each other’s interests and asking each other questions.

There were many factors outside of class that affects a student’s ability to be present in classes, which resulted in many missed classes. Therefore, in addition to in-class communication, out-of-class communication was equally relevant. According to survey data, ten Claremont students reported that they spoke to their Clark student partner outside of class via text-message.



Claremont Student Survey Figure 2

In the digital age we are in now, this is especially important. There is another level of trust formed when you are willing to communicate with someone outside of class to communicate your needs and problems. Text-Messaging outside of class was one of the main enablers of forming relationships, which leads to the ability to form a more constructive and openly communicative relationship. By the end of the class, 46.2% of Claremont students indicated that on a scale of one to five (five being the most comfortable) that they would rate their comfort of working with their Clark student at a five and 38.5% indicated their comfort as a four out of five ranking. This shows that through this sense of open communication, they were able to form a comfortable working relationship throughout their research together.

Collaboration and “Burning Questions”

A “burning question” is a concept from Susan Harter (2006). In class we discussed the idea of a “burning questions.” This term, as described by Harter, means that we seek to find questions that young people want to ask and to find questions that feel important to the youth. Professor K’s framework was built on the idea that young people have important things to say and that their voices should be uplifted to become change makers in their own lives. The intention of the class was to create opportunities where youth can draw on what they already know from their experiences in life so that they view themselves as individuals with a voice. As described by Professor K:

“They are beaten down in some ways by the negative messaging they get from their teachers at school, like, linguistic discrimination. [The effects of] being called ESL kids throughout their schooling and what that does to their sense of self.” (Interview, Professor. K, 4/29/21, p. 1).

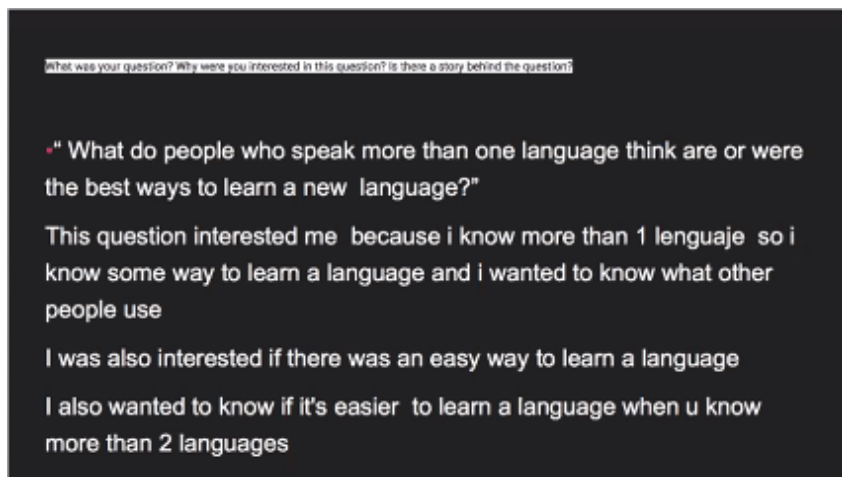
This class hoped to provide a space where young people were able to see their own power to enable them to become agents of change in their own lives in collaboration with Clark students. This collaboration not only is meant to support the youth and “showcase their brilliance,” (Interview Prof. K, 4/29/21, p. 1) but also to teach Clark students how to support such efforts first hand. Clark students acted as guides through this research, presenting their ideas and material in order to make the project more cohesive and accessible to the Claremont students.

Questions that Clark students and Claremont students formed together shows the importance of collaboration in YPAR. This process helped give high school students the agency to explore something that is important to them. Many Claremont students did not have the

educational experiences to know how to collect data, conduct interviews, and form concise questions; however, when the Clark students were introduced into that environment using guiding questions and talk moves to encourage idea sharing, together they were able to create researchable questions with importance to the Claremont students. As one of the Clark students expressed it:

“It was so exciting whenever we were talking about a question (survey or interview) and I would flip the question on the students and ask them about their thoughts and they would have so much to say! It was amazing because I could tell that this subject really mattered to them.” (Clark Student Survey Response)

An example of this would be when one Claremont student reflected that, “Because I am Hispanic, I was interested in learning if people wanted to learn other languages, especially learning and speaking Spanish” (Claremont Student Slideshow Response).



Claremont Student Slideshow Figure 3

This question was important to the student because of their background and built on the experiences they have had in their lives, but they may have not had the tools needed in order to create a research question and collect data without the ideas and input of the Clark student.

Additionally, in figure 3, we can see their research question “What do people who speak more than one language think are or were the best ways to learn a new language.” They then cite that they were interested in that question because they “know more than 1 lenguaje” and were interested in other multi-lingual experiences because of their own experiences with language.

There were several factors that hindered the ability to create a truly collaborative environment, however. One problem that several Clark students were worried about was if they were taking too much control in the group projects. One Clark student expressed this in their response to the survey at the end of the course:

“One of the biggest challenges I faced was representing the youth's voices equally and fairly. It was not always easy to get them to share and participate, and I often felt like I was overpowering the group with my voice. I wasn't confident that they felt they ‘owned’ the project, but I had to keep us moving in order to get things accomplished.” (Clark Student Survey Response)

Clark students struggled to find the balance between presenting new information to the Claremont students, while trying not to overpower the group conversation. Despite this, when asked “what did you find to be the most valuable about doing research with youth?” answers included “they had different experiences and stories [to offer to our project],” and the “empowerment of youth ideas.” While Clark students were generally worried about their ability to authentically represent and uplift the ideas of their youth group collaborators, Claremont students seemed to feel like they were important contributors to the discussion. When asked “after this class, how do you feel about doing research?” I received answers like, “it kind [of taught] me a lot of things like I can actually do [it].” This high school student revealed that they

gained confidence in their own ability to engage in meaningful research. Similarly, another student stated, “I am capable of conducting research.”

Not only did they develop their sense of confidence to do this work, but some students also even came to enjoy this work, ideally because they felt that their ideas and perspectives mattered. As one high school student indicated, “After this class research I felt I was enjoying the things I was doing.” When asked “what was the best part about the class”, seven of the thirteen high school respondents indicated that the best part was when they were making and discussing these questions with their Clark students. For example, one student stated that the best part was “When we talk in group and discuss questions,” another stated the best part was “like going into our groups and talking to our group and asking questions.” Additionally, working with a college student was highlighted by three Claremont students stating the best part was “working with a college student”, “working with Clark students to come up with questions and ideas”, and “how I had to work with a college student” (Claremont Student Survey Responses). This shows how students came to enjoy the collaboration between Claremont and Clark students and how they enjoyed asking questions and sharing their thoughts.

Additionally, when asked “how do you feel your opinions and ideas were valued in your project group,” over 84% of Claremont student participants indicated over seven on a scale of one to ten on feeling that their voices were heard. These answers speak on the collaborative process that occurred between the Clark students and the Claremont students. They worked together in order to create research questions that were meaningful and important to the youth, which shows the Clark students ability to successfully uplift their partners voices and make their youth partners opinions feel valued.

Cooperation and Power Dynamics

Cooperation is described by Brindley, Walti, and Blaschke's (2009) as doing things together but each with his or her own purpose. For our purposes I have broken that down into cooperation as delegation and assignment of roles within groups. Essentially, they decided on who was completing which tasks in order to more effectively get them done. When considering cooperation, we must also look at the power dynamics at play in our class. In a typical class, you can see the teacher-student power dynamic. Here, the teacher has power over the student creating an imbalance. In our YPAR class, there were three power imbalances at play.

The first power dynamic is the student-teacher dynamic between the high school teacher and her high school students, Professor K and her college students, and the high school teacher and Professor K with all the students. The second power dynamic at play is the imbalance between the Clark students and Claremont students given the differences in age, education, and positionality in the class. In their individual groups, the Clark students were entering the high school student's space and introducing new information to them each week. The Clark students were in a position with a higher sense of authority because of the knowledge and tasks they were coming into the groups with, despite not having actual authority over the Claremont students. Additionally, language differences can complicate this power dynamic. Because they were bilingual or multilingual, the youth had further insight and lived experiences relating directly to the research questions. This gave the Claremont students more power over some of the Clark students that spoke only English. Mainstream English and academic writing was something that the Clark students were familiar with, however, Clark students were encouraged to have Claremont students write sections of the final paper in the ways that they were comfortable with. This meant potential spelling and grammatical errors. This also gave power to the Claremont

students. They were able to make sense of the research in their own words and on their own terms, which meant that the opinions written by youth in the final paper were their authentic thoughts. The third power dynamic at play was my position in the class as PLA. While I did not have authority over the Claremont students or Clark students, I would go around to the groups to observe and often would be asked for advice or help. While I was a Clark student in the Clark class, I was situated as a Peer Learning Advisor (PLA) because I had taken a YPAR course in the past, so I helped guide some of the Clark students in their research and answered questions they had about assignments as I visited the different breakout rooms. These three power imbalances are important to consider when assigning roles in the class and individual groups in order to complete tasks.

Class and race can complicate this further when considering how some students also had to overcome inequities including access to stable Wi-Fi and technology, familial responsibilities, differences in socio-economic status, and racial inequalities, all during a pandemic that disproportionately affected immigrant, BIPOC, and lower-class neighborhoods. According to Faith Mitchell of the Urban Institute, “Children of color have also disproportionately felt the educational effects of the pandemic, as elementary and secondary schools across the country transitioned to virtual learning” (Mitchell, 2020). She goes on to explain that people of color, especially Black and Latinx people, are not only more likely to contract COVID-19, but they are also more significantly affected by its economic consequences. As many schools transitioned to virtual learning, many home environments were not prepared or able to provide comparable learning environments for youth. One of the biggest factors contributing to this inequity was that “only 66 percent of BIPOC households in the U.S. had home broadband services in 2019” and “only 45 percent of BIPOC Americans owned a desktop or laptop computer in 2015” (Slay,

2020). Although most low and moderate income BIPOC families have some form of internet connection, many families are under connected with mobile-only access and inconsistent connectivity. As a result, many BIPOC students experienced “learning loss” or how much learning students lose during school closure impacted by remote learning, the quality of remote instruction, home support, and the degree of engagement (Hancock and Sarakatsannis, 2020). This learning loss, in addition to language differences and policies that already leave students of color with fewer or lower-quality resources, larger class sizes, is important to consider when talking about our research. While many Claremont students had access to technology, often there would be connection issues or home-life conflicts which made missing class time necessary. Overcoming these inequities was a big part in the success of as group’s work and was a factor when determining the Claremont student and Clark students roles within the group.

Role assignment happened informally and naturally in the individual groups depending on the Clark and Claremont student involvement. During the Monday class time, the Clark student class prepared for the time spent with the youth partners. Clark students would come to the joint class with tasks prepared based on what they needed to get done and guided the conversation so that those tasks could be completed. Clark students as a cohort would meet alone on Mondays, completing readings about new tools such as interview skills, photo-voice, and coding. They then would go to the joint class on Thursday and would explain the concepts of each tool to their Claremont partners. They would then come up with tasks for each Claremont member to complete over the course of the next week, such as conducting interviews, taking pictures for photo-voice, or by the end of the semester, writing sections of their joint paper and creating slides of their PowerPoint presentation. This shows cooperation because they were able

to meet together, go over information, and then assign tasks to each other for the next week according to their roles in the group.

When college students were asked to describe their role in the group in one word. Responses included “facilitator”, “compiler”, and “organizer.” They were responsible for presenting the information, making sure their group partners understood the material, and then assigned tasks for the Claremont students to complete. Towards the end of the semester, Clark students were tasked with making “homework sheets” for their Claremont student partners, an example of one is shown in Figure 4.

Research question: Why do high school students talk differently in different settings?

1. Why is our research question important? What can be accomplished by answering this question, what would we be able to find out? Write 4 or 5 sentences/bullet points.

Here's what you guys have said about the research question so far. Use these notes as a starting point to say why the question is important.

- It's how you talk differently in class and outside of class
- In a classroom where people speak a different language than you and that they feel bad
- Because they don't know if you are talking about them

- Because of who you are with
- In a classroom you have to be like more educational and be more productive with classwork so everyone will be talking about the same topic
- Outside of school it's like a different lifestyle not everyone does the same thing like how they do in class

Worksheet
Example Figure 4

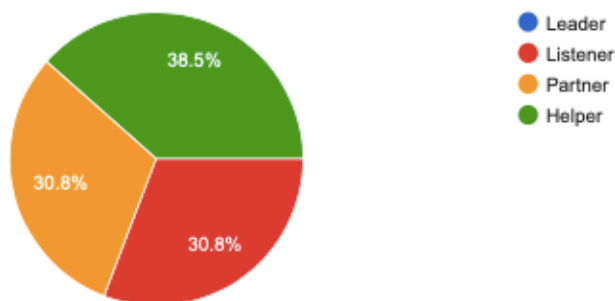
Claremont students were then asked to complete them for the next class and use that information to help construct their final paper.

When Claremont students were asked the same question about describing their role in the group, 38.5% of participants chose “helper” as their role, while 30.8% chose “listener” and

30.8% chose “partner”. No Claremont students indicated that they felt like a leader in their project, despite it being an option.

Pick the word that best describes your role in the group?

13 responses



Claremont Student Survey
Figure 5

When asked why they chose that word, student responses included ideas about listening to what information their Clark student partner was bringing to them and helping complete the tasks that they were assigned. When asked to elaborate on their choice, some Claremont students stated that they picked listener because “[I] will not really speak, I would of listen and do my work”, others stated, “I [just] listened most of the time but I did pop some few ideas”, and “because most of the time i will just listen to what people say’n”. Alternatively, when asked about their choice of the word helper, they stated that they picked that word because “I helped my partner to look for answers”, “I picked helper because I was there to help them when need help to come up with ideas”, “Because I really like to help when someone [has] the answer but I do not know how to explained”, and “I picked helper because I was there to help them when they need help and come up with ideas” (Clark Student Survey Responses). This highlights the power dynamic between the college students and high school students as “facilitators/organizers/compilers” vs

“helpers/listeners” This also shows the shared responsibilities of the group members and how the work was divided. This delegation and role structure shows the cooperation between the Clark students and Claremont students as they worked on their projects on their own and completed their assigned tasks. This shows cooperation between the Clark students and the Claremont students because they have their assigned roles and agreed upon tasks split up between them in order to complete the project together.

Community

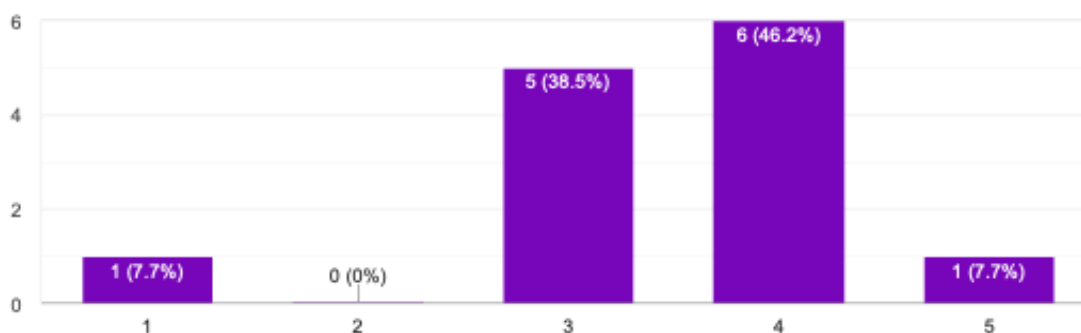
When considering community, I pose that communication, collaboration, and cooperation can lead to a greater sense of community. In my definition of community, I describe community as group members utilizing communication, collaboration, and cooperation in order to reach a common goal while developing a working relationship. To measure community, I looked at student’s relationships with research pre-class and post-class in addition to how students felt about the relationships they formed with their group partners. Many students in the Claremont class had no experience with research prior to the class and five out of thirteen Claremont students stated that they had feelings of nervousness and another five students stated that they were worried that it was going to be hard. From that point and through the rest of the class, students were able to form relationships together, get to know each other, create questions that were important to the Claremont students, and gain valuable research experience. When asked about how they felt about research post-class these answers were very different. Four out of thirteen Claremont students indicated that they felt good or great about research after they had taken the class, one stated that they felt “confident”, and another stated that “it kind (of) teached me a lot of things like I can actually do”. I think this is extremely important because Professor

K's plan when starting this class was to encourage youth to feel like they are valuable and have important things to say. When this student talked about believing that they are capable of doing research this shows that their group member was able to uplift their voice and make them feel heard and valued.

Additionally, when asked about their relationships with Clark students and how comfortable they were working with them 84.7% of participants chose four or five on a scale of one to five. When asked about their favorite parts of the class, three students stated that their favorite things were “working with Clark students,” “how I had to work with a college student,” and “talking about native languages with the college students.” This shows a level of trust built between Clark students and Claremont students based on community. Moreover, as indicated in figures 6-9 below, when asked “how well did you get to know your Clark student” and “how well did your Clark student get to know you” Clark and Claremont students most often responded with a three or four on a scale of one to five.

How well did your Clark student get to know you?

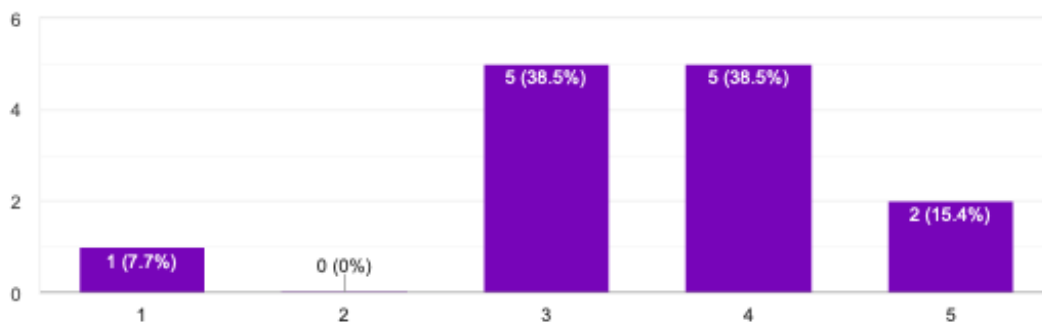
13 responses



Claremont Student Survey Figure 6

How well did you get to know your Clark student?

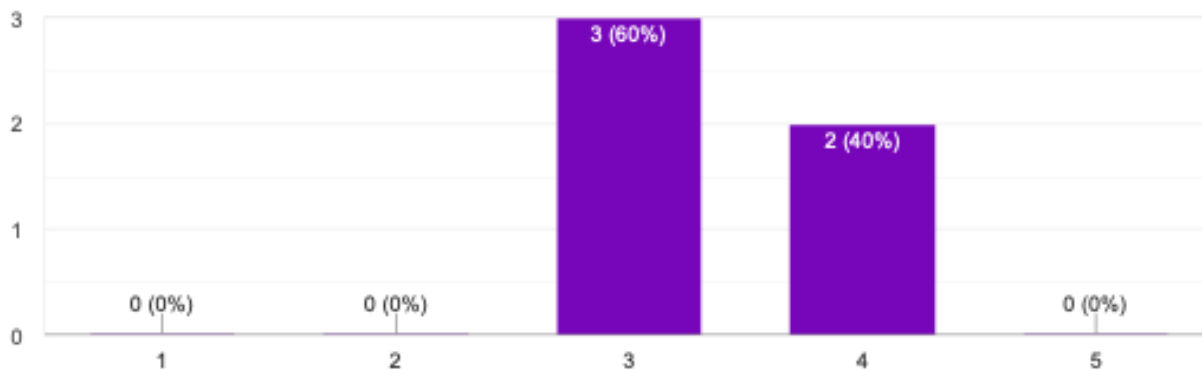
13 responses



Claremont Student Survey Figure 7

How well did your Claremont student get to know you?

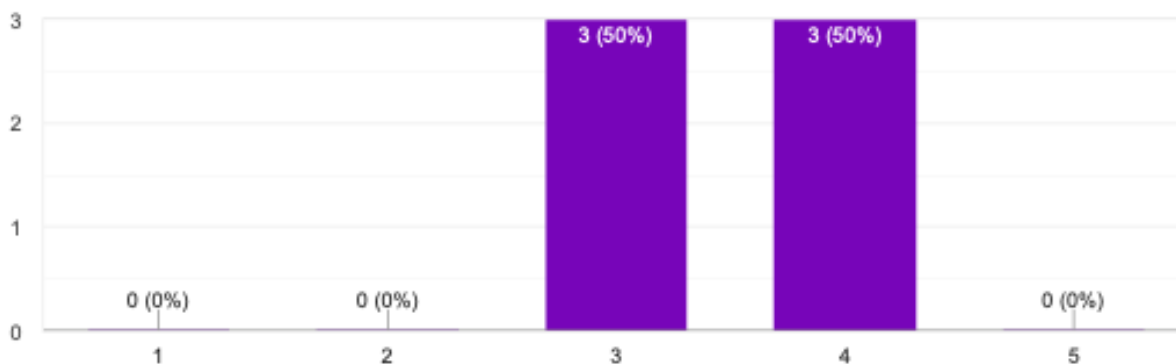
5 responses



Clark Student Survey Figure 8

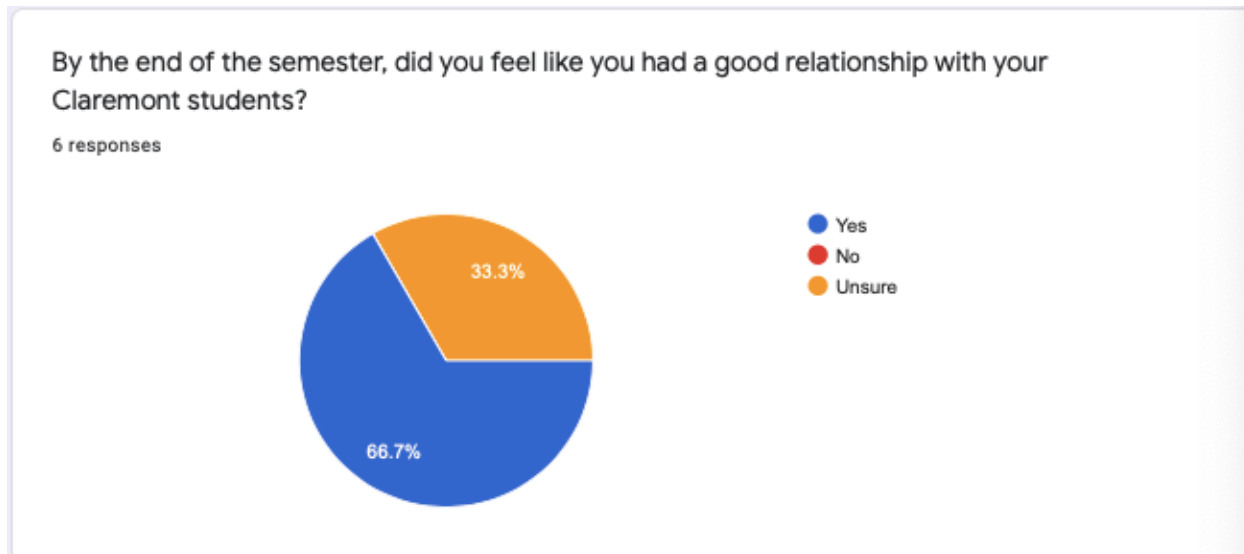
How well did you get to know your Claremont student?

6 responses



Clark Student Survey Figure 9

In comparison, 66.7% of Clark students indicated that by the end of the semester they thought they had a good relationship with their Claremont student while 33.3% were unsure about their relationship with their group partner. One Clark student went on to explain how their relationship with their Claremont student will continue throughout the following semesters to work together on college applications and mentorship. While 66.7% of Clark students indicated that they had a good relationship, there were students that wished their relationships were stronger and that they made more long-term connections with their youth. Additionally, Claremont students stated that their favorite part was working with a Clark student, however, 46.2% of those who took the survey selected a three or lower on how well their Clark student got to know them (Figure 6).

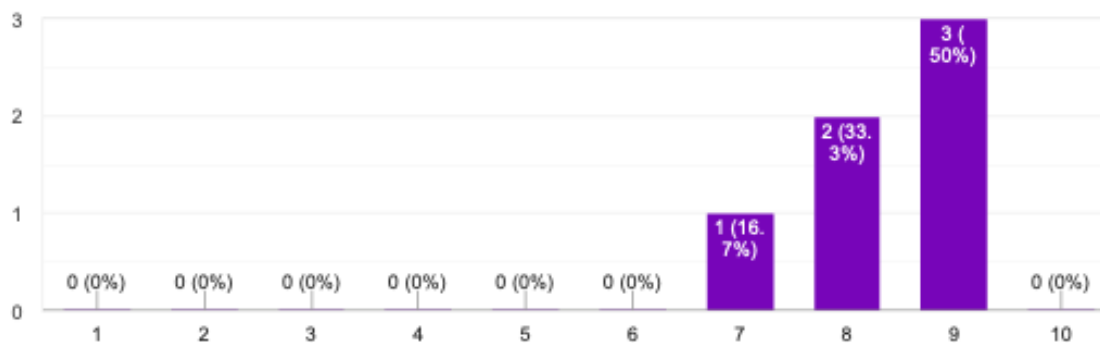


Clark Student Survey Figure 10

Overall, according to survey responses, Clark students thought that they “did relationship building well”, “facilitated meaningful conversation” (Clark Student Survey Response), and on a scale of one to ten, rated their experience as a seven, eight, or nine (Figure 11). One Clark student stated that, “the most inspiring part of the research is how we made a connection despite [COVID-19] and what we were able to accomplish with these challenges,” (Clark Student Survey Response).

How would you rate your experience?

6 responses



Clark Student Survey Figure 11

There was also another sense of community within the class of just Clark students, when asked about their comfort with speaking and expressing their opinions to their Clark classmates, one Clark interviewee responded with “I never felt uncomfortable sharing my ideas and putting my thoughts out there,” (Interview, John, 1/16/21, p. 3.) and another responded, “yeah, definitely. I’m very comfortable [expressing thoughts and opinions] in the class” (Interview, Becky, 1/16/21. p. 2.). This shows that the college student space also had a greater sense of community and classroom culture that encouraged students to voice their opinions. Through the enjoyment of the class, both as a Clark student group and as a joint Claremont and Clark class, and a joint sense of accomplishment and learning towards their final goal, this shows a greater sense of community within the groups as they strived to complete their research together by communicating, collaborating, and cooperating with one another.

Conclusion

This research came with many limitations including technological difficulties, attendance issues, changes of plans, and of course, the general challenge of online relationship-building between college and high school students. This specific class faced many obstacles and was able to present successful products despite this adversity. Many students reflected on the class wanting more time to work together and stated that this class would have been more effective and more valuable if it were in-person. As one Clark student stated in the survey, “The most challenging part of the research was not being able to get together in-person. There were so many days where we faced Wi-Fi problems and couldn’t get as much accomplished as we wanted.” I would be interested to see a similar study analyzing communication, collaboration, cooperation, and community in-person to see how students make even stronger relationships

when members are able to speak to one another in the same room without Wi-Fi issues and breakout rooms. However, this research can contribute to a greater understanding of how groups work together and reinforces the ideas about communication and collaboration being integral to productive work and relationship building between college students and high school youth.

In summation, through the youth participatory action research (YPAR) class, Clark students and Claremont students were able to gain experience with language-based research, data collection, coding, interviewing, and photo-voice while building community between two very different groups of people through communication, collaboration, and cooperation. This research model is important for college students to learn because it encourages them to become better facilitators and organizers, teaching them how to authentically represent youth voices. As one Clark student stated:

Our project was far from perfect and there are a lot of things that I would do differently if I could. However, I feel like I learned a lot about how research with youth gets done and I am better prepared to do something similar in the future. (Clark Student Survey Response)

Most importantly, Clark students were able to create meaningful working relationships with their Claremont students while giving them agency by encouraging them to voice their valuable opinions and share their ideas, effectively helping them become better agents of change in their own lives.

What is missing from the theory behind communication, collaboration, cooperation, and community is how inequity and power imbalances can affect the pillars. Inequities including socio-economic status, language differences, academic support, and access to technology and internet connection can all impact a student's ability to be engaged in the research and hinder the ability to form working relationships. Power dynamics like student-teacher dynamics, Clark

student-Claremont student dynamics, and PLA-Clark and Claremont student dynamics have to be factored into how students can communicate with each other openly and freely, how they delegate tasks to one another, and how they are able to complete their research. Additionally, while language differences can give power to the multi-lingual youth while doing research on language, academic writing can be inaccessible and difficult to understand. Age, language, class, and race all can affect the group's ability to communicate, collaborate, and cooperate with one another which can directly affect a groups sense of community and ability to actively participate. While projects can be done without all of the pillars active, it is important to talk about what can be damaging and what can hinder relationship building in order for groups to work together.

There are several implications for practice when considering this type of class structure collaboration between high school youth and college students. While this group of students was able to overcome adversity caused by the pandemic in addition pre-existing academic inequalities, there is no guarantee that high school youth and college youth will be able to create the same types of collaborative working relationships through YPAR. However, I believe that this model is a valuable and empowering method of learning how to conduct research and gave assist in guiding future yPAR courses. Many times, researchers will go into a community (especially a school setting) and try and enact change in collaboration with only the adults within that community. Relationship building is important because when you create a sense of community within a space that you are trying to enact change in, the people involved are given a greater sense of agency and can feel that their ideas and needs are important. Moreover, if a group of students build a sense of community and strive to reach a common goal then they are able to connect more with their research and become agents of change in their lives. Often, the people that are being affected are the young people who can offer many ideas and opinions of

their own. Participatory action research with youth is important because this type of research encourages the youth to be able to recognize their own value and brilliance. When youth are encouraged to create “burning questions” and find out what issues are important to them, it helps them become more engaged members of their community and effective positive change-makers. This research has inspired me in several ways by encouraging me to continue working alongside youth in order to help authentically represent their voices and make them feel heard. I have always struggled with feeling like I do not have my own voice and that I am not capable of doing research or making an impact. Through this research, I have discovered not only that I am a capable researcher but that I have the ability to uplift others and am capable of doing work that is important. Moving forward, I seek to use the pillars of communication, collaboration, and cooperation to create environments where my future students feel like their voices are heard, form relationships, and build a community of students that believe that they are capable. I want to ensure that they feel as powerful and brilliant as I believe them to be.

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