

May 2021

## Creating Counternarratives on Trauma Informed Care Through Student Podcasting

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<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2021.EDU.12>

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### Recommended Citation

Low, Christopher, "Creating Counternarratives on Trauma Informed Care Through Student Podcasting" (2021). *Master of Science in Education | Master's Theses*. 42.  
<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2021.EDU.12>

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**Creating Counter-Narratives on Trauma-Informed Care Through Student Podcasting**

by

Christopher Low

A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

May 2021

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## **Abstract**

This research explored how participatory action research (PAR) specifically youth participatory action research (YPAR) could be utilized to help inform and bring change to an alternative high school's trauma-informed care. The study was informed by critical race theory (Yosso, 2005), trauma-informed care (Day et al, 2017), and youth participatory action research (Halliday, 2019; Goessling, 2020). The YPAR project was conducted at an urban/suburban alternative education high school in Marin County California with nine 11th and 12th graders who engaged in a series of subject-themed forums and then created a podcast informed by an interview they conducted with a community member. Students held a symposium in which they shared the podcasts with administration and other adult leaders and successfully petitioned the school administration to add after school programs. The research found that YPAR is a culturally responsive way to cultivate student agency around school policy, and support meaningful exploratory dialogue that informs engaged practices in the delivery of trauma-informed care. These findings have important implications for how teachers can provide the space for students to create change in their school environments, support one another in navigating life challenges and create connections to mentors in the larger community.

## Acknowledgments

My deepest gratitude to all of the staff and students at my current school site. Their support in this project means more to me than words can tell. I want to specifically acknowledge the students who participated in this participatory action research project with me. They were all amazing co-researchers and have created a process for change at our school that has the power to impact many young lives. For these co-researchers thank you and know your voices and wisdoms have the power to make the world a better place.

To my mom and dad who instilled in me the value of education at a young age, I love the both of you more than words can tell. For my amazing life partner Kimberly, your strength, support, and love throughout this process kept me inspired and motivated to complete this thesis.

The most sincere thank you to all of those who have helped me along my educational journey. For all of my elementary, middle, and high school teachers thank you for your patience and kindness to me. To all of my graduate and undergraduate professors, I appreciate you more than you will ever know and am forever grateful for all of the insight and inspiration you all have imparted.

Finally to my first reader Matt Davis, and second reader Zoe Batholomew, your unbelievable support throughout this process taught me how to be not only a better student and teacher, but how to be a better person.

## Table of Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Abstract.....  | iii |
| Acknowledgments.....   | iv  |
| List of Tables .....   | vi  |
| Chapter 1: Introduction.....   | 1   |
| Statement of Purpose.....  | 1   |
| Overview of the Research Design.....   | 3   |
| Significance of the Study.....   | 4   |
| Research Implications.....   | 6   |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review.....  | 8   |
| Understanding Race & Trauma.....   | 9   |
| Trauma & Trauma-Informed Care .....  | 12  |
| Youth participatory action research (YPAR): More than just a method.....             | 17  |
| Conclusion .....   | 22  |
| Chapter 3: Methods .....   | 25  |
| Research Questions .....   | 25  |
| Description and Rationale for Research Approach .....                                | 25  |
| Research Design.....   | 27  |
| Chapter 4: Findings .....  | 32  |
| Internalizing Language Matters: Strengths vs. Deficit .....                          | 32  |
| Cooking, Drawing and “Making the Right Move”: Understanding Sources of Strength..... | 38  |
| “A Goal Without Action is a Dream”: From Theory to Action .....                      | 42  |
| Conclusion .....   | 48  |
| Chapter 5: Discussion.....   | 50  |
| Implications for Literature .....  | 52  |
| Implications for Practice and Policy.....  | 53  |
| Limitations of the Study and Future Research .....                                   | 56  |
| Conclusion .....   | 57  |
| References.....  | 58  |
| Appendix A: Focus Group Questions.....   | 64  |
| Appendix B: Reflection Prompts and Questions.....                                    | 65  |

**List of Tables**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Table 1 Students' and Principals perceptions of language shifts..... | 36 |
|--|----|



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

When I first began teaching at Bayview High in the Fall of 2018, I realized that I had a lot to learn about trauma-informed education. What had worked at my previous school in terms of classroom management needed to be altered in my new school setting. Bayview is labeled as an alternative education high school where students are placed by their districts either because of disciplinary issues or chronic absenteeism. The school is located in a predominantly white county, and our student population is mostly Latine (Menendian & Gambhir, 2020). For this reason, all school staff underwent training in culturally responsive pedagogy in the form of a two-day professional development conference. Bayview administration then grounded the school staff in notions of adverse childhood experiences or ACE's (Felitti et al., 1998) to better prepare us to work with a population that was experiencing mal-educational outcomes in large part due to their experiences with childhood trauma. Despite this important training I still struggled to properly address both the trauma and educational needs of all of my students. I seemed to be missing a very important perspective on the intersectionality of race and trauma, namely that of the students. I started to be exposed to ideas about student perspective and trauma (Watson et al., 2016) and applied the simple principle of listening more to my everyday practice. Thus, when pondering potential topics for this thesis I kept coming back to how the narrative perspective of my students could help inform the implementation of trauma-informed care.

### **Statement of Purpose**

A critical exploration of trauma-informed care or TIC involves studying and explicitly teaching about the intersectionality of race and trauma that has been covered in previous research (Haskie-Mendoza et al. 2018). A critical exploration of trauma-informed care or TIC involves studying and explicitly teaching about the intersectionality of race and trauma that has been

covered in previous research (Haskie-Mendoza et al. 2018). The youth participatory action research (YPAR) method of inquiry empowered students by allowing them space to share their ideas and recommendations in an authentic setting. This research drew upon a theoretical framework that integrating previous research on participatory action research (PAR) and youth participatory action research (YPAR), theories on critical race and trauma-informed care (Dutil 2020; Crosby 2016), and counter-narrative strategies to “challenge racism” (Quiros et al. 2020 p. 160). CRT was expanded upon in the 1990s to include an examination of the Latine experience called Latine critical race theory or LatCrit (Yosso 2005). YPAR is rooted in early action research projects and seeks to learn from participants' lived experiences thus aligning with a key principle of CRT (Goessling, 2020). Trauma-informed care was first developed in the 1990s to help students who suffer from the effects of trauma (Menschner & Maul, 2016). Students of color are disproportionately affected by trauma (Crosby, 2016) making a critical lens important for understanding trauma. YPAR podcasting is thereby an appropriate approach to create counter-narratives in trauma-informed care (Diebold et al., 2020).

Students' podcasts provide a creative vehicle for students to use a strength-based approach to share the strengths and connections of their lived experiences (Diebold et al., 2020). The research was guided by the student's unique strengths and cultural capital that research has found can go undervalued (Yosso, 2005). Research shows that honoring student strengths emboldens students toward social agency and increased personal empowerment (Ayala, 2016).

This research identified a gap where YPAR podcasting methodology could be used to explore the intersection of TIC and race with student participants. It also became a question to explore how YPAR might be utilized to inform and potentially direct policy decisions in the areas of TIC at an alternative education high school in Northern California.

## **Overview of the Research Design**

This study used a constructivist and transformative approach to qualitative inquiry in order to build on the understanding of how empowered student voices can actively improve their school's trauma-informed care. The purpose of this study was to explore student podcasting as a youth participatory action research project (YPAR) methodology to critically explore and act to improve a high school's trauma-informed care.

The research was conducted at Bayview High (name has been changed to protect the identity of the students), a northern California alternative education middle and high school that serves grades 7-12, where the researcher has worked for the past 3 years. Nine 11th and 12th graders joined the researcher in conducting YPAR through focus groups, reflections, podcasting personal narratives and interviews with mentors in the community. The shared research questions included: What is the internalized worldview of students as it relates to asset versus deficit-based language? The second asked, to what extent does student voice and advocacy contribute to change in their community? The third explored how student's unique wisdom creates actionable change in schools and communities TIC. The nine participants (identified in this study using pseudonyms) were my co-researchers in the project over the course of eight weeks from January to March 2021. We collectively aimed to better understand podcasting as a YPAR methodology and how this method could lead to actionable change.

A qualitative analysis involved examination of the data using an open coding of student reflections, podcasts, interviews, and field notes to find themes. Data was reviewed using focused coding to delve deeper into the discovered themes. Data was collected from student podcasts, reflections, a student symposium, and observation notes from forums. Data encompassed the perspective of community members, administration, students, and staff.

The researcher has been an employee at the school for three years and acknowledges potential bias in working and researching in the same location. In light of working within the framework of CRT, TIC and YPAR, it's important to note that the researcher is white, while six out of the nine participants were Latine, and one participant was African-American. A lack of exposure to trauma in the researcher's own childhood makes understanding childhood trauma limited to an academic perspective not a personal perspective. Within the project it was important for the researcher to reflect on positionality in the YPAR project. Reflection involved writing analytic memos and adjusting my approach where appropriate.

### **Significance of the Study**

Three central findings emerged from this YPAR project. The first finding enumerated the impact and power of internalized-language and the impetus for shifting language to be more strengths-based. Both students and the administration identified ways in which language has been internalized and offered alternatives to deficit-based language. The study found that shifts in language happen both in the classroom and in the school's institutional language (i.e. official school documents, mission statements, parent communications). Findings also showed that when language is shifted students see themselves and their strengths as assets. And when student participants' strengths and wisdoms were honored as research assets via language shifts, a more authentic environment for research was found to occur.

The second finding from this research was the way in which YPAR facilitated an understanding of students' own identified sources of strength. For instance, students identified unexpected sources of strength in activities of personal interest such as cooking, drawing, and motorcycling. Many students called for after school programs to better serve these authentic strengths as a foundation for their growth and learning. This led to an actionable outcome of the

administration and students agreeing to a student planning committee to plan for an after school program starting Fall of 2021. The second source of strength individuals identified included their own senses of integrity. One example was when one participant spoke about gaining confidence from, “Making the Right Move”. The study found that participants' self-reliance was a strength that was a necessary foundation for those in TIC. Participants also expressed confidence in self growth. Data showed that students were more likely to turn to their interests, their peers, or themselves when in need of strength and support. These sources of strength were identified by students in reflections, podcasts, and a focus group. Multiple students reported that these sources of strength were more authentic and easily accessible than traditional services offered in TIC such as therapy sessions, group counseling, or other traditional forms of trauma care.

The third finding, identified by an *in vivo* code, “a goal without action is a dream”, illuminated how the student participants value action over empty ideas and conversations that they often experience in relationship to the power structures of the communities in which they live, work and learn. In particular, the study found that the YPAR forums within our project provided access to actionable change.

Much like in Goessling (2020) this study found that YPAR was in itself a form of TIC. Using podcasts to gather student perspectives and to inform policy was a new approach that built off Ayala (2016) call for creative expression as a means for students to authentically engage in YPAR. In addition, the study found racial microaggressive language is part of the everyday lived experience of students of color in an alternative education high school in Marin County. These findings reflect those of Sue et al., (2007) who found these microaggressions are internalized by students. This research offers YPAR as a tool to help guide school wide shifts in language from

deficit-based to asset-based. This inquiry found that trauma-informed care is improved when students are given the opportunity to create counter narratives (Quarios et al., 2016).

### **Research Implications**

The aim of this research was to explore method by which student agency could be given a meaningful and authentic platform to bring about actionable change at an alternative education high school in Northern California. The fact that students reported feeling heard and that they could indeed make a difference has major implications for the use of YPAR podcasting perspectives in school curriculum to build important academic skills and social-emotional skills across disciplines. YPAR podcasting perspectives can also be used as a way for students to inform school policy through well researched student perspectives delivered and received in a creative and authentic way to school administrators.

This study found the importance for shifting language from deficit-based to strengths-based frames. These findings recommend that institutional language needs to be analyzed and mined for deficit-based language in an effort to uproot this language and seed a strength-based language approach that honors students. Institutional language needs to be reevaluated after a fixed amount of time to ensure institutional language continues to adapt toward best serving students. Creating student awareness around internalized language by building critical consciousness through YPAR podcasting provides schools a culturally responsive tool for schools and educators to use.

Studies like this one can help school leaders understand the importance of partnering with academic institutions and community partners to conduct YPAR. YPAR is shown to be a potential school course offering that would provide schools informed ideas for how to improve school policy and contribute to the disruption of systemic inequities. Furthermore, the study's

findings come with a recommendation that school administrators examine a shift towards a strengths-based language approach in institutional language to benefit all students.

Finally, the systems of support identified in this YPAR project were an important development to the YPAR project and participants. Therefore, it is important that each school identify its student's unique set of strengths in an authentic setting such as was provided in this study. Honoring student interest and hobbies as ways to heal from trauma and feel empowered requires schools to build systems that create space for student agency.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review seeks to conceptualize how participatory action research (PAR) can enhance a school's trauma-informed care (TIC) and can be a contributing factor toward cultivating agency and empowerment amongst youth participants (Halliday et al., 2019). Braydon-Miller and Maquire (2009) emphasize that the perspectives of youth have not been properly represented and remain as untapped potential toward providing insight into how schools and educators can better implement TIC, as a set of tools that are prominent at alternative schools, such as the one where the researcher currently works.

Student perspectives are valuable to researchers, school administration, teachers, communities, and students themselves (Braydon-Miller & Maquire, 2009). Students who are placed at alternative education high schools are disproportionately from communities marginalized by race and income status. This marginalization increases the risk for youth to experience trauma and toxic stress (Stemple et al., 2017). By exploring student perspectives and wisdom on their own lived experiences students have the opportunity to improve their schools and communities' approach to trauma-informed care. (Braydon-Miller & Maquire, 2009), and contribute to counter-narratives as a strengths-based approach for uplifting student voices and addressing monolithic narratives (Qurios et al., 2020).

Three major themes will be explored in this context, beginning with racism and power in trauma-informed care through two theoretical frameworks: critical race theory (CRT) and Latine critical theory (LatCrit). Next, there will be an examination of the definition and field of trauma-informed care (TIC), and how TIC can perpetuate systemic white supremacy by creating a lens focused on student deficits rather than understanding and appreciating their strengths. Lastly, youth participatory action research as a methodology to empower students



will be outlined by how it creates agency and addresses the single narrative in TIC. In total, this literature review explores theoretical frameworks that make explicit the ever-present racism and power structures in education and how a sense of student's voice can address racism and power structures.

### **Understanding Race & Trauma**

Race is central to understanding trauma-informed care (Crosby, 2016). Dutil (2020) states, "CRT framework should be used when developing trauma-informed systems of care" (p.173). Students with trauma come disproportionately from communities of color (Crosby, 2016). In addition, students of color have an additional risk to trauma via exposure to racism and police brutality (Quiros et al., 2020). Students who exhibit signs of trauma are at risk of being misunderstood by their teachers as acting out (Dutil, 2020). Felitti et al. (1998) found that trauma impacts physical, social, and emotional development. Teachers who are not trauma aware are prone to misinterpret symptoms of trauma as maladaptive behavior, and this misinterpretation falls disproportionately along color lines (Stemple et al., 2017). Students of color with trauma are especially at high risk for involvement in the criminal justice system in large part because of the lack of adequate care (Dutil, 2020).

### ***Foundations of Critical Race Theory***

During the 1970's Derrick Bell began teaching scholars a new curriculum and casebook titled: *Race, Racism, and American Law*. Bell's curriculum examined the structural analysis of racism and whiteness, and this examination became the roots of critical race theory (Quiros et al., 2020). Subsequent critical theories (Yosso, 2005) share common CRT principles established by Bell: "(a) ordinariness of racism, (b) whiteness as property and protected status, (c) differential racialization, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the

interdisciplinary perspective” (p. 75).

Bell’s theory and subsequent principles opened the door for a new way of examining race in different contexts. The principles Bell laid out had implications for not just legal studies, but studies in psychology (Sue et al., 2007), sociology (Yosso, 2005), and education (Crosby 2016).

### ***CRT and Education***

The principles of CRT and their application in the field of education allow for new perspectives and understandings to foster equitable outcomes (Dutil, 2002). A critical race approach to education draws on CRT principles in particular the centrality of experiential knowledge. CRT in education seeks to build on strengths students of color bring to the classroom that may have been undervalued by schools because these strengths are not perceived as such by the white, dominator culture (Quarios et al., 2020). For example, Yosso (2005) explores how we ascribe epistemological capital to white middle class cultural values or strengths and devalue or fail to acknowledge those in communities of color. Historically knowledge held by “the white upper and middle classes are considered capital valuable to a hierarchical society” (p. 70). This leads to viewing communities of lower socio-economic status, made up disproportionately of people of color, through a deficit lens. An aim of a critical race approach to education is to help create awareness and appreciation of the various strengths in our communities of color and how these strengths can be used to address racism, oppression, and other social justice issues.

### ***Latine Critical Theory & Education***

Building on Bell’s notions critical race theory spawned other critical theories such as Latine critical race theory (LatCrit). Both theoretical frameworks are important to understand

in the context of the U.S. education system where 39% of students are either African American or Latine (Census Bureau 2017). These students are disproportionately affected by trauma (Stemple et al., 2017). LatCrit builds on the foundations and principles of critical race theory. LatCrit is a, “scholarly movement responding to the long historical presence and enduring marginality and invisibility of Latine in law, theory, policy, and society” (Guajardo et al., 2020, pp. 3-4). LatCrit evolves and expands upon the black/white binary of early critical race theory to include the acknowledgment of the racialized subordination of Latine people. LatCrit is essentially a synthesis of critical legal studies, feminist legal theory, critical theory, critical race feminism, and queer legal theory that “considers the ways in which Latine experience systems of power and oppression through complex racial and cultural identities” (Guajardo et al., 2020, p. 4).

Yosso (2005) posited that sources of knowledge available and used by youth of color had less value in educational settings because those sources strayed from the traditional white middle class values. Yosso’s (2005) concept of community cultural wealth within Latine communities consist of six forms of capital:

- (a) *Aspirational capital*: the hopes and dreams that provide visions for change.
- (b) *Resistance capital*: strengths that address injustice and inequality, and an ability to persevere despite repeated exposure to inequities.
- (c) *Linguistic capital*: a community strength in the area of storytelling and communication via visual art, music, or poetry.
- (d) *Familia capital* is a broad understanding of kinship that becomes a valuable source for support and care.
- (e) *Social capital*: mutual aid societies, or large networks that prefer to work together.

(f) *Navigational capital*: the ability to help oneself or one's family find a way through the various maneuvers through institutions. By identifying cultural wealth through a LATCrit lens communities are appreciated for their strengths rather than defined by their perceived deficits.

LatCrit in education seeks to ascribe value to these sources of capital. When providing students with trauma-informed care student's cultural values need to be carefully considered.

Furthermore, CRT's and LatCrit call to value these strengths builds on principles of TIC (Brunzell et al., 2015) and PAR (Halliday et al., 2019).

### **Trauma & Trauma-Informed Care**

The substance abuse and mental health services administration or SAMHSA defines trauma as an individual's lived experience that involves instances of the actual or extreme threat of physical or psychological harm. Psychologically speaking trauma can be thought of in terms of stress (Walkley & Cox, 2013). Walkley and Cox (2013) posit that stress ranges from normative to traumatic and when stress is in the traumatic range one has suffered trauma. Normative stress is age appropriate and typical (i.e. stress from everyday school life) whereas traumatic stress provokes feelings of helplessness and horror, and these events are unpredictable (Walkley & Cox, 2013). Walkley and Cox (2013) define toxic stress as a child's exposure to: "strong, frequent, and prolonged adversity" (p.123).

### ***Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)***

For educators, understanding the effects of trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) is important to properly implement TIC. Without this awareness, teachers may mistakenly misinterpret the side effects of trauma and ACE's as maladaptive behavior (Dutil, 2020). This misdiagnosis of ACE's most impacts students of color (Crosby, 2016). ACE's are

high stress or traumatic events in the life of a child. ACE's include abuse, neglect, or household dysfunction (Crosby et al, 2016). Felitti et al. (1998) identified ten adverse childhood experiences in three categories of abuse which include physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. The second category is neglect which includes physical and emotional neglect. The third category, household dysfunction, includes mental illness, violence towards mother, divorce, incarcerated relative, and substance abuse in the house (Felitti et al., 1998). Students who have been impacted by ACE's are at-risk for undesirable educational outcomes as seen in the research of Felitti et al. (1998) which found that ACEs resulted in significant impairment in cognitive, social, and emotional development and functioning. Stempel et al. (2017) found a link between adverse childhood experiences and school absenteeism. Student absences are often met with hostility by schools that may threaten punitive action on a parent if a student does not attend. This added stress may exacerbate existing home dysfunction, neglect, or abuse (Walkley & Cox, 2013). At school, the effects of trauma on a child can severely compound the ability to self-regulate and sustain healthy relationships making accessing the curriculum difficult (Brunzell et al., 2015). ACE's often compound on one another for students. For instance, Walker et al. (2018) notes that youth homelessness puts one at risk for other trauma, of all homeless youth two thirds will be victimized while homeless, including physical or sexual assault.

### ***Race, Trauma, and Where it's Happening***

Quarios et al. (2020) asserts that "trauma-informed service delivery models have historically failed to emphasize the significance of "race" racism as both interpersonal and sociopolitical trauma." (p.161). As individuals are trying to cope with trauma they may be met with a clinician or teacher who is an extension of white culture and complicity with the everyday microaggressions because they themselves do not feel them (Quarios, 2020). Sue et al. (2007)

define three categories of microaggressions:-micro assaults, micro insults, micro invalidations. These are categories in which the acts are so ingrained in our systems of whiteness that perpetrators of these aggressions may be unaware or colorblind to the fact they are even committing these aggressions. Quarios et al. (2020) also document that educators, clinicians, and other practitioners of TIC may be displaying microaggressions towards students with whom they are trying to help without being aware they are doing so.

Another source of trauma for many students is the home (Walkley & Cox, 2013). Trauma in the home can be caused by a variety of factors. Felitti et al. (1998) found that home dysfunction makes up half of the possible adverse childhood experiences. Pressures on families due to substance abuse, violence, incarceration, divorce, and mental illness, all of which fall disproportionately on communities of color can contribute to a student's trauma (Dutil, 2020).

Youth who grow up in socially-economically disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to be exposed to violence, drugs, gangs, and other nefarious activities than their socially economically advantaged peers (Crosby, 2016). Another way in which youth experience trauma is when a youth of color comes in contact with the representatives of the criminal justice system such as police officers, judges, probation officers, and youth correctional officers (Crosby, 2016). The United States leads the world in youth incarceration, 5 times higher than the next highest, South Africa (Crosby, 2016). Of those youth incarcerated in the United States, 80% have had at least one reported traumatic event in their lives (Ford et al., 2014).

From police and court interactions to correctional placement and aftercare, the various layers of the criminal justice system have structural barriers that lead to disproportionate incarceration rates of black and brown children (Crosby, 2016). Crosby (2016) found that the

juvenile justice system arrested 1.6 million youth in 2010 of which 62% were youth of color, while the youth of color only make up 39% of the K-12 population (Census Bureau, 2017). This overrepresentation may in fact be linked to lack of appropriate care in the various levels of the criminal justice system specifically trauma-informed care. Youth who have already suffered trauma outside of the criminal justice system are more likely to become involved with the criminal justice system. Crosby (2016) documents how police interactions can lead to hostility due to significant discretion police have and the way the nature of the interactions vary according to what community one is in. Negative influences that police may be racist do not make for good police interactions for youth of color.

### ***Trauma-Informed Care to address ACE's and other Toxic Stress***

Trauma-informed care requires teachers to receive education on the principles of TIC and the proper implementation of the practices in educational settings. Often educators are the first responders to a child who is experiencing or has experienced toxic stress or trauma hence the need for schools to invest in professional development in TIC (Dutil, 2020). Herman & Whitaker (2020) identify the principle 4 R's" of TIC:

1. Realizing trauma is common and has long term health impacts
2. Recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma
3. Responding by integrating knowledge about trauma policy, practice, and procedure
4. Resisting re-traumatization

When the 4r's of TIC are examined through an ecological lens it becomes possible to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of TIC for a given individual, home, or community (Herman & Whitakerm, 2020). Persistent racial trauma is experienced by individuals in the forms of racist microaggressions, families and home life impacted due to income inequality, and by the

structural racism in all areas of life (Sue et al., 2007).

When working with students we need to seek alignment between TIC and CRT, one way to inspect and challenge TIC is to allow for student voice and creativity to create a narrative to counter existing monolithic narratives that are pervasive in the United States educational system policies practices including TIC (Querios et al., 2020).

### ***Strength-Based Approaches & Counter-Storytelling To Addressing Trauma and Racism***

Strength-based approaches to trauma-informed care enable students to be heard by educators and in the process find their voice and become empowered to use their voices for social change. Moore (2017) notes that a strength-based approach “emphasizes the untapped abilities and talents of the individual as opposed to focusing on pathological symptoms or situational problems, and it builds upon natural resiliency” (p. 42). Strengths-based approaches are therapeutic, culturally responsive, and have the potential to effect change. Brunzell et al. (2015) acknowledged that strength-based approaches, such as the construction of counter-narratives, helped students use their strengths to build regulatory processes and to foster better interpersonal skills.

The literature recognizes strengths-based approaches as a way to address trauma and racism simultaneously. Yosso (2005) advocates for a strength-based approach to appreciate the unique perspectives and cultural wealth in Latine communities by advocating for students “utilizing assets already abundant in their communities” (p.75). Yosso (2005) supports the concept that the students have valuable knowledge that allows them to provide a valuable counter-perspective, and thus create a counter-narrative that benefits themselves, their communities, and their schools. Strengths-based approaches shift the focus from the deficits of a particular community and places that focus on the sources of strengths, wisdom, and beauty of



the individual members and use of those strengths to create actionable change (Moore, 2017). Goessling (2019) further notes how strengths-based approaches created in youth friendly spaces are structured to honor participants' unique wisdom and strengths. This emphasis on students' experiential knowledge aligns with CRT principles.

Brunzell et al. (2015) speaks to the importance of participants being aware of their character strengths and seeing how those strengths worked within their own lives. One way in which educators can help develop student strengths is through creative expression (Moore, 2017). Various forms of art have been used as a way to enhance and present student voices. Photography, digital storytelling, community mapping, creation of murals, are all strengths-based approaches to address educational inequities. To students these are “structured, purposeful and meaningful activities” that provides space to heal, develop agency, and become empowered (Moore, 2017 p. 46).

Creating positive learning environments requires a redistribution of power back to the students and a commitment to a strength-based approach. Positive education aims to understand and support students' strengths and then help to co-create with them pathways in which they can use those strengths (Ayala, 2016). Halliday et al. (2019) notes that an important voice has been left out when it comes to the implementation of positive education environments, and that voice is that of the students. Brunzell et al. (2015) revealed that positive education practices can be enhanced when students take a lead in communication on the culture change to a positive educational environment.

### **Youth participatory action research (YPAR): More than just a method.**

Participatory action research or PAR builds on theories found in both CRT and TIC, by allowing students to have a say in how they are cared for (Amse & VanWynsberghe, 2005).

Youth participatory action research is a variation of participatory action research that differs only in that the participants are under the age of 18. Youth Participatory action research (YPAR) combines a Freirean critical consciousness with actionable outcomes through meaningful and authentic inquiry on behalf of the research participants (Goessling, 2019). YPAR methodology allows researchers to more deeply understand the lived experience through the perspective of the participants to help better answer research questions while also helping create actionable change. YPAR shifts power from the researcher to the participants (Haskie-Mendoza et al., 2018). YPAR requires using a framework of collaborative relationships to produce genuine engagement and lasting relationships and is an especially appropriate method when research issues pertaining to student empowerment and its potential to affect policy change in areas such as trauma-informed care (Villa et al., 2018).

### ***History of PAR & YPAR***

Braydon-Miller & Maguire (2009) trace action research back to 1932, with the founding by Myles Horton of the Highlander Research and Education Center, located in Tennessee. The Highlander School was involved very early on in civil rights and labor movements that used an early form of action research projects to advance causes (The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute). Action research concepts were used as the foundation of participatory action research (PAR) Braydon-Miller & Maquire (2009) document how in the late 1970s PAR further developed globally, including in locations such as Columbia, Tanzania, Brazil, and India. Central to this development was the worldview that oppressed people can be empowered to create change and resist oppression through action. During the 1960s the first multimedia PAR project was conducted with participants from the Chinese province of Yunnan, this method was called Photovoice (Wang et al., 2004). Photovoice was used by Wang et al. (2004) with youth

participants in Flint, Michigan to better understand how their lived experiences could inform community policies. As PAR evolved so did the participants. A review of the literature found PAR projects with youth participants referred to interchangeably as PAR (Wang et al., 2004) or YPAR (Goessling, 2019) without any theoretical or conceptual difference. Diebold et al. (2020) demonstrates how YPAR aims to address issues important to the people and acts as a vehicle for cultivating agency and for changing systemic disadvantages for oppressed peoples. Another focus of PAR is a complete restructuring of traditional power paradigms within research designs by shifting power from the researcher to the participants, by using a framework of collaborative relationships to produce genuine engagement and lasting relationships (Braydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009).

### ***YPAR***

Youth participatory action research (YPAR) builds on positive youth development (PYD) that first emerged in the 1980s and shifted the focus from youth as a “problem to be managed” to youth as individuals with unique wisdoms and strengths (Livingston et al., 2014). YPAR empowers young people to affect just outcomes in their communities while gaining new competencies (Haskie-Mendoza et al., 2018). Villa et al. (2018) see YPAR as a way to investigate issues that are current and authentically relevant to the youth who are investigating them. As a result, youth are often inspired to use the skills acquired in a YPAR project and apply them in other areas of their lives and as they continue to be advocates for positive social change long after a particular project is completed.

The principles of YPAR align with the values of the local cultural, political, economic, and environmental values (Haskie-Mendoza et al., 2018). PAR and YPAR aim to keep the individual lived experience at the center of research. This lived experience often dictates the

appropriate YPAR methodology. Seeking the unique or unheard perspective is a goal of both CRT and YPAR (Crosby, 2016). This alignment can be seen in YPAR principles which “provide[s] a framework for recapturing the potential for practitioner inquiry to bring about meaningful change” (Braydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009, p. 79). YPAR research, therefore, fulfills the principles of TIC and CRT by providing a framework for change in various areas of social justice (Day et al., 2017).

### ***Digital Media Arts as YPAR Method***

The use of digital arts as YPAR methodology aims to empower students with 21st-century competencies in both tech and social justice (Goessling, 2019). Furthermore, digital media has the capability to reach a larger audience than traditional art methods due to its ability to travel via the internet to the intended audience. Digital media requires the use of electronic devices for dissemination, and with the more widespread use of electronic devices, YPAR outcomes can be shared with larger audiences making the research have even more potential to create social change (Day et al., 2014).

### ***Podcasting as Youth Participatory Action Research.***

Podcasting like other digital art methods provides interesting ways to obtain the student perspective. The opportunity for “dynamic dialogue” creates awareness and informs audiences on best practices (Diebold, 2020, p. 5). Diebold et al. (2020) used podcasting as YPAR methodology to explore TIC principles and interviews were conducted around the topic of trauma. The podcasts were co-hosted by one former victim of trauma and one professional in the area of trauma. YPAR podcasting allowed space for victims of trauma to share their story and provided a counter-narrative to a common misconception of trauma victims, that they want to remain silent about their experiences. Diebold (2020) used narrative storytelling to create a “safe

outlet for painful memories and experiences challenged through a creative vehicle” (p.47).

Podcasting as a PAR methodology not only informs participants of the subject matter to be researched but also teaches “real-world literacy skills”, which honor linguistic capital and resistance capital as powerful forms of knowledge by (Yosso, 2005). Creating space for youth agency and voice to provide personal narratives of trauma-informed care through podcasting allows for the opportunity to broadcast counter-narratives to a wide audience (Diebold et al., 2020). These counter-narratives challenges colonizing narratives and are in themselves a form of resistance.

### ***Podcasting as YPAR tool to Create Counter-Narratives***

YPAR allows for the construction of counter-narratives as a way for students, in particular students of color, to take action against the white, monolithic oppressor culture that is systematically embedded in all of America's institutions (Querios, 2020). Counter-storytelling allows researchers the ability to focus on quotidian details as a source of rich and interesting data (Oh, 2020). Oh (2020) also found that through participants' narratives researchers gained a “new understanding of how children use their surroundings to make sense of their past and present experiences.” (p. 287). Moore (2017) researched a strengths-based storytelling curriculum over a six-week period. The student participant-researchers collected oral histories that lead to the creation of comic books or written responses, then participants used photography and video to capture stories of hope and possibility.

Solortano and Yosso (2002) document how counter-storytelling is empowering, just and provides a space for healing. The participants use their own narrative to effect change by providing a historically ignored voice space to share. Counter-storytelling allows youth participants to teach the researchers as well as builds a base of youth leaders who are

empowered to be agents of change (Villa et al., 2018).

Armsden and VanWynsberghe (2005) studied how counter-storytelling created a counter-narrative that helped uncover previously unknown community assets through a concept called community mapping. Armsden and VanWynsberghe (2005) found that community mapping is a strengths-based approach to “creating an empowering space” (p. 361).

Understanding the community from the perspective of participants helped researchers and participants better understand community resources. Moore (2017) touts narrative storytelling as a way to create a “safe outlet for painful memories and experiences through a creative vehicle” (p. 47). Wang et al. (2004) found that counter-storytelling produces a way to cultivate student agency and voice while also bringing about actionable change.

## **Conclusion**

The literature reveals conceptual alignment in the areas of trauma-informed care, critical race theory, and participatory action research, as all three share common principles. Research in the areas of strengths-based approaches, counter-storytelling, and counter-narratives, told from the perspective of the research participants' lived experience is central to all TIC, CRT, and PAR.

The research had a continuity of positive participant experiences. Diebold (2020) states “Podcasts are a flexible and accessible avenue to capture stories that can uplift and provide hope during times of uncertainty and upheaval” (p. 10). The evidence from the literature demonstrates that existing research documents monolithic narratives in TIC, as well as racism in TIC praxis against people of color. There is also widely accepted evidence for the efficacy of strengths-based approaches, as well as the use of counter-narratives to uplift and empower students in addition to inquiries that have sought to understand how these perspectives can enhance TIC. Furthermore, many past arts and digital arts projects have included the voice of youth and people

of color in trauma-informed care praxis. The vast amount of information regarding theoretical frameworks within the literature has the strength of going deeply into the origins of race, trauma, and participatory action research.

The direction of future research is also very compelling. By using PAR to explore trauma researchers to hear the narrative of a unique lived experience and thus is provided a perspective that had not previously been considered. Scholarly work needs to be done to better understand all perspectives, and shape new ones. Dismantling inequitable systems and empowering oppressed people is done through the sharing and creating of knowledge. This calls for researchers to focus their studies on the local and actionable to affect real change in communities in which research is being conducted.

There was a gap in the literature in regard to substantive information on using Podcasting to conduct PAR in the areas of TIC in alternative education environments. There is also little literature around the use of student podcasts to create counter-narratives aimed at school policy change. What research does exist in these areas is very new and not yet widespread. Given the desired outcomes of PAR research is aimed at benefiting local communities, it is important to note that the community for which this research project takes place no literature exists on how podcasting can provide insight to student strengths and wisdoms. Thus, there is a lack of information in the literature on youth participatory action research that uses a critical race lens to examine TIC through podcasts in alternative education environments.

Critical race theory has been used as a theoretical framework to examine TIC practices before (Quiros et al 2020; Day et al. 2019; Moore 2017) but few, if any studies have been done using PAR methodology. My research aims to empower youth voices to create actionable change. The purpose of this inquiry, therefore, is to explore how to add student narratives, rich

with unique understandings to school's TIC implementation, and to do so in a manner that honors strengths and values student voice.



### **Chapter 3: Methods**

Research has explored YPAR as a culturally responsive method to explore issues of race and trauma-informed care (Crosby, 2016). YPAR podcasting has also been used to explore issues of trauma (Diebold, 2020). However, there is a lack of literature on YPAR podcasting and its potential to shape an alternative education high school's policy on trauma-informed care. In addition, there appears to be a gap in how YPAR can apply a CRT lens to examine TIC practices.

#### **Research Questions**

This study centers on how student participation in action research can create new understandings that inform a school's TIC. The central research questions included:

1. What is the internalized worldview of students as it relates to strength-based versus deficit-based language?
2. To what extent does student voice and advocacy contribute to change in their community?
3. How can a student's unique wisdom create actionable change in school/communities TIC?"

#### **Description and Rationale for Research Approach**

This research sought to understand how students' perspectives can provide a counter-narrative to improve the school's delivery of TIC by making the care more equitable and raising awareness around the lived experience of students learning in school environments with teachers trained in trauma-informed care. A qualitative approach provided increased opportunity to focus on questions such as whether the students placed more value on an experience itself or the meaning that they are able to make from the experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Both constructivist and transformative worldviews informed this research. Creswell & Creswell (2018) state that the constructivist worldview acknowledges experiences are not simply imprinted on individuals but rather formed through interactions with others and through historical and cultural norms that operate in an individual's life.

Youth who have high rates of trauma come disproportionately from marginalized groups, (Stempel et al., 2017) and the achievement of social justice for this group is an important aspect of my work. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain that the transformative worldview places importance on the study of lives and experiences of diverse groups who have traditionally been marginalized, and to provide the space for research participants to change the power dynamics and systems of oppression. Given recent events in our world such as a global pandemic and civil unrest as the result of racial injustices, schools more than ever need to create space for the youth voice to help school practitioners understand traumas.

In this study, I seek counter-narratives drawn from the voices and experiences of students who had been placed or voluntarily enrolled at an area community school. The counter-narratives correspond to Solórtano and Yosso's (2002) description of biographical narratives told by another in which our analytical interpretation was guided by our participants. While I did not foreground race in recruitment or data collection, I presumed like others (Quiros et al., 2020) that the disproportionate number of students of color assigned to alternative schools reflected institutional racism and intersectional oppression that would be woven through these stories. Using a phenomenological approach to understanding students' unique wisdoms allows the researcher to more deeply understand the lived experiences of the participants (Maxwell, 2013).

## **Research Design**

The design of this project seeks to empower students by engaging with them as co-researchers. The methodology seeks to conduct research with students and not on students (Halliday et al., 2019). The design of this project also aligns with the curriculum of the school in which the research was conducted. The school had invested in professional development for staff in the areas of culturally responsive pedagogy and trauma-informed care. This alignment between research and school culture allowed for strong administrative and staff support.

### ***Research Site and Entry into the Field***

The research was conducted at Bayview High (name has been changed to protect the identity of the students), a northern California alternative education middle and high school that serves grades 7-12. I selected this site as it is where I have worked for the past 3 years and as such have an invested interest in the student's experience.

Students who attend Bayview are referred there for chronic absenteeism or disciplinary expulsion. Students are placed at Bayview from several different schools including the local juvenile court school. 53 students are enrolled at Bayview. Bayview is over 88% Latine, 6% White, 4 % African American 2% Asian American. All students receive free or reduced lunch. Bayview has 17% of it's families classified as homeless. By contrast, the county in which Bayview resides is 85.3 White, 16.3 % Latine, 6.6% Asian American and 2.8% Black or African American.

### ***Participants and Sampling Procedure***

Juniors and seniors in the researcher's homeroom cohort at Bayview High School were recruited to participate in the research. On average the homeroom cohort ranges from 10-15 students. Nine students from the homeroom elected to participate in the research. Educational

and community professional participants were recruited from Bayview High, as well as from the school's various community partners as mentors and interviewees for the students.

The researcher introduced the study to the homeroom class by giving background and context of CRT, TIC, and YPAR, and the podcasting process that would be used. After students in the homeroom were invited to participate, those with interest were provided with a consent letter for parents and guardians that outlined the purpose of the study and provided details of the participatory action research project. Students who returned the parental consent form were enrolled to participate in the research and were asked to sign a line on that form offering their assent.

The research was also introduced to 7 adult participants including two administrators, school staff, members of the local youth probation department, mentors, and community members connected to the school. Educational and community professional participants were provided a consent form that outlined the purpose of the study and provided details of the participatory action research project.

### ***Methods***

The research project progressed over the course of eight weeks. Inclusive of the student participant co-researchers, we aimed to better understand podcasting as a YPAR methodology and how this method could lead to actionable change. The co-researchers took part in a focus group at the end of the YPAR with conversations around a set of questions presented by the lead researcher (Appendix A). The research project progressed through 4 phases.

- Phase 1: Youth researchers built an understanding of participatory action research methodology as a way to empower voice to create equitable outcomes. Researchers reviewed topics for future exploration (Diebold et al., 2020).

- Phase 2: Research in the community. Student participants interviewed adult participants and analyzed their own data.
- Phase 3: Research participants produced 1-2 min podcasts
- Phase 4: Youth research participants presented their research findings to an authentic audience they identified (Ayala, 2016). All researchers examine and check themes coded by researchers and produce a reflection answering the two question prompts (Appendix B).

Interviews of adult participants occurred on the campus of Bayview High in the researcher's classroom. All notes and data were recorded and uploaded to the researcher's computer which was password protected. Analytic memos were taken after each meeting, podcasts were transcribed, and at the end of Phase 4 students wrote reflections on the project.

### *Data Analysis*

Qualitative data analysis methods were used to analyze the podcast, focus group discussions, and participant reflections. All podcasts were completely transcribed by the researcher. The researcher wrote analytic memos posthaste after the group discussions to capture data about the interactions. The memos serve to "facilitate [analytic] thinking [about data], stimulating analytic insights" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 105). Then, all the data was analyzed through open coding. Creswell and Crewswell (2014) defines open coding as the process of labeling concepts and generating categories based on their description. Open coding can also be defined as an inductive attempt at capturing new insights (Maxwell, 2013).

The coding process involved inductively segmenting text data to identify keywords and phrases. These words and phrases were then categorized into expected and unexpected codes. Codes were expected based on the review of literature. Unexpected coding arose in the language

and insights of the co-researchers during the focus group, podcast, and participant reflections. Subsequently, the data was coded a final time utilizing a focused-coding process, whereby the expected and unexpected codes could inform a more detailed analysis of all the qualitative data sources.

After coding the data, the researcher used connecting strategies in the analysis process. Through this strategy, the researcher compared and contrasted both the antecedents and consequences within the data. The connecting strategy gave a more rigorous analysis by showing connections to events, rather than just defining categories (Maxwell, 2013).

### ***Validity***

The researcher acknowledges his position as a classroom teacher of the student participants. This may have influenced data collection because the researcher had a personal investment in wanting the podcasting project to positively affect my students' lives. Maxwell (2013) noted that reactivity is more of a consideration in qualitative studies when it concerns interview data. Thus, I noted my role as an employee as well as a researcher in collection and review of data from my interview with the school's principal. Another bias was that I wanted my students to connect their understanding of systemic inequities with action in order to increase their hope for their futures and sense of agency. I am aware of my bias and wanted to keep my objectives for the research clear to ensure a valid study. Therefore, I implemented several strategies to address these validity threats.

I conducted repeated observations throughout the research to verify and confirm what was seen and inferred. This is important because it provides more complete data about certain situations (Maxwell, 2013).

As a third year teacher at the school I have maintained intensive, long-term involvement with the student participants and the culture of the school. My participation allowed me to develop an in-depth understanding of my participants' experiences and increased their trust in me (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Enhanced validity was achieved by enlisting member checking (Maxwell, 2013), whereby the participants provided peer analysis of the podcast submissions, rather than relying solely on the researcher's perspective. Thirdly, rich descriptions of the data (especially the podcast submissions) were offered as evidence of the authenticity of the participants' experience.

Data was triangulated by obtaining data in a variety of ways and from a variety of perspectives to ensure its validity. Data from student researcher's podcasts, reflections, and forum responses were all cross-references with observational data and my interview with the school's principal. Furthermore, student podcast perspectives were informed by interviews with members of the community and those interviews provided another source of data to further triangulate.

Validity was further confirmed through the practice of member checking (Maxwell, 2013). YPAR participants reviewed the researchers coded data and confirmed the findings. There was a discussion on quotes with participants to ensure that they were recorded correctly. The administrative interview was followed with a review of the transcription to ensure accuracy.

The data was reviewed for discrepant evidence (Maxwell 2013). The researcher considered bias in reviewing data and wrote analytic memos to continuously evaluate positionality. Data was also reviewed by members of researcher's masters thesis cohort to ensure data was not flawed.

## Chapter 4: Findings

The study sought to understand how youth participatory action research (YPAR) podcasting could bring actionable change to an alternative education school's policy, practices, and services around implementing trauma-informed care (TIC). Additionally, I looked at how the process of YPAR podcasting can support the development of student agency and student empowerment. The action research project was divided into four phases. The first phase began with a series of two sessions and a focus group designed to orient the group to YPAR podcasting. The second phase involved student research. Student participants interviewed community members, about whom the students thought could inform the podcast perspectives on trauma-informed care. In the third phase, students created one-minute podcast perspectives informed by their research. The fourth and final phase involved a student led symposium where students discussed with school leaders the need for afterschool programs.

The study revealed three major findings, in the areas of language, sources of strength, and student empowerment through informed action. The first finding identified how language is internalized by students. The study found that shifting the language away from a deficit-based approach towards a strengths-based approach can help students see themselves as agents of change. The second theme explores novel sources of strength identified by student researchers. This theme explores what these sources of strength are and student researchers' suggestions for how schools can better support them. The third theme looks at how YPAR performed in an alternative education setting became a platform for authentic use of student agency.

### **Internalizing Language Matters: Strengths vs. Deficit**

Language shapes not just our perception of the world, but how we see ourselves in that world. Both the school principal and the students identified language as having the power to



uplift as well as put down. A focus on language and shifting language from deficit-based to strengths-based became a catalyst for empowerment for those in the YPAR cohort.

### *Shifting from Deficit to Strength-Based Language*

The power language can have on school culture and on an individual was not a novel finding in itself. What was interesting was the way in which student researchers identified deficit language in our local community and the process by which they came up with and shared their unique perspectives on how language could be shifted from deficit-based to strength-based. One student researcher, GZ, relayed an encounter with deficit language while talking with a local police officer:

I had a police officer who once asked me for my name, when I gave it to him he responded ‘o’ that makes sense because I have a Latino last name. He assumed I was a bad kid or something.

Just as GZ was finishing telling his story, all of the other participants nodded and acknowledged similar treatment. For instance, MW commented, “you can get shot by the police just for not being white.” GZ’s encounter with this language highlights how those tasked with serving our communities, like the police officer in his story, are using language in subtle, microaggressive ways towards people of color. GZ found that he was able to explore how language had personally impacted him and by recognizing that language could be used in oppressive manners he gained a critical understanding that helped him contextualize some of his past negative experiences with language. After his interview, GZ shared that, “I really just like how you guys (the staff at the school) talk to me.” Through the YPAR process GZ started examining critically his experience with negative, deficit-based language, and out of that experience produced a new

narrative that highlighted positive school achievement, and aided him in his own critical understanding of TIC. GZ's new understanding was that he has allies in his support group.

### *Listening to the Language of Students*

One of the surprising results in the examination of language was the way I had to shift myself to listen and understand the value-statements in the students' lived experience. For instance, while working with VW to prepare for her interview we had a discussion on how she could make some of the changes that she had talked about in our YPAR forums. I started by reminding her that she had previously said she would like to improve the "rec center" as a possibility for her YPAR project. She quickly replied that "it's not a rec center, I have been to rec centers and that is not what that place is." I asked her what she meant. She responded that "rec centers have free games, and stuff for teens to do. They don't have none of that." The language I was using to describe the building was asset-laden and in VW's eyes, this did not align with her perception of the building as it stood, but rather the kind of transformation she wanted to see created. For VW it was important to shift the language. Calling it a rec center would mean there would be no need for her to direct her energy into advocating for its improvement.

To better understand students' perceptions of TIC I also found it important to understand the perspective of the principal whose final say on school policy includes how trauma-informed care is implemented. I was pleased to see that much like language was important for VW and other student researchers it was important for their principal. In my interview with the school principal language was highlighted as a way to create counter-narratives about the school and its students, and aligning with the experience that GZ acknowledged having at the school.

I sought to understand steps the administration was taking to address the dominant narrative on how to best implement trauma-informed care. KA shared her vision for what needed to be done:

So as we have worked to redesign the school here. We talk a lot about language and how we use it, and so, from a deficit language to strength-based language. So, for example, it used to be the kids who came to “intake meetings” which sounds like an institutional intake and so we changed the name to admissions meetings. It used to be that we were called “County” and we shifted that to “Bayview’s Community School”. The fact that I hear kids telling other kids that, and the fact that our staff is telling bus drivers that (laughs), I feel like we have [begun to internalize] that language [ourselves].

The impetus for a new language arose out of a culturally responsive approach to trauma-informed education and as a reaction to a pathologized deficit-based narrative. KA talked about the importance for students to “reorient how they see themselves.” A big part in how the school wants to achieve this, according to KA, is by helping students to “understand what are the systems of oppression that have led to them feeling like that.” KA’s acknowledgment of systemic oppression creates the space for solutions like the one’s the YPAR project advocated for.

Throughout the YPAR project the researcher found that participants, as well as the school principal, identified language in terms of deficit-based or strengths-based. These distinctions in language were noted in an interview with the principal and interactions with students while working on the project. The research also found these distinctions in the student podcast, reflections, and in the student symposium. Below is a table that outlines various perceptions of

deficit-based language and the corresponding strength-based language that YPAR participants advocated to shift towards.

*Table 1 Students' and Principals perceptions of language shifts.*

| <b>Participants &amp; Principal</b> | <b>Deficit-Based Language</b>   | <b>Strength-Based Language</b>          |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| KA (Principal)                      | “Intake Meetings”<br><br>“County School”  | “Admissions”<br><br>“Community School”  |
| VW                                  | “Community Center”  | “Rec Center”                            |
| GZ                                  | “O that makes sense”  | “Nice to meet you”                      |
| KW                                  | “Being fake”  | “Being real”                            |
| YE                                  | “Didn’t know our names”   | “Talk to us like we're people”          |
| NZ                                  | “former teachers were calm<br>but others didn’t go about<br>communicating with me in a<br>proper way” | “teachers got on the students<br>level” |

Both student researchers at BVHS and the school's principal came to see counter-narratives as an important way to fight against oppression. Creating counter-narratives within the individual student and transforming how they saw themselves, was just as important as creating counter-narratives about the school and narratives that existed in the community about our students. This alignment between project goals and administrative philosophy reaffirmed the

importance of this project. YPAR seemed to be an appropriate vehicle towards greater student participation and student voice in the creation of policy and conflict resolution. Through our YPAR project student, researchers were thus tasked with writing the next chapter of the narratives using one min perspectives. The production of these perspectives empowered participants to control their own reality by taking control of the language used to describe their reality. In the forums and in my interview with the school's principal language was referenced as a way to create empowered youth. Both students and the principal noted that when deficit language was used language became a tool of disempowerment. The fact that the school community collectively identified language as a crucial part of TIC is a critical finding. For instance, students like GZ, TW, and YE stated that they felt more supported at our school in large part because the language is strength-based. When prompted by the question, where do you find support, TA replied, "This school." YE added, "yall are chill." The various micro-honorings of a student's strength and their lived experiences had created a supportive culture at our school that these students had been missing at their previous schools. This is highlighted below by NZ's perspective:

At my old school teachers used to speak to me in a way that made me feel like I didn't want to listen to them. Words are powerful and can make people think a bunch of different things. Some of my former teachers were calm but others didn't go about communicating with me in a proper way. It's important not to assume and try and understand, communication could improve if teachers got on the student's level.

The clear conclusion is that language does indeed matter. Language is internalized whether it is strength-based or deficit-based. Young students of color attending our northern California school reported encountering deficit language and through YPAR sought to actively disrupt these

narratives by shifting the language and thus creating a counter-narrative on TIC that was critically informed.

### **Cooking, Drawing and “Making the Right Move”: Understanding Sources of Strength**

Critical to informing our goals as a YPAR cohort was to understand what was truly helpful to those who may be experiencing trauma. In our third YPAR forum, I explicitly asked two questions. First, what are your sources of strength? And, second, where do you find support? Students, like TW, identified the school as a place that they feel supported. As a teacher, it always feels good to hear that students feel their school is a place they are supported, and given the context of a discussion on TIC understanding how to use a school to provide support was an important part of this research. I wondered if TA felt that if the school was a support, then what specifically did the school offer her that made her feel that way. It became interesting to observe how TA chose to interview SM, our school’s family outreach coordinator to gain a better understanding of his role, and by doing so found her own perspective on the school’s TIC. YPAR had led to inquire about her systems of support and thus empower her to use them in a more informed way. can advocate for family outreach with her newfound understanding, by creating awareness around the supports it provides. TW’s critical understanding gained in the forums allowed her to view our school’s family outreach program with a critical lens. Through her exploration of TIC she found that honoring what Yosso (2005) had referred to as "familia capital" was an important strength in our school’s TIC approach. Honoring cultural strengths that may be different than those of the dominant culture is a way in which critical approaches can deliver more authentic services. TA discovered SM’s role in the school and led to a more holistic and culturally responsive approach to TIC. KA echoed this in her interview when she said:

I don't think that we blame parents. I think we reach out to parents and families and try to help them find support to try to wrap around the whole child and actually the whole family and actually the whole Community.

TW's qualitative research via her interview with Saul found that an approach to TIC was the whole child/parent/community support. TW's findings in her interview with Saul aligned with my research with the administration. Knowing this TA was now in a position to provide a perspective that serves as a call to action. TA knew to focus her attention on improving holistic support systems in trauma-informed care by elevating student strengths and she knew her administration's visions for change were much like her own.

Another identified system of support and source of strength was the staff. When I asked during one of the YPAR forums, "what are systems of support?". TA said "staff", and TM added "JC". TM interviewed JC to find out his role in the community's response to trauma. The research process was difficult for TM he did not particularly enjoy the task of scheduling and conducting an interview. I spoke with TM and we made the observation that if the school is a system of support then wouldn't after-school programs help expand an already identified system of support.

### ***Self as Source of Strength and Support***

One of the most enlightening memories of our YPAR forums was when I asked, "who or what is a source of strength in your life?" and RT replied "me". The response, at first, caught me off guard. I was expecting him to name a person or an activity. It had not initially occurred to me that one of the major and perhaps most important sources of support our students have is themselves. RT spoke of activities such as coloring or drawing as a way that he shared made him feel confident. RT, a 16-year-old teenage father, has been presented with various challenges but

consistently showed up to school and is set to graduate early. For his research, RT explored how others rely on themselves to navigate through life. RT's choice to interview VC, one of the school's co-teachers, was due in large part to the positive relationship the two had. RT and I reviewed his data and found that in his interview RT asked VC about his role in the community and one thing VC said was that his role was "to teach the young people the importance of loving themselves." RT now had an informed perspective on which to work from. Looking at his interview data RT decided to share a perspective on how one's self is a source of strength. RT's podcast perspective:

I can't even remember when I started feestylin' but I remember loving it from the first time I started sparking my mind. Rapping makes me feel powerful. It is a way for me to temporarily escape reality. People use music in many different ways, some use it to get money, others use it to calm their minds, For young people, music and rapping can be used to cope with trauma.

Through the YPAR process, RT gained an important understanding of what it meant to be self-reliant in a healthy way. And helping advocate for people to get the skills to be self-reliant. RT learned more deeply how people use themselves and their interests as sources for healing. His ability to articulate how he utilizes himself as a source of strength in the student symposium helped the administration and staff better understand how to support RT and students like him. RT advocated for a committee in the summer to plan for the building of interest based after-school programs for the fall of 2021.

Interest based healing or personalized healing was identified by the student researchers as an important part of TIC. Interest based healing in a school setting can be both therapeutic and educationally valuable. This information about RT can guide instruction. As a teacher, I now



know to work with RT on a passion project around art and healing. RT said he liked to draw and color and his research found that after-care programs designed to explore these types of passions did not exist for students like him. RT was challenged to merge his passion for drawing into an actionable change by working with the school to create a program that offered students support particularly during the 3-6 pm hours. RT's YPAR work led to a collaboration with staff aimed at adding an after-school program to our school.

TM's identified that he found his interest in motorcycles as a way to "relax". TM's passion for motorcycling is an area where he is very confident in his knowledge. TM's confidence in motorcycling bolsters his self-esteem and serves as one of the places he finds personal strength:

I remember riding my motorcycle by the ocean. I felt a lot of adrenaline and was present-minded. Activities like this can be considered interest-based healing because I'm doing what makes me happy and also keep me healthy.

Interest-based sources of support were identified by when she responded "cooking" to my question on "what gives you confidence?" TA's feelings of confidence around her cooking is support for her that can be used to address feelings of self-doubt or when we have feelings of low self-esteem. Teacher-led YPAR projects help educators and students identify individual student strengths. The process for this YPAR project was guided in large part by what the students wanted to improve in TIC. For the students to discover what they wanted to improve they had to connect their own interest to the project. A personal connection to the project was important for authentic engagement.

In an excerpt from YE's podcast he shares how his enjoyment of sports and the lessons learned can be beneficial and inclusive:

I learned a lot of life lessons from playing soccer with him and got a lot of good advice. Soccer was a way for me to be active while also learning life lessons. For others, it can be things like basketball, hiking, or football. But one sport that has started to become popular at my school is boxing. The sport is a great way to get exercise and to get your mind focused. It doesn't matter where you're from or what color you are boxing is worldwide, it is a sport that people enjoy all over the world.

YE advocated for after-school programs, especially sports-related ones, as a source of strength for individuals.

### ***YPAR as a Source of Strength and Support***

The week after we were done with our cohort group sessions VW asked if we would be “getting into our circle today?” I explained that we were going to start working on our interviews and not doing a whole group session. She understood but seemed disappointed, “I like those groups,” she said. The forums had become a system of support for students because they were, as she had reported, both, “voluntary” and “authentic”. VW added that groups, where you could talk to peers, “like this one” referencing our group, was more beneficial than working with a therapist. In addition, the study found that sharing out ideas during our research process improved student’s interpersonal and communication skills.

### **“A Goal Without Action is a Dream”: From Theory to Action**

In the first forum, we listened to a one minute perspective that had been featured as part of KQED’s youth perspective series. This perspective was from a student whose experience in juvenile hall helped him change his life for the better. NZ, an 11th grader noted, “he should be able to get help without being locked up,” in response to the perspective. A few other students then shared their personal experiences in juvenile hall.

The purpose of the forums had been to create critical consciousness around trauma-informed care by looking at how trauma disproportionately impacts communities of color. Two students mentioned that they thought that they had parents who may have suffered from ACE's. "I think that's what happened to my dad, ACE's or whatever," said TW. I had not asked them to share this information but the YPAR group was beginning to become a place to speak openly. The forums provided an opportunity for research participants to connect with one another socially and emotionally. The group dynamics were observed to be positive throughout the project. I noted that students engaged openly with one another in all of the YPAR forums and seemed comfortable sharing out.

As we set on our journey of participatory action research I asked our research group, "what wisdom do you share with the world?" VW's set the tone for much of what we would discover through this process in her reply that, "a goal without action is a dream." This highlighting of action as being of central importance to the authenticity of learning and conversation, and distinct from the abstract ideas and learning objectives that had been pervasive in much of what they disliked about school, proved to be a driving and motivating element to each step of our collective research journey.

In the third forum, participants were asked and discussed a series of focus group questions (See Appendix A). Participants talked about strength in the form of interest and hobbies, like RT who said he gets confidence from "rapping" or TW, who identified "cooking". These questions both helped me better understand the students, but also, unexpectedly, helped the students better understand each other and humanize our research process as a whole. The group learned that MS aspired to travel and that drawing gave RT confidence. The focus group

had helped transform our understandings of each other and provided a foundation for students' to ground their research in recognitions of their own sense for strength and value in the world.

The YPAR forums proved to be a transformative space where students found their voices and felt comfortable expressing their opinions in front of one another. The groups had been advised that YPAR was being used to shift the power of decision-making to the students. By using a democratic approach the YPAR process built on ideas in critical pedagogy (Bryadon-Miller & Maguire, 2008). The sharing of power was explicitly talked about by the researcher throughout the YPAR process. The principal noted the empowered students “really wanted to share out”. The group had transformed not only individuals but the class culture.

### *Interacting with Community*

Most students jumped right into the task of interviewing a community member. For example, YE, VW, RT, and TA completed their interview by the first in-person class immediately after the forums. The interviews allowed participants to practice research skills while learning new things about their community. VW learned that a former staff member shares her passion for changes to the rec center. Most importantly, students recognized that the research was practical in their lives, actionable and felt authentic.

TM was struggling to reach out to the community member he was going to interview, “honestly, this is hard for me” he said of the interview process. The research was forcing TM out of his comfort zone and forcing him to learn new skills to successfully complete his research. YPAR provided an opportunity for TM to practice scheduling an interview, a skill he said will help him when he looks for a job next year. YPAR had become a transformative process for TM. At the end of the project, TM reflected that he enjoyed the process and said, “we can easily talk about issues.”

The benefits of the interviews provided opportunities for the students to take action in their school's TIC, and understand themselves as agents for change. For instance, RT found space to engage in authentic advocacy for after school programs dedicated to his hobby. RT had taken concrete steps to explore how supports that work for him could be utilized by others. RT spoke often during the student symposium in noticeable contrast to his level of participation in the early YPAR forums. The YPAR process made RT's suggestions for improving the school's TIC feel to him to be meaningful because it was authentic. Another participant, YE learned from the school's counselor more about how boxing can be a way to heal from trauma. YE enjoys boxing himself and participates in opportunities to practice the hobby often. Podcasting allowed YE to utilize one of his identified strengths "communication" with one of his passions, boxing. YE was empowered by his interview to advocate for his hobby to be used as a tool for healing. Each student now had concrete research to inform their podcast perspectives and empower them to action.

### ***Transformation***

One day as the group was working on their podcast I observed students' confidence was growing around their perspectives. As VW was preparing for her podcast, I asked VW to give TA and TM an idea of what her perspective was going to be about. VW immediately started sharing excitedly. She explained the positives of creating better access to the local community center and talked about ideas she had for programs that could be offered. VW had clearly developed a passion for what she felt were actionable outcomes that could be achieved through her research and through her enthusiasm was creating awareness, inspiration, and invoking passion in the other student participants with whom she was speaking.

I was given permission to use a room at our school on a non-student staff workday to provide students a space to receive help, if needed, in recording their podcasts. Since it was an off day for students, I didn't expect anyone to show but wanted to extend the offer anyways. I was excited when two students, MW and VW showed up to work on their podcast. That afternoon as we worked collaboratively on the podcast, we formed a deeper bond to both our research and one another. This was my first time in three years of teaching at this school that students had shown up on a non-school day aside from filling out paperwork. VW would produce a podcast that afternoon appropriately titled "A Place to Go". In VW's perspective she advocated for after school programs:

When you have a place to go it's productive, safer, and you're less likely to get in trouble. It's productive in a way that allows teens to develop and practice skills, such as communication and social skills as well as to create networks that help teens achieve their goals. It's safer because people know and because teens are surrounded by adults where they're not tempted to use substances or engage in dangerous activities. Teens are less likely to get in trouble because in a way they are supervised and provided different activities to keep their mindset busy and healthy

GZ spoke about the podcast perspectives as a way to "release our thoughts". Students were creating counter-narratives by "releasing their thoughts", in this way the YPAR process was found to be a cathartic exercise for participants.

### ***Action***

The action component of this participatory action research project-evolved into students successfully advocating for after-school programs. The action was guided by student interest and refined through student research and the production of their one minute perspectives.

Participant empowerment came through realizing their expertise and unique wisdom can bring about meaningful change in their communities. VW's idea for improving the community center came to her during our second YPAR cohort. When she first mentioned the idea I do not think she thought this idea would be taken seriously by community members. Identifying an issue is one thing but doing something about it is a whole different thing. VW had agency in choosing what her action step would be. VW's perspective sparked a conversation on how her local recreation center could become more accessible. At the end of the YPAR process VW's call for action in the student symposium led her to get a recommendation on a next step from the school's principal who suggested VW connect with JJ, a community member, who shared her aspiration to make her community center more accessible for young people.

The actionable outcomes of this project were completely driven by student interest and inquiry. The action took many forms such as interviews, podcast productions, forums, and the student symposium. The primary action step was the student symposium. At the symposium, students presented their podcast perspectives to the school's administration with a student lead symposium. The symposium offered the students another authentic space to communicate directly with their principal and community members with the understanding they were the experts in their area and that what they had to share mattered toward concrete change. Students were observed in this symposium as being engaged and eager to share ideas and present their podcast and the community members were excited to hear them.

At the conclusion of the participatory action research process I asked the students to reflect on the project by answering two questions. The first was, "what strengths do you have that may go unrecognized?" TM shared "playing the drums," while YE wrote, "communication". While I hadn't known these were skills these students had prior to these admissions, I realized

that both of these students had explored these strengths in their podcast and had found a sense of validation and valuation of strengths they had but had not previously been acknowledged for in our school community.

The second question was, “what have you learned about yourself and your community through this work?” VW replied that, “working with the community helps me understand my community a lot better & allows me to reflect on my own life.” VW had come to understand herself better through the YPAR project. TM shared that “what I have learned about myself is that I can do a decent perspective.” Much like VW, TM had gained confidence through the project. For these students YPAR served as a space for self-discovery by participants, The student participants were able to both showcase their strengths in an authentic setting while simultaneously discovering new ones.

## **Conclusion**

The research questions were centered around three primary points of inquiry. The first was, what is the internalized worldview of students as it relates to strengths-based versus deficit-based language? The second research question was, to what extent does student voice and advocacy contribute to change in their community? The third explored, how a student's unique wisdom creates actionable change in a school community's TIC?”

Through this research, three findings emerged. First, the power of internalized language on student self-perception identified systems of support, and YPAR as a means for student agency. In respect to my first research question, I found using podcasting as a YPAR tool allowed students to create strength-based counter-narratives on trauma-informed care. I also sought to understand the impact of student's voice on school policy. The findings clearly show that YPAR empowered students to advocate for change in school policy. Participant's advocacy



was enhanced through a critical understanding that was strengthened by their research. Thus, student voices had a positive effect not only on school policy but on how new policy will be drafted going forward. The findings were also clear that elevating perspectives and allowing students space to use their agency to positively impact not only TIC policy but school policy as a whole by increasing student engagement through empowerment. The implications of these findings have the potential to change how schools and researchers view TIC systems of support, use of language within TIC, and the utilization of the YPAR process as a tool for healing and for guidance in school policy, especially at this alternative education high school in Northern California.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The three major findings of this research include the importance in shifting internalized language from deficit-based frames to strength-based ones, the identification of unique sources of strength and systems of support, and the importance of concrete steps toward change for the student participants and named by a student who said, “a goal without action is a dream.” By building a critical consciousness in and around the subject of trauma-informed care (TIC). YPAR participants identified the insights, assets and strengths of their own lived experiences. This research also looked at subtle ways in which microinvalidations exist in the language experienced by our youth and how that language is internalized. These findings call for shifting language from deficit based to strength-based. Shifts in language are necessary to help students reach their academic and social-emotional potential.

In this chapter I will first explore how the findings of this study align with and build on concepts and theories in the literature. Then I will examine how using student podcasting for YPAR is both culturally responsive and trauma-informed. Next, I will look at the implications for YPAR’s use in the classroom and as a tool to inform school's decision making in areas of policy and curriculum. Finally, in this chapter I will look at the limitations of the study and propose new inquiries for future research.

This study reinforced and utilized many of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks previously found in the literature. The concept of “democratizing of voice” (Day et al., 2017 p. 3) in our project adhered to both CRT principles (Crosby, 2016; Quiros, 2020) and TIC principles (Walkley and Cox 2013). All three frameworks CRT, YPAR, and TIC advocate allowing students to have equity of voice. The positive effects this YPAR project had on student participants, such as authentic engagement and a feeling of belonging are also represented in the

literature (Halliday et al.,2018). Student participants in this study improved their interpersonal skills as evidence through the YPAR project which mirrors findings from Brunzell et al. (2015) who also found benefits in these areas. Student's identification of cultural resources aligns with Yosso's (2005) six forms of cultural capital within Latine communities, specifically *familia capital*, *resistance capital*, and *social capital*.

The TIC counter-narratives created by the students gave power to their voices and challenged the traditional TIC narratives which connect to the findings in other studies (Quiros, 2020). Moore's (2017) findings on strengths-based approaches also align with those same approaches highlighted by the research participants in this study.

The findings in the study and in the literature mirrored one another in terms of students' identification of peer support as one of the most beneficial for students who may be coping with trauma (citation). Students identifying peer support as therapeutic is also found in Day et al. (2017). The link that Stemple et al. (2017) found between chronic absenteeism and ACE's was reaffirmed by data collected in this data in the form of first-hand student accounts and interviews with community members and administrators.

Research showed strength-based approaches can be explored by schools and help them understand how to unearth the roots of student agency by beginning to understand cooking, drawing, or writing lyrics as forms of healing. The student co-researchers also emphasized the importance in altering TIC to support the unique strengths of our students.

Diebold et al. (2020) found student podcasting to be an effective tool in TIC, it did not explore podcasting in an alternative education high school setting nor did it use YPAR. While Watson et al. (2016) used YPAR to better understand trauma, the study did not use podcasting perspectives. While student perspectives have been utilized in various YPAR methods such as

community mapping (Amsden & VanWynsberghe 2005), Photovoice (Wang et al., 2004), and Poetry (Ayala, 2016), no study has utilized the one min YPAR perspective to critically understand race and trauma.

### **Implications for Literature**

While podcasting has been used as a research tool in previous studies (Diebold et al., 2020) this research advances and advocates for the integration of YPAR podcasting as a curricular tool. This study found benefits in fostering a critical consciousness in students, especially with regards to race (Dutil, 2020) and trauma practices (Menschner & Maul, 2016), to engage with and actively transform the pedagogical priorities. YPAR provides an authentic space for student agency to shape policies of an academic community, especially with regards to alternative education secondary schools. In both this study and Day et al. (2017) “interpersonal” skill development was a YPAR outcome (p. 228).

While many studies acknowledge and explore the alignment between YPAR and CRT (Haskie-Mendoza, 2018), this study explored the alignment for the first time in an alternative education setting. Previous research has highlighted that when TIC is researched in a culturally responsive way using YPAR methodology it builds critical understanding in participants (Day et al., 2017). The literature on using YPAR methodology to drive school’s policy change may indeed evolve to include how students can help make hiring and curriculum decisions for schools.

The literature emphasized how racism can be a form of trauma when experienced regularly and persistently in the form of microaggressions (Sue et al. 2007). Similarly, this study found that students in our northern California alternative education school experienced racial trauma in the form of microaggressions, specifically microaggressive language. Creating

counter-narratives had similar positive effects as those found in Quiros et al. (2019) and helped provide an awareness, and a shift, in the language used at our school.

### **Implications for Practice and Policy**

Exploring trauma-informed care through a YPAR project provided valuable practice and policy insights. This study found that the use of language in our schools, classrooms, and communities needs to be reevaluated and shifted to better serve our students. This shift away from a deficit-based language approach towards a strength-based approach has major implications for students especially those who have suffered trauma. Findings in this study also point to how schools can view and value various systems of support, and intrinsic senses of strength identified by students. Trauma-informed schools need to be aware of students' perceived systems of support as well as how to bolster those systems. Finally, schools' practice and policy can greatly benefit from YPAR research as part of the curriculum.

### ***Classrooms***

As an educator, who has the honor of designing projects for students, I will continue to use YPAR podcasting to go about helping my students gain agency and take action. In the classroom, YPAR has traditionally examined social justice issues (citation) but has the potential for student-led research across disciplines. Most importantly YPAR shifts the power dynamics in the classroom from teacher to student. This shift facilitates culturally responsive pedagogy by creating space for equity of voice and authentic interaction with the student's local community. In this way, YPAR allows educators to extend learning and student voice beyond the classroom walls. Classrooms can also benefit from helping to develop and support the unique sources of strength.

The process of identifying strength-based language should be site specific and involve student voice. Understanding how our students perceive language is an ongoing effort. Performing an audit of language used in the classroom in an effort to examine opportunities to shift from deficit-based language towards strength-based language will help educators better serve their students. While the literature has recommendations for strengths-based language approach teachers can read, students are ultimately the experts educators should be turning to.

### ***Schools and Administration***

School principals and other school administrators should examine how a shift towards a strengths-based language approach can have positive impacts on students, especially those that may have suffered trauma. Subtle changes in languages can include such practices as shifting from an “intake meeting” to “onboarding meeting”. The internalizing of positive language helps young people to perceive themselves in positive ways. Principals and administrators who professionally develop their staff to be trauma-informed are humanizing student victims of trauma. This professional development needs to coincide with site specific student perspectives on TIC. YPAR is not the only way to collect these perspectives but worked well in this study.

Schools you seek formation of student councils and committees that play meaningful roles in shaping school policy. Student groups like these can use a YPAR methodology to create student understanding, solicit community feedback or input and provide informed perspectives on important school matters. Schools benefit by having well informed policy and helping empower their students.

Those who found strength in themselves often did so through hobbies such as, drawing, cooking, listening to music. While these types of activities exist in some public schools they are harder to come by at a small alternative education campus. Alternative education schools need to

prioritize adding programs aimed at supporting student interest. All students need “a place to go” and schools need to create these places using student voice.

### *Policy*

One way in which schools can better utilize student agency to inform policy is by understanding the internalization of strengths-based and deficit-based language from students’ perspectives. These perspectives offer rich data on how the language experiences of our students, especially those who have experienced trauma, affect their social-emotional well-being. Administrators should seek to make these changes towards strength-based language in areas such as official school documents, board meetings, and internal emails. Schools can adopt these practices to examine and evaluate language and create similar shifts like Bayview's shift from “in-take” to “admissions”. As language is often co-opted and connotations change, it is important that school communities reevaluate shared language frames on a semi-annual basis and to include student input in the updating process.

If schools and school districts seek to dismantle systemic racism (citation) then it is important for these institutions to consult the students themselves by making room for student-led inquiry such as YPAR. YPAR allows for students and families to explore ways to use research as a tool for self, family, and community transformation (Haskie-Mendoza et al., 2018). This transformation involves an active deconstruction of the traditional white middle-class norms that govern the school and educational policy. YPAR provides a new narrative that counters the monolithic, predominantly white narrative (Quiros et al., 2020). School leaders can partner with academic institutions to conduct YPAR groups as a part of an ongoing school course offering that would provide schools well-researched and locally sourced ideas for how to improve school policy and continually dismantle systemic inequities.

## **Limitations of the Study and Future Research**

YPAR projects require that researchers are flexible and understand that participants have a lot going on in their lives aside from the research project. More time would have allowed for more research opportunities for student participants. The limited time also made it difficult for participants to gain deep understandings of all components of YPAR, CRT, and TIC. Another limiting factor in these findings was that this study was conducted with an alternative education population, while the perspectives of these students are rich, they are by no means representative of all students. Consideration for the geographical location is important. Urban/suburban environments like the ones the project participants come from are not comparable to all school settings and therefore limit the scope of this research. The study did not include staff members or parents whose voices would no doubt create important research findings.

### ***Future Research***

Future research could be done in podcasting perspectives using a mixed method approach such as utilizing survey data. Participants could also be expanded to include staff members and community members as research participants. The study's geographic could be expanded to include a variety of different demographic communities and serving a broader cross section of student populations. Furthermore, the population in this study was predominantly Latine. Future studies may wish to explore YPAR podcasting perspectives with other ethnic groups. Longitudinal research would allow researchers to track participant growth and check for suitability of positive student self-perception.

The creation of counter-narratives through student podcasting has the potential to be utilized across the demographic spectrum. Podcasting perspectives are affordable to produce, students simply need access to some kind of digital recording device. This allows future research



to be conducted anywhere student researchers have access to these digital recording devices.

Future studies would also need to try and understand how new platforms, such as podcasting can allow researchers to hear from a larger, more diverse, cross-section of the population.

### **Conclusion**

This research showed that participatory action humanized student researchers and provided them with space to critically analyze trauma-informed care. YPAR is a culturally responsive way to practice TIC. The conceptual and theoretical overlap between YPAR, TIC and CRT was found to be beneficial in this study in that all three frameworks seek to authentically empower students. Within our schools we have voices that go unheard that offer a wealth of untapped knowledge. When given authentic space to be heard, student voices can improve school policy and empower young people to use their unique wisdom' for positive change.

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### **Appendix A: Focus Group Questions**

1. What makes you feel confident?
2. How do you create happiness in your life?
3. How do you overcome challenges?
4. What do you look forward to?
5. What are your aspirations?
6. What wisdom do you share with the world?
7. How do you identify a system of support in your community?
8. What are the benefits/challenges that you see in this community?
9. How do you believe students can continue to find networks of support?
10. What are the practices for success in achieving one's goals and aspirations?
11. What helps you feel strong?



## **Appendix B: Reflection Prompts and Questions**

Question 1: What strengths do you have that may go unrecognized?

Question 2: What have you learned about yourself and your community through this work?

