

FULL-LENGTH ARTICLES

A Partnership in Youth-Led Dissemination and Meaning Making

Shareen Springer, Ph.D.¹, Miranda Ryker¹, Marmy Hernandez-Gonzalez¹, Olivia Staten¹, Kennedy Ruybal¹, Nicolle Marroquin Leon², Raquel Amador³, Gretchen Nihill⁴, gabi Garcia⁴, Maya Ostroff⁴, Jared Reynolds⁴, Mariah Kornbluh, Ph.D.³ 

¹ Lane County Educational Service District, ² Lane County Education Service District, ³ Psychology, University of Oregon, ⁴ University of Oregon

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Dissemination is a vital and often under looked step towards leveraging research to inform systematic change. And, yet there has been limited scholarship or guidance around the co-creation of dissemination in partnership with community members. This paper offers lessons learned, illustrative examples, and ethical considerations from three youth-led and conceptualized dissemination projects. The first is a youth-led podcast, executed and run by high school students focused on educational transformation and reimagination. The second focuses on a multi-phase report generated from county-wide youth-led summit focused on mental health and youth organizing. And the third involves a youth-led evaluation of a juvenile drug treatment and recovery court. Throughout these case studies and dissemination products (i.e., podcasts, reports, workshops, media), we highlight the valuable role of youth in pushing for dissemination to be an iterative and relational act that promotes creativity, urgency and long-term accountability. We also note the complex ethical considerations involved in honoring the voices and agency of young people, while recognizing and navigating evolving oppressive forces. We conclude with discussions and implications for academics, community partners, and young people themselves.

Introduction

Dissemination is a critical step towards leveraging research to promote and inform tangible policy change (Mosavel et al., 2019). And it can also serve as a valuable platform to uplift new voices and generations (Middaugh et al., 2024). While community engaged research values the “final act” of sharing research to the broader community and public (Kirshner, 2015), there is limited scholarship or guidance around how such processes are co-created (Kia-Keating et al., 2017). Nor is there a holistic discussion of the ethical considerations involved in meaningfully engaging in and uplifting such work from institutional partners (i.e., school districts, non-profits, and universities; see Ozer et al., 2021 exception).

This manuscript explores youth-led dissemination as an integral stage of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), drawing on three intergenerational projects in which youth collectively generated, interpreted, and circulated knowledge through podcasts, summits, and system-level evaluation tools. These projects are all centered in an ongoing and intentional partnership (i.e., the CoLab). The CoLab is a collaborative research space

where high school students, educators, and community partners work alongside the University of Oregon undergraduate and graduate students to explore real-world questions and challenges through the lens of **youth action and community-based research**. The partnership is built on the belief that students—at every stage of their educational journey—have powerful insights and experiences that can shape systems, policies, and practices.

Within this manuscript, we highlight three youth-led and conceptualized dissemination projects. The first is a youth-led podcast produced, executed, and run by high school students. The podcast explores the potential of school when students lead with curiosity, care, and purpose. Through the initiation of authentic conversations, stories, and reflections, students dig into what matters most—identity, belonging, community, and the schools we all deserve. The second case study focuses on a report inspired by a county-wide youth-led summit. Throughout the course of the year, youth from various advisory councils (i.e., non-profit, behavioral health, school, and government spaces) met, organized, and ran a summit for their peers. Findings were then shared through a “quick guide” to other youth, administrators, and non-profit leaders, as well as a more detailed evaluation report constructed by undergraduate and graduate students. The third case study involves a youth-led evaluation of a juvenile drug-treatment court. Here, youth reviewed program evaluation data, toured detention centers, and interviewed a range of actors with varying roles within the criminal justice system. Youth then created an “implementation road map” to spur discourse and problem-solving around immediate barriers as well as push for long-term transformation with the goals of creating a more responsive and developmentally oriented program grounded in local community knowledge.

Throughout these case examples, we intentionally adopt an expansive definition of dissemination aligned with principles of YPAR, in which knowledge circulated, sense-making, and action are intertwined (Akom et al., 2016). Additionally, our systematic analysis across case studies highlights the valuable role of youth in dissemination practices that 1) promote creativity, urgency, and long-term accountability, and 2) account for the complex ethical considerations involved in honoring the voices and agency of young people, while recognizing and navigating evolving oppressive forces. We conclude with discussions and implications for academics, community partners, and young people themselves.

Literature Review

Within academia, dissemination is often focused on the production of peer-reviewed articles due to an emphasis on yielding results and amassing publications to achieve promotion and field recognition (Renick et al., 2024). Such a narrow dissemination focus may partially contribute to the 15 to 17-years it takes for scientific research to translate into real-world practice (Clarke et al., 2013; Farley-Ripple et al., 2018). This troubling research-to-practice gap may also yield larger ripple effects by contributing to a growing disinvestment in scientific research and higher-education entities (Ozer et al.,

2021; Renick et al., 2024). The field of dissemination science has documented that researchers invested in science-communication need to proactively plan the dissemination process involving practices such as developing an early dissemination plan, working in partnership with the community and directly impacted populations, and strategically engaging targeted end-users (Gollust et al., 2025; Kwan et al., 2022).

YPAR is one approach that elevates the use of research evidence (URE) by involving youth from the inception to dissemination (Ozer et al., 2020). YPAR is a form of community-based participatory research in which youth and adults are engaged as co-collaborators in a research partnership that promotes youth development, the democratization of research evidence, and the dissemination of localized knowledge (Ballonoff Suleiman et al., 2021; Ozer et al., 2024). In YPAR, youth identify a social issue of importance to their community, gather and analyze data, and share their findings to spur social action and policy change (Abraczinskas & Zarrett, 2020; Ozer et al., 2020). Social action is a critical stage of the YPAR process, in which findings are disseminated to raise public awareness, motivate behavioral change, and at-times sway influential decision-makers (Kennedy et al., 2019; Ozer et al., 2020). Youth hold important expertise and viewpoints to strategically design, develop, and circulate research evidence in impactful and meaningful ways (Kikut-Stein et al., 2025). For instance, Kikut-Stein and colleagues (2025) found that youth held valuable insights in leveraging effective peer cues and channels to disseminate health information via social media, strengthening both help seeking and self-efficacy behaviors amongst high school students.

Ozer and colleagues (2020), further note that YPAR has inherent characteristics that can facilitate research use by key decision-makers in the context of: 1) being action-oriented, 2) involving the strategic analysis of audiences who will act on such research, and 3) creative dissemination of research that is both timely and accessible. Though YPAR studies often report an overview of the dissemination strategies and topic, reporting often lacks depth around dissemination processes and outcomes (Abraczinskas & Zarrett, 2020; Ozer et al., 2020). Thus, a more detailed and critical exploration around youth co-designed dissemination strategies is needed to track the uptake and ultimate use of research to inform policy and practice. Platforms for sharing such scholarship (such as this special issue) are incredibly valuable in that they highlight the various strategies, mediums, and ethical challenges of partnering with youth researchers to strategically disseminate youth-generated findings in an evolving and tumultuous political climate.

Positionality and Purpose of the Writing Team

The CoLab (which entails our writing team) emerged from an ongoing intergenerational research-practice partnership between the University of Oregon, Lane County Education Services, and the Lane County Student Voice Design and Research Team. The Student Voice Design and Research Team was convened by the first author as a cross-district, youth-led,

collaborative space composed of high school students representing diverse geographic and identity communities across Lane County (rural and urban) within the United States. Students were recruited through affinity groups, leadership programs, and educator nominations, with attention to engaging young people whose perspectives are often marginalized in school decision-making contexts. The team has met with Dr. Springer weekly over the last three years to identify shared concerns and design collective action projects grounded in youth priorities. Notably, the university research-practice partnership was initiated between the practitioner-researcher (Dr. Springer) and the faculty researcher (Dr. Kornbluh). After meeting and discussing values around youth voice and engagement, the practitioner researcher began to invite the faculty member to the Student Voice Design and Research Team meetings and a larger countywide youth advisory council (monthly meetings). Through this two-year partnership, graduate and undergraduate students were strategically plugged into specific high school student-led projects offering support through one-on-one mentorship, data analysis (e.g., running descriptive statistics), literature reviews (e.g., generating annotated reviews), and product generation (e.g., supporting the development of infographics). The practitioner research and faculty member also meet weekly to discuss ongoing project updates (i.e., emerging challenges), write in real-time, and share their lived experiences (i.e., balancing motherhood and work).

As an intergenerational writing team, we hold and continuously navigate multiple identities in relation to systems of power. We share our positionality to honor the breadth, richness, and perspective of our collective in dimensions of age (adolescents, emerging adults, and adults), professions (student workers, school administrators, graduate assistants, and faculty), ethnic and racialized identities (white, Middle-Eastern/SWANA, Latina/x, Black), socio-economic class (working class, first generation, educated, middle class), gender (non-binary, cisgendered), dis(ability), as well as sexual identity and gender expression (heterosexual, queer). Student authors of this manuscript entail high school students (from the Student Voice Design and Research Team) and undergraduate co-researchers who directly participated in one or more of the case studies. Student authors contributed written reflections on their experiences. Adult authors include a faculty researcher, three doctoral graduate students in Social, Developmental, and Clinical psychology, and a practitioner-researcher who supported project coordination, analysis, and manuscript integration. Our focus centers on relationship building, in which we foster a critical and celebratory learning community and affinity space focused on issues of equity and student power. Our weekly meetings allow us the opportunity to engage in critical reflection, share notes that uplift our knowledge, and recognize our biases and assumptions (Mosley et al., 2020). Through intentional facilitation and relationship building, we continue to aspire to recognize our vulnerabilities and biases, as well as welcome iterative dialogue from one another. In writing this piece, student authors (high school students and undergraduates) shared

their personal thoughts, reflections, and processes to guiding questions informing the paper conceptualization in individualized documents (i.e., journals developed via google forms) to allow space to honor their voice and not feel intimidated writing in real-time with adults. Notably, a separate written journal reflection was solicited by student authors for each case study. Specifically, one high school student author wrote two reflection pieces for both case studies 2 and 3. In our preparation of the manuscript, we selected quotes to honor, bring attention to, and elevate youth co-author voices (high school and undergraduate) throughout the research and dissemination process.

Methodology

Across all three case studies, the primary source of information for the manuscript are student authors' individual reflections on the dissemination process and archival products (i.e., dissemination products). Student authors were provided journaling prompts via google forms (co-developed by the team) to reflect on their experiences (*see [figure 1](#) for a full list of questions*). Additionally, archival documents (podcasts, podcast guides, evaluation reports) that are publicly available were utilized to expand upon each case study and approach. Next, student author reflections were reviewed by the writing team (composed of both high school and undergraduate students, and adult authors) using an iterative, collaborative analytic process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Specifically, the writing team engaged in data familiarization (reviewing all responses), abandoning pre-existing frameworks by actively bracketing (memo-ing), and identifying significant statements. Significant statements were identified through both repetition and novelty of student authors' experiences. Thematic clustering of statements involved: (1) labeling of statements, (2) sorting statements into similar groupings, (3) reviewing and refining groups, and (4) selecting excerpts to guide construction and storytelling within the manuscript. Student authors reviewed numerous drafts of the manuscript prior to submission. In particular, verifying the quotes selected for each case study.

Figure 1. Journal Prompts for Student Authors Across Case Studies

1. How did you come to be a part of this project? What brought you to this work?
2. What was it like to work with a team from different backgrounds?
3. What did you learn from the experience?
4. How are you thinking about sharing this information (findings and recommendations from) from this project? What are your concerns? What strategies have you been generating as a team?
5. What do you see as your role as a researcher on this project?
6. What were your expectations for the project when you started (what did you think research meant/you would be doing), and how has that changed over time?
7. What does it feel like to work on a project with long-term/transformational shifts that you might not be around to see? Do you have faith that things might change? What feels important in terms of dissemination and roles of adults in moving those big system-level shifts forward after you aren't on the project anymore?

For each case study (described in detail below), we offer accompanying tables summarizing the purpose of each case study and timeline, the YPAR composition of each case study team and roles played, the data collection

methods and analytic processes utilized for both YPAR projects and manuscript writing, the role of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and other important ethical considerations in each specific case (see tables [1](#), [2](#), and [3](#)). In regard to the IRB, each case study was either qualified as exempt or did not qualify for review as projects were focused on evaluation purposes and individual student author reflections.

Case Studies

Case Study One. In the first case study, students engaged in the Student Voice Design and Research Team created a podcast ([Between Classrooms](#)) designed, produced, and hosted by high school students. The decision to create a podcast grew from the team's desire to reach audiences beyond their immediate classrooms and districts. High school students identified podcasting as an accessible and flexible format that allowed them to share stories and reflections in their own voices, extending youth inquiry and dialogue into broader school and community contexts.

Although the podcast originated as a youth-led media project, it functioned as a youth participatory action research (YPAR) process, in which high school students collectively identified and explored problems they experienced in their schools. The podcast functioned as a form of youth-led dissemination central to YPAR, intentionally connecting student analysis with opportunities for conversation and change. Each episode began with a Student Voice Design and Research Team meeting in which students surfaced recurring issues (e.g., school safety, disciplinary inequities, access to mental health supports). After selecting a topic, high school students developed semi-structured peer interview protocols and conducted interviews across multiple schools. When available, they incorporated school climate or county-level data and reviewed relevant policies or community resources. High school students then engaged in thematic comparative analysis, identifying patterns across interviews and examining tensions between official narratives and student experiences. For example, in an episode focused on school safety and absenteeism, high school students investigated reports that peers—particularly LGBTQ2SIA+ students and students of color—were staying home due to feeling unsafe. Interviews revealed that safety was experienced as relational rather than physical, that high school students often avoided reporting harm due to mistrust of adult response, and that accountability mechanisms were inconsistently enacted. The episode interwove interview excerpts, high school student analysis, and relevant data, concluding with a collaboratively developed discussion and resource guide for educators. High school students subsequently shared the episode in professional learning spaces, positioning the podcast as both research dissemination and policy intervention.

Throughout each episode, high school students work with an adult mentor over the course of 6 to 8 weeks to develop discussion questions and resource guides intended to bring student-generated knowledge into school spaces. As one high school student author reflected, *"We wanted to start*

the podcast to inform educators and people who make decisions in educational fields about real-life experiences of high schoolers.” For many high school students, the project also reflected a broader commitment to representation, visibility, and belonging. One high school student author described their motivation as grounded in identity and belonging: *“As a young Latina and a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I wanted to create a space where students feel seen, heard, and represented.”* Through the production process, high school student authors reported significant growth in communication, collaboration, and confidence. They learned to navigate the technical and relational aspects of podcasting including scheduling, interviewing, editing, and working in a team setting. As one high school student author put it, *“I have experienced a lot of learning while making this podcast. Specifically, when it is my place to step up and speak up, and when it is my place to step down and let others speak for themselves or me.”* Others reflected on the personal transformations that came from hearing their own voices and stories publicly shared: *“I don’t mind hearing my voice anymore. I love meeting people and it’s amazing for the soul.”*

Youth-Led Adult Supported. While the topics and episodes were entirely high school student-driven, adult partners collaborated with students on dissemination strategies and the development of episode guides to accompany each episode for use by high school students, educators, and community members. These guides offered discussion prompts, resources, and reflection questions to extend learning and dialogue beyond listening (see [Figure 2](#)). Together, the podcast and its guides reframed dissemination as an accessible, relational process—one that centers high school students as producers of knowledge and invites educators and peers into ongoing, student-led conversations about belonging and transformation in schools. High school students viewed this dissemination process as an opportunity to challenge conventional boundaries of educational communication. As one high school student author reflected, *“Not very often does a collection of youth create a message to be spread nationally and even globally. This is important because it reaches more rural areas who might not be keen to adapting to ways that seem ‘against the traditional way.’”* Through their work, dissemination became a creative act of accessibility and care—using technology and storytelling to ensure that student knowledge could travel across contexts.

Furthermore, the creation of the podcast fostered intergenerational mentorship and learning. High school student authors emphasized how mentorship and support contributed to the success of the podcast. Their partnership with the county’s Student Voice and Engagement Specialist (Dr. Springer) was grounded in collaboration and encouragement, creating conditions where high school students could take creative risks and develop confidence in their roles as producers, hosts, and editors. Rather than directing the process, the adult partner helped remove barriers, connect high school students with resources and community guests, and foster an environment of trust where student voice guided each decision. One high

Figure 2. Podcast Guide (Case Study One)

For Students:

Use the guides on your own, with friends, or in class to reflect, spark conversation, and connect the episode to your own experiences. Think of them as a toolkit to explore identity, community, and student voice in schools. The guides are designed to help you:

- Notice how your experiences and perspectives connect with the stories shared.
- Reflect on belonging, relationships, and the ways school environments support or challenge you.
- Share your ideas, insights, and questions with peers or advisors to help shape positive change.
- Build awareness of diverse identities, experiences, and ways of learning in your community.

For Educators & Administrators:

These guides can also be a resource for professional learning and staff meetings. They provide a way to bring authentic student voices into school conversations and decision-making. Quick ways to use them include:

- **Watch & Reflect:** Watch an episode together and use the guide's questions to spark meaningful discussion.
- **Discussion Prompts:** Break into small groups to explore prompts, then share insights with the larger team.
- **Connect to Practice:** Reflect on how student stories connect to classroom strategies, school culture, or efforts to create learning environments that are inclusive, affirming, and responsive to students' identities, backgrounds, and needs.
- **Action Steps:** Identify 1–2 concrete ways to center student perspectives in classroom practices, school programs, or policies.
- **Center Student Voice:** Use quotes, themes, or stories from episodes to ground discussions in real student experiences and honor diverse identities, experiences, and learning styles.

Goal: Engage with student voices, deepen understanding of students lived experiences, and explore ways to create learning environments where all students feel seen, supported, valued, and empowered to thrive.

school student author reflected on this relationship, noting that having an adult ally who listened deeply and affirmed their experiences was instrumental to the project's growth:

“Talking with her about our experiences has been so meaningful because she really listens and never pushes us aside. She’s taught me how to use my voice, emotions, and experiences to help others. I’ve learned so much from her...”

This kind of mentorship—grounded in trust, shared purpose, and affirmation—reflects the project's broader commitment to youth leadership and partnership. Within the podcast, adults served as collaborators and facilitators rather than directors, reinforcing the podcast's central premise: that students hold expertise essential to understanding and transforming the educational environments they inhabit.

Need for Urgency, Accountability, and Action. Instead of waiting for the yearly student-led summit, the Student Voice Design and Research team created a dissemination channel allowing them to act on ideas, topics, and needs arising from their schools and communities. High school students noted that there was no “right time” to share information and have conversations with each other on pressing issues. The podcast and its accompanying episode guides demonstrate how dissemination can operate as an ongoing form of participatory inquiry and community-building. The format allows for high school students to systematically gather and analyze data as well as disseminate findings in a timely manner that is in alignment with their everyday experiences and needs. The podcast created a venue to bring conversation and dialogue to students, and an avenue for adults to listen and engage authentically. High school students strategically selected to use YouTube to make the podcast accessible on school Wi-Fi networks. The platform also created opportunities for listeners to leave direct comments and request specific topics for future conversations. By positioning youth

(high school students) as both the creators and transmitters of knowledge, the project challenges hierarchical models of research communication, instead framing dissemination as a process of relationship and reflexivity, while reimagining what is possible within the systems and structures that surround young people. Additionally, this format allows listening to become an act of connection, moving permission among and between young people to see themselves as not only having a voice, but being supported as a driver of change in their school spaces.

Ethics and Safety Considerations. Notably, the data collected is owned by the Student Voice Design and Research Team and is not under the jurisdiction of the University of Oregon Institutional Review Board, as it is a county owned project that is not being utilized for academic research purposes. Our academic focus in this paper is solely to describe the dissemination process of the project, not the data gathered by students for online content. Outside of institutional review, ethical and safety considerations are still central to this project and an ongoing conversation. Specifically, Student Design Team members made collective decisions about whether to use aliases or real names, balancing visibility with protection in a politically charged climate. As one high school student author shared, “*We chose to use aliases...because with protests happening directly in our community that threaten the safety of minorities, we believed it was a good additional step to help keep our members safe.*” Another high school student author chose differently: “*I didn’t choose to use an alias because I want to be clear about what I stand for and own my voice.*” These differing approaches reflect the project’s commitment to autonomy and self-determination in how student stories are told and shared.

In the Fall of 2025, the CoLab witnessed locally how social media and the internet dialed up in hostility. Educators within our own school community were being doxed (i.e., sharing personal contact information) and tagged by outside groups for personal messages shared on private social media accounts that did not align with federal policy and leadership messaging. The experience brought important conversations within our collaborative (youth and adults) re-thinking the implications around power, dissemination, accessibility, and safety online. For instance, the collaborative chose to take down one podcast episode that had specifically talked about white nationalism and efforts to push it into schools through nationally organized chapters. The podcast and content were timely, relevant, and a desired conversation amongst students. Yet the online environment made the group feel that leaving the episode up would make them vulnerable to attack and potentially pose a risk to the entire project. Considering such safety concerns, circulation of the podcast has been re-envisioned to involve more direct and in-person dissemination (i.e., sharing stickers with QR codes) rather than through mass social media outreach. While such strategies are aimed to

Table 1. Summary of YPAR Case Study 1

Case Study	Product	Methods	Data Analysis	Composition of Team	Targeted Audience	Urgency, Accountability, and Action	Ethical Considerations
1	Podcast: Purpose to iteratively explore, unpack, story-tell, and disseminate information around pertinent school issues across the county. Duration: Ongoing (Average episode 6-8 weeks from conception to release)	YPAR Project: Interviews with peers and reviewing community resources. Manuscript: Authors/ Podcast Host Journaling Podcast Episodes & Episode Guides	YPAR Project: Thematic clustering of interviewee quotes and direct podcast editing. Manuscript: Inductive coding of direct text of three journal entries and reviewing archival documents (i.e., podcast audio and episode guides) in relation to thematic clustering.	High school students from two different schools (2) College student (1) Adult mentor (1)	High school students Educators/ Administrators	Create real-time podcasts Develop episode guides/discussion guides Engage in active social media circulation Leverage YouTube to enhance accessibility on school WIFI channels and enable direct communication via commenting	Challenge: Project integrity and youth safety in an evolving online climate. Strategies: 1) Youth determine level of personal anonymity, 2) circulating podcasts via personal networks, and 3) critically assessing content curation as a collective. Role of Institutional Review Board: Did not qualify for review, as authors were the ones reflecting on their individual roles within the project for manuscript purposes.

YPAR Dissemination in Practice: Steps for Designing a Youth-Led Podcast

1. Convene a group of youth (diverse in identities and positionalities with shared social justice values) to collectively identify problems experienced within their school, community and/or district.
2. Work together to collectively prioritize topics (based on school climate, group needs, and/or interests) and develop a sequence of topics to address for a series of podcasts.
3. Generate key questions, brainstorm sources of data and consider whose voices hold expertise on the topics.
4. Support with networks, and in the process of inviting community partners to participate in interviews.
5. Record critical stakeholders (interviews should facilitate acts of storytelling and collective inquiry)
6. Edit interview to reflect key takeaways, integrate findings, and call for action.
7. Circulate media-products and findings through trusted networks (i.e., social media, personal relationships).
8. Create episode guides that include invitations for ongoing reflection, action, and supportive resources.

support student safety and preserve project integrity, the collective recognizes that this can make it even more difficult to circulate information surrounding the podcast to students in more rural and isolated communities.

Case Study Two. In the second case study, the Student Voice Design and Research Team convened four different youth advisory councils (YACs) of high school-aged youth (from Lane County public health, Eugene mayor's office, and partnered with a local non-profit that focuses on supports for unhoused youth) over the course of 9-months to design and lead a youth-led summit with the goal of fostering intentional connections across YACs throughout the county. YACs offer sustained opportunities for high school youth to share their ideas to guide the policies and practices of youth-serving organizations (i.e., non-profits, government agencies, schools, etc.). The goal of a YAC is to foster a safe environment for youth to share their voices, build personal connections with their peers and adult advisors, and develop a sense of agency (Havlicek & Samuels, 2018). *"YACs gave me an opportunity to have a voice and work for a purpose"* (High School Student Author). Throughout the year, the planning team (consisting of the Student Voice Design and Research Team, other YACs of high school-aged youth, adult advisors, and graduate students) worked to build community across YACs, gain skills and exposure to a range of research methods (i.e., photovoice, social networking, focus groups), and organize a summit that brought diverse YACs together for data gathering and network building. In particular, the goal of the summit was to give the YACs an opportunity to *"understand and learn the perspectives of all types of students"* (High School Student Author).

In the Spring of 2025, the summit brought together over 100 high school-aged youth and representatives from 11 YACs across the county. At the beginning of the summit, high school youth worked in teams to document current challenges, stressors, and needed support identified by their peers, organizations, and school communities. Data was gathered through a series of eight posters, which solicited feedback on the challenges and supports for students in their school community. Planning committee members (YAC high school students and an undergraduate student) were stationed at each poster to solicit high school student input. *"They were so eager to connect, share resources, plan events or initiatives, and all sorts of YAC related things"* (Undergraduate Student Author). *"Some key things I learned from the summit were that 1) mental health outreach and support systems need to be*

improved in school, 2) an overall vague understanding of who constitutes a mandatory reporter, which led to a fear of opening up to the adults around them” (Undergraduate Student Author). The group then leveraged the summit data to identify and assess areas for future action. They noted quick low-stake tasks that could be completed by their own YAC or working in partnership with another, as well as more intensive and aspirational tasks that would require further funding, resources, and support from local policy makers. *“Have our voices heard and appreciated by adults in power”* (High School Student Author). During the summit, high school aged youth also built a participatory network map of current collaborations across YACs. At the end, they returned to the network map and drew in new connections that were made during or inspired by the event. This real time map served as a visual reminder of what they had accomplished in just two hours and also served as an aspirational road map that provided an impetus for ongoing strategies for growth and further network building.

Youth-Led Adult Supported. High school-aged youth-led the summit. They ran the activities, facilitated group discussions, and led a report out of sessions across groups. As the summit ended, many youths were preparing for graduation, summer jobs, and other YAC activities. Thus, adults took an active role in leading the dissemination effort. Undergraduate students (from a community psychology course led by Dr. Kornbluh) in attendance at the summit took the lead in summarizing key findings via posters. The opportunity allowed them to learn qualitative analysis and rapid evaluation techniques. For many, this was their first time engaging in qualitative data analysis: *“I learned about coding. That was my first exposure to the concept.”* and *“Dr. Kornbluh and her team of graduate students helped walk me through the process without overcomplicating anything and created a space that welcomed everyone’s ideas without fear of judgement”* (Undergraduate Student Author). Dr. Springer took the lead in partnership with Student Voice Design Team youth (high school student authors) to [design a 1-page “quick guide”](#) highlighting key, themes, recommendations, and action steps to share back with attendees for feedback, adult advisors, and educators and non-profit staff. This graphic was shared with key district officials to also encourage dialogue and attendance by school decision-makers at future summits (which has notably occurred in subsequent sessions). Summit participants (high school students) appreciated that the quick guide created a visually stimulating report that highlighted key takeaways and ideas for further action. A detailed evaluation report, led by Dr. Kornbluh, was also created to accompany the quick guide with the support of the larger university team. The more detailed evaluation report was valued by the state and county district administrators as it helped document outcomes and spurred discourse for advancing policy (i.e., the expansion of youth mental health services, a behavioral health specialty focus for college students and partnering with local non-profits to provide student support services). Both guides are available and showcased on the county website.

Need for Urgency, Accountability, and Action. A key desire of the summit was the need for connection amongst YACs and high school-aged youth throughout the county. The summit ignited a craving amongst young people for more connection and community-building and led to an expressed desire for the summit to take place on a quarterly basis. "...more events like the YAC summit that give us opportunities like this" and "building a positive culture when students have trusted adults" (*High School Student Poster Response at YAC*). Informally, this emerged through high school attendees staying connected via social media, group chats, and one-on-one meetups. For instance, youth actively relied on newly formed relationships with other YAC members to bring in support and resources for their schools, including access to basic needs for unhoused youth and mental health clinics. Others shared events, workshops, and employment opportunities across networks and recruited friends in different schools to join organization leadership teams.

In response to youth participant requests for more consistent opportunities to connect and collaborate, the idea for a countywide Youth Voice Network emerged directly from the summit. With coordination support from the CoLab and YAC advisors, high school-aged youth proposed hosting quarterly youth-led summits throughout the school year to strengthen cross-building and cross-content relationships and to sustain collective action in the face of funding cuts. This model sustains youth voice efforts while creating low-barrier access points with built-in pathways (to local YACs and to collaborative social research opportunities with partners at the University of Oregon) for youth leadership. Members of the original YAC and Student Design Team (Case Study One) now mentor other high school youth groups in participatory research and dissemination, helping to build a self-sustaining network where young people lead the learning, connection, and change they envision.

Ethics and Safety Considerations. Since the university research team partnered with the Student Voice Design and Research Team to analyze the data, they submitted and received an exempt status from the University of Oregon Institutional Review Board to analyze the high school student poster responses and network map for evaluation purposes. A doctoral student (Mrs. Amador) did go through a full Institutional Review Board review process to conduct one-on-one virtual follow-up interviews with high school student participants around their experience with the summit. For those research purposes, she gathered youth assent and parental permission. Designing and implementing the summit required careful attention to equity, access, and care beyond the guidelines put forth by the Institutional Review Board. For many participants—particularly high school-aged youth who were unhoused, ensuring that access to caring for children and/or pets, or living far from town—ethical participation depended on the team's ability to reduce barriers that often limit who can lead. Adult facilitators worked alongside high school youth organizers and participants to ensure that basic needs such

YPAR Dissemination in Practice: Steps for Designing a Cross-Sector Youth Summit

1. Convene a network of Adult Advisors or Coordinators of Youth Leadership Groups, Advisory Boards, or Youth Committees.
2. Bring YAC's together to routinely share about organizational priorities, insights, and ideas for areas of need and collaboration.
3. See if a central theme emerges across organizations and youth conversations.
4. Present an overview of research methods and allow YAC members to select what types of activities, projects, and conversations would allow for the greatest impact (while also remaining feasible).
5. Recruit and invite participation from community organizations (build a dashboard of organizations, projects and initiatives with youth leadership positions)
6. Convene summit
7. Bring youth together immediately following the summit to create a "quick guide" of findings and takeaways from the summit (to keep control in the hands of youth leaders and organizations in support of next steps)
8. Create a more detailed summit evaluation report for distribution to academic and policy level leadership

as transportation, food, and safety were prioritized. Organizers intentionally ordered extra meals and provided to-go containers so participants could take food home or share it with others. These seemingly small gestures communicated that youth well-being was not incidental to the work, but foundational to it (a strength of organizing alongside young people who make visible these needs in event planning). Ethical practice also extended to how the event was structured. Rather than repeatedly asking young people to name problems for adults to solve, facilitators framed the summit as a collaborative space for collective sensemaking and action planning. In this format, youth expertise guided both the identification of challenges and the design of responses. This approach acknowledged the emotional labor of revisiting experiences of stress, exclusion, and mental health strain, while also centering youth agency in shaping actionable pathways forward.

Recognizing the spaces young people hold, dissemination of the summit to adult affinity support leaders, school counselors, and administrators was flexible and intentionally allowed opportunity for variation in youth engagement and support, based on a host of unique needs and capacities of the youth involved. Adult leaders and the university team were able to take on the task of data analysis and report generation, while allowing opportunity for intergenerational partnership, sense-making, and validity checking (i.e., member checks) to ensure dissemination continued to center high school youth voices. The format of dissemination projects also recognized diversity in both student and adult stakeholder time, capacity, and bandwidth to engage with evaluation materials. The coupling of such formats allowed opportunity for transparency, an openness to the evaluation process (i.e. sharing of codebooks and data generation), and conversation around future partnership building.

Table 2. Summary of YPAR Case Study 2

Case Study	Product	Methods	Data Analysis	Composition of Team	Targeted Audience	Urgency, Accountability, and Action	Ethical Considerations
2	Evaluation report Duration (9 months)	YPAR Project: High school student poster responses Social network map Manuscript: Undergraduate author journaling High school student posters High school student social network analysis	YPAR Project: Thematic clustering of poster responses, and SNA analyzed via UCINET. Manuscript: Inductive coding of direct text of four journal entries and poster responses, reviewing archival documents (i.e. evaluation report), and further SNA using UCINET.	High school students (8) Undergraduate students (7) Graduate students (2) Community partners/NGO staff (5) Professor (1)	Students/ Affinity group leaders Community partners (Mental health public & nonprofit agencies) Counselors/ Administrators	Relational organizing across YACs (i.e., offering workshops, and resource sharing), YAC peer mentoring, and transitioning to a quarterly summit Producing a "quick guide"/evaluation report highlights Creating a detailed evaluation report including scholarly references	Challenge: Honoring youths' basic needs while involving them as co-partners in data collection and dissemination Strategies: 1) Providing basic needs, 2) offering an inclusive meeting space, 3) working collaboratively, and 4) adults offering time, resources, and support to garner project deliverables Role of Institutional Review Board: Ruled exempt due to the research focus being on evaluation.

Case Study Three. In the third case study, Student Voice Design and Research Team evaluated a juvenile drug treatment and recovery court over the course of 9 months. Initially conceived as a youth-centered evaluation focused on listening to young people's experiences, the project shifted when adults engaged in the evaluation invited high school and college students to join the research team itself as paid co-researchers shaping every stage of the process. This partnership brought together high school students and recent high school graduates with lived experience in the juvenile justice and education systems to analyze data, interpret findings, and co-develop recommendations for systems change. During the project, the YPAR team reviewed program documentation (i.e., handbook, internal materials, court protocols, policies, and program matrices), administrative data (i.e., participant demographics, enrollment and completion data), and 21 stakeholder perspectives (i.e., judges, probation officers, public defenders, district attorneys, treatment providers, peer support specialists, youth, caregivers, and community partners). Data analysis involved: 1) descriptive statistics (program completion rates, demographic breakdowns, and compliance measures, 2) qualitative analysis (thematic analysis of interviews and focus groups), and 3) comparative analysis to explore patterns across data sources.

The project modeled participatory dissemination by positioning youth not only as data contributors but as interpreters and communicators of findings—co-authoring executive summaries, infographics, and presentation materials that translated complex evaluation data into accessible insights for courts, schools, and community partners. In doing so, the evaluation reframed research as an iterative process of shared meaning-making, relational accountability, and youth-driven systems improvement.

Youth-Led, Adult-Supported. When invited to join the evaluation, youth stepped into roles rarely offered to them in system-level research. One high school student author explained, *"I thought it was right up my alley since I am really passionate about youth voice, so I joined because I thought it was a wonderful opportunity,"* while another shared, *"I was asked if I was interested in using my experience with the justice system to help educate others while also learning more for myself."* The team's intergenerational composition—youth with lived experience, university researchers, and public agency staff—brought multiple forms of expertise into dialogue. As one high school student author reflected, *"Working with people from different backgrounds makes looking at data fun. Everyone brings up things I'd never have thought of—we leave no stone unturned to offer the most support to youth."* Adults provided scaffolding for research ethics, data infrastructure, and coordination while ensuring that students led the interpretive process. Another high school student author summarized, *"My role was to be a student consultant, but in that role, I became so much more. I was seen as an equal—and not only that, but I also became more involved and informed than many adults starting in this field."* This youth-led, adult-supported model challenged traditional

hierarchies of evaluation, distributed expertise across roles, and underscored that credible knowledge about systems must include those most affected by them.

Need for Urgency, Accountability, and Action. Through data analysis and dialogue, youth co-researchers surfaced tensions between the court's intentions and the lived experiences of participants, expressing a collective determination to turn those findings into actionable change. One high school student author explained, *"I would love to bring more awareness to the effects the juvenile system has on our community in order to face systematic injustice and gain more control on the way we treat people around us."* As the evaluation moved toward dissemination, youth co-designed executive summaries, infographics, and presentations to make findings accessible to courts, schools, and community organizations, transforming dissemination into a collaborative act of translation rather than a one-way report. *"We brought a lot of things to the surface that cannot be ignored any longer,"* one high school student author summarized. Yet participants also voiced concern that their work might be overlooked: *"I'm concerned that our findings may just be thrown out or barely implemented."* Others expressed a balance of hope and realism *"It's kind of hard to walk away after all the work we put in, but I also know that in order for them to change and grow, we can't hold their hands through it."* Their reflections reframed accountability as both follow-through and ethical responsibility. As one high school author wrote, *"Youth can only raise so much awareness and educate so many adults until it gets to a point where people with genuine power need to use their voices as well."* Another added, *"The most important thing adults in the system need is ambition and commitment to seeing positive change—they have to want it and fight for it because there will be people opposed to it."* Several students envisioned dissemination as a form of public education, hoping to *"do presentations for schools or organizations, maybe even a workshop at the student voice summit,"* to raise awareness among those who, as one noted, *"don't even know what juvenile drug treatment courts are."*

Students also created an implementation road map, where they highlighted low-stakes tasks (phrased as "small wins") that treatment providers and actors within the juvenile justice system could engage in. This included building opportunities to talk with and across different agencies, supporting youth within the juvenile system, and ensuring programmatic meetings were in alignment with available public transportation and young people's everyday realities. The map also pushed for larger secondary change, in which the program could be re-imagined incorporating best practices in alternative community-based diversion/harm reduction models, as well as less punitive and more youth-friendly approaches. The map itself became a conversation point where audience members and policy makers were asked by the presenters to identify key actions they could take (small or big) to begin to push for juvenile reform.

Ethics and Safety Considerations. This study was a contract conducted by the county and Student Voice Design and Research Team. The university research team offered technical support (i.e., training in qualitative data analysis, a workshop on developing interview protocols, an overview of evaluation techniques, and a detailed literature review). Original data was not collected, analyzed, published by or owned by the University of Oregon Research Team. Therefore, the University Institutional Review Board was not involved. In this manuscript, we do not present any of the data within the YPAR project and solely describe the process for supporting youth-led dissemination efforts.

Engaging directly with justice system processes required deliberate attention to emotional safety, confidentiality, and relational ethics. Youth researchers described the weight of witnessing court proceedings and reading narratives of harm—*“Being in the detention center, seeing the court process, reading the youth’s experiences, seeing parents say the most horrible things about their child right in front of their faces—it was suffocating,”* one student author recalled, adding that it *“put things into perspective when I realized that most of the youth in the program are younger than my little brother and don’t even get the bare minimum to survive.”* The evaluation team approached this work through trauma-informed and relational practices. Youth determined what to share publicly, adults ensured institutional safeguards, and regular reflection circles provided space to process both data and emotion. Relationships across the team—between youth, graduate students, faculty, and practitioners—became an anchor for navigating the emotional complexity of systems research, including the reactivation of system-inflicted trauma and the despair that can surface when confronting the persistence of punitive structures. Within these relationships, care was not peripheral but methodological, sustaining participants’ ability to hold grief, anger, and hope simultaneously. As one undergraduate student author reflected, *“It’s always hard to have faith when I’m working on a project and it takes a long time to see progress, but I hope to be in the loop of any updates on what effect our report will make.”* Ethics, in this context, were not a checklist but a relationship—an ongoing practice of transparency, shared care, and accountability that allowed the team to continue imagining change even within systems that often resist it.

The university research team (a graduate student, a faculty member, and three undergraduate students) became a partner in this process by leveraging evidence-based literature within the field, to both affirm and uplift youth-generated findings to further support and add empirical backing to the evaluation report. Evidence-based literature was used to honor and elevate youths’ insights and also offer further credibility from outside researchers and institutional bodies to the evaluation findings. For instance, the university research team provided the youth researchers with empirical literature on alternative evidence-based justice deferral programs (e.g., harm reduction, restorative justice) to address issues of delinquency and substance use

Table 3. Summary of YPAR Case Study 3

Case Study	Product	Methods	Data Analysis	Composition of Team	Targeted Audience	Urgency, Accountability, and Action	Ethical Considerations
3	Presentation & report Duration (9 months)	YPAR Project: Program documentation (handbook, internal materials, court protocols, and program matrices), administrative data (participant demographics, enrollment, and completion data), and 21 semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders (judges, probation officers, public defenders, district attorneys, treatment providers, peer support specialists, youth, and caregivers). Manuscript: High school author journaling Evaluation report	YPAR Project: Descriptive statistics (summarize administrative data including program completion rates, demographic breakdowns, and compliance measures). Qualitative thematic analysis identifying recurring patterns related to program strengths and challenges. Comparative analysis explored how program policies mapped onto federal guidelines. Manuscript: Inductive coding of direct text of three journal entries, and reviewing archival documents (i.e., evaluation report).	High school students (3) Undergraduate students (3) Graduate students (2) Professor (1)	Judges/ Attorneys Director of youth court services/ Treatment providers School administrators	In-person presentations to key decision-makers Sharing information via infographics and executive summaries Curating a final detailed report Implementation roadmap Workshops to courts, schools, and community organizations	Challenge: Trauma of the research on youth, and how to ensure adults would “take up” the findings Strategies: 1) Centering the work in trauma-informed and relational practices, and 2) affirming knowledge through the literature and developmental frameworks. Role of Institutional Review Board: Did not qualify for review. RAP report was an independent, community-led evaluation. No personal data was shared; authors reflect on their own experiences.

YPAR Dissemination in Practice: Steps for Designing a Youth-Led Evaluation

1. Identify a diverse group of youth, many of whom may be impacted by the social issue or program being evaluated (i.e., personally or have family involved).
2. Build a research community and leverage adult support across sectors.
3. Engage youth in the reading of critical texts that explore the history of such programming and also issues of equity.
4. Analyze and assess existing program documents and assessment tools with an eye towards adultism and equity.
5. Gather cross sector data (i.e., interviews with stakeholders across the program)
6. Generate actionable solutions, and long-term goals towards systems transformation.
7. Leverage empirical research and evidence-based programs to support and bolster student-led evaluation claims.
8. Disseminate broadly to policy makers and the public through conversation and connection.

amongst adolescents. The team also brought in adolescent brain development literature to showcase that adult models are often not developmentally appropriate for adolescent populations. These conversations sparked opportunities for youth researchers to be exposed to empirical literature, emerge themselves in new concepts and helpful frameworks, as well as affirm their reactions and deepen insights to the program evaluation results.

Discussion

Across all three case studies, dissemination functioned as both a method and a site for social action. By centering student voices, we identified stakeholder-led engagement practices that pushed for creativity, urgency, and long-term accountability, mirroring other YPAR and community-based projects (Akom et al., 2016; Kia-Keating et al., 2017) while also highlighting diverse mediums and platforms across educational and community settings. In tandem, we also named and navigated evolving ethical concerns outside of the boundaries of the traditional university-led institutional review board (Kornbluh et al., 2025; Teixeira et al., 2021), including developing contingency and safety plans for dissemination within an evolving political climate. This study offers a unique multi-faceted approach to community engagement, moving beyond a singular dissemination product, to consider dissemination as a relational act and iterative process centered within the YPAR cycle (Anyon et al., 2018a; Ozer et al., 2020).

Supports and Barriers to Youth-Led Dissemination

Our case studies highlight how facilitators and barriers to youth-led dissemination emerged. University-led dissemination often models the format of a one-way transaction, in which information is being shared out with targeted users and or the broader public (Renick et al., 2024). However, youth inherently viewed dissemination as relational, an opportunity for co-learning to occur, and an iterative process in which research gathering and sharing is ongoing. Young people were motivated to act strategically and quickly as a result of their work. They were inspired to reach out to one another and build relationships and community outside the boundaries of the YPAR project or act of dissemination, and identified multiple outlets (i.e., podcasts, infographics, community presentations) in order for cyclical

and iterative learning to occur. Furthermore, acts of dissemination were interwoven into their everyday experiences and the multiple settings (school, community, affinity groups) they occupy throughout the day.

The facilitators of dissemination documented by our YPAR team hold notable overlap with other disciplines and literatures (i.e., Use of Research Evidence (URE), Research-Practice Partnership) converging around terminology such as brokering, active engagement, and trust, as well as contextual relevance (Coburn et al., 2020; DuMont, 2024; Farley-Ripple et al., 2018). In regard to brokering, scholars have noted the importance of brokers (i.e., key actors ensuring research is translated to critical decision-makers in an accessible and compelling format; Farley-Ripple et al., 2018; Neal et al., 2015, 2019, 2022). Ozer and colleagues (2020) put forth the theoretical argument that adult advisors and student researchers engaged in YPAR may be particularly effective as brokers due to their ability to disseminate research in a relatable, contextual, and accessible format to key stakeholders and decision-makers. Across all three case studies, student researchers, with the support of adults and university faculty, brokered their findings in creative, engaging, and strategic manners to a diverse array of critical stakeholders (i.e., judges, attorneys, students, educators, and school administrators) in an effort to expand understanding of social issues impacting youth (i.e., mental health, education, criminal justice system) and move towards evidence-informed policy change.

Research within educational policy notes the importance of curating an active learning community in which research can be digested, discussed, and worked into everyday practice (Coburn et al., 2020; Farrell et al., 2019). The relational nature of the dissemination products (podcasts, annual summits, and ongoing community presentations) focused on not just dissemination but building a community and network of diverse actors to continuously engage with emergent youth-generated research. Furthermore, trust is a notable condition for promoting research use and engagement (Doucet, 2019; Metz et al., 2022). Kirkland (2019) and Doucet (2019) highlight the value of community-based research models that partner with marginalized voices to ensure research is reflective of their needs. Across these three distinct case studies, we found that youth researchers are often perceived by their peers and school decision-makers as *trusted* figures in the sharing and dissemination of evidence due to their lived experience and close ties to the community. Lastly, the quality of the actual research is a notable URE condition (DuMont, 2024). This involves the *contextual relevance* of the research findings (Hyde et al., 2016; Palinkas et al., 2014; Tseng & Nutley, 2014). Studies on URE in relation to educational policy have emphasized the value of presenting research that is timely, relevant, engaging, accessible, easy to understand (Asen et al., 2013; Dagenais et al., 2012; Farley-Ripple et al., 2017; Ozer et al., 2020). In these three case studies, YPAR was utilized to generate local and contextually relevant research and then translated into an engaging dissemination format that spoke to key decision-makers. Our

findings complement an emerging literature base exploring YPAR and acts of student-generated dissemination in relation to evidence-informed policy change (Ozer et al., 2020; Stickney et al., 2026; Voight et al., 2026).

Student authors (high school and undergraduate students) reported a host of benefits in relation to engaging in YPAR as well as student-led dissemination products. This included critical thinking, research, agency, communication, and intergenerational support. These findings support prior scoping reviews around YPAR and direct student researcher outcomes (Anyon et al., 2018b; Nash et al., 2024). Our study corroborates emerging YPAR literature in the domains of student authors reporting growth in key dissemination skills surrounding media production, communication, and online content creation (Middaugh et al., 2017; Riina-Ferrie, 2020). Middaugh and colleagues (2017) stress that such skills are critical for students to learn in an evolving online and participatory political climate, in which young people are active agents in shaping, sharing, and consuming information.

However, YPAR and youth-led dissemination was also met with notable challenges and barriers. Our scholarship speaks to what Campbell and Morris (2017) warn are the complex ethical challenges of engaging in community-based work and upholding values of social justice. A key goal of dissemination is ensuring research is accessible and engaging (Mosavel et al., 2019). Yet, with public education becoming increasingly scrutinized there is notable vulnerability for students and the adults they partner with (especially educators) in garnering unwanted national or political attention (Hunt-Hinojosa & Maher, 2022; Pollock et al., 2022). Notably, Hunt-Hinojosa and Maher (2022) identified coordinated national efforts to censor YPAR in school settings, describing it as a form of leftist politics, which trains students to be activists. These efforts make our work increasingly vulnerable, when the goal is to engage in county wide efforts to facilitate student voice and perspective across geographic silos, we are cautious that navigating such communities exposes our team to diverging geopolitical identities. Throughout our case studies, balancing acts of inclusivity, accessibility, and public engagement with collective safety are continuously challenging and evolving acts that require creativity, intergenerational dialogue, and raw vulnerability. While as a collective we do not hold the answers to what the future of youth-led dissemination looks like, we have found as a group that partnerships with a range of community agencies, on the ground organizers, and interwoven networks have allowed us to pause and gather critical information and think through strategies for informed and strategic dissemination that continue to allow for intentional relationship building and community to occur. We hope this article supports future discussion and imaging for what such work might look like in an evolving political environment.

Limitations and Future Directions

A critical gap in this paper is how best to understand, measure, and document the dissemination process in relation to setting level-outcomes. As youth researchers actively share their findings in public presentations, on social media, and through community-outreach it can be difficult to discern if such research is “taken up” and ultimately utilized to inform tangible policy and action. Furthermore, with the bundle of strategies being leveraged, sometimes simultaneously, it can be daunting from a measurement lens to systematically identify which ones hold notable traction and promise in the utilization of research evidence into direct policy and practice. Dumont (2024) notes that there are a host of strategies and organizational conditions needed to promote research use, and that those engaged in dissemination and policy change may benefit from leveraging more than one. Recent scholarship has begun to document the uptake of YPAR in relation to policy change across various systems (e.g., transportation, education; Stickney et al., 2026; Voight et al., 2026). For instance, Voight and colleagues (2026) documented school-level policy adoption across 36 YPAR projects. They found that projects which advocated directly for policy change, solicited administrator engagement, had strong adult advisor support, and were in alignment with recent district initiatives were more likely to have an impact on school settings. More research is needed to explore the impact and uptake of YPAR and youth-generated research across geographic contexts and districts leveraging a host of methods and stakeholder perspectives.

As such, we continue to grapple with how we might measure if the ultimate use of research disseminated through various channels improves direct youth outcomes (i.e., school climate, mental health, well-being). We have been partnering with community partners to access larger data sets around countywide measures (education, criminal justice, and health outcomes). Yet, measuring if engaging in YPAR, youth-led summits, or viewing broader dissemination products creates population-level shifts is challenging to discern when there are a notable host of outside variables at play. In discussions with our student co-authors, we are also reminded of the burden of survey fatigue and the need for more measures that are adaptive, engaging, and uplifting. Recently, our team has begun to center the perspectives of youth researchers from across the region on how YPAR has been leveraged to promote policy change and the role of student-generated dissemination. We aspire to expand this work to interview policy makers directly in both education and government sectors surrounding their interest, willingness, and engagement with YPAR and student-generated dissemination in informing policy making.

Conclusion

Implications for academics, practitioners, and young people themselves. We conclude with a description of implications, considerations, and critical questions for the multiple actors and affinity groups involved in YPAR and youth-led dissemination processes.

Universities. Universities can strengthen youth-led dissemination by cultivating intentional, trust-based relationships with young people and the community partners who already support them. Effective collaboration begins not with new projects or “cold recruitment”, but with existing networks committed to authentic student voice and engagement. For academics this involves advocating for compensated youth roles and creating structured opportunities for co-authorship and co-presentation throughout all phases of dissemination. Equally important is ensuring that young people hold genuine decision-making authority over the framing, format, and audience of communication products—determining not only what is shared, but how and with whom. As illustrated across the student voice and participatory dissemination models highlighted in this article, pairing traditional research outputs (e.g., peer-reviewed articles, technical reports) with rapid, accessible companion products (e.g., podcasts, episode guides, quick-reference tools, and implementation roadmaps) enables universities to connect academic research with broader community audiences. These multimodal strategies make findings available and actionable beyond academic settings, countering the ways in which research can become confined by paywalls, jargon, and disciplinary norms that exclude non-academic participants. Finally, treating dissemination as an iterative, relational process—through co-translation cycles, feedback loops, and “what changed” reflections—positions universities to model ethical, participatory scholarship that not only documents but actively sustains youth-led inquiry and systems change that can continue after research closes.

Reflective Practice for Academics:

- How might your current research practices make space for youth to shape not only the data, but also the story of the research?
- What barriers keep youth from being co-authors or co-presenters? How can these be named and dismantled?
- What does “authentic authorship” look like when youth decide how their stories are told?

Practitioners. Practitioners within our case studies highlight the impact of adults reimagining their roles as service providers to partners in design, research, and dissemination. This shift invites adults to leverage their positional, institutional, and relational power, not just to create access for youth voice within academic research or consultation, but to invite youth

leadership into the design. Practitioners who modeled this approach did so not by withdrawing from leadership, but by reorienting their influence to remove barriers, amplify youth perspectives, and ensure continuity across systems. Practitioners and community-based researchers can extend these findings by conceptualizing dissemination not as a discrete event, but as an ongoing relational process grounded in mutual accountability, reflection, and action. This includes recognizing that dissemination cultivates belonging and interconnection across systems, which in turn catalyzes shifts in practice, policy, and culture across institutions.

Reflective Practice:

- How can your organization move from *consulting* youth to *co-designing* with youth?
- What systems of accountability could you put in place to ensure youth see how their input shapes decisions?
- What practices have you adopted that go beyond “doing no harm” toward “actively naming and navigating experiences of safety”?

Youth. As the case studies demonstrate, youth engagement in dissemination establishes concrete pathways into leadership and systems transformation. When young people participate as co-authors (determining how findings are framed, shared, and received) dissemination becomes a reciprocal process that builds connection and accountability across universities, schools and communities. The examples presented here show that youth-led dissemination is not simply the communication of results, but a relational practice through which young people cultivate visibility, belonging, and agency. When supported to navigate questions of safety, authorship, and representation, youth transform dissemination into a form of collective care where knowledge is mobilized not just to inform, but to connect and change systems.

Reflective Practice:

- What responsibilities come with holding space for others’ voices or stories?
- What boundaries feel important to protect when sharing your experiences or findings publicly?
- How will you know if your work is being understood, used, or felt in the ways you intended?

Summary. YPAR is a critical method and pathway for youth-informed and led dissemination efforts. Prior scholarship has been limited in documenting community-engaged dissemination efforts. This study, written in partnership with young people and in conversation with other pieces within the special

issue, begins to address this gap by documenting three youth-led and YPAR-informed dissemination projects. In this paper, we break down the: 1) key steps taken to ensure authentic youth stakeholder engagement, 2) lessons learned in community-building as well as generating accessible content for diverse audiences, and 3) ethical considerations for supporting such work in an evolving context with competing goals.

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