

Youth as Co-Researchers

How to Implement
Intergenerational and
Participatory Action Research

B | Center for
Universal Education
at BROOKINGS

BROOKINGS



Facilitators



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What is one word that you associate with meaningful youth voice?



1

Youth Experiences as Researchers

2

Types of Youth Research

3

Apply YPAR Principles

Youth Experiences as Researchers



KSVT

NOTHING ABOUT US, WITHOUT US.

*The power of intergenerationality &
YPAR in the fight for education justice.*



WHAT WE DO

Support students as education **research, policy, and storytelling partners** to co-create more just, democratic Kentucky schools & communities.



Young people are the **primary**
stakeholders of their education.



YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

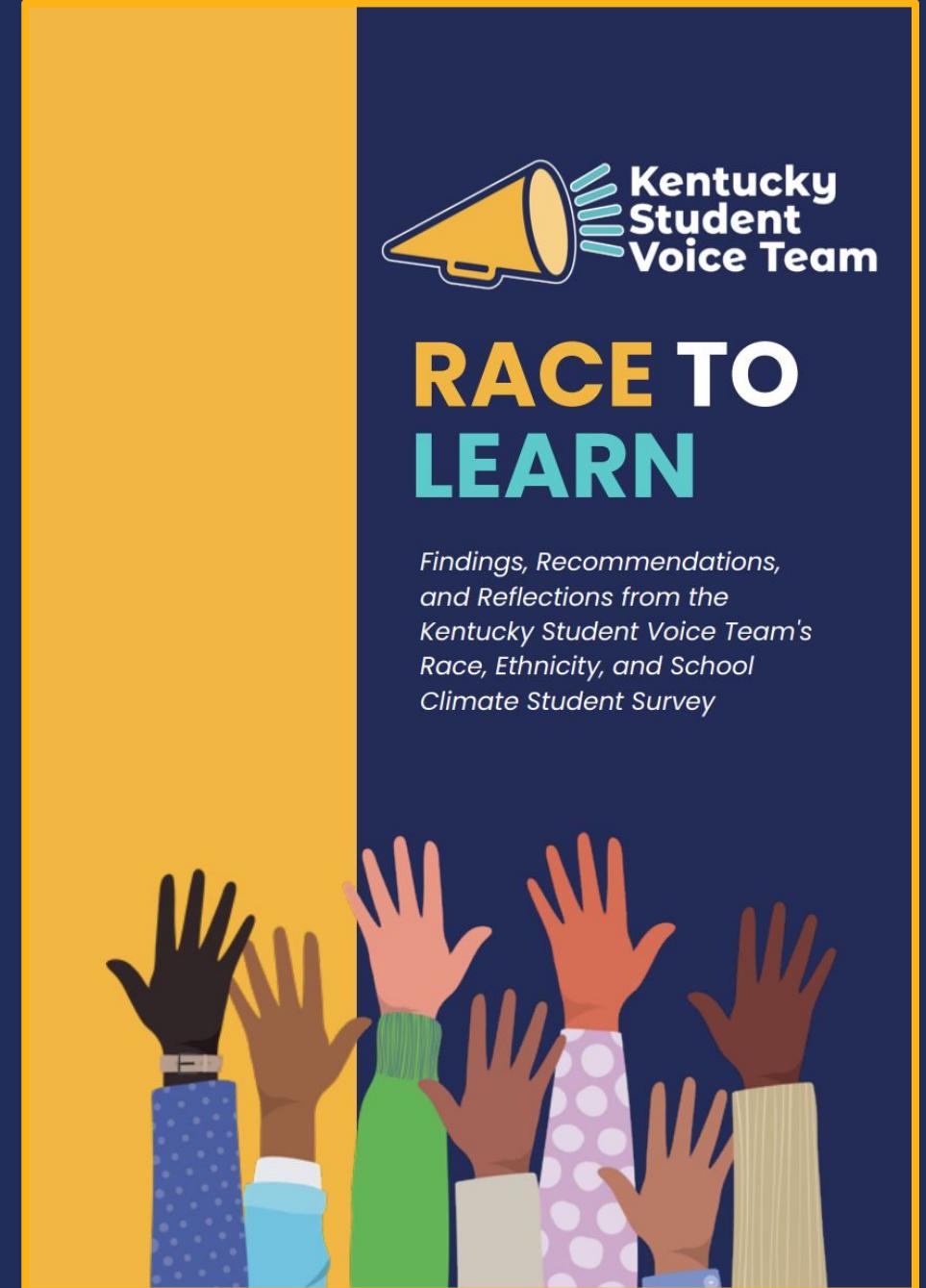
YPAR IN ACTION:

| Why?

To capture how race and racism shape students' experiences in Kentucky public schools in the midst of local & national debates on Critical Race Theory (CRT).

| How?

- ~11,000 survey responses
- 114 counties



RACE TO LEARN PRESS CONFERENCE

Kentucky State Legislature,
3.10.22



KENTUCKY STUDENT VOICE TEAM

v.

COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY



Kentucky Students Challenging Whether the State Is Meeting Its Constitutional Duty on Education

A student-led lawsuit in Kentucky claims the state's education system has been backsliding for years since lawmakers enacted nationally renowned reforms



By Associated Press | Jan. 15, 2025, at 3:25 p.m.

Kentucky students demand the state provide 'adequate' public education in lawsuit

KENTUCKY STUDENTS SUE THE STATE OVER INADEQUATE EDUCATION

Wednesday, Jan 15, 2025

Kentucky Students File Groundbreaking Lawsuit Against the State for Denial of Constitutionally Protected Educational Opportunities

≡ MENU Q SEARCH

EducationWeek®

LEADERSHIP POLICY & POLITICS TEACHING & LEARNING TECHNOLOGY

EDUCATION FUNDING

These High Schoolers Are Suing for Better Schools. Can They Win?



By Mark Lieberman — January 15, 2025 8 min read

EDUCATION GOVERNMENT

Students sue KY for failing to provide 'adequate and equitable public education'

Lawsuit claims legislature, state education officials are falling short of constitutional obligations

BY: MCKENNA HORSLEY - JANUARY 14, 2025 3:24 PM



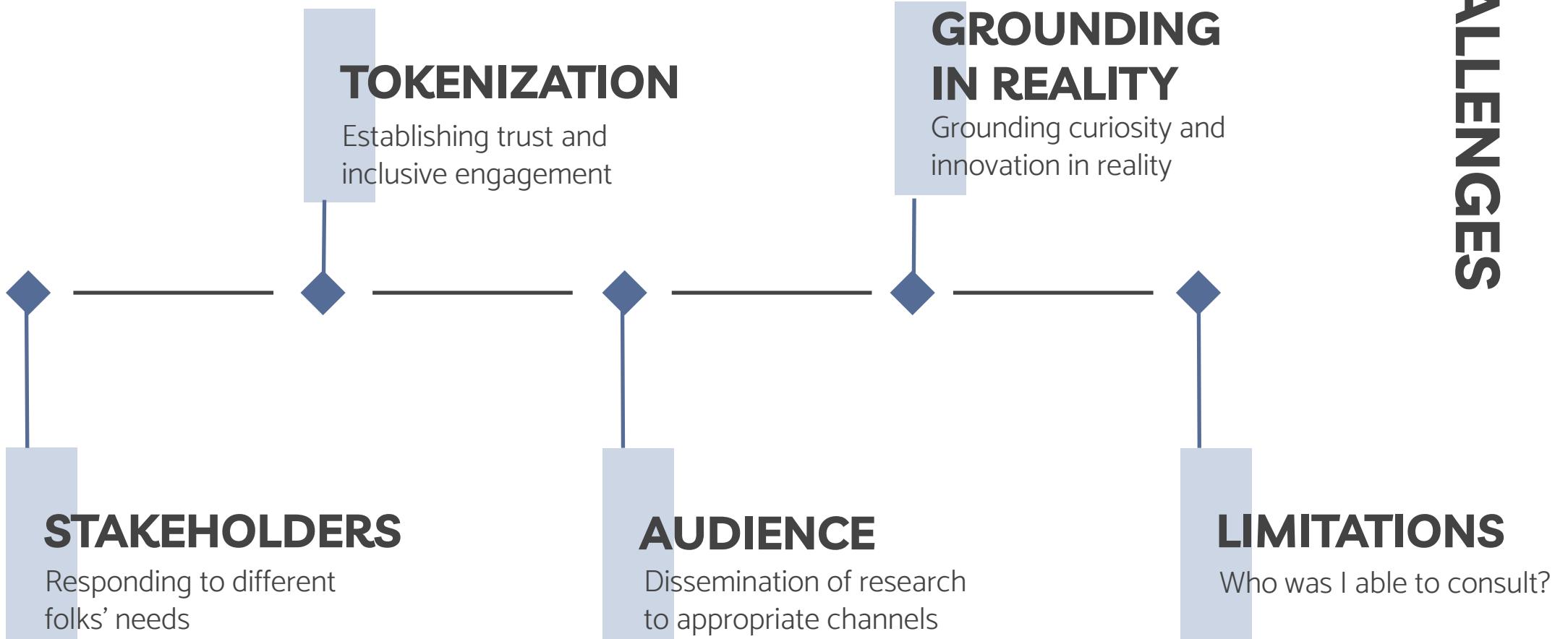
Students file lawsuit against the state of Kentucky over the quality of education

Across the globe, young people
are **shifting the narrative**.

Empowering Pakistan's youth to address climate change risks



CHALLENGES



PROCEDURE

01

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Intentionally inquiring about interests, experiences, and desires

02

IDEATION

Scoping out existing research and identifying needs in the policy space to build a literature review

03

GENERATIVE RESEARCH

Having collaborative discussions to build shared understandings

04

REVIEW

Intentionally soliciting feedback

05

DISSEMINATION

Sharing results in each respective network

BENEFITS

BUILT INTERGENERATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

Collective knowledge

CRITICALLY APPROACH SYSTEMS

Youth experiencing systems designed by adults

CHALLENGED TOKENIZATION

Youth expressing agency

FOSTERED YOUTH CAPACITY

Skills development & platforming



MOVING FORWARD

Building upon newly established networks

Why should we center youth in research and practice?

What are different ways that we can involve youth in research?

Types of Youth Research

Youth as
SUBJECTS

Youth are the **subjects** and
objects of research.

Youth as
CO-RESEARCHERS

Youth **co-construct and**
co-lead the design and
implementation of
intergenerational research.

Youth as
LEAD RESEARCHERS

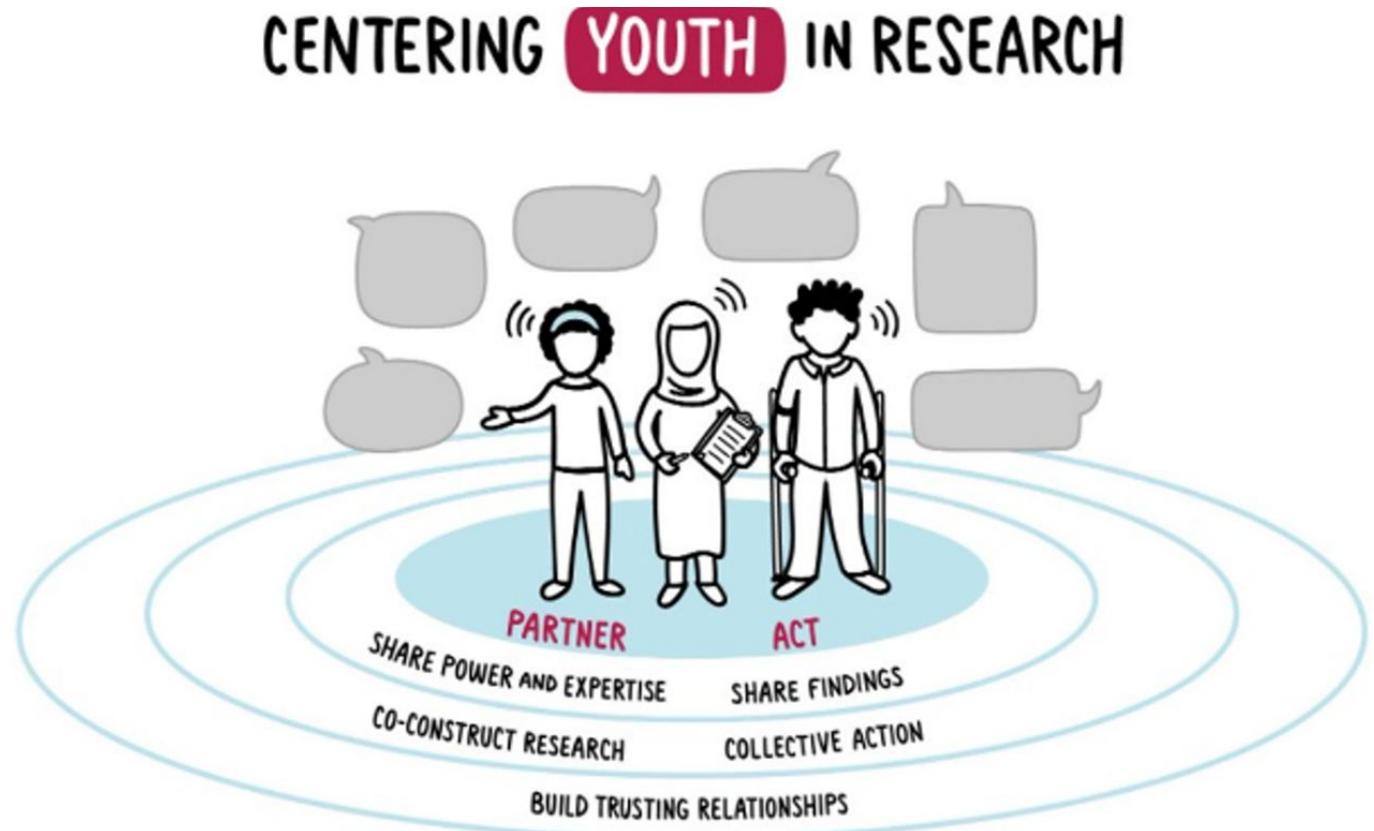
Youth are the **primary**
agents and leaders of youth
participatory action
research.

Giving vs. Centering Voice

GIVING VOICE	CENTERING VOICES
Assumes youth "need" a voice 	Assumes youth "have" voices 
 Acknowledges silences	Breaks silences 
Empowers youth to speak 	Transforms spaces so youth can be heard 
 Includes youth	(Co)constructs with youth 
Turns up the volume 	Hands over the mic 
 Creates allies	Builds solidarities 

Principles for moving from conducting research on youth to research with youth.

- 1. Share power and expertise:** Treat youth as experts not as objects and subjects
- 2. Co-Construct research:** Use methods and questions where youth can shape and control their narratives.
- 3. Build Trusting Relationships:** Put care, relationships, and safety first and collaborate with integrity.
- 4. Share findings:** Create informal (check-ins) and formal ways (youth advisory groups) for youth to share and discuss findings.
- 5. Collective Action:** Work together to develop how to put research into action and next steps.



Source: Emily Markovich Morris and Emily Marko, 2023

Source: Berson, Berson, & Gray, 2019; Maynes, Levinson, & Vavrus, 2021; Markovich Morris, 2021; Tomas & Kane, 1998; Woodgate et al., 2019.

How do we center youth in research and practice?



Scenarios

Reflection Questions:

1. How would you recruit youth collaborators?
2. What phases of this project will youth lead/co-lead?
3. How will you build trust and share power?
4. What challenges might you face?
5. What would success look like if youth were centered?



Scenario 1: Climate Resilience and School Program

You are a civil society leader in a flood-prone area. You work with schools on integrating climate education in curriculum and teacher professional education. Over the last 3 years, your town has experienced high torrential rains and flooding that have displaced families, and damaged homes and schools. Students have lost many days of learning as a result.

As a part of your program, you have received funding to develop a school climate resilience program which include school infrastructure, emergency preparedness, family and community engagement, and academic and psychosocial support. In the past, students and families have not been included in any planning or decisions in schools. There is low trust among students and families that schools will be able to support them during a crisis.

As a leader, it is your job to ensure that the schools that you work with have the right information and support to be prepared for another crisis. Critical to this program's success is deep trust between the families, students, and schools. You have 4 months to develop and pilot a program in 5 schools. The local district education offices will implement a similar program based on the success of your pilot.



Scenario 2: Education in Emergencies

You are the district education officer in a region recently emerging from a five-year armed conflict that displaced thousands of families and disrupted education across several communities. Many school buildings are damaged, educators have fled or are traumatized, and formal schooling has been inconsistent for youth aged 12–18.

As part of a national education reform initiative, your district has been allocated funding to redesign the curriculum and rebuild educational spaces. You've been tasked with leading this process locally. However, youth in the district, especially those who spent years living in refugee camps and joined informal learning groups, feel deeply excluded from planning. They often claim that it is 'out of touch' with their lived experiences. They have voiced frustration over rigid & inflexible school models that don't reflect their current needs.

As the district leader, it is your job to ensure that post-conflict reforms don't just restore what existed before, but rather build something more structurally sound, inclusive, trauma-informed, and, most importantly, youth-centered. Given the circumstances, you are being asked to build a system—literally—from the ground up. You've been given flexibility to shape the consultation and design process, but you're under pressure to deliver a concrete plan in 1 month.



Scenario 3: AI and Youth Voice in Education Policy

You're a consultant advising your country's Ministry of Education on integrating AI into public secondary (high school) education - things like adaptive learning tools, grading algorithms, and student data systems. So far, youth have been excluded from policy discussions, even though these technologies will shape their learning, privacy, and futures. You have to design a youth-inclusive research and engagement process to inform national AI-in-education guidelines within 3 months.

You're tasked with co-designing a youth-centered process where youth aren't just consulted, but are shaping the questions, methods, and policy ideas. As a group, discuss and outline: How will you recruit youth collaborators from diverse backgrounds? What parts of the process will youth lead or co-lead? How will you build trust and share power in decision-making? What challenges (logistical, ethical, political) might arise? What does success look like if youth are truly centered? In the future, AI literacy will be a prerequisite for participation in many industries and civic life. These policies won't just regulate technology, they'll shape the futures of an entire generation. What kind of systems do we need to prepare youth not just to adapt to, but to lead in an AI-powered world? Why are youth uniquely situated to answer these questions?



Scenario 4: Student Voice in School Systems

You're a school leader in an urban school facing a troubling rise in student absenteeism. Many students say school feels disconnected from their lives—boring, irrelevant, and lacking the support they need to succeed. They're frustrated. They feel like decisions about them are made without them, and often against them. Some point to an uninspiring curriculum or frequent teacher absences; others say they fall behind easily and struggle to catch up without help.

Since COVID, family attitudes toward school have also shifted. A growing number of parents no longer see regular attendance as essential, making it harder to rebuild consistent engagement. At the same time, students feel excluded from decisions that directly affect their experience. They're rarely asked why they don't come to school, or what might make them want to.

You've just received funding to co-design school management committees (school councils), with students, to understand causes of student absenteeism and develop school policies to tackle it. You have one month to develop a plan that is capable of addressing both systemic barriers and shifting mindsets. What would you do?

Key Takeaways

Q & A



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