Being in “Their House”: Impact of Youth Participatory Action Research on Adult Learning at a Rural High School

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Abstract

This article examines the impact on the adult facilitator of a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) team at a rural high school in the Midwest. By focusing on the learning trajectory of the adult facilitator and emphasizing the youth's pedagogical and inspirational roles, it illuminates the potential impacts of YPAR on adults in a school context, a topic not yet thoroughly examined in research on YPAR. If the goal is to ensure that schools are supportive spaces for all youth, it is imperative that adults in schools learn from the young people they work with. This article argues that engaging with students through YPAR can be one way to facilitate transformative change and growth for adults in school settings, including in rural locations.

Keywords: *Youth Participatory Action Research, rural high schools, transformative school change, youth empowerment*

> *Hi, Brian. Yesterday as an icebreaker activity, the student research team were answering a few questions, including "Who do you admire in your community?" One of the students said that they admired you and a bunch of the other students agreed: "Yeah, he's cool." Thought you'd like to know!*
> (Email correspondence, December 4, 2019)[1]

This article examines the impact on the adult facilitator of a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) team at a rural high school in the Midwest. Previous literature has documented the important impacts of YPAR on youth well-being, academic performance, sense of belonging, and empowerment, including at rural schools (Anyon et al., 2018; Caraballo et al., 2017; Carson Baggett & Andrzejewski, 2017; Means et al., 2021). Building on this research, I focus specifically on the learning trajectory of the adult facilitator, emphasizing the youth's pedagogical and inspirational roles. YPAR projects, particularly with youth of color who are often marginalized in their school contexts, are often implemented with the goal of changing those contexts, a goal that depends on the willingness of adults to value youth insight and knowledge (Bertrand & Lozenski, 2021). This article illuminates the potential impacts of YPAR on adults in a school context, a topic

1. Because this study is based on a federally funded participatory action research project with publicly available information, the institutions and the people involved will be named. The author has informed consent from the adult facilitator (Brian) to use his real name in the article.

not yet thoroughly examined in research on YPAR. If the goal is to ensure that schools are supportive spaces for all youth, it is imperative that adults in schools learn from the young people they work with. This article argues that engaging with students through YPAR can facilitate transformative change and growth for adults in school settings, including in rural locations.

This article draws on the experiences of a biracial/Black[2] school counselor, Brian, who acted as a facilitator for a YPAR team at a rural high school in Minnesota during the 2020-2021 school year. The YPAR team was part of a four-year federally funded participatory action research (PAR) project in Faribault, MN (2019-2022).[3] Consisting of Somali and Latinx high school students, the YPAR team was one of several community research teams supported by the grant who used various methods over the grant period to investigate why Somali and Latinx students were not graduating at the same rates as their white peers from the high school. As the facilitator's experiences illuminate, engaging in YPAR can provide a structured way for adults to learn from student knowledge and expertise, especially if they are open to being transformed by their involvement. Such perspective-shifting can be especially important in rural schools where teachers and other school staff remain predominantly white, even as student bodies are becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, as was the case in the town where this study took place. The facilitator's experiences also suggest that working with young people in this capacity can also be a source of support for staff of color in rural schools, as they negotiate the realities of being one of few adults or the only adult of color in a school.

Literature Review

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a framework for conducting research and generating knowledge centered on the belief that those who are most impacted by research should be the ones taking the lead in framing the questions, the design, the methods, and the modes of analysis of such research projects. The framework is rooted in the belief that there is value in both traditionally recognized knowledge, such as scholarship generated by university-based researchers, and historically de-legitimized knowledge, such as knowledge generated within marginalized communities (Torre, 2009). The PAR project in Faribault aimed to bring together college faculty who have expertise in PAR theory and methods, college staff who have expertise in civic engagement, and community members who have personal and professional expertise in their lived context. The concerns and interests of community members fundamentally shaped the "appropriate questions, research design, methods and analysis as well as useful research products" (Torre, 2009, p. 1) Centering the experiences and expertise of community members is important in generating useful and relevant solutions in all settings, including in rural communities.

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is one type of Participatory Action Research (PAR) that centers "young people in identifying problems relevant to their own lives, conducting research to understand the problems, and advocating for changes based on research evidence"

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2. Terms to describe individuals and communities are always changing and limited in their inclusionary intent. I use the terms that individuals used to describe themselves and the terms most often used in the community and grant work. I will also use other terms when quoting sources and data from the school district, state, and the U.S. Census Bureau as applicable. I have also chosen to *not* capitalize "white" (unless I'm quoting a source), though I acknowledge that these decisions about capitalization are complicated ones (Appaiah, 2020; Laws, 2020).

3. This article is based on a participatory action research project in Faribault, MN, funded by AmeriCorps under Grant No. 18REHMN001 through the Community Conversations research grant competition. Opinions or points of view expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position of, or a position that is endorsed by, AmeriCorps.

(Ozer, 2016, p. 190). One important goal and outcome of YPAR projects is to reframe deficit narratives of youth and to position youth as "capable of generating expert knowledge of value in understanding and addressing problems that affect their development and well-being" (Ozer, 2016, p. 191). For example, YPAR curricula explicitly ask youth to identify personal, group, and community assets. For young people of color or otherwise historically marginalized young people, YPAR can be a way "to experience self-determination, social justice, and empowerment" (Ballonoff Suleiman et al., 2019, p. 27). Means et al. (2021) note that YPAR can be one way to "invite rural youth to collaborate with school administrators, educators, and community leaders" to both identify challenges and needs *and* assets and strengths in their community (p. 43).

A meta-review examining outcomes for youth participating in YPAR noted that several studies reported that youth increased their leadership skills and sense of agency, especially youth of color. However, YPAR programs set in schools were *less* likely to report these outcomes (Anyon et al., 2018). This finding suggests that youth might face more difficulty in seeing themselves and/or being seen as experts in schools because of schools' hierarchical power structures (Anyon et al., 2018). While there are many ways to ensure that youth voice and insights are embedded into rural schools, including setting up a youth advisory board (Means et al., 2021), structural changes in who makes decisions and how depend on the willingness of adults to implement such changes. Bertrand and Lozenski (2021) argue that often the youth expect that "sympathetic and/or inspired adults with decision-making authority will take up [their] recommendations and translate them into policy or practice" (p. 3) but such changes do not often occur. They posit that appeals to the morality of adults in powerful positions are unfortunately not enough to overcome "the tenacity of powerful people and entities to maintain the status quo" (p. 8).

The experience of facilitating a YPAR team, rather than merely listening to a team present, could be a catalyst for transforming adult perspectives. In most contexts, YPAR groups are facilitated by adults who act as "facilitator, observer, and reporter of the participant group" and who support the youth by "building participants' confidence and independence by listening to and validating their inputs" (Mathikithela & Wood, 2019, p. 79). YPAR projects can provide an opportunity for youth and their adult allies to "collectively address, question, theorize, and take action against social and institutional injustice" (Scorza et al., 2017, p. 139). While several studies have made clear the benefits of YPAR for youth, working with youth in this capacity also presents an important learning opportunity for adults. As a group of adult facilitators note:

> When we began engaging in YPAR, we had some understanding of the pedagogical roles that adults would need to play to help youth become powerful researchers and advocates for change. We were wholly unprepared, however, for the ways that students would use YPAR as a pedagogical tool to impact adults and youth alike. (Scorza et al., 2017, p. 139)

This quote points to a central premise of YPAR, and PAR in general, that the knowledge and perspectives of all those involved in the research process are valuable. Studies examining the impact of YPAR projects then need to consider the impact of YPAR on the adults involved as well as on the youth involved. This article focuses on the transformative potential of YPAR on the adult facilitators' view of youth as experts and of themselves as agents of change.

Context for the YPAR Team at Faribault High School

In October 2018, Carleton College, in collaboration with Faribault Public Schools, Somali Community Resettlement Services, and Community without Borders, received a grant from AmeriCorps to design and implement a participatory action research (PAR) project (*Carleton-Faribault PAR Collaboration,* n.d.). Faribault is located in Rice Country, Minnesota, and has a population of approximately 23,000. According to data from the Minnesota Department of Education (*Minnesota Report Card*, n.d.), in the 2009-2010 school year, 19% of the students in Faribault were identified as Latinx and 6.68% were identified as Black. By the 2020-2021 school year, 28% of the students were identified as Latinx and 26% as Black or African American. At the high school, approximately 20% of the students are identified as Latinx and 20% are identified as Black (*Minnesota Report Card*, n.d.), with a majority of the "Black" population in Faribault being identified as African immigrants/refugees—primarily from Somalia (Hirsi, 2018).

This rapid change in student demographics in less than a decade has not led to parallel changes in the teaching force in Faribault. In the region that includes the Faribault School District, the numbers of African American and Hispanic teachers remain low despite increases from 2000 to 2014, with just 23 African American teachers and 12 Hispanic teachers out of a total teacher pool of 5,327 in 2014 ("Teacher supply and demand", 2015). This reflects a statewide challenge: of approximately 58,000 teachers in Minnesota in 2014, just 594 were African American (1%) and 521 were Hispanic (1%) ("Teacher supply and demand", 2015). A 2019 report did not find much improvement in increasing teacher diversity, with only 0.9% of teachers in the region being identified as teachers of color (Wilder, 2019). Nationally, teachers of color make up 11% of the teacher population in rural schools (Geiger, 2018).

Like other small, rural towns adjusting to such changes in the racial and ethnic make-up of their communities (*Racial and Ethnic Diversity Is Increasing in Rural America*, n.d.), Faribault has been facing challenges in terms of ensuring that all students complete high school and pursue higher education. In 2018, the overall high school graduation rate for the Faribault School District was approximately 68%; while 82% of white students graduated, only 41% of Black and Hispanic students did so (*Minnesota Report Card*, n.d.). These low graduation rates for Latinx and Somali students were the primary reason for why community members wanted to get involved with the participatory action research (PAR) project.

The PAR project's main objective was to understand the experiences of three different stakeholder groups at Faribault High School: Latinx and Somali high school students, their parents, and the white teachers who work with those students. The project sought to have the stakeholder groups define, explore, and understand both the challenges they face and the assets they possess, in order to move away from deficit-focused understandings and solutions while maintaining a focus on the documented disparities in racial minority students' educational experiences and outcomes. For example, in 2019 when the PAR project started, while approximately 89% of white students graduated from the high school in Faribault, only 53% of their Hispanic/Latino and 43% of Black/African American peers graduated from high school. In 2019, the four-year high school graduation rate for English Language Learners, most of whom were Somali or Latinx, was 16% (*Minnesota Report Card,* n.d.).

Faribault's rural setting made this work of bringing together young people, their families, and their parents both more challenging and easier compared to doing similar work in larger, urban areas. The "New Latino Diaspora" (NLD) describes the phenomenon starting in the 1990s where Latinx migrants moved into rural and semi-rural areas of the country where previously there were

not substantial numbers of Latinx residents (Wortham et al., 2002). Scholars studying such places have written about both the possibilities within and challenges faced by communities who have not been as accustomed to supporting immigrant/refugee youth and families. While the "newness" of different racial and ethnic communities does present challenges such as the lack of existing resources catering to a more diverse population (for example, established English as Second language programs or availability of qualified translators and interpreters), these "new" locations might also "allow more flexible and sometimes more hopeful immigrant identities" because negative and racist stereotypes about immigrant cultures are not as entrenched there compared to areas with long-term Latino settlement (Wortham et al., 2009, p. 389). The smaller, rural setting of Faribault also meant that all young people in the town attend the same schools because there is, for example, only one public middle school and high school. Administrators were often invested in improving outcomes for students of color because this had important implications for the overall well-being and reputation of the school district and town.

Composition of the YPAR Team (2020-2021)

While there was a YPAR team at the high school during the first and second years of the larger PAR project in Faribault (2018-19 and 2019-20), the youth team's work during the second year was interrupted by the onset of the COVID pandemic in the spring of 2020. In the summer of 2020, when the project funding was renewed for a third year, the two co-principal investigators (co-PIs), Anita Chikkatur (author) and Emily Oliver, for the grant at Carleton College approached Brian Coleman, the career and equity counselor at the high school, about being the facilitator for the YPAR team in the 2020-2021 school year. As indicated by the email quoted at the beginning of the article, Brian had been identified by many of the students on the 2019-2020 YPAR team as a trusted adult in their school and community. Brian agreed to facilitate the team with the support of the two co-PIs. Because of pandemic-related restrictions, my co-PI and I could not meet with Brian or the students in person.

In initial discussions with Brian, my co-PI and I stressed the need to have students on the YPAR team with a range of academic experiences and from a range of grade levels. We wanted to make sure that participation in the YPAR team did not end up reinforcing academic hierarchies. Brian used his existing relationships with students and staff to recruit eight students, two of whom had been on the previous YPAR teams. Four of the students identified as Somali, three identified as Mexican/Mexican American, and one student as Dominican. The team included students in 9th through 12th grades. While the goal was to recruit and enroll students who were English Language Learners, Brian was unable to do so, despite several attempts. By January 2021, the team began its work after obtaining parental permission for them to participate in the team. While the YPAR teams had met after school during the first and second years of the project, the team decided to meet on Wednesday afternoons during the school day. The hybrid schedule for the school during 2020-2021 facilitated this option; while Wednesdays were designated as an "online learning day" for all students, students had the option of coming to the school to do their work. Finding time for YPAR teams to meet during the school day often becomes a barrier (Caraballo et al., 2017) and, in this case, the hybrid schedule, necessitated by the pandemic, ended up removing this particular barrier. Brian facilitated these meetings, using a curriculum he co-developed with the two co-PIs.

Data Sources and Methodology

This article draws primarily on an inductive thematic analysis of two main sources of data: a formal interview conducted with the adult facilitator, Brian, by the author in October 2021, and notes from planning and debrief meetings[4] with Brian and the two grant co-PIs during the 2020-2021 school year. The article's analysis is also informed by the work that the author did in collaboration with the various PAR teams in Faribault over the four years of the grant.

Findings

The Impact of Facilitator Positionality and Perspectives

Brian describes himself as a biracial male who grew up in a lower middle-class family in Michigan and as always having a passion for getting involved with and advocating for underserved communities. He was first hired in the Faribault School District as a Service Learning Coordinator. He worked with K-12 students for four years to coordinate service learning projects in the town. At the time he decided to take on the role of facilitator for the YPAR team, Brian had been working as the Career and Equity Coordinator at the high school for two years. He supported students in deciding on their paths after high school and coordinated internships and apprenticeship opportunities. He also had been asked to be the advisor for the newly formed Black Student Union at the school. Brian was the only counselor of color and one of very few staff of color at the high school. Nationwide, approximately 10% of school counselors are Black/African American and 5% are Latinx (American School Counselor Association, 2021).

As a staff member of color, Brian saw many similarities between his experiences and those of the youth of color on the YPAR team. For example, in an initial planning meeting, Brian noted that students of color sometimes think that no adult "gets it" but that "little do they know that you have been trained your whole life to be aware. I had the same gut feelings as a youth but you don't have the courage or the support to express [that]. You'd be labeled as having a bad attitude" (meeting notes, December 4, 2020). In the interview, Brian talked about his identity and experiences as a staff of color being key to the kind of relationship he was able to build with the YPAR team members. He explained, "I think it mattered for sure that...it was a staff of color that was facilitating. I think it mattered for them. It mattered for me" (interview, October 2021). Later in the conversation, Brian spoke about how some of the powerlessness his students felt as youth was reflected in his position as a staff member, especially a staff member of color. He talked about how teachers and administrators at the high school would not always take his analysis of a situation seriously because he was "just the career guy." He noted that this dynamic seemed "similar...like [how] students felt disempowered because they would bring these things up and nothing would happen...and as [a] staff and like as a counselor, you didn't have a lot of power, either, right?" The YPAR space became a place for Brian to discuss his positionality within the school, leading the students to understand that "as a staff of color, you have a lot of weight on your shoulders." Given the reality of having so few teachers and staff of color at rural schools, being able to facilitate

4 . Most of these meeting notes were taken by Emily Oliver, the co-PI for the AmeriCorps grant from September 2019 to September 2021.

YPAR teams in rural schools with all or a majority of students of color might provide a supportive space for adults of color as well as for students of color.

This connection Brian had with the YPAR team members and with youth of color at the school more broadly became poignantly important at one point in the school year—when 20-year-old Duante Wright was shot and killed during a traffic stop in Brooklyn Center, a Minnesota suburb about an hour away from Faribault (Sullivan, 2021). During a meeting a few days after the killing, Brian expressed how it had been an exhausting week for him, with numerous meetings at the school about Wright's murder and about the protests that followed his death. Brian talked about how Wright's death "hits a little different" because Wright was so close in age to the high school students. He told us, "When you are the only person of color in the school, those students all come to you. While I can comfort them, I can't tell them it will be different for them." He shared a story about when he noticed his car's brake lights were out and he went during the school day to get it fixed. When a white colleague teased him about taking time out during a workday to do so, Brian had to explain why it was important that he did that—he did not want to give a police officer any excuse to pull him over, leading to a potentially deadly interaction (meeting notes, April 15, 2021). This example points to the shared set of experiences, both negative and positive, that enhanced Brian's ability to connect with and support the youth of color on the YPAR team. This moment also speaks to why it is so important for rural schools to make more of a commitment and concerted effort to recruit and retain teachers and staff of color. Brian's ability to be there for his students of color was influenced by his own experiences of racism and the kind of preparation that he took to try and minimize the number of potentially harmful racist encounters.

While it is definitely possible and important for white teachers to be supportive allies to their students of color (Emdin, 2017), the experiences of staff of color with racism allows for an affirmation of student realities in ways that are hard to replicate in a school setting with few or no adults of color. Research studies have found that white teachers often do connect more easily with their white students. For example, Bettie's (2014) research on a group of white and Latinx high school students in California found that teachers often formed friendlier relationships with students who are "like" them—white and middle-class. Similarly, Lee's (2005) ethnography of Hmong American students at a Wisconsin high school notes that the "good" students at her site were the ones who were on "friendly terms with faculty and staff…They [could] engage in witty banter with teachers and administrators inside and outside of school" (p. 28). These kinds of interactions with teachers required a certain level of fluency in English and with mainstream white culture that not all students had access to. White teachers can and should listen to and affirm the experiences of their students of color (Kivel, 2002). However, when students of color feel differently included and welcomed when there are adults of color in the school who have had to negotiate the same racial stressors as them, such as racial profiling and police brutality, are familiar with their familial and cultural practices, and/or speak their home language fluently.

Learning from Youth

As noted earlier, much of the analysis of YPAR projects' outcomes focuses on what young people gain from the experience and the benefits for youth, especially youth of color and other marginalized youth, of participating in such work. For example, Sprague Martinez et al. (2020) note that engaging in YPAR provides professional development opportunities for youth; increases their sociopolitical skills and motivation to get involved in their schools and communities; and provides opportunities for youth "to be at the table" (p. 703). As noted earlier, however, being "at

the table" does not guarantee that youth expertise and perspective will be taken into serious consideration by those with power at those tables. At Faribault, for example, Brian noted that there was some concern among teachers that "equity work might 'get out of hand' to the point that they can't control it" (meeting notes, January 15, 2021). The teachers' concerns speak to why it is often difficult for young people on YPAR teams to see any substantial changes based on their research and expertise. Letting go of the need to control the process or the outcomes can be difficult for teachers and other adults in an educational setting. However, as Kumashiro (2002) argues, there is much in the process of teaching and learning that cannot be controlled or even known by teachers, and recognizing and embracing this reality would support teachers to teach in anti-oppressive ways that centers their students' needs, assets, and knowledge.

Rather than worrying about controlling the YPAR group space as an adult, Brian instead clearly positioned himself as a co-learner. He described how "going into this [project] was a whole learning process for me in relation to research in this way" and while working with students in a group was not new to him, "it was listening to them, you know, in that space, right?...We hear a lot of things that kids say but...we're not in a space which they've considered their space" (interview, October 2021). Facilitating the YPAR team felt different than his counseling experiences because "like, I'm a guest in their house at this point...and they are welcoming me into their environment and I am a learner and a listener." He noted that usually when he would ask a student how their day was going, a typical answer would be "It's going alright. It's going good." But the YPAR team members often responded with deeper, more honest answers: "But in their house, in their space, they felt like they could let me know how they really felt their day was going, whether it be good or bad" (interview, October 2021). Brian's choice of language—describing working with the YPAR team as being in "their house"—points to the difference between inviting students to a "table" built by adults and adults going to a space that students have created for and by themselves. Later in the conversation, Brian noted how teachers often think, "I'm the teacher here. This is my classroom, so I'm taking ownership right away" and he wondered how teaching and learning might look different if teachers instead saw the classroom as a shared space of reciprocal learning, a place of co-learning.

Facilitating the YPAR team gave Brian an opportunity to "have the students be teachers" (interview, October 2021). He noted several times during the interview that this kind of space reinforced to him that students "don't get enough credit for their knowledge that they bring, the experiences that they bring and what they see and how they see the world." Co-creating a space where students were open and honest meant that he "was able to just sit back and really kind of be a sponge at times because the information that they were sharing, it was deep." However, as Kumashiro (2002) notes, more knowledge does not necessarily lead to empathy nor does it always lead to changing one's ideas or behaviors. What was important in Brian's case was that his deep listening to student perspectives actually led to changes in how he viewed and understood certain dynamics in the school. For example, some of the YPAR team members who were academic "high flyers" complained to Brian about being tokenized by their teachers and the administrators. They did not like being told that "more students need to be like you" because everyone is an individual (interview, October 2021). Brian noted that after that conversation, he started noticing how when teachers or administrators chose students of color to give an announcement or be featured in a story or video about the school, the same few students were chosen.

Brian's conversations with the YPAR team also made him more aware of certain student-teacher dynamics; what looked like a positive interaction between a teacher and a student to him was sometimes a more negative experience for the student because they viewed the teacher as

using a deficit perspective. Brian talked about how learning about that difference in perception made him notice the differences in how teachers sometimes interacted differently with students of color and white students (interview, October 2021). Such awareness, based on what he learned from the students, is crucial for white teachers and administrators in rural schools, given that their experiences in schools are often vastly different than those of their students of color. Additionally, the fact that Brian, even as a man of color, did not often see what was happening speaks to the importance of such deep listening for all teachers and staff in order to look beyond their own limited perspectives and to analyze the school setting from their students' perspectives.

In addition to shifting how he viewed the school setting, Brian noted that the insights and perspectives of the YPAR team members impacted how he interacted with his children. He realized that

> I need to listen to them as well and hear what they have to say because they are being affected. They should have a voice and if I teach my kids at this age to do that, then, hopefully it's gonna carry forward through their life to be able to speak when they need to...and not be afraid to have any option. (interview, October 2021)

This new understanding of how to approach conversations and interactions with young people, whether at work or home, has meant he no longer "rushes into conversations" and tries to be conscious of taking the time to ask for and listen to young people's opinions and perspectives. Brian's willingness to learn from the young people from YPAR and to apply these lessons not only to his professional life but also to his personal life speak volumes about the importance he placed on the transformative power of listening to youth and on the possibility for collective learning in a YPAR space. These kinds of transformative and collective learning experiences are necessary to achieve a main goal of YPAR projects in school settings: changing practices and policies to ensure a more supportive learning environment for all students.

Limitations of Individual-Level Change

This case study, however, also speaks to limitations of systemic and sustained changes through the implementation of just one program or through the efforts of one individual, especially if this person has little power within a hierarchical structure. Brian noted that once he became more aware of troubling dynamics between white teachers and students of color, for example, he would follow up with administrators to see what could be done to change such dynamics. However, even when administrators would agree with the students' and Brian's assessment of a situation, Brian noted that he started to "lose faith…[that] it's going to be handled appropriately...or at least addressed"(interview, October 2021). Like the youth on the YPAR team, Brian also felt a sense of powerlessness in being able to push for change. He noted that the few staff of color at the school were guarded about what they shared at meetings, even when they were invited to speak "their truth" because "our truth will offend people, right?" (interview, October 2021). At the end of the school year, Brian decided to leave Faribault; based on the lack of support he felt he received as a Black staff member, he had no compelling reason to stay. Sustaining the work of change in rural schools can be difficult if those who are most capable and most willing to work differently with students are not supported by their colleagues and supervisors.

Brian's decision to leave also speaks to the nationwide trends in teacher of color turnover rates in schools. Teachers of color leave at a higher rate than white teachers and they often cite the working conditions of their schools as a reason for leaving (*The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education*, 2015). A Minnesota-focused report found that teachers of color were more

willing to stay in their jobs if they had opportunities to build respectful relationships with students, had the autonomy to influence the broader school culture, and felt respected for their perspectives and knowledge (Vitrella, 2019). If recruiting and retaining a diverse staff is a priority for rural schools, then they need to find ways to support their teachers and staff of color by providing them with opportunities to work closely with youth of color (including by facilitating YPAR teams) and by continuing to listen when they might be speaking truths that may go against the status quo and make others uncomfortable. For Brian, working with the YPAR team gave him a space to be more fully himself as a person of color and to bring in his racialized experiences a way to connect with and affirm youth. Providing a space for colleagues of color and students of color to build solidarity with one another can be helpful for all involved in rural spaces that feel lonely and unwelcoming for young people *and* adults of color.

Conclusions

This in-depth case study of what one adult facilitator learned from his experiences of working with a YPAR team in a rural high school setting speaks to the potential of YPAR's impact on adult learning. While this case study is specific in its contextual details and PAR projects are, by design, focused on "what happens here, in this single case--not what goes on anywhere or everywhere" (McTaggart et al , 2017, p. 28), there are important lessons to be learned from Brian's approach to facilitating the YPAR team at Faribault High School: the importance of creating a collaborative learning space that students come to feel is *their* space; the willingness of adults to let themselves be transformed through deep listening and letting go of the idea of control; and the capacity and willingness of white adults to listen to the uncomfortable truths shared by their students and staff of color. This kind of learning experience for adults is particularly important in rural areas where the student populations are becoming racially and ethnically diverse more rapidly than the population of teachers and staff. While there are important efforts underway in Minnesota to increase the number of teachers of color (*Legislation*, 2022; Velazco, 2021), it will take time for the educator population to be as diverse as the student population in rural areas. Additionally, *all* teachers and staff members, white and of color, benefit from taking seriously the knowledge and insights of young people of color and their communities. Using YPAR principles more broadly in schools and classrooms can create the conditions for more equitable collaborations in rural schools between the mostly white staff and students of color where youth of color, their caregivers, and their communities as viewed as an important "source of expertise and leadership for achieving educational equity and justice" (Ishimaru, 2020, p. 4). Such collaborations are key to building rural classrooms and schools that nurture all students' interests, insights, and imaginations.

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