

YPAR: Exploring New Literacies and Critical Literacy Pedagogy in a Virtual Teaching and Learning Environment

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Abstract

This dissertation illuminates a particular kind of school-embedded Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project that adds to the collective understanding of what facilitates and challenges YPAR work in particular field settings. This dissertation contributes to the ongoing discussion about urban children and the use of digital literacies for justice aims with the ultimate goal of conscientization. Through using new literacies around a critical literacy pedagogy, the critical consciousness is achieved through youth taking action against the challenging elements in their life.

Focusing on 8 seventh-grade literacy students at East Lower School in the Rochester City School District (RCSD), during a virtual learning environment during the 2020-2021 school year, this work synthesizes the literacy practices of students using YPAR approaches supported by digital tools. Participants leveraged the affordances of digital platforms like social media to take part in civic and political life by accessing and circulating information about issues that matter to them, are a community concern, and influence peers and elected officials to take action.

Keywords:

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), conscientization, critical literacy, new literacy studies, literacy practices, action research

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CHAPTER ONE

As educators, we do not realize that forbidding students from writing in the first person could imply that their voices and experiences had no place in research writing. It also implies that students could not be experts on anything, and that they could not express what they knew in ways they chose (Mirra et al., 2015). Giving students the choice and autonomy to craft their own learning experiences is a powerful way to engage youth in their education. Educators need to shift to alternative forms of learning, writing, and research that challenge traditional ideas about knowledge (who produces it, how, and for what purpose) and instead focus on research that honors youth as authentic researchers of their own lives.

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR; Cammarota & Fine, 2010) has the power to transform teaching practices, blur the lines of expert and learner, and transform the way we see our students. It also exemplifies the meaning of literacy and teaching itself by providing real-world reading and writing experiences. Though researchers and practitioners have advocated for authentic, culturally relevant curriculum, there is still a status quo of instruction across all contexts, and ingrained patterns of using traditionalist methods among urban students. Given the racial and social injustice continuing to occur in public education, there is no better time than now to empower youth and teachers (Caraballo et al., 2017).

Overview

Since creating an educational partnership in 2015, East High School has been functioning under receivership with an Independent Receiver (The University of Rochester). East High school has been in the most severe accountability status since the 2006-07 school year, and it is listed as one of the “persistently struggling schools.” The superintendent, school officials, and staff were given an initial 1-year period to use the resources of the University of Rochester to

make demonstrable improvement in student performance or the Commissioner of Education will direct them to change to a different Independent Receiver.

The first proposed improvement plan in 2015 was to provide 1 hour of expanded learning time for all students during the school day, which doubled instruction time for math and literacy in the lower school and ninth-grade academy. For the arena of literacy, curriculum teams at East High recommended Nancie Atwell's *Reading and Writing Workshop* model to provide more authentic opportunities for students to explore authentic texts and produce meaningful pieces that mattered to them (Atwell, 2007). The model fit perfectly with the school-wide mission of developing students with strong collaboration skills, literate identities, and personal agency (East EPO, 2015). In creating a learner-centered approach to teaching, Atwell (2002) described how meaning-making, feedback, and ownership of writing creates motivation, and enables students to become stronger writers through the writing process. Showcasing students' literacy development in a Reader's-Writer's Workshop model at East helped to create a highly engaging and collaborative space, as well as providing opportunities for students to further develop their literacy-related identities and enhance their critical literacy skills. Through ongoing curriculum development and professional development, East High literacy teachers have also begun to infuse Lucy Calkins' (2005) Reader's-Writer's Workshop into their praxis.

Based on my experience at East High as a literacy teacher and my interest in engaging in relevant curricula, my action research study has added to the knowledge base of using YPAR. This approach is an inquiry-based way to facilitate advocacy-based curriculum that students can access within the traditional classroom setting and/or from an online learning classroom. My analysis of YPAR in my Reader's-Writer's Workshop analyzed my own experiences of facilitating YPAR among challenges that were not planned when designing quality instruction

for youth e.g., deep budget cuts to the district, teacher layoffs, and another interrupted school year due to COVID-19. I collected qualitative and quantitative data through observations and tools such as the adapted literacy curriculum and student work.

Statement of the Problem and Goals of the Study

Street (2003) identified the common definition of literacy in schools as autonomous but argued that educators need the full continuum of autonomous/ideological to address the diversity of reading and writing in the world. Literacy is something that people *do* in the world, and in society; it is a sociocultural phenomenon imbued with power, rather than solely a mental phenomenon (Gee, 2015). Paulo Freire, an influential curriculum philosopher, described the traditional model of education which he refers to as the banking system (Freire, 1985). This system is where the students are not perceived to have knowledge of their own but must instead have it bestowed upon them by educators. Freire (1985) instead put forward a new liberatory perspective, one in which students play an active role. In Freire's view, the teachers and students should have a relationship "so that both are simultaneously teachers and students" (p. 2). However, curriculum is often constructed with the learner as its central focus, but the *voice* of the learner is often ignored from the curriculum design and implementation process (Jagersma, 2010). To overcome this challenge, Freire argued that education must involve the problem-posing curriculum designed to promote *conscientization* (critical awareness and development) and also the worldview of the learner. Although there are multiple definitions of student voice, for the purpose of this research, it was considered to be the systematic creation of space for youth to use decision-making processes within their learning as well as through advocating for their community (Mitra & Gross, 2009).

One common method of achieving student voice is through participatory action research projects (Konings et al., 2010). Literature shows that participatory action research is typically conducted in higher education settings and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is conducted with high school students and/or during after school or summer programs. It is rarely integrated into the yearly curriculum. Youth Participatory Action Research has the power to transform our teaching practice. As a mode of inquiry, YPAR addresses problematic reform (Fine, 2019) and traditional schooling practices that restrict youth in their right to research, but it can also be a way to continue learning when students need it most. Literacy can also exist and be captured in online spaces as a way to continue teaching and learning due to challenges such as COVID-19 and racial injustice.

In the literacy context, I find it necessary to provide youth with opportunities to conduct research on the topics and issues that they find important and impact their lives. In light of that problem, I wanted to bring YPAR to East Lower School during a tumultuous time (such as the global pandemic, societal injustices, teaching and learning digitally) and answer the following questions: What are the literacy practices of participants (including students, teachers, community members?) in YPAR? What happens when I attempt to build a critical literacy teaching practice around YPAR? To study those questions, I examined literacy practices and showed how literacy is a social practice¹ in school, online and in the community in order to mediate rigid forms of curriculum, explore the challenge of online learning, and encourage student participation and engagement. This form of research gave students control over their learning, engaged them in advocacy with issues that they care about, gave students choice in

¹ A decontextualized and decontextualizing model of literacy that imparts unique influences on human culture and cognition (Gee, 1990; Street, 1984).

their learning, and finally, engaged students in their community by enacting change and becoming experts on important issues (Fine, 2018). Youth participatory action research can also be facilitated by teachers of all grade levels and content areas. It also illuminated literacy practices and showed how literacy is a social practice² in school, online and in the community.

Theoretical Frameworks of the Study

In this study I utilized these theoretical lenses to frame the YPAR study: 1) new literacy studies, 2) critical literacy, and 3) practitioner inquiry.

New Literacy Studies (NLS)

Literacy is bound together through social practices and is not limited to the idea of just reading and writing text (The New London Group, 1996). In the traditional definition, literacy is considered to encompass reading and writing skills with print, and it is seen as an ability that is acquired autonomously through cognitive skills (Street, 2005). New literacy studies (NLS) shift the traditional, cognitive perspective of literacy and challenge the theory that readers and writers solely engage in mental processes like decoding, retrieving information, comprehension, inferencing, and so forth. New Literacy Studies push this definition to expand, and this approach reinforces the ways that readers and writers also engage in social and cultural practices. This standpoint states that written languages are used in different practices and by different social and cultural groups (Gee, 2015). This standpoint points to the ways that literacy is a complex set of practices emerging from specific social and cultural contexts and research on the use of literacy. New literacy studies suggest that autonomous models are insufficient for understanding the

² A decontextualized and decontextualizing model of literacy that imparts unique influences on human culture and cognition (Gee, 1990; Street, 1984).

diversity of reading and writing in the world and for designing practical curricula (New London Group, 1996; Street, 2005).

Methodological approaches informed by NLS often seek to tap into students' local knowledge to actively engage learners in their learning process and to be able to find and develop their opinions and positions (Freire, 2004). New literacy studies seek to understand the relationship between real-world literacy and its benefits that are independent of formal schooling. Though many scholars' research has contributed to the shift in beliefs about literacy, I have highlighted the work of Scribner and Cole (1981), Heath (1982, 1994), Street (1984, 2000, 2003), the New London Group (1996), and Gee (2004, 2005). This is because their work has contributed significantly to the theoretical concepts and methodological approaches that have become central to NLS and to the analysis of the literacies that youth use when conducting YPAR. New literacy studies allow us to discuss literacy, not only as a social practice and also within its many forms, but this framework also allows us to ground literacy within the critical theoretical lens and to see literacy as a way to view the world in which we live.

Critical Literacy

Critical theory began to be widely recognized in the late 20th and early 21st century as a form of revolt against the traditional ways of viewing and conceptualizing the world. It became a way to challenge powerful, oppressive, and dominant social groups who made cultural, economic, and educational decisions that have affected the lives of those who are less powerful (Freire, 2004). Critical theory has been informed by the larger theories of postmodernism, poststructuralism, radical feminism, and critical constructivism. These approaches go against the Eurocentric cultural traditions that privilege those who are White, educated, rich, and male in comparison to those who are non-White, uneducated, poor, or female (Schiro, 2012). Critical

theory focuses on the construction of knowledge rather than on objective knowledge and it is centered around emancipation through questioning political, economic, social, and psychological structures. It offers action to improve society and individuals through education about a hidden curriculum³ (Anyon, 1980).

Critical theory also works to engage practical education for those with little social, economic, or political power to take control over their lives and education by critically examining the forces that disempower them (Freire, 1970). Under critical theory ideology, schools create spaces that maintain unequal power relationships by socializing students to conceptions of what is important and what is “normal” through the hidden curricula at school (Apple, 1995; 2004). Critical theorists are greatly concerned with the way that education has become a corporate Capitalist entity that includes school privatization. Critical theorists’ concern grew with the rise of accountability movements which undermine teacher effectiveness, school efficiency, and teacher education program effectiveness. The return to the social efficiency model of education positions teachers as workers and students as products. The emphasis on objective knowledge embedded in state standards is seen as the preferred form of knowledge and it challenged by critical theory.

Critical theorists challenge relationships of power between teachers and students and recognize that the teacher is not the all-knowing presence. They note that when teachers simply give students information to memorize, they are taking away a student’s personhood and making them an object of the school environment (Freire, 1970). Critical theory engages in the creation of educational opportunities that provide people with social, cultural, economic, and political

³ A tacit preparation for interaction in wider social contexts which makes students “marked” or influenced by the objective or subjective points of view of their teachers.

equality through empowerment and it encourages the continuous towards freedom to help people reconstruct themselves and society (Schiro, 2013). Critical literacy is an instructional facet of critical theory which focuses students on a broad understanding of reading, creating texts, moving towards social action, and developing in students an awareness of texts in relation to the larger context of the world (Freire, 2005).

Critical literacy and critical theory are not the same thing though they have similarities and were developed alongside each other. Critical literacy is a pedagogical approach to literacy that focuses on the political, sociocultural, historical, and economic forces that allow students to come to understand that texts are not ‘true’ but rather that they represent the perspectives of the writer and the sociocultural times in which they were written (Ciardiello, 2004; Lapp & Fisher, 2010). It moves away from the traditional teaching methods focused only on skills, toward creating spaces and opportunities for students to recreate and challenge texts, ideally furthering students’ engagement, academic achievement, and ability to take action. Janks (2009) argued that even though education has changed with the use of technology and has made the world more democratized, it is still wildly important to support students’ understanding of the social effects of texts and images, and to redesign the educational experience of reading and writing. Janks examined apparent contradictions between the ways in which teachers adopt the form of critical practice without necessarily understanding the nuances of critical practice.

Practitioner Inquiry Research

In fostering critical consciousness, or conscientization (Freire 1970), critical literacy demands that practitioners increase their awareness of the sociocultural realities that construct our existence (De los Ríos et al., 2015; Mirra et al., 2013). Naturally, critical literacy and the framework and research methodology of practitioner inquiry can be woven together in research.

Practitioner inquiry is a powerful means to create new knowledge by teachers for teachers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Practitioner inquiry allows teachers to be researchers of their own practice by playing a part in the research process with the goal of facilitating change in school settings.

With many versions of practitioner inquiry, some have been reworked to undermine the emancipatory goals of many educators. Instead, they operate by shifting teacher responsibility to educational improvement. Instead of challenging underlying social and economic inequities that have a profound impact on children's schooling experiences, greater numbers of stakeholders increasingly place emphasis solely on student gains on standardized tests (Grace & Langhout, 2014). Youth participatory action research effectively informs K-12 educational research by directly involving teachers while providing the process to connect theory to a methodologically grounded approach. Compared to the traditional methods and roles of teaching and learning, YPAR directly leads practitioners to recognize that students are stakeholders in their learning and are also valuable collaborators. This is because YPAR, in essence, creates opportunities for youth to work as researchers alongside adults. In general, practitioner inquiry focuses on the concerns of teachers and engages teachers and youth in the design, data collection, and interpretation of data around their research questions (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2019). This type of action research generates new knowledge because it is grounded in the realities of educational settings.

Action Research (Practitioner Inquiry Research) Justification

Action research fits with the nature of YPAR because it is “inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 3). Practitioner inquiry research focuses on the concerns of teachers and engages

teachers in the design, data collection, and interpretation of data around their research questions (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2019). I asked the following research questions to better understand the uses of YPAR with my students online:

1. What are the literacy practices of participants (including students, teachers, community members?) in YPAR?
2. What happens when I attempt to build a critical literacy teaching practice around YPAR?

Research question one includes what arose from facilitating YPAR with my middle school students during a time where we were virtually learning during a time where racial injustices that impacted my students were being protested across the nation. Research question two is a reflective question; to answer it, I had to study my experiences as a teacher, researcher, and the facilitator of YPAR with my students.

Overview of Study Design and Implementation

My design plan followed an iterative action research intervention within my seventh-grade classroom virtually. This group was a Reader's-Writer's Workshop (eight students) class. During each instructional cycle, observational notes and an audio recording were created for each class session to capture students working within the YPAR lens.

The first cycle focused on building community, acknowledging the COVID-19 pandemic, and reintegration into school virtually. It touched on students' socioemotional needs with support from school social workers, and shared strategies to navigate online and virtual learning, and co-create norms for online learning. The second cycle focused on brainstorming community challenges, personal challenges, topics of interest, speaking and listening protocols, and collaboration. The third cycle focused on the research, writing process, and peer revision as the

first instructional unit of the year. The fourth cycle contained the “call to action” outlined by YPAR, where students worked to publish their writing and decide on a way to present out and take action in the larger community.

After data collection, I analyzed it through various rounds of open and grounded coding. Upon collecting data and throughout the process, I reflected upon my experiences using memoing and journaling (Saldaña, 2015). I also coded my journals and memos to look for themes which helped me to draw conclusions about my experiences and helped modify my instructional approach for the future cycles.

Contributions of the Study

Through my review of the literature, I discovered that there is a gap in the literature on YPAR being implemented in core classes especially in the middle-school grades. Many of my literature findings described YPAR in elective classes for upper-class students or during out-of-school programs, therefore, I hoped to add to the limited body of knowledge about effective facilitation of YPAR in middle-school classrooms and curriculum models. Another possible contribution is demonstrating how YPAR can be a way to engage youth in their own education and community. Given the positive-youth-development lens that Gutman and Eccles (2007) mentioned, empowering middle school youth is the most crucial time. Lastly, I intended to surface this work in a way so that other educators can use YPAR “with” as opposed to “on” youth and see that YPAR can be used as a mode of inquiry within many already existing curriculum models. My goal with this study was to show that other educators can use YPAR as a mode to mitigate the current challenges of online/hybrid learning in K-12 education.

Organization of This Study

Chapter 1 provided an overview of my study. I discussed the problem space, as well as the issues of rigid curriculum models that may not promote student and teacher voice. I then discussed my history with the school and my roles therein. I described the theoretical frameworks that I used to inform my thinking about new literacy studies, critical literacy, and practitioner inquiry as a lens for action research. I briefly outlined my research design and reason for using action research with a brief introduction to practitioner inquiry as well.

Chapter 2 includes my theoretical framework and a review of the literature. The first section of Chapter 2 is a discussion of the conceptual frameworks I structured my study upon. The second section of Chapter 2 is a review of the literature pertaining to YPAR and practitioner inquiry. The literature broadly identifies effective YPAR experiences and evidence of practitioner inquiry. My literature review supports my justification for using the theoretical frameworks that I chose, and also supports my study organization and my data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3 is a detailed description of my research design and methodology. I describe the basic tenets of action research and my justification for its use, followed by a discussion of the context of my study. I then discuss my positionality in the study, looking at my roles as teacher and researcher. I include a description of the specific structures of my study, including research questions, detailed plan for intervention, data collection, and analysis.

Chapter 4 includes a discussion of the study findings, specifically as they relate to the research questions. I first analyze the data surrounding new literacy studies within the facilitation of YPAR and its impact from a virtual setting. I then discuss the critical literacy practices used by students and by myself using a critical literacy lens throughout the YPAR process. Lastly, I

analyzed the data pertaining to the use of the online virtual teaching and learning environment and the implications therein and how the planning and research cycles compromised and navigated this context. Throughout, I relate findings to the literature and theoretical framework, specifically the prevalence of new literacy studies and critical literacies during the facilitation of YPAR.

In Chapter 5, I detail the action research cycles I completed in the course of the study. I also detail the action research steps that students use throughout the YPAR experience. Then, I describe the actions that have resulted from the study and what future action research cycles may look like, as well as the future of this project. I also reflect on how this study has impacted my future practice. I end with recommendations to other researchers and educators looking to create new curriculum and learning experiences in their schools.

Chapter 6 is a summary of the study, including study highlights, implications, and limitations, as well as including contributions to the field and ending with suggestions for future research in the area of literacy in schools.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

The studies included in this literature review were chosen because of their focus on NLS, critical literacy, and practitioner inquiry as well as their relationship to YPAR through various lenses. In many of the included studies, teacher-researchers used theoretical perspectives such as NLS, critical literacy, and practitioner inquiry to take relevant curricular, instructional, and interactional approaches within school institutions.

An Overview of the Historical and Contextual Framework of YPAR

In an interview published by the National Council of Teachers of English, Paulo Freire (1985) captured the essence of what it means to be an educator working alongside students to create a more just and equitable world. The traditional notions of schooling are deeply entrenched in what Freire (1970) termed “the banking model” of education which mirrors the manufacturing system of Capitalism. Students receive knowledge in a passive environment from a teacher who, knowingly or unknowingly, is merely a factory worker on the assembly line as well. As a pedagogical approach, YPAR explicitly seeks to reverse the banking model approach by giving youth direct roles in their own learning experiences. The roots of participatory action research (PAR) and, by extension, youth participatory action research (YPAR), grew deeply from the critical theoretical and pedagogical foundations of Freire’s work. YPAR has been documented as a growing practice among researchers of critical youth studies (Burke & Greene, 2015; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Morrell, 2008; Torre, 2006). The doctrine of YPAR, however, is firmly situated in a historical lineage of applied participatory research. An exploration of the roots of YPAR also presents bridging themes of critical theory, new literacy studies, and action research methodology.

As methodologies, PAR and YPAR require a critical lens to examine the complex tensions within the power structures of an institution or community. Critical theory also works to engage practical education for those with little social, economic, or political power to take control over their lives and education by critically examining the forces that disempower them (Freire, 1970). Under critical theory perspectives, schools create spaces that maintain social power relationships by socializing students to society's conception of what is important and what is "normal" through the hidden curricula at school (Apple, 1995, 2004).

Critical literacy as a way of being and doing outlines the tension within how educators and young people are struggling with the traditional academic demands of literacies while living in the current world crowded with so many different platforms that disperse information (Vasquez et al., 2019). According to Vasquez et al. (2019) "Critical literacy is a way of being, living, learning, and teaching across the curriculum and not just an orientation to teaching literacy" (p. 302). This fundamental stance solidifies ways to answer my second research question of: What happens when I attempt to build a critical literacy teaching practice around YPAR?

New Literacy Studies

Youth Participatory Action Research can be situated within new literacy studies (NLS) which suggests that the traditional definition of literacy is insufficient for understanding the diversity of reading and writing in the world or for designing practical curriculum (New London Group, 1996; Street, 2005). New Literacy Studies (NLS) shift the traditional cognitive perspective of literacy and challenges the theory that readers and writers solely engage in mental processes like decoding, retrieving information, comprehension, inferencing and so forth. New literacy studies reinforce the idea that readers and writers also engage in social and cultural

practices and that written languages are used in different ways and by different social and cultural groups (Gee, 2015). New Literacy Studies argue that the broader understanding of literacy is a set of practices emerging from specific social and cultural contexts in addition to research on the autonomous model of literacy.

Methodological approaches informed by NLS often seek to tap into students' local knowledge to actively engage learners in their learning processes and be able to find and develop their opinions and positions (Freire, 2004).

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) positions youth alongside practitioners in their communities, giving them agency to become knowledge producers (Caraballo et al., 2018). Cammarota and Fine (2018) described YPAR as a method that “provides young people with opportunities to study social problems affecting their lives and then determine actions to rectify those problems” (p. 2). Youth-developed research projects feature personal experiences which are often dismissed from traditional learning settings; these can take on many forms depending on the audience and the participant’s community-advancement goals. Youth participatory action research’s theoretical positioning connects deeply to new literacy studies, critical literacy, and practitioner inquiry frameworks. Through a detailed review of YPAR literature, I was able to illuminate trends and patterns that arise in the existing body of YPAR research. Those trends and patterns informed my theoretical and practical approaches to engaging with YPAR with my students in a middle-school literacy classroom.

Implementation of YPAR Methods

Advocacy through YPAR

Honeyford and Zanden’s (2013) study “Critical projects of Latino cultural citizenship: Literacy and immigrant activism” detailed the work of activism in a secondary English

classroom. It served as a model of methodology and data collection for the work in the chapters that follow because it outlined the literacy practices that youth use while participating in YPAR studies. Situated within the theoretical lens of critical literacy, Honeyford and Zanden's (2013) 5-year case study explored cultural citizenship as a conceptual framework within the secondary English classroom among students for whom English is a new language. The writings and interactions of Latinx immigrant youth in the class were examined "to learn more about how a theory of cultural citizenship can inform new pedagogies for teaching language and literacy" (Honeyford & Zanden, 2013, p. 62). Drawing on the work of Gee (1996) and Street (1984, 1992), Honeyford and Zanden's research acknowledged and emphasized the sociocultural layers of language and literacy. Questions guiding the study examined the implications of a theoretical and pedagogical stance and the meanings within them for designing learning spaces and curricula. Throughout the study, Honeyford and Zanden (2013) argued that "Latino immigrant students claimed the space of the language classroom and took up sophisticated literacy practices for the work of cultural citizenship" (p. 62). In other words, instead of continuing as passive learners, the youth in this study decided which knowledge and learning was meaningful to them.

Honeyford and Zanden's (2013) approach to data analysis was an iterative process of comparative analysis that included memoing, questioning, noting comparisons, extracting concepts, and naming them. Honeyford and Zanden's analysis of curricular and reflective texts attended to the student individually and the class as a whole. Findings included how each of the student-led projects in Honeyford and Zanden's (2013) study grew organically from students' personal experiences and also the obstacles Latinx youth in their school and in the broader community faced. Findings included the contradictions that students make in school spaces and how these can produce new social spaces. With the new understanding that spaces are socially

constructed comes the possibility for developing new spaces for teaching and learning. To this end, educators must begin with the expectation that students can and will push back on predetermined structures in schools and especially with the current global pandemic, we must all begin to envision schools as territories of possibility, not just structural spaces. Not only does this work connect to my work of reimagining teaching and learning but this work also relied greatly on the dialectic between inquiry and practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) which is vital to supporting the notion that learning is a social practice.

Another critical inquiry project at Leo Politi Elementary School in Los Angeles called Project SMARTArt, focused on incorporating critical thinking about media. Jolls and Grande (2005) participated in this program along with teachers and elementary-aged students who communicated their thoughts about social injustices through media literacy activities and ultimately challenged corporate advertising in their school. The findings reported that using a critical inquiry stance helped break down barriers of difference, strengthen critical thinking skills in students, and challenge media representations of children with disabilities. Jolls and Grande also mentioned distinct approaches to critical inquiry such as finding primary sources from marginalized bodies which helped students to empathize and understand social injustices experienced by children with disabilities.

Drawing on Jolls and Grande's (2005) conceptualization of critical inquiry to illuminate injustices, Land et al. (2018) worked alongside classroom teachers and students in an ethnographic case study. This analysis identified ways in which teachers constructed flexible and broad definitions of readers and writers, blurred the roles between teachers, students, and texts and used literacy as a tool of power. The study explained how the era of President Trump and "fake news" called for all age groups to not only discuss current social issues but to also be able

to engage in these discussions critically by responding to the world and reconstructing it. Findings showed how schools need to reshape reading and writing in English classrooms to prepare students for participation in the civic, career, and personal worlds within and beyond school. Jolls and Grande (2005) and Land et al.'s (2018) use of YPAR in educational settings showed how political teaching practices supported students' engagement with explicitly political topics while also recognizing that students are just as much the experts as the researchers and teachers.

YPAR: Taking a Critical Stance for Urban Education

Two scholars of English education, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) situated the work of youth participatory action research within the constructs of critical pedagogy. In their collaboration, "Youth Participatory Action Research as Critical Pedagogy", Duncan-Andrade and Morrell observed that while there has been excitement surrounding the possibilities of critical pedagogy in urban education, little empirical work has surfaced to prove a translation between critical pedagogical principles into actual practices. The researchers pointed their attention "to theory to build theory instead of understanding that critical pedagogy began with practice to build theory" (p. 105). In short, there is a "need to develop sound theories of practice that can be implemented and evaluated through critical lenses" (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 102).

Highlighting the environment of urban youth, Morrell (2008) posed the following questions, "What, for instance, does it mean for a young woman or man attending an urban secondary school to become an intellectual? Outside of academic performance indicators, how is this intellectualism measured? How is it manifested?" (p. 106). These questions guided Morrell's (2008) work in the design of a summer program for urban youth. By positioning urban youth as

intellectuals, they became front and center in the research process. Rather than doing research “on” or “for” urban youth, objectifying them in the process, critical research enables the possibility for these adolescents to do research that matters and simultaneously positions them as their own research subjects. Their findings included the ways that popular culture can help students deconstruct dominant narratives and challenge oppressive practices. Morrell et al.’s (2008) research challenges educators like myself to create curricula and pedagogical strategies that are inclusive and that facilitate the development of academic and critical literacies.

In the day-to-day work of school, we bear witness to the positioning of students in an assembly line more so than seeing students as intellectuals actively in charge of their own learning. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) urged us to deconstruct the banking model in exchange for student efficacy and providing a meaningful education. Youth participatory action research serves multiple purposes as it helps to develop students academically. In addition, through youth-initiated research, adult researchers and advocates of a more just education system can better solve the inequities so entrenched in urban education (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

Similarly, Warren and Marciano (2018) launched a YPAR initiative to gather and activate student voices for justice in education. The Central City Youth Co-Researcher Project (CCYCRP) consisted of 15 youth from seven different high schools in an urban metropolitan area. The students spent 6 months as co-researchers studying educational policy-making with the aim of creating educational reform in their schools. In collaboration with business leaders, educators, and community stakeholders, the taskforce worked to create a successful career pathway program for all students regardless of race, gender, and socioeconomic background. Through the students’ inquiry, they believed that not every student fit into the college-ready

pathway. Focus groups were created and interviews were conducted with all of the stakeholders including youth. Findings from this project showed that student voices greatly enhanced the quality of policies supporting poor and/or youth of color in urban schools and the choices that they could make after high school. As Freire (1970/1995) wrote, “knowledge emerges only through the invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 53). Practicing YPAR with a critical inquiry lens is a powerful way for youth to unlock knowledge to enact change.

Working Alongside Youth

Based on Cammarota and Fine’s (2008) tenet of using YPAR “with” as opposed to “on” youth, Herr (2017) found that when youth are involved in critical inquiry, it teaches them “that conditions of injustice are produced, not natural, are designed to privilege and oppress but are ultimately challengeable and thus changeable” (p. 3). Herr (2017), a White school counselor, worked to surface issues regarding the curriculum in meetings to address the lack of histories represented for her students of color. The students analyzed the issue of not addressing multiple perspectives and believed that the curriculum and teaching were ignoring them. Herr (2017) collaborated with a group of students of color through a co-researcher relationship in an increasingly diverse school. They became concerned about the small number of students of color in the school and noticed a disproportionate amount of academic trouble for these students. Their goals included facilitating institutional change because of this situation. The author noted that some students were in danger of not being invited back the next year, and Herr (2017) initially thought that she would be a voice for her students but soon realized that her students were becoming co-researchers and change agents. In fact, they would speak for themselves.

Students began an “it’s my school too” movement and worked to create a presence in the school by walking the hallways collectively, sitting together at lunch, reading the autobiography of Malcolm X after school, discussing issues of race, and attempting to create a film festival featuring Black history. Little by little, the students gained recognition through the student-created “Minority Awareness Committee ” which was later supported by school administrators. Through Herr’s (2017) experience with using YPAR as a method of inquiry, she found that adult/student research collaborations and critical inquiry benefited schools but at the same time, it was a complex undertaking. This experience showed large changes in the perspectives of those who took an interest in the students’ push for change. More importantly, there was also the notion of healing justice (Ginwright, 2015) because the YPAR practices cultivated critical consciousness, which is engaging in individual or collective social action to produce social change (Freire, 1973). Students’ collective action outlined in this study helps demonstrate reasons for teachers to create learning experiences that students can see themselves in. It also challenges other school personnel, like social workers and administrators to recognize that there are many structures within schools that do not promote equitable opportunities for students. Like Herr’s (2017) research, I had hoped to also help my students raise awareness about inequities in school and their communities.

Burke and Greene (2015) explored what happens when, like Morrell (2008) stated, teachers and students work alongside one another in the research process. Their work focused on two projects in two separate afterschool programs in which the inquiry was student-generated and related to the students’ everyday lives. Through multiple literacies and the guidance of an arts-based approach, 12 middle-school students engaged in the participatory action research process to plan, propose, and carry out a local park renovation. As a result, a community-

university partnership evolved that “sought to connect youth to their neighborhoods, to foster intergenerational communication, and to encourage youth to speak up and out about the ways their neighborhoods could be more responsive to their needs” (Burke & Greene, 2015, p. 387).

In the vein of Freire (1970), Burke and Greene (2015) suggested that students began to view literacy as an ideal that affects how others read and see the world. Through a process of creating and interpreting multimodal texts, youth acquired strategies for debating, inquiring, and using evidence to create more equitable conditions for those living in neighborhoods bearing the brunt of economic instability.

To illustrate the results of youth participatory action research, the students involved in Burke and Greene’s (2015) study engaged with multiple literacies to produce Photovoice projects to communicate to city leaders that the conditions in their neighborhood needed to change, and a park (which they, the students designed) could provide a haven for neighborhood youth and adults to use voice, agency, and creativity as researchers. Naturally, students did not arrive to the experience well-versed in Photovoice.

As with any introduction to a new digital tool and a new form of communication, guidance and explicit instruction coupled with time for independent exploration is critical. This is something that I kept in mind while engaging with YPAR using new literacies and digital tools in my own study. Burke and Greene’s (2015) findings concluded that the use of Photovoice was instrumental in building a network among the youth researchers and their adult counterparts. It aided also in the telling of their stories about the spaces in which they live.

Within many of these YPAR studies, the researchers were teachers themselves, conducting learning experiences and researching the outcomes for their students while reflecting on their own teaching practices. For example, promoting agency, creativity, choice, and voice is

the type of action research that generates new knowledge because it challenges traditional forms of schooling and it is grounded in the realities of youth's lived experiences. Pairing this research directly with youth created Youth Participatory Action Research which uniquely places teachers in the position of not only working alongside their students in research, but also included using that research to create new knowledge for other educators.

Practitioner Inquiry

Practitioner inquiry can be used by teachers to bring light to some of the complexities and challenges that occur in teaching and learning. It can raise teachers' voices in discussions about educational reform and it can position teachers to ultimately transform the profession and classroom experiences (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2019). Practitioner inquiry allows teachers to be researchers within their own classrooms by playing a part in the research process with the goal of facilitating change in classrooms and schools. With many versions of practitioner inquiry, some have been reworked to support the emancipatory goals of educators by shifting teacher responsibility to educational improvement by challenging underlying social and economic inequities that have a profound impact on children's schooling experiences (Grace & Langhout, 2014). Youth participatory action research effectively informs K-12 educational research by directly involving teachers while providing the process to connect theory to a methodologically grounded approach.

Educational Research in Schools

Historically, there have been research paradigms that have not given teachers the role of problem-posers and solvers (Shulman, 1986). Three educational research paradigms have been process-product research, qualitative or interpretative research, and teacher inquiry (practitioner inquiry). Shulman (1986) explained that process-product research is a model where the teacher's

role is to implement the research findings of outside experts such as university researchers, who typically do not have an understanding of the everyday happenings in classrooms. In this model, teachers negotiate challenges framed by outside experts and are then asked to implement a curriculum designed by those researchers who are outside of the classroom. A problem with process-product research is that it does not allow teachers to problematize their classrooms and may result in top-down training instead of solution-seeking behavior on the part of classroom teachers (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2019).

A second paradigm of educational research is qualitative or interpretative research where teaching is considered a highly complex, context-specific, interactive activity. Clark (1995) believed that it is part of a teacher's job to acknowledge these contextual differences and that differences in classrooms, schools, and communities are critically important to research. Even with qualitative or interpretative research, the research is still largely conducted through universities for academic audiences. While this research is valuable to school communities and also offers valuable insights on theory and practice, this paradigm limits teachers' roles in the research process.

While both of these research paradigms have highlighted insights into the teaching and learning process, they have often excluded the voices of those closest to students—classroom teachers. The third research paradigm finally situates teachers as knowledge-generators and teacher researchers. This paradigm is often referred to as “teacher research,” “teacher inquiry,” “classrooms research,” “action research,” or “practitioner inquiry” which is what was used here (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2019). While these terms have been used interchangeably, they do have somewhat of different emphases and histories (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). For example, action research usually brings about some kind of change, usually with a social justice

focus, whereas teacher research quite often has the goal only of examining a teacher's classroom practice in order to better understand teaching practices or learning. Experts such as Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2019) have continued to replace the term *research* with *inquiry* as it is conducted by teachers in classroom settings to improve classroom practice and implement change, in contrast to being solely for academic impact. This research paradigm focuses on the concerns of teachers (not outside researchers) and engages teachers in the design, data collection, interpretation, and dissemination of data.

Implementation of Practitioner Inquiry within YPAR

Cremin et al.'s (2012) research involved each teacher participant researching at least two families to challenge assumptions about students' funds of knowledge in relation to 21st-century literacy. It was also important to consider implications for the literacy curriculum. González et al. (2005) defined funds of knowledge as the skills and knowledge that have been historically and culturally developed in marginalized communities. Cremin et al. (2012) argued that the project challenged teachers' perceptions and beliefs about children and families, prompting dispositional shifts and new understandings of literacy practices and diversity. Findings concluded that by creating responsive curricula that connected to the lived social realities of youth, there was a significant professional challenge for the teachers involved. But with time, space, and support, teachers were able to appreciate and understand children's and families' funds of knowledge and to blur the boundaries between home and school literacy practices. The project tapped into the practitioner inquiry theory by encouraging teachers to step away from existing parental participation strategies and enabling teachers to investigate children's and families' funds of knowledge. This helped them to examine their teaching practices for fostering alternative home-school relations.

Hill's (2010) practitioner inquiry project investigated the out-of-school literacies of young children. It also supported teachers in developing a multiliteracies map to inform curricular planning and teacher professional development. Twenty-five teacher-researchers investigated home-based multimodalities and then planned curriculum based on these findings. In response to children's use of and engagement with multimodal texts, the teacher-researchers developed a framework known as the multiliteracies map. These findings were then shared in a professional learning program to support literacy curriculum planning going forward. Based on Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (2009) practitioner inquiry theory, the teacher research in this study identified the practitioner's stance in relation to knowledge generation in the field. The teacher-researchers were engaged in knowledge creation and collaboration.

Alvermann and Moore (2011) researched how teachers in a middle-school setting in New Zealand investigated in-school and out-of-school literacy practices. They used an ethnographic approach to answer the question: how can practitioner inquiry into the multiliterate practices of one student complicate understandings of literacy? Alvermann and Moore (2011) sought to change how literacy instruction in New Zealand frequently resembles traditional approaches used by generations of teachers, through emphasizing meaning-making with written texts. They argued that this outdated version of literacy discredits rich multimodal texts that students engage with daily. Although there are many variants of practitioner inquiry, the method that Alvermann and Moore (2011) used in their research project is best described as teacher research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), which involves teachers questioning their own beliefs and constructing local knowledge, often in collaboration with university researchers. The researchers found that their students' multiliterate practices challenged the role of traditional literacies and that there was a strong potential to use nontraditional literacy practices in classroom settings. Alvermann

and Moore (2011) argued that practitioner inquiry is a powerful means to challenge assumptions and extend the understandings of literacy. This is vital because Alvermann and Moore (2011) challenged traditional literacy definitions, instruction, and teacher practice. All in all, these researchers did something similar to what I did with studying the facilitation of YPAR while also analyzing my own practice.

The opportunity for young people not only to assume leadership roles but to have a voice in discerning the problems affecting their lives is a key aspect of YPAR and revolutionary educational settings. Grace and Langhout (2014) unearthed a set of “revolutionary educator” problem-posing questions during their YPAR study to facilitate shifts in power between adults and youth. Their research investigated the ways in which adult questioning can help children to challenge conventional models of power in elementary educational settings. This shift in power is integral in YPAR settings since power is often determined by whoever controls the knowledge. This study had the goal of teachers reflecting on their questioning practice to shift the power from themselves to their students. It also encouraged students to be the knowledge disseminators. The problem-posing questions in this study were based on Fink’s taxonomy (Fink, 2003) which is used when the educational setting is problem-based, project-based, and team-based, which is the case with many YPAR projects. This research found that teachers tended to use banking-concept questioning which relies on factual or known-answer questions. This study addressed the need for practitioners in YPAR settings to examine if their practices embodied YPAR principles as well as Fink’s (2003). They did this through learning how to generate questions which incorporated students as knowledge producers. This articulated how students learn, which provides opportunities for students to deconstruct their learning practices in order to continue learning with more confidence.

Bonsor Kurki (2015) introduced her students to texts such as movies, YouTube videos, Tweets, songs, poetry, paintings, and narratives to discover how her students interacted with multiple forms of text through a critical literacy lens. Participating students completed assignments related to current events and the teacher gave them a choice in how they got to demonstrate their learning. Since many of the students had Individual Education Plans (IEPs) there was more flexibility for her to embrace a range of texts that could address the students' abilities. Findings concluded that when students were comfortable in their learning environments, they could offer insightful information about texts and their use in everyday interactions in their own voices. Surveys and interviews were analyzed and demonstrated that students thought critically and made reasoned judgments that were logical and well thought-out. Students also did not simply accept all arguments and conclusions, which solidified an important pillar of critical literacy: challenge and recreate texts. Bonsor Kurki's (2015) critical literacy work in her classroom is a strong example of practitioner inquiry. She helped facilitate change in her own students' schooling experience and then went on to develop a tool to assist other teachers so they could also move their students beyond evaluative and critical thinking, into a transformative position to rewrite media that they question and want to challenge. By placing students in this position, students are more likely to engage in school-based literacy in more meaningful ways, to make sense of it, and to communicate their learning through different contexts.

Discussion

The research that I've reviewed informed the aims of my study by providing context, informing methodology and helping me to identify gaps in the studies that I reviewed. The studies included in this literature review were chosen because of their focus on new literacy

studies, critical literacy and practitioner inquiry and their relationship to YPAR through various lenses.

In many of the mentioned studies, teacher-researchers used theoretical perspectives such as NLS, critical literacy, and practitioner inquiry to take relevant curricular, instructional, and interactional approaches within school institutions. These methods have been qualitative in nature, highlighting the importance of understanding the nature of YPAR. Although there is a gap in the literature that focuses on YPAR being conducted in educational settings embedded within curriculum, the articles selected showcased strong examples of the application of theories to understand the educational problem of excluding student voice and choice. Including empirical studies about practitioner inquiry also provides a strong theoretical framework for this issue as it addresses how teachers must internalize their own teaching practice, methodology, and understanding of critical practice and literacy instruction.

Understanding the current literature also helped me to establish the clear goals of uncovering literacy practices in my YPAR study as well as helping to select the appropriate research methods for communicating relevant results. Lastly, an in depth understanding of the mentioned literature helped me to engage in reflective critique about the research study as well as to be included in meaningful dialogue surrounding new literacy studies in a virtual teaching and learning setting specifically including critical literacy practices within YPAR facilitation.

When beginning my educational research journey at the University of Rochester during my master's work with reading and literacies, I focused on how establishing equity is necessary for students of color and from highly marginalized and stereotyped backgrounds. Even though there is a plethora of research regarding marginalized communities in education, I became increasingly interested in how to intertwine the literature with practice. With this in mind, I

began to read and mix my understanding of literacy as a social practice with my knowledge of literacy and how it looks in schools. The equity framework outlined by Gholdy Muhammad (2020) blends the teaching and learning pursuits that I align my practice with. He speaks to identity development and helping youth to make sense of themselves and others. It also highlights the skill development across academic disciplines and criticality, which is developing the ability to read texts to understand power and equity.

In Chapter 3, the theoretical frameworks of NLS, critical literacy, and practitioner inquiry in my own YPAR action research study will be used to discuss the methodology. As an inquiry model, YPAR lessens the deficit thinking applied to urban schooling and urban youth (Cammarota & Fine, 2010); additionally, YPAR can be used to increase learning opportunities and outcomes that challenge traditional approaches (Caraballo et al., 2017). Freire (2004), in what he termed a ‘pedagogy of indignation,’ reminded us that rather than adapting to the world as it is, we must devise practices consistent with transforming it.

For my action research study, I sought to design and facilitate YPAR interactions with my literacy students. YPAR practices served as the foundation for working alongside youth by helping them to become social justice advocates through the use of literacy events and practices while taking a critical stance in my Reader’s-Writer’s Workshop classroom.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Design

Introduction and Overview

This study was conducted to fulfill the requirements of Warner's doctoral EdD program in Teaching and Curriculum. The purpose of this research was to study the literacies that students were using in a virtual learning environment centered around facilitating YPAR within a critical literacy pedagogy. The goal is sharing results and practical ideas and concepts with the East educators, students, and community. It involved YPAR through giving students the autonomy and space to decide what their learning would encompass throughout the first part of the school year.

By bringing Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) to East Lower School during a tumultuous time (such as a global pandemic), it was possible to mediate rigid forms of curriculum, despite the challenge of online learning and student participation and engagement. As outlined in the literature review section, YPAR can give students control over their learning, and can help them advocate for issues that they care about by giving students a choice in what they learn about (McIntyre, 2000). It can also engage students in their own community to enact change and become experts on important issues (Cammarota & Fine, 2018). Additionally, YPAR illuminates literacy opportunities and shows how literacy is a social practice in school, online, and in the community (New London Group, 1996; Street, 2005). Youth Participatory Action Research also allows youth to determine what it is worth knowing and learning which in turn assists youth in realizing educational inequality. This in turn engages youth in the process of critiquing, redefining, and overcoming the problems that they face in their schools and communities by working as experts of their own lives. It also increases the students' knowledge

and understanding to write for change on endemic issues that face their world. This happens through creating spaces for youth to challenge and recreate texts, ideally furthering students' engagement and academic achievement (Caraballo et al., 2018).

A goal of this research was to present conclusions in such a way that other educators can use YPAR “with” as opposed to “on” youth in their own classrooms and to create a teaching and learning culture centered around youth choosing to learn about what matters to them (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

Choice of Methodology

Methodological approaches informed by new literacy studies (NLS) often seek to tap into students' local knowledge to actively engage learners in their learning process and help them to find and develop their opinions and positions (Freire, 2004). New literacies and critical literacies together raise and explore many issues that affect the very nexus of what it means to do research, to teach, and learn (and live!) in the 21st century (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). New literacy studies examine the relationship between real-world literacy and those benefits that are independent from formal schooling. With this grounding my research, I used action research (AR) for this study, due to many of its inherent tenets outlined by Herr and Anderson (2015), which aligned with my work. Even though inquiry research is described many ways, it is still considered *action research* according to Carr and Kemmis (1986). Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2019) believed that three important benefits to action research are: (a) theories and knowledge are generated from research based on the realities of the classroom and teaching practice, (b) teachers are collaborators in research as the main investigators of their own problems, (c) teachers play an integral part in the research process, facilitating change based on the knowledge they create.

In action research, the researcher collects and analyzes data while also taking action; in this case I served as both a participant and a researcher. I took part in planning and facilitating YPAR with my seventh-grade students while simultaneously collecting and analyzing data. Action research additionally aims to make changes related to the problem identified; it states that current policy does not address important issues for youth. In addition, current educational reform efforts create a substantial barrier to civic participation and educational equity (Ginwright et al., 2006). My choices of methodology also connected to my research questions:

1. What are the literacy practices of participants (including students, teachers, community members?) in YPAR?
2. What happens when I attempt to build a critical literacy teaching practice around YPAR?

Practitioner Inquiry Research

Youth participatory action research effectively informs K-12 educational research by directly involving teachers while providing connections between theory and a methodologically grounded approach. Compared to traditional methods and roles of teaching and learning, YPAR leads practitioners to recognize that students are stakeholders in their learning. Students are valuable informants because YPAR, in essence, allows youth to work as researchers alongside adults.

Context

This study focused on eight seventh-grade literacy students at East Lower School in the Rochester City School District (RCSD). These students were members of my seventh grade Reader's-Writer's Workshop class for the 2020-2021 school year. A convenience sample was composed of students including general education students as well as students with disabilities

who were reading at a variety of levels. These students began the school year virtually online due to health concerns and state mandates from COVID-19, and they had the option to return for 2 days of in-person learning in February 2021. The age range for these students were 12-13-year-olds. These students represented varying socioeconomic statuses, and all had just entered the school community for their first year. The focus on this age group was because the literature shows that YPAR is typically conducted only with high school students and/or during after-school or summer programs and is rarely integrated into the yearly curriculum (Duren, 2020).

As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, East High School's Educational Partnership Organization (EPO) highlights social justice and equity in education. It also uses curriculum teams which recommended the Nancie Atwell (2007) Reading and Writing Workshop model (later adding the work by Lucy Calkins, 2005) to provide limitless opportunities for students to explore authentic texts and produce meaningful pieces that matter to them. This class section is designed for students who are reading proficiently for their grade level. The workshop model fits perfectly with the goals of developing students with strong collaboration skills, literate identities, and agency. This learner-centered approach to teaching and learning showcases students' literacy development in an engaging and collaborative space. There are two other layers to the East literacy model which are supported with Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's *System 44* and *Read 180* instructional models and materials that seek to build foundational literacy skills in a way that engages students in learning experiences. These systems use informative assessments and a flexible rotation model that combines traditional and online instruction. These two instructional models are designed for students who are reading below grade-level proficiency.

Researcher's Positionality

Throughout my 5 years as a literacy specialist at East, I have been very fortunate to take on the role as a Reader's-Writer's Workshop teacher in the Lower School. Throughout my experience as a workshop teacher, I have gained experience in curriculum writing and development, the facilitation of authentic reading and writing learning experiences, and creating curriculum-embedded performance tasks (CEPTs) with live community audiences. Most importantly, this has been giving students the opportunities to engage in meaningful literary experiences while also giving me the opportunity to learn alongside my students.

Furthermore, during my doctoral studies at the University of Rochester, I began reading and researching critical literacy and new literacy studies in the early stages of my program. Through my critical literacy research, I realized that there are YPAR after-school programs, summer programs, or electives offered for 11th-12th graders but there is virtually no YPAR work being done with middle-school students within traditional school settings. I believe that this is the critical age for this work to be done. I believe that my work so far and my own practice alongside my students not only allowed me to fulfill the requirements needed for my dissertation, but my research also embodies the mission at East High to "take charge of our future by being tenacious, thinking purposefully, and advocating for self and others." I will share my dissertation and a research findings summary with fellow East educators through the literacy department and interdisciplinary meetings. My goal is to share this school-wide with East leadership, teachers, students, and the community to inspire and challenge others to facilitate YPAR in their own classrooms.

Theoretical Framework for Data Analysis

Theoretical models such as New Literacy Studies and Critical Literacy emphasize the way in which literacy should create change in various ways. As theoretical models, these have had a large impact in offering practical models for this work in a classroom setting (Larson & Marsh, 2015). Before I examine YPAR in a virtual environment in more detail, it helps to have a clear understanding where I position my analysis in the midst of a confusing array of meanings around literacy and new literacies. Gee's (2010) essay was helpful in clarifying the distinctions and developments in the field. He pointed out that new literacy studies are about "studying new types of literacy beyond print literacy, especially digital literacies" (p. 31). This information involving new literacies and the literacy practices students use throughout the YPAR process in a virtual learning environment is how critical literacy connects to this research study.

Understanding that critical literacy involves action, and learners positioned as active agents in relation to texts and social practices (Larson & Marsh, 2015) is vital. This demonstrates the importance that all literacies, even literacies in a virtual learning environment create meaning and have the potential to make an impact on youth and their communities. Literacy is situated within specific contexts, and shaped by social interaction (Larson & Marsh, 2015) both in person or in virtual environments.

Participants

Focusing on eight seventh-grade literacy students at East Lower School in the Rochester City School District (RCSD), students were members of my seventh-grade Reader's-Writer's Workshop class for the 2020-2021 school year. A convenience sample was composed of students including general education students as well as students with disabilities who were reading at a variety of levels. These students began the school year virtually online due to health concerns

and state mandates from COVID-19 and they had the option to return for 2 days of in-person learning in February, 2021. The age range for these students was 12-13 years old. These students represented varying socioeconomic statuses, and all had just entered the school community for their first year. The focus on this age group was because as mentioned before, the literature shows that YPAR is typically conducted with high school students and/or during after school or summer programs and is rarely integrated into the yearly curriculum (Duren, 2020). Students were engaged in participatory action research to inform themselves and others about challenges persistent in their local community through inquiry, collaboration, and writing. Students worked to become effective advocates to communicate about relevant chosen issues.

Research Design

Data were collected in the form of observational field notes, coded audio recordings, and the use of a researcher journal with prompts and memos. The study used a qualitative approach that enabled analysis of the teacher's perceptions about the use of YPAR in a middle school literacy classroom virtually. The study yielded new insights about how YPAR contributes to the students' development and the teacher's practice.

This study was conducted within a seventh-grade classroom. It was a Reader's-Writer's Workshop group of eight students. This class met twice a week virtually throughout the research. During each research cycle, observational notes and audio recordings were made throughout the individual class sessions to capture students working within the YPAR lens.

The first cycle focused on building community, acknowledging the COVID-19 pandemic, and students' reintegration into school whether virtually or in-person. The first cycle touched on students' socioemotional needs with support from school social workers. It also included concepts for autonomous learning as students navigated back into a virtual school. The second

cycle focused on brainstorming community challenges, personal challenges, topics of interest, speaking and listening protocols, and collaboration. The third cycle focused on research, the writing process, and peer revision. The fourth and final cycle contained the “call to action” outlined by YPAR where students worked to publish their writing and decide on the way to present it and act upon it. In Table 1, the research steps are outlined into the 4 research cycles. Each step involved and youth working through their own action research process to work towards enacting change in their community. While I worked through my own action research process to uncover New Literacies during around facilitating YPAR in a critical literacy lens.

Table 1

Overview of Research Cycle and Steps

	Community Building	Brainstorming	Research	Call to Action
Steps	Introduce selves to one-another	Analyze affordances and constraints in community	Begin research and writing processes	Make connections and recommendations through letters:
	Become familiar with online environment	Engage with texts with similar frameworks	Engage in peer revision	Rochester City Council
		Investigate issues in Rochester	Define issue and significance, make and support a claim	Other audiences
		Identify and choose an issue	Use evidence to build argument	2 nd item- Options Spoken word poem, Tik Tok, Instagram, Presentation, Vlog, FacebookLive

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of students utilizing YPAR within a critical literacies-infused curriculum as well as my interpretations of how students, myself, and community members utilize literacy practices. Again, this research involved

approximately four action research cycles including data from each class session meeting twice a week. This included 12 instructional phases of 55 minutes each, twice a week.

I collected data from each class session as well as after each action research cycle to distinguish how students were engaging in YPAR virtually. Each meeting with students was composed of five instructional phases: writing reflection check-in, mini-lesson, independent writing, feedback, and conferencing, and then finally we discussed next steps. Each meeting with students is described below.

The writing reflection check-in: This was meant to be a quick time to address how students are doing that day or what they might be struggling with or succeeding with. This was the main time to build relationships and make connections with students. It was also a wonderful time to tap into students' prior knowledge. For the purpose of this research, students did this through writing; either by responding to a reading, a video, or updating everyone (including the teacher) about where they may be in the writing process—prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, evaluating, or publishing. A status update of the class for the writing process did not happen every day. I specifically kept track of students' progress weekly and gave feedback on students' writing daily. This time was also useful to group students together depending on their research topics to engage with each other in virtual Zoom breakout rooms.

The mini-lesson: This was the teacher-directed portion of the writing workshop. Mini-lessons are usually assessment-based, explicit instruction. Mini-lessons were designed to be brief and focused on a single, narrowly defined topic that all writers could implement regardless of skill level. According to writing workshop guru Lucy Calkins, mini-lessons are a time to gather the whole class to raise a concern, explore an issue, model a technique, or reinforce a strategy (1986).

The independent writing time: The majority of this instructional phase of the class meeting was devoted to simply giving students time to write about or research a challenge or topic that they believed was interesting and that they could combat through YPAR. During this time, the teacher either modeled the process by working on their own writing or gave written feedback to individual students via Google Docs.

The feedback and conferencing: This step included students responding to written feedback from me, comparing their work to a peer, discussing their work with a peer, or participating in teacher conferences (either individual or small group). For example, with virtual learning, the teacher coordinated break-out rooms through Zoom to conference with individuals or groups of students. In all reality, most of this time was spent observing and helping students. A goal during each week was to conference with each student or group in the class at least once. If there was a need, a whole-class discussion happened at this time as well. The main priority of conferencing was to listen and also to prompt students to share their progress, ask questions, and receive and respond to in-moment feedback on their writing. Here are a few questions that were used during conferencing:

- What are you working on?
- How is it coming along? What can I help you with?
- What are your next steps?

The next steps: This phase was originally meant to be split between student time and teacher time. This phase was originally meant to act as a closure for the instructional phase for students where they would decide what they need to work on asynchronously when we are not meeting together on Zoom. However, with the realities of virtual learning and teaching and

abbreviated class time, much of this time was time for my own reflection responding to the following prompts:

- What did the student show?
- What is the student ready for next?
- What were the major takeaways from students' work today? What are the major themes of YPAR?
- What literacy practices did students use today?

Through this practitioner inquiry lens, these reflection prompts were designed to elicit thinking to uncover my decision-making processes as well as the students' decision-making processes, perceptions, interpretation, and use of critical literacy practices.

Recruitment of Participants

A convenience sample was the method of obtaining the participants in my action research study. A convenience sample is one where the units (my students) that are selected for inclusion in the study are the easiest to access. For example, I began the school year with 31 Reader's-Writer's Workshop students. Of the 31 workshop students, it was easily feasible to collect and analyze data from 8 students. Even with 31 workshop students, beginning the year virtually created a challenge of achieving a larger sample size because of informed consent and assent procedures of guardians and students being conducted completely via phone or Zoom. All students were invited to participate but was only able to receive informed consent from guardians for eight students. Since the aim of convenience sampling is easy access, researching 8 out of 31 students already assigned to me seemed convenient for my study with parental verbal permission and student assent. Even though this method is considered convenient, in a full remote setting, receiving even permission for 8 participants proved to be difficult.

This study began after contacting parents/guardians starting with my 2BD Workshop class (12 students) and continued on to ask parents/guardians of my 4BD Workshop class (19 students) for their participation in a virtual information meeting. There was a Zoom link provided by the district which could easily be found on their child's Google Classroom. At this meeting, each parent or guardian was instructed on how to access the informational letter within Google Classroom. Since the research was being conducted at East High School EPO with the University of Rochester, signed permission was waived, but verbal permission had to be given and recorded. Once informed about the research study and upon verbal approval, each parent/guardian was given a code connected to their child. Each child then designated me as the principal investigator (PI), with their respective code to note that a discussion about the research had happened and that they gave permission for their child to participate in the research study.

If parents did not attend the virtual Zoom meeting to give verbal permission, I reached out by phone with instructions on how to access the permission information letter on Google Classroom. I then received verbal permission over the phone along with the shared code with their child that was then reported back to me that a conversation was had about the research study. Any students who did not have a verbal permission on record and shared code were not included in the study and I continued to reach out to the rest of the families. After 2 weeks of contacting families and continuing this process, eight students were permitted to participate in the research study.

To receive student assent, students were provided with their code following their parent/guardian's participation in the virtual information session or phone meeting. Students whose parents verbally gave permission and shared their respective code with their child, were then asked to join a virtual information session outside of their usual scheduled class time. This

took place during my scheduled Wednesday office hours from 1:00-3:30pm. At this session, I read the informational letter and then students had the opportunity to ask questions about the research. Students had access to the informational letter within their Google Classroom at all times to refer back to. If students, for whatever reason, did not attend the office hours Zoom session, a private breakout session during class was used for the same purposes.

Data Collection

This study was conducted from September-January in the 2020-2021 school year during the normal instructional hours with students assigned to my classroom virtually. During the 2020-21 school year, there were approximately 1,250 students in grades 6-12, 356 students in the Lower School (6-8) and 190 teachers and administrators. Lower School student demographics showed that 193 of the students identified as African American; 124 Latinx; 34 White; 11 Asian; 2 students identified other (distributed among American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or 2 or more). 41 students of the student population were English as a New Language Learners (ENL), and 65 were students with disabilities. All of the students received free lunch (a proxy for poverty).

Through a practitioner inquiry lens, I looked at my own practice as it related to using YPAR within a middle school Reader's-Writer's Workshop literacy model and collected data on the literacies students used in YPAR. All lessons were audio recorded via the school district-supplied Zoom account to aid in data analysis. The lessons were audio recorded using a secure and encrypted digital device and the audio recordings were stored securely via the University of Rochester's server on the same day. Below in Table 2, I have presented tools that were used throughout the research process and used for data collection and analysis. This involved collecting digital tools from Google sources and audio recordings that were used with

participants. In my researcher memos, I discussed the challenges of virtual teaching and learning and also the facilitation of YPAR.

Table 2

Overview of Data Collection Tools

Tool	Data	Timetable
Google survey	The survey collected the information to learn about students reading and writing experiences as well as their experiences with school and communities.	Participants completed the survey prior to the second session.
Researcher memos	I wrote a memo for each Zoom meeting with students. I addressed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Challenges of virtual learning ● Observations of attendance ● Observations of participation during Zoom sessions as well as asynchronously 	I wrote memos before each Zoom meeting.
Researcher journal	After each Zoom meeting I documented the following items: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● My observations during the Zoom meeting ● Logistical challenges and how I plan to overcome them in the future. ● My learning from the practitioner inquiry lens. ● My learning as a facilitator of the YPAR virtually Critical literacy characteristics that students are using	I wrote a journal entry immediately following each Zoom session and throughout the data analysis process.

Table 2 (con't)

Video recordings and chat transcripts	I recorded and archived each of the 2 Zoom meetings per week and download and archive each of the chat transcripts.	At the end of each of the Zoom meetings, I uploaded the audio, audio transcript, and chat transcript to my University of Rochester Box Drive.
Google Suite materials	Students were working within The Google Suite utilizing Google Classroom, Docs, Drive, and Jamboard.	The number of artifacts in the Google Suite based on engagement of study participants. I analyzed each Google artifact.

Data Analysis

Throughout this research study, I used the literacy practices as a unit of analysis which across digital artifacts within learning experiences. I started the data analysis process following the completion of the first Zoom meeting after guardian consent and student assent were complete.

The first process of coding was through iterative and ongoing data analysis (Luttrell, 2010) by reading across all data sources to identify instances when participants engaged in literacy practices. Literacy practices are “social practices and conceptions of reading and writing” (Street, 1984, p. 1; Street, 2003, p. 78). Instead of literacy events as observed skills, literacy practices are conceptualized (Street, 2000, 2003). Literacy practices rely on the reading and writing process that people hold when they are engaged in a literacy event (Street, 1984). Street emphasized that literacy practices heavily rely on the social, cultural and contexts in which they are used. Literacy practices observed through a new literacies and critical literacy lens to uncover literacy practices seen across data sources including digital platforms, Zoom meetings, learning experiences, researcher journals and memos. By systematically coding the literary

practices, I examined these practices and associated them with patterns such as engagement, motivation, virtual norms, empowerment etc. I noted key words, frequency, amount, and content of participants' writing and collaboration with me, peers, and community members. Examples of this were tracking words such as: asset, challenge, deficit, community, support, resource, benefit.

To better understand which literacy practices participants used to work for a larger change in a justice issue following critical literacy participation in the YPAR project, I engaged in open and closed coding of the data sources (Charmaz, 2014) as the second process of coding. This involved developing focused codes around the literacies that students were using throughout YPAR. I analyzed literacy practices within learning experiences as a chunk across multiple digital artifacts found through using Zoom chat, Padlet, Jamboard and Google platforms.

Learning experiences are defined by the Understanding by Design instructional model (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998). This is a backward design focused primarily on student learning and understanding that was adopted by the East EPO as an instructional planning method. The final stage of backward design process is when instructors consider the instructional strategies and learning experiences. For the purpose of this research project, learning experiences were analyzed as chunks across multiple digital artifacts. Wiggins and McTighe (1998) argue that when teachers are designing lessons, units, or courses, they often focus on the activities and instruction rather than the outputs of the instruction. Therefore, it can be stated that teachers often focus more on teaching rather than learning. This perspective can lead to the misconception that learning is the activity when, in fact, learning is derived from a careful consideration of the meaning of the activity.

I then refined and collapsed the focused codes considering the themes which were transparent through using YPAR. Examples that emerged for critical literacies such as

empowerment, issues of inequities, and socioemotional learning developed throughout this process. For new literacies students used while learning online, focused codes such as interaction and engagement, collaboration and motivation emerged.

The third process of coding that I used was drawing from the work of Saldaña (2016) to pattern code to analyze my data related to my own teaching practice around my second research question dealing with the facilitation of critical literacy pedagogy around YPAR. These data sources came from my researcher memos and journals relating to my own practice and facilitation of YPAR. My unit of analysis through pattern coding relied on line by line or phrases relating back to the data of how students and myself were engaging with new literacies and critical literacy practices in an online teaching and learning space.

In addition, I needed to answer my second question: What happens when I attempt to build a critical literacy teaching practice around YPAR? To do this, I needed to look for themes of inquiry within my own reflections using my research journal and memos. Through this analysis, I looked for themes having to do with inquiry into my own practice to solve problems that came along with facilitating YPAR in a virtual environment. Once these themes were uncovered, I used a pattern code to organize data relating to my own practice and facilitation of YPAR (Saldaña, 2016).

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

Introduction

This chapter addresses the findings of the study and discusses the data that were collected. Using action research, this study was conducted with eight seventh-grade student participants at East Lower School in a Reader's-Writer's Workshop Literacy class with varying levels of reading proficiency as determined by the school's universal reading screener, The Reading Inventory. As the researcher, I conducted two cycles of action research. Data were collected from teacher-researcher observations, student discussions, student work, and the memos and researcher journal that I completed while conducting this study. Negotiating YPAR around critical literacy pedagogy in a middle school, virtual classroom with the goal of revealing literacy practices was the intention of this study, and the findings reflect the overall research questions that indicate the way the data was organized and analyzed.

Due to the nature of action research and providing that the research was conducted in a virtual teaching and learning environment due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, significant challenges occurred. The contextual challenge resulted in many different student discussions and varying levels of engagement in activities which were used during class in the data shared in this chapter.

Most YPAR projects occur in extracurricular or community-based settings, rather than school-based settings; by contrast, this dissertation and action research study involved YPAR in a virtual urban middle-school setting given the global COVID-19 pandemic. Data contributes to the ongoing discussion about urban children and the use of digital literacies for justice aims with the ultimate goal of conscientization. Conscientization focuses on achieving an in-depth

understanding of the world, allowing for the perception and exposure of social and political contradictions (Freire, 1970). Through using new literacies around a critical literacy pedagogy, the critical consciousness achieved allowed youth to take action against the oppressive elements in their life.

This dissertation illuminates a particular kind of school-embedded YPAR project and adds to the collective understanding of what facilitates and challenges YPAR work in particular field settings. Additionally, while much of the research of the literature on YPAR includes extensive description and analysis of YPAR-related activities, little research explores the literacies that youth use while doing YPAR, particularly in virtual environments. This dissertation is novel because can help readers consider how YPAR and in-school critical literacy pedagogies intersect, in increasingly online learning environments. Another significant contribution is to build knowledge on how students use digital platforms for transformative justice work.

To serve as a reminder, the research questions for this study were, what are the literacy practices of participants (including students, teachers, community members) in YPAR? And What happens when I attempt to build a critical literacy teaching practice around YPAR?

By definition, PAR is entirely collaborative and collective (Anderson et al., 2007; Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Cahill, 2007; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Torre & Fine, 2006). Even though I determined the timeline of the work, created the learning experiences, and helped students brainstorm problems to be investigated, I have a continuous commitment to the participatory paradigm which links my interest in researching and facilitating YPAR in my classroom as a teacher researcher.

This chapter begins by reviewing the context of the literacy program at East and its relationship to the research questions. The findings are then organized with themes that emerged as a result of using NVivo 12 to code and analyze the data that were collected. Evidence for each theme is included.

Rationale for the EPO and Differentiation of Literacy

Literacy remains one of the largest challenges in many schools across the nation including East Lower School and High School. Evidence of this surfaces not only in high-stakes assessments, but also in the daily academic lives of students. The 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scores for twelfth graders showed a decrease from 80% at the proficient level in 1992 to 73% in 2005 (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006).

Approximately eight million students between fourth and twelfth grade struggle to read at grade level (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). When deciding to create a literacy department at East High School, it was discussed that there must be a push to create high quality curricula that also compliment the rich lived experiences of students.

East's long-term goals for literacy are for students to monitor comprehension and apply reading strategies flexibly for learning and pleasure, to read often and widely from a range of global and diverse texts to understand the world around them and how language is used, to communicate effectively in a variety of formats for a variety of purposes and audiences, and to strengthen writing by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach. Following Haddix and Sealey-Ruiz (2012), the ultimate goal is seeing youth as producers of knowledge who can and do use a wide variety of literacy practices. Another significant goal is developing a love of literacy (Larson et al., 2021).

When describing the literacy program at East, the epistemological dilemma arises between the state supported autonomous literacy practices and the literacy practices that create sociocultural learning. According to the East High School and Lower School Working 2020-21 Literacy Handbook, the literacy program at East is designed to provide additional instructional time devoted to literacy for all students grades 6-9. Scholars below grade level are placed in either daily or every-other-day Read 180 classes are based on individual needs. Students for whom it is determined that foundational phonics is an area of great need through the use of the Phonics Inventory (PI), are placed in a daily System 44 class. Students reading at or above grade level are placed in Workshop. The curriculum in all courses is designed to encourage students to think purposefully about a variety of reading and writing strategies, tenaciously strive to improve their reading and writing skills and abilities, and advocate for self and others through their work. The model is a fluid model and allows for students to move from one course to the next at the end of each marking period based on their performance. To access reading progress and strategically schedule students, teachers deliver the *Scholastic Reading Inventory* five times per year. The baseline administration of the inventory occurs in September and subsequent administrations occur each quarter. To be placed in a certain literacy class, previous state test scores are analyzed, and the first Reading Inventory is used as a measurement to place a student in one of the three interventions. As students show progress throughout the year, the program works fluidly to allow students to move into a different literacy intervention class with the help of school counselors to coordinate schedule changes.

As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, curriculum teams recommended Nancie Atwell's Reading and Writing Workshop model to provide opportunities for students to explore authentic texts and produce meaningful pieces. East High School's Educational Partnership

Organization (EPO) with the University of Rochester highlights social justice and equity in education, and the Workshop Model fits perfectly with the goals of developing students with strong collaboration skills, literate identities, and agency. Showcasing students' literacy development in a Reader's-Writer's Workshop model helps to create a highly engaging and collaborative space as well as provide opportunities for scholars to explore their identities as readers and as writers and to further develop their literacy-related identities and enhance critical literacy skills. After evaluating the literacy ability of incoming students prior to the start of the EPO, the two layers of Read 180 and System 44 were added to engage students in small-group instruction, independent reading, and adaptive instructional software. The emphasis of the curriculum is reading comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, word study, writing and grammar.

The three tiers are designed to support different levels of targeted instruction for students: Reader's-Writer's Workshop for students reading at or above grade level, Read 180 for students reading just below grade level, and System 44 which is designed for students reading severely below grade level to provide more specific targeted intervention. System 44 has also helped show growth predominantly with ENL (English as a new language) students. However, these curricular pathways are problematic because Read 180 and System 44 provide teachers with little flexibility to implement the kinds of transformative approaches seen in YPAR. I am not making the claim that Read 180 and System 44 are inappropriate pathways for learning; rather, I am making the claim that by complementing curricula with critical participatory action research can be a way for more equitable educational resources. It is important for the field of literacy studies to explore how the activist and practitioner methodologies illuminate the problem of access to educational resources (Morrell, 2008).

Research Question #1: What are the New Literacy Practices of Participants (Including Students, Teachers, Community Members) in YPAR?

Leander and Boldt (2013) argued that a vision of literacy as “the design of texts to achieve already-known goals...projected onto students as the trajectory of their activities” (p. 28) overemphasizes human intentionality and misses “literacy’s ability to participate in unruly ways” (p. 41). Given the COVID-19 global pandemic, creating, changing, and facilitating an action research project in a virtual teaching and learning environment with 12-year-old participants, in its own way, became unruly and unpredictable without even taking into account the literacy practices that students and I were using. However challenging it was to facilitate, distance learning offered new experiences both for students and myself. It is also important to note that though these digital literacies supported the new literacy studies theoretical framework, there are relationships across all of these data linking to how digital platforms also supported the critical literacy framework as well.

Uses of Digital Platforms to Facilitate New Literacies in a Remote Learning and Teaching Context

Knobel and Lankshear (2014) define New Literacies as follows: they “focus on the ways in which meaning-making practices are evolving under contemporary conditions that include but are in no way limited to technological changes associated with the rise and proliferation of digital electronics” (p. 97). Based on this paradigm, literacy is situated within specific contexts, and shaped by social interaction (Larson & Marsh, 2015) and throughout time and space, social interactions change. In terms of what students were creating in my virtual classroom environment, Lankshear and Knobel (2011) would call “ethos” two-dimensional: creation of literacy practices within social interaction. When describing literacy practices through my

analysis, I lean on Scribner and Cole (1981) to define practices as “socially developed and patterned ways of using technology and knowledge to accomplish tasks directed to socially recognized goals” (p. 236). For YPAR purposes, our goals were to research, act, and facilitate change in our communities.

Table 3 outlines the multiple digital platforms that were used throughout this research. In order to collect data, to gauge participants’ engagement, collaboration, participation in the global context and for students to have multiple pathways to present their information, digital platforms were used in a variety of ways, yielding different findings throughout the study.

Table 3

Digital Platforms

Digital Platforms	Student Interactions with Platforms for Particular Purposes
1. Jamboard- a collaborative online whiteboard that gives students a creative workspace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students used Jamboard to brainstorm and gathering ideas, sorting them by color, organizing them on different frames, moving them together, drawing lines to connect important ideas, etc. ● Used for peer feedback to help strengthen research claims ● Collaborative in remote settings for students to work together in the same “jam.”
2. Google Classroom- a free tool within Google Workspace that allows educators to distribute and collect assignments, give personalized feedback and grades, and see students’ work in one place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Helped make participation more productive and meaningful by streamlining students’ writing and work, boosting collaboration, and fostering communication. ● Students were able to collaborate with each other by working in Docs on shared projects ● Easily accessible for students who may have been working from their phone.

Table 3 (con't)

3. Canva- a graphic design site that allows students to create visual templates for social media, banners, magazines, pamphlets, posters etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students were able to create their own visuals with the most important content from their YPAR research to share on social media accounts.
4. Instagram- a social media platform that can be used as a space to share photos, videos and information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A way for students to share their Canva designs or Vimeo on their Instagram story for followers to see.
5. Vimeo- a free video maker which offers templates for students to create and customize videos presenting information about their community issue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students created personalized videos to explain their community issue to share with classmates or on their Instagram story.
6. Padlet- a web app that lets users post notes, images, links and videos on a digital wall.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Used for either for the whole group to share information or small groups of students participating in collaborative research. ● Students posted articles that connected to their community issue to share with others ● Teacher researcher used Padlet to help gauge engagement through the writing and research process.
7. Google Forms- a way to compose questions, collect student information, receive feedback from students and a way of reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teacher researcher used Forms to help gauge engagement through the writing and research process.

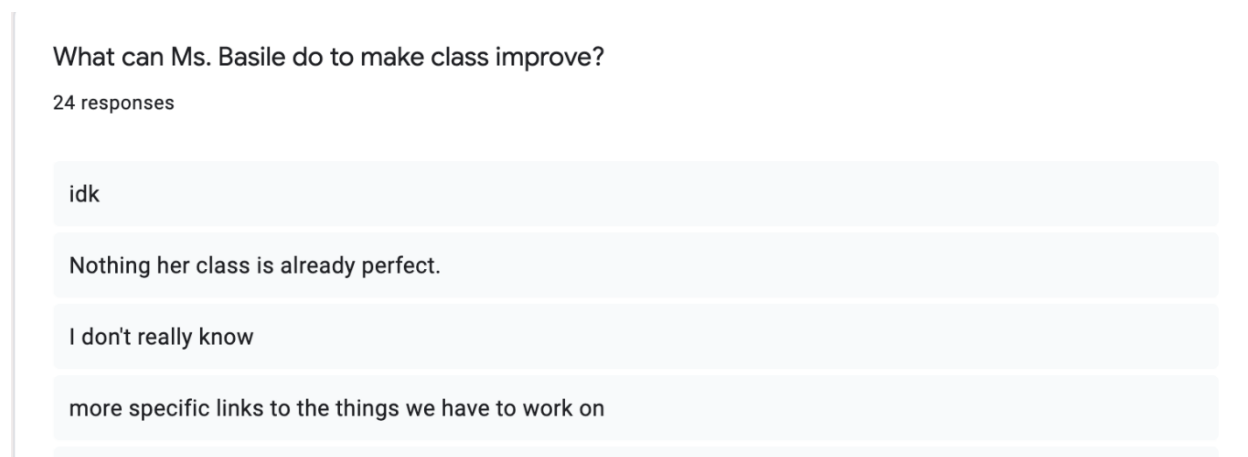
Cain (2015) notes that digital technologies can make the educational landscape more flexible and accessible for a larger group of learners; and during the global pandemic, digital technologies were widely used for that purpose. In a virtual setting, I was very clearly able to connect the use of digital technologies to new literacies as a way to inform participant engagement. In a memo from December 12, 2020, I wrote, “It’s clear that during independent writing time, students are actively engaged because they’re doing what I’ve asked, they are

asking questions verbally in the Zoom chat or physically typing in their shared Google docs.” Assessing engagement and collecting evidence of students’ work served a dual role of gauging how and what students were producing and identifying obstacles that may have hindered their participation.

As written in my researcher journal, the use of Google Forms was a “helpful feedback tool, and the usefulness of such data for immediate and revision for next session.” In figure 1, it is observed that the literacy practices used through Google Forms, was paramount because in a physical classroom setting, I would have been able to pick up on student misconceptions right away through their actions such as facial expressions, body language, lack of writing etc. Through Google Forms, I was directly able to observe misconceptions about our class time through the literacy practice of writing and reflecting. I was also able to make adjustments based on their feedback.

Figure 1

Google Forms for Feedback



What can Ms. Basile do to make class improve?

24 responses

- idk
- Nothing her class is already perfect.
- I don't really know
- more specific links to the things we have to work on

Using a videoconferencing platform like Zoom for whole-class sessions as well as small groups and individual conferences, was a helpful tool. During Zoom, students adapted to new norms like muting themselves to avoid background noise, leaving younger siblings and pets out

of the picture during discussion, turning their video camera on, and sitting up in the frame. Even simply utilizing the Zoom Chat for frequent check-ins with students. In my researcher memo on October 29th, it read:

Surprisingly, students are really quick to respond to direct messages in the Zoom chat.

This has become a quick and easy way to communicate with students when they are released into independent writing time. I think this may be the case because youth are already used to messaging across various online platforms and social media already so typing a quick update to me isn't a big deal.

Even informal socializing occurred the in Zoom chat. For instance, it was not uncommon for a handful of students to chat with other students in Zoom chat to connect or want to stay after the official class was over to talk about what games other students play or to ask for social media name handles. Students used a wide array of literacy practices related to Zoom. Many students even reported setting a digital alarm to remind them when it's time for class. They also had to choose the best lighting for visibility, turn on their device and find and click the meeting link in Google Classroom.

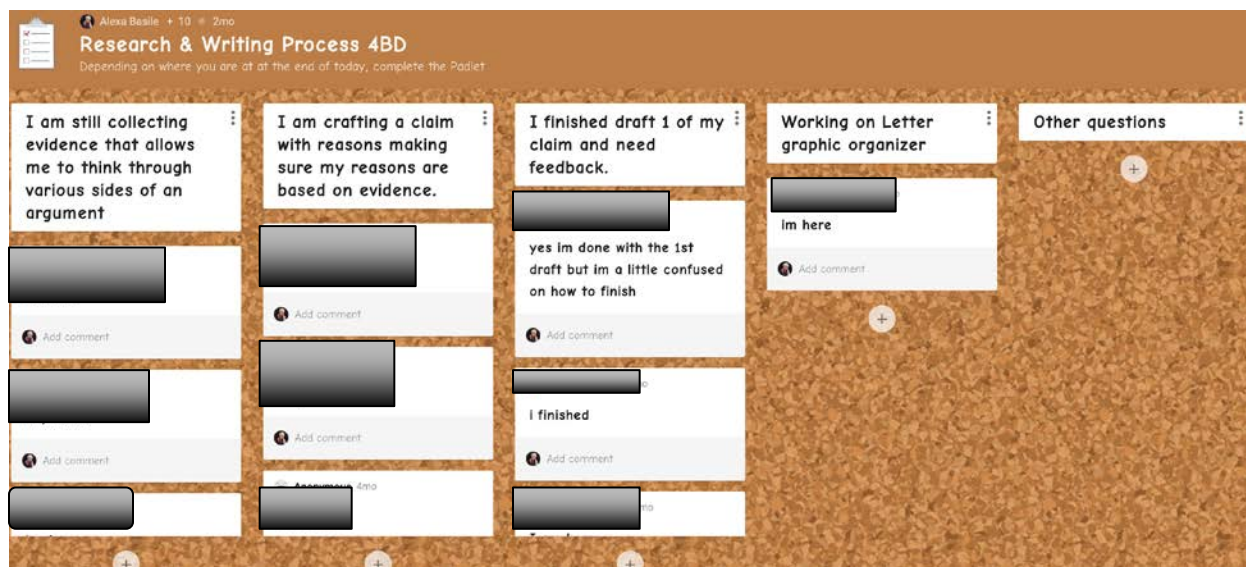
As digital communications have increased, so have the distribution and opportunity for teaching and learning. The emerging reality for youth today, is one in which the digital literacy practices have a significant role in the mediation and construction of literacy. On the other hand, the emerging reality for educators today is how we need to catch up to the digital literacy practices observed by our students.

In my second action research cycle, I referenced using Padlet as a digital platform to help track students' engagement in the research and writing process. One activity that helped me keep track of each student's process and to give me information about engagement was using

Padlet. This digital notice board featured in Figure 2 is able to feature images, links, videos, and documents, all collected on a "wall" that can be made public or private. When exposing students to Padlet for the first time, as an adult, I thought that I would have to spend time modeling and teaching students how to post on Padlet. Many students became frustrated because I wasn't giving them the quiet and time to reflect in the Padlet because I was trying to give them directions on how to use it when they already knew how.

Figure 2

Padlet



On account of shifts in learning and teaching environments and practices during the pandemic, myself and my students adapted remote learning tools such as Jamboard, Padlet, Google Classroom, and Zoom, to the literacy practices of brainstorming, writing collaboratively (i.e., feedback and revisions), communicating the results of their work to audiences, and self-monitoring and conferencing about their writing processes.

This shift in teaching and learning is closely connected to my descriptions of my research. The next sections segue into an in-depth description as they are applied to YPAR aims

and practices specifically the use of technology in an effort to earn attention to a sociopolitical issue that students identified. The adaptation of online learning tools using new literacies within YPAR, is core to how new literacies manifested in this study. This adaptation makes this research not only relevant but also timely as it adds a new online context and shows facilitating YPAR in curricula, online possible.

YPAR-Digital Literacy in the Online Environment

Collaboration. Using new literacies in the classroom helps students become more collaborative, independent learners, and critical thinkers (Leu et. al., 2019). New literacies include the skills, techniques, and dispositions to adjust to the ongoing changes that impact student collaboration. The literacy practices that reflect collaboration in this study expands on the new literacy lens which aids in the adaptation from physical classroom learning to a virtual environment while still affording students with the opportunities to collaborate with one another. In a research memo from November 16, 2020 and December 16, 2020, I referred to new literacies through collaboration using the digital tool, Padlet, “Students sharing their thinking and opinions about societal injustices with peers” and “They are able to reflect upon what they have read across multiple digital platforms as well as share their own personal lived experiences.”

For this learning experience using Padlet, I wanted to create conversation around societal issues in the Rochester community and give students the opportunity to share their perspectives. In figure 3 and figure 4, the digital artifacts from Padlet are not adult-dictated outcomes. These students expressed themselves through forms of collaboration using the digital platform. The participant who is showcased in figure 3 described different resources that they are aware of after reading multimodal resources available in the community. The participant from figure 5 responded with a different view, clearly articulating structural injustices when it comes to food

access. Students were given the option to post anonymously or with their names and invited to use the rating system to agree or disagree with other posts. This connected ideas to words and images as well as directly to their communities. Further, these digital Padlet posts related to contemporary topics as well as lived experiences that weigh heavily on the minds and hearts of our youth.

Figure 3
Padlet Response

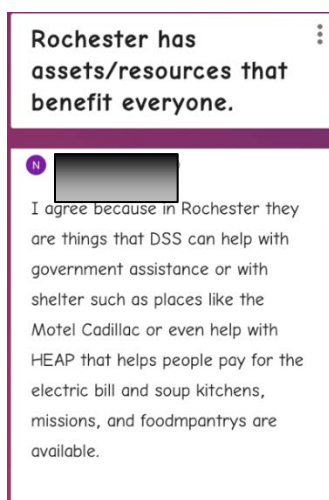
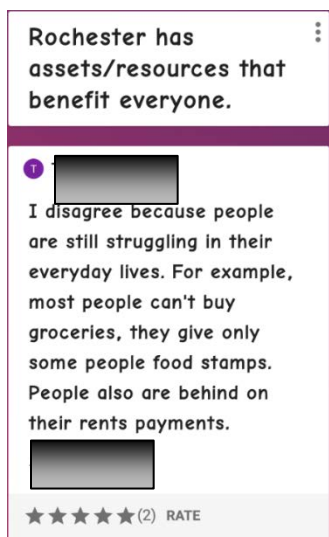


Figure 4
Padlet Response



In light of facilitating YPAR with my seventh-grade students, participants were largely collaborative and participated in ways that an autonomous model of literacy would restrict. Understanding that literacy is a social practice situated in context shaped by social interaction (Larson & Marsh, 2015) is an important focus of this research. Participants were open to teacher and peer feedback, shared resources and expertise, and provided support to others by participating in contemporary community challenges. Using new literacies during virtual learning, students built on digital literacy practices through the creation of photos, engaged in online social networking, and created videos to name a few.

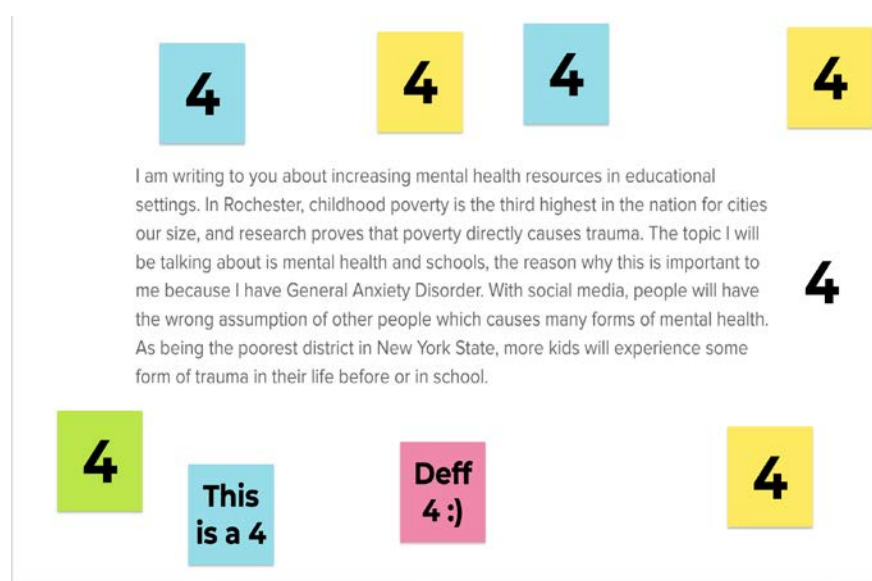
Below in Figure 5, an example of collaborative feedback is given with the use of Jamboard. In this learning experience, students were asked to share their claim statement in Jamboard. Students then used the success criteria outlined by the rubric to give one another feedback with the intention for students to then go back and revise their claim statements before continuing on with their letter. There was 100% participation in this online activity, which high levels of interest revealed by the students' post-it notes. The use of post-it notes reveals a literacy practice of giving feedback to other students after reading their peers work. A few students reported through the Zoom chat that they voluntarily continued using their peers work to help them write their own research claims or to self-assess their own writing. This is a self-initiation literacy practice which became evident on specific learning experiences that fostered collaboration with peers. According to the literature, self-initiated learners who encounter something new, experiment and explore, are receptive to input and find it natural to share knowledge (Levinsen, 2011).

The use of Jamboard shows that students can continue to use the literacy practice of feedback even in digital formats. Students are given the opportunity to use feedback in different

ways that may not have been used in classrooms prior to digital learning. One benefit of Jamboard is that it is collaborative in remote settings for students to work together in the same “jam.” I prompted students to have themselves unmuted during this process so they could talk through their sticky notes and the reasoning for peer feedback underlying their scores.

Figure 5

Using Jamboard to give Peer Feedback



In figure 6, there is an example of how students used Padlet to begin free writing about their chosen community issues. Students also began to share their discovered research through the literacy practice of “hyperlinking” multimodal resources. For example, one student first provided a hyperlink to web information about their topic and many other students began asking how that was done or already knew how to hyperlink. While the participants were not required to insert hyperlinks for peers to use, this literacy practice of hyperlinking resources became a useful way for students to share research articles with one another if they sought to address the same community issue. This also provided me with time as the teacher-researcher to plan Zoom

breakout rooms for students with similar community issues, so they had a collaborative space to work on their claims, to openly chat about their topics, and discuss findings.

Figure 6

Sharing Knowledge and Resources Using Padlet

Pollution and Littering -

Pollution and littering are my pet peaves because when you wake up in the morning and see trash covering your street it makes me annoyed. Why can't everyone just through the garbage into the trash can , it's there for a reason! A few things you can do to prevent pollution is carpool, bike and or walk. These little things if everyone does can make a big difference. Littering also can be put a stop to if you clean up your street and then if everyone puts in the minutes everywhere is clean and healthy. My [Article](#).

Digital Tools Supporting Participatory Politics. Researchers have begun to describe youth-driven and interactive forms of engagement as participatory politics (Middaugh, Kahne, & Allen, 2015). The Black Lives Matter movements are notable examples of youth shaping dialogue and attention around priority politics. Participatory politics can help educators move beyond doubts of social media having a place in curricula and instead work as facilitators of learning while using social media as a digital tool that amplifies youth voices. Interestingly enough, in a 2012 survey, members of the American Association of School Librarians reported that 88% of their schools blocked social networking sites, while 74% blocked chatting programs (AASL, 2012). The blocking of social media platforms shows the issues that are raised when adults make decisions about the kinds of digital learning that youth can experience. Clearly in my research project and in others, these platforms can be conduits of transformative learning that give students opportunities for expression and civic engagement (Ito et al., 2013).

An example of participatory politics is supported from my researcher journal when a participant was having trouble collaborating with a teen activist community group that she interacts with. She wanted to coordinate a FacebookLive event to present out about her YPAR topic about school-to-prison pipelines. After repeated efforts trying to engage her community group, the participant decided to create a series of infographics to share on her Instagram story to inform her followers. The student used an app called Canva which is a graphic design platform used to create social media graphics, presentations, posters, documents, and other visual content. In addition to the natural feedback mechanisms inherent to Instagram, the participant was provided with additional, ongoing feedback through responses from other followers on Instagram. After this interaction with the participant, I wrote, “she can make specific choices when presented with a challenge which involved persistence, searching for other options, tapping into prior knowledge, problem solving, creating, and evaluating.” This example is also discussed subsequently connected to critical literacy showing how new literacies and the use of digital tools also support youth’s voice and conscientization which is a key component of critical literacy pedagogy.

It is worthwhile to note that the relationship between participants use of digital media and civic engagement because it investigates how it shapes the political role that youth have on the internet. According to Zhong (2011), youth develop skills of collaboration, social interaction, information seeking and civic participation through online forums. Figure 7 and figure 8 show a participant who wrote a letter to Rochester District Attorney, Sandra Doorley about the rising crime rate in the City of Rochester. She then also used Canva to create a social media graphic for her Instagram story. This participant also reported getting feedback from her Instagram followers.

Figure 7*Research Letter Excerpt to District Attorney of Monroe County*

Dear District Attorney Sandra Doorley,

My name is [REDACTED] I am a 7th grader at East Lower School. I am writing about the major issue of crime in Rochester, NY. I am writing to you because I think that some areas in Rochester, NY are unsafe or dangerous. When I did my research, I found out that according to the most recent data from the FBI, "the total crime rate in Rochester is 4,165.1 per 100,000 people. That's 62.17% higher than the national rate of 2,568.4 per 100,000 people and 132.56% higher than the New York total crime rate of 1,791.0 per 100,000 people." This tells me that Rochester, NY is very dangerous. This is important to me and the community because a lot of other people hear or see cop cars and may think that Rochester, NY isn't safe and we deserve a better living situation.

The crime in Rochester is higher than the national average meaning Rochester is treacherous and most of us want to keep our families safe. This is from 2018 but crime is increasing. Even though violent crime and property crime are decreasing that doesn't mean that other crimes aren't increasing. Basically, I am trying to say that Rochester has a lot of crimes that need to be solved in a safer way.

Figure 8*Crime Social Media Post*



The participants' use of Instagram was an opportunity for authentic collaboration that reflected the kinds of new literacy practices with which students would need to engage in both their personal and working lives. Regarding this social participation presented by the data, the concept of 'digital empowerment' (Makinen, 2006) is unveiled because of the participants' development of new ways to participate and express themselves across digital platforms while taking on the role of an empowered citizen.

Moreover, to synthesize literacy practices of students within the workshop model, using YPAR approaches with digital tools, gave students the control over how they would demonstrate learning through their choice of genre, format, and platform of their final presentations. Participants leveraged the affordances of digital platforms like social media to take part in civic and political life by accessing and circulating information about issues that matter to them, are a community concern, and influence peers and elected officials to take action.

Motivation. Through the students' YPAR process, in steps 2-4 (identifying community issue, researching and enacting change), literacy practices connected to technology used, were oriented toward encouraging students to identify problems, locate useful information about those problems, critically evaluate information to develop solutions, and clearly communicate potential solutions in various forms to others. Together, these literacy practices helped students to clearly identify their problems of interest and the personal and social relevance of those problems, which seemed to motivate them to read, collaborate, and create and share written work related to those problems.

With the natural motivating factors of YPAR, looking across multiple data sources (researcher journal, memos, Zoom meetings, student digital artifacts), there were examples showing how digital tools supported motivation during the YPAR process. These examples were illuminated through patterns observed over a few weeks. Examples of these patterns were represented through student attendance, frequency of speech either verbally, through the Zoom chat and having cameras turned on. It's also important to remember that so much of our communication is nonverbal. For adults, cameras on during a Zoom meeting is usually the norm but for 7th grade children, a sense of insecurity comes with a camera being on. As students became engaged and motivated through the YPAR work over the weeks, I observed the communication practices of students being present and visible. While analyzing my data and watching my Zoom video recordings for each class, 65% of my students turned their cameras on each class session.

As mentioned earlier, to be considered for Reader's-Writer's Workshop, students must score proficient in reading for their grade level. One participant, who was "misplaced" into Workshop despite scoring below proficient, was failing each class except for literacy.

Nonetheless, I fought for this student to stay in my class because, as a researcher, I saw that his engagement in the YPAR process was persistent. With support from me and his peers and consistent attendance, this student worked through the YPAR process by choosing the issue of lack of funding for local recreation centers, doing the research on how recreation centers help all members of a community, and spreading awareness about the importance of his own neighborhood recreation center by sharing a Canva visual on his Instagram story. To retain this student in Workshop, I provided multiple data points to administrators and counselors, suggesting that this student was capable of doing the work and arguing that the YPAR process allows such students to connect literacy learning with something meaningful to their daily lived experiences. With multiple pushes from administrators and counselors to try to change his schedule to what was believed to be a “more appropriate” literacy class (System 44), I made the argument that he should remain in my Workshop class. Throughout the YPAR experience, this student was able to successfully participate as evidenced by the figures below.

Figure 10

Sharing Ideas and Resources Using Padlet

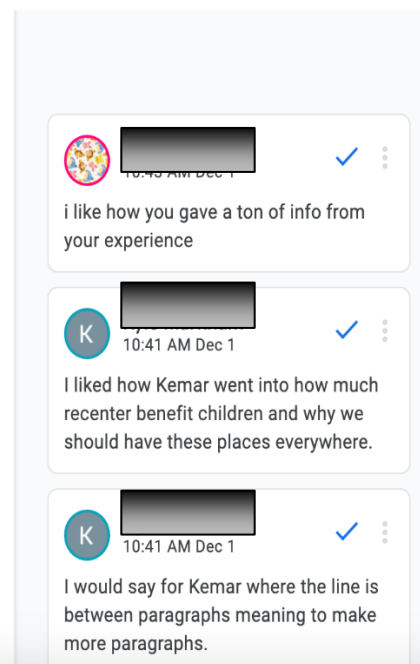
i thing it should be more rec canter because kid's and adult's can exercise and get the workout they need to lose weight and to see your friend's see family member and just to have fun and make new friend's and i think it should be more rec canters so kid's wont try to join gangs

Figure 11*Social Networking with Instagram Stories*

Highlighting the justice issue of this student, he believed that there is an equity issue with funding for recreation centers in the City of Rochester. Though using new literacies motivated this student, critical literacy was deeply supported by the new literacy practices that this student used. Critical literacy practices informed his thinking about himself and his experiences, experiences of others in his community and believed that other children in other neighborhoods should have a rec center like the one in his community.

Figure 12*Research Letter Excerpt to Mayor Lovely Warren*

Hi my name is k [REDACTED] and I am a 7th grader at East Lower School. I'm writing to you about why my community needs more Rec Centers in Rochester NY. because they provide resources that are important to the community. Did you know that you can leave your kids there and they will have a good time with friends? Did you also know that the staff at Rec Centers also gives out healthy snacks and also gives lunch? In the Rec Center that I go to, there is a library with a lot of computers for toddlers, little little kids, kids, teens and also adults. The librarians also help with homework and the Rec Center also has a gym that we play basketball, football, and kickball. So that's why I think there should be more Rec Centers in my city because if there are not enough of Rc Centers nearby for some kids to visit, they miss out on really awesome and important resources so that's why I think there should be more Rec Centers around my city of Rochester. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that children get 60 minutes of exercise every day. Research conducted by Tudor-Locke, Lee, Morgan, Beighle, & Pangrazi (2006) state that "most of children's physical activity occurs outside of school hours; thus, access to and the quality of community recreation facilities and programming are



Motivation is a crucial element in the learning process and without motivation, learning does not occur (Karkar & Loftis, 2021). When young people engage with digital tools, they are motivated by the affordance of the activity, interaction, and information they are provided or provide to others through the use of the digital tool. If we consider this in relation to a classroom context, it has significant implications for pedagogical decisions.

The choices that students made surrounding their use of digital tools (Instagram, sharing in Padlet, Jamboard etc.), were consistent across the project length which point to the role that digital tools play in motivating student participation. It is also safe to say that that through the data collection and analysis, digital tools motivated students to participate in YPAR experiences, but the role of the activity itself and choosing a community issue that mattered to students, also played an important motivating factor. Using a new literacies perspective requires educators to

consider how literacy processes can create opportunities for students to draw on reading, writing, social, and technological practices valuable for life in a digital society.

New Digital Literacies within Critical Literacy: Summary

Thinking about new literacies and the digital tools that have accompanied critical literacy, I don't focus my data collection and analysis solely on the skills of operating computers and network connections, but I focus on themes dealing with selecting, communicating, processing, and sharing information while participating with digital tools to achieve various goals. These digital experiences both enable and demand greater participation and collaboration compared with traditional contexts (Jenkins, 2008). Technologies such as Jamboard, Google classroom, Padlet, Zoom chat, and social media platforms allow students to interact and contribute within a social community (Hutchison et al., 2016). Grounded in my findings, engagement, collaboration and motivation were uncovered as participants worked through the YPAR process utilizing digital tools in a virtual learning environment.

This shift also requires that we adapt what we count as learning success to include new social practices, such as strategies for participating in social communities and collaborating on ideas with digital tools. The aforementioned Instagram posts about recreation centers and environmental community challenges were liked, reshared, and commented upon, for example. An example of this was how a participant used hashtagging to get others to notice and respond to his posts on Instagram. Including such new literacy practices gives students important learning opportunities and also prompts us to teach these practices and count them as learning.

Using new literacy practices suggests greater agency and criticality for students as they create, rather than merely consume, information. On the internet, students have a multitude of

opportunities to voice opinions and participate in real-world issues in impactful ways (Hutchison et al., 2016).

Research Question #2: What Happens When I Attempt to Build a Critical Literacy

Teaching Practice Around YPAR?

Sociopolitical consciousness and commitment to social justice are essential in addressing the unique needs of Black and Brown students. As most educators are privileged according to their race, class, and language, many are unprepared to work with minoritized youth, due to limited experience with the social inequities these students face. This sociopolitical consciousness would enable educators to lean into social justice beliefs and practices (Freire, 1970; García & Guerra, 2004). Once educators can realize this conscientization, there is potential to facilitate sociopolitical consciousness with youth. Conscientization calls individuals to connect injustice and inequities to themselves, others and the world at large affecting minoritized populations. Critical literacy aids conscientization by providing the steppingstones toward the development of sociopolitical consciousness and social justice commitment. In other words, critical literacy is the process of conscientization; it's not innate.

YPAR was the what we (teacher-research and students) attempted and as the action researcher, I used critical literacy as a lens to unveil literacy practices present in the process. From community-based or school-based work, YPAR has become increasingly popular with marginalized youth who have an opportunity to have their often-silenced voices heard and receive meaningful feedback on their work. Referencing the key aspects of critical literacy as compiled by Vasquez et al. (2019), the chart below shows how this study addressed many components of critical literacy (Table 4).

Table 4*Key Components of Critical Literacy (Vazquez et al., 2019)*

Elements	Evidence from This Study
1. Critical literacy should be viewed as a lens in which to teach throughout the school year and is not meant to be a topic covered in isolation as one unit of study within a school year. It is an ongoing process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continuing critical literacy lens into future unit facilitation.
2. Students' prior knowledge, previous experiences, and language abilities should be used to build curriculum so that it is meaningful to them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students given the choice of choosing the issue that they would like to research and combat in their community. ● Given opportunities to share, write and discuss from their perspective.
3. It is the role of the teacher to facilitate sociopolitical consciousness for students and support them in understanding how they can make a difference in their own lives as well as others because of the problems they perceive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Given opportunities to share, write and discuss from their perspective. ● Focus on how purposeful questioning and discussion might influence how students engage. ● Sharing writing and creating
4. The world is socially constructed and has the potential to be changed and reconsidered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participate in peer conferences so they can brainstorm and gain feedback.
5. Critical literacy focuses on issues of inequities to support us in making sense of the sociopolitical systems in which we live.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discussions around assets and deficits of a community ● Questions centered around: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are the assets or services within our community? What is missing from our community? ○ How can we inform others about the assets and deficits in our surrounding community in order to advocate for change? ○ Why do some communities not deal with these issues?

Table 4 (con't)

<p>6. Critical literacy practices can be transformative to create a more equitable and just society.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Making space and time to support action plans (even if the pandemic posed a challenge) makes a difference in the type and quality of work students engaged in. ● There was intent to carry this out, but the pandemic posed challenges to interact with the community.
<p>7. Critical literacy is about reconstructing and redesigning texts, practices, and the use of language to create a more socially just world. Text design and production can be a source of societal transformation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students make decisions about how to be heard. First with a letter to a community member and then a second supporting piece (social media post, Tik Tok, taking on the form of a journal entry as a character or a part of the story told from an alternate perspective....).

Conscientization Analyzing Power Through Critical Literacies

Critical literacy involves the analysis of the world by interrogating the power structures present in texts that oppress certain voices (Flint & Laman, 2012). This requires students to analyze texts in ways that examine race, class, and gender that can influence a text's creation and perception (Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012). For example, students looking at the school-to-prison pipeline considered the role(s) of school leaders and resource officers, while the student looking at the closure of community recreation centers considered how city leaders have changed budgets (i.e., reduced funding for youth services) over time. This is less about the "oppression of certain voices" and the general "examinations of race, class, and gender," and more about specific examinations of how power operates relative to students' problems/issues.

Table 5*Analyzing Power through Critical Literacy*

Social Justice Topics	Analyzed Power
Racial Justice is Education Justice: Ending school-to-prison Pipeline	Analyzing exclusionary school discipline policies that are pushing kids out of the classroom and into the criminal justice system at unprecedented rates.
Education Injustices	Funding to urban schools who lack in materials, food, transportation and building safety.
Gender Biases in the Justice System	Using lived experiences to analyze gender biases in the justice system.
Environmental Justice	Discussing equal access to a healthy environment in which to live.
Covid-19 & Vulnerable Communities	Systematic inequities stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic. Stressors and equities facing the homeless and most vulnerable communities during the pandemic.
Equitable Housing	Researching housing inequalities that promote the large racial wealth gap between Black and white households.
Public Transportation	The unequal access to transportation between social groups.

As outlined by Vazquez et al., (2019), a critical element of critical literacy is how students' prior knowledge, previous experiences, and language abilities should be used to build curriculum so that it is meaningful to them. When youth engage in YPAR as a form of social inquiry and activism, the construction of sociopolitical and activist identities in youth are supported by literacy practices. Participants' interpretation of public problems, and taking action promote youth conscientization (Morrell, 2008).

In figure 13 and figure 14, this participant was interrogating power by tapping into her past experiences, observations and school experiences in city schools. The first step in the process of analyzing power was to first think of the issue that affected the student and then shifting to why it matters to others beyond themselves. For the purposes of this project, the shift students took to connect their issue beyond themselves, was done through the research process. This is truly achieving conscientization. As per figure 13 and figure 14, the student seemed aware of injustices in school and society but also was properly examining and analyzing texts to identify the relationship between the power of language. This occurred because critical literacy motivated the reader to make judgement and become aware of one's own experiences relative to power relations through reading, research and writing.

Figure 13

Sharing research findings through Padlet

Systematic Racism in the School System

The School-to-Prison Pipeline is a racist system built against black and brown students in city schools. It normalizes jail like conditions in schools (going through metal detectors, police in schools, getting your bag checked). Getting suspended for unreasonable things is part of the school to prison pipeline. Getting suspended just once increases your chances of going to jail

Figure 14*Analyzing Power Through Research*

What does this article make me think of? What connections can I make?

This article makes me think of a time when a student said something racist to another student and the other student ended up getting suspended because they got mad for that other kid disrespecting her.

Evidence- choose a direct quote that you feel is important:

"During an elementary school class, while working on an art project, a third grade student was holding up child safety scissors. The teacher, concerned that they were fighting, requested a sentry to take him out of the room. The vice principal talked to the police officer stationed in the building, who charged the student with assault with a deadly weapon, handcuffed him, and walked the student out of the building."

Analysis- in your own words, what does this direct quote mean?

This shows that systematic racism in the RCSD is real because a third grader should never be arrested, especially not when the teacher probably gave them permission to use the scissors in the first place. This also goes to show that the teachers can be racist too.

Figures 15, 16 and 17 also articulate this but with a very specific literacy practice. This participant identified an issue rather quickly based on his own lived experiences and perspective that the justice system gives child custody predominantly to women. The participant read articles and digital sources from a resistant perspective to uncover findings about custody data. Resistant reading is a literacy practice that occurs when an individual is reading against the text to determine how the text perpetuates relations of power. Following Wolfe (2010), we understand resistant reading as the act of interrogating "how power, history, and ideology are inscribed in texts" (p. 371).

For this student, it became difficult for him to find data specific to Rochester, NY. This kind of challenge compels researchers to reach out to other sources or expand their data sources. In this student's case, he was able to connect with a local legal expert who helped him gather more evidence to build his claim for his research letter. For the student's supporting piece, he

created a fictional story from the perspective of a father losing custody of their child. The fictional story represented a counter-text that allowed readers to understand an uncommon but significant perspective amidst the struggles of custody challenges. It is possible that in any other school setting, this student would not have been able to spend time researching something that was so crucial to his life. This participant used the practice of resistant reading to scrutinize the beliefs and attitudes that typically go unexamined in the justice system, drawing attention to the gaps, silences and biases that are present while drawing on his lived experiences.

As a researcher and his teacher, I feel honored that he felt not only comfortable to share about this topic but to also feel empowered to spread awareness about the issue. The data illuminated from this participant helps educators and researchers better understand what the process of building critical literacy practices (via a school embedded, online process) involves. It also draws attention to the way resistant reading practices position readers in relation to text and the affective orientation these practices encourage students to take towards accomplishing conscientization.

Figure 15

Sharing Chosen Topic Through Padlet

Women Being Favored in the Court System (Family Court)

Women are usually favored in main custody over children in family court. This is a problem because father are just as much as a parent as a mother. But mothers get custody more than men and it takes away the right to men being parents because of stereotypes like women are better parents than men are.

<https://www.nocodivorcelaw.com/mothers-favored-child-custody-process/>

Figure 16

Excerpt From Letter Written to District Attorney of Monroe County

Imagine feeling how a father would feel if he lost custody over his child because judges are just as susceptible to gender bias. According to study by Andrea Miller at the Illinois news bureau it says, "Judges in the shared-custody case were more likely than laypeople to give a mother more time with a child than a father. The judges gave mothers, on average, about half a day more time with their children than they gave fathers. Laypeople awarded 0.15 of a day more time to mothers. The judges' tendency to discriminate in this manner coincided with their traditional gender ideologies: The more they supported traditional gender roles for men and women, the more parenting time they gave to the mother in the case." As it says the more they supported traditional gender roles the more they were rewarded with parenting time. In the article by Miller it said, "We're giving them identical case facts and we're only changing a couple of variables that should be legally irrelevant – race and gender," Miller said". This shows

Figure 17

Fiction Narrative

I have visitation rights though. I can still see my son. Saturdays and Sundays only but I will always cherish these days because I will be able to see my son. It saddens me that I am only getting two days to see my son but it's fine, I'll take what I can get. It's been three quarters of a year since these visitations on the weekend started. I've noticed that me and my son have not been the same since the custody battle. Every month he seems different like he doesn't. Little by little I notice he starts to get bored or annoyed when I talk. I hope I'm not a disappointment to him. I hope I still love, I want him to be my son.

It's been 3 years since I lost that custody battle. I feel like my son doesn't want to even call me dad. He seems to be detached from me. He seems very attached to his mother. After a couple of weeks I overheard a conversation from them before they came over to the bench I was sitting at. "Remember your father is like the devil. He lies, he's evil, he's everything evil in this world." I was furious that she was spreading this blasphemy about me to my own child. Has she been doing this over the last 3 years? Is this why he's been so unattached from me? I continued to try and have a nice time with my son whilst glaring at his mother. I hope my son doesn't hate me.

Summary: Critical Literacy Research Findings

Two points that can be made from my findings related to my second research question focused on critical literacy teaching practice are: (1) Critical literacy supports youth conscientization shown through analyzing power and interrogating power; (2) critical literacy supports youth conscientization shown through the literacy practice of resistant reading. In an effort to weave my two research questions together, the kind of critical literacy I observed is complemented by digital tools and literacy practices which enable inquiry, strengthen collaboration, and provide students access to information and community members (including and beyond their classmates) who can help with their inquiries and are responsive to their written ideas.

CHAPTER FIVE

Impact of Action Research

Actions that have Already Resulted from this Study

Action research, a tool that allows researchers and educators to solve real-world problems to make a difference in their classrooms (Stringer, 1999), was selected as a methodology to enable me as the teacher-researcher, the freedom to examine and improve my own teaching practice with (practitioner inquiry).

Action research is connected to practitioner inquiry explained in chapter 2 and with reflection on each meeting with students as a teacher researcher. This involves making changes to improve communication with students, continuing to reflect on and enhance critical literacies and new literacies, and/or increasing participation or engagement. Action research includes an iterative process through a series of action cycles each of which includes the following stages: planning for action, acting on the plan, observing effects of this action, and finally reflecting on the effects to inform the subsequent cycle (Anderson et al., 2007; Herr & Anderson, 2015). The first cycle focused on building community, acknowledging the COVID-19 pandemic, and reintegration into school virtually.

Conducting YPAR based in local social action provided students with an opportunity to critically investigate problems in their communities and respond by generating texts designed to promote positive social change. Echoing Freire and Macedo (1987), participants were given the opportunity to make meaningful observations about sociopolitical contexts from families to schools to neighborhoods. Table 5 serves as a reminder of the student participant research steps that they took throughout the YPAR process.

Individually, students were asked to follow a research cycle that followed four steps: (a) co-create collaborative norms and build collaborative relationships with peers and the teacher in a virtual learning environment; (b) develop topics grounded in community-based problems or issues, and seek to change conditions underlying them; (c) conduct research on those problems or issues; and (d) take action – write a research letter to city council members and produce a “real” research text (e.g. video, social media post, meme, etc.), distributing that text to authentic audiences to help raise awareness about or change some aspect of their community. Through these participant steps, I was astonished by the commitment, curiosity, and motivation for students to see themselves as researchers who can create change in their community context.

Table 6

Overview of Participant Research Steps

	Community Building	Brainstorming	Research	Call to Action
Steps	Introduce selves to one-another	Analyze affordances and constraints in community	Begin research and writing processes	Make connections and recommendations through letters:
	Become familiar with online environment	Engage with texts with similar frameworks	Engage in peer revision	Rochester City Council
		Investigate issues in Rochester	Define issue and significance, make and support a claim	Other audiences
		Identify and choose an issue	Use evidence to build argument	2 nd item- Options Spoken word poem, Tik Tok, Instagram, Presentation, Vlog, FacebookLive

Within these research steps, as a teacher researcher conducting action research, I then went through my own focused research process cycles (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Between cycle one and cycle two of the research, many changes occurred. Within the first few days of the

teacher's research (cycle 1), students established norms with peers with the understanding that in order to support their engagement and participation in Reader's-Writer's Workshop, constructing norms virtually was important. As noted in chapter 4, it was difficult for me as the teacher-researcher to clearly gauge what students were writing and how they were interacting in a virtual setting. The reflection and action aspects of the cycle helped me create a Google survey which helped give myself as the teacher-researcher, vital information about students' interests, learning styles, home lives and to voice worries or concerns about virtual learning and the school year. Cycle one of the action research cycle went through 4 aspects which included the plan, action, observations and reflections. Throughout each aspect, I worked to refine, change, and organize data collected during the participants' community building and brainstorming process.

Figure 18

Aspects of Teacher Researcher's Action Research Cycle #1

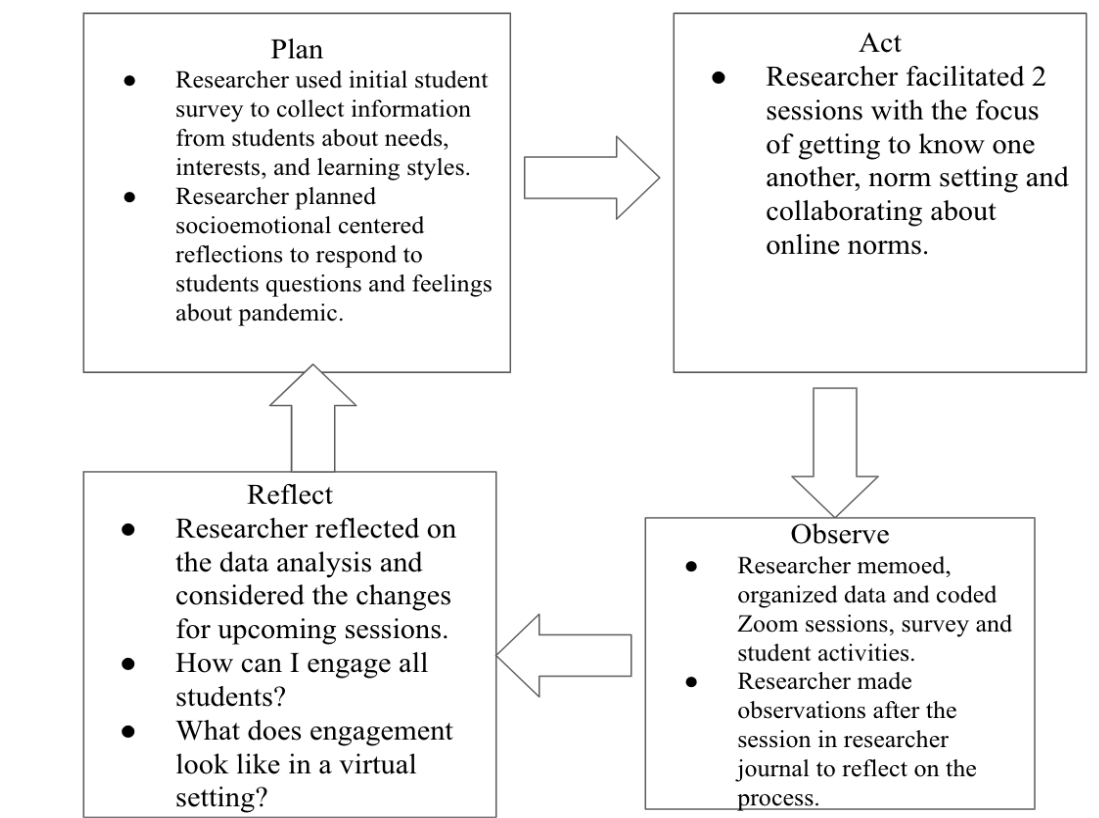
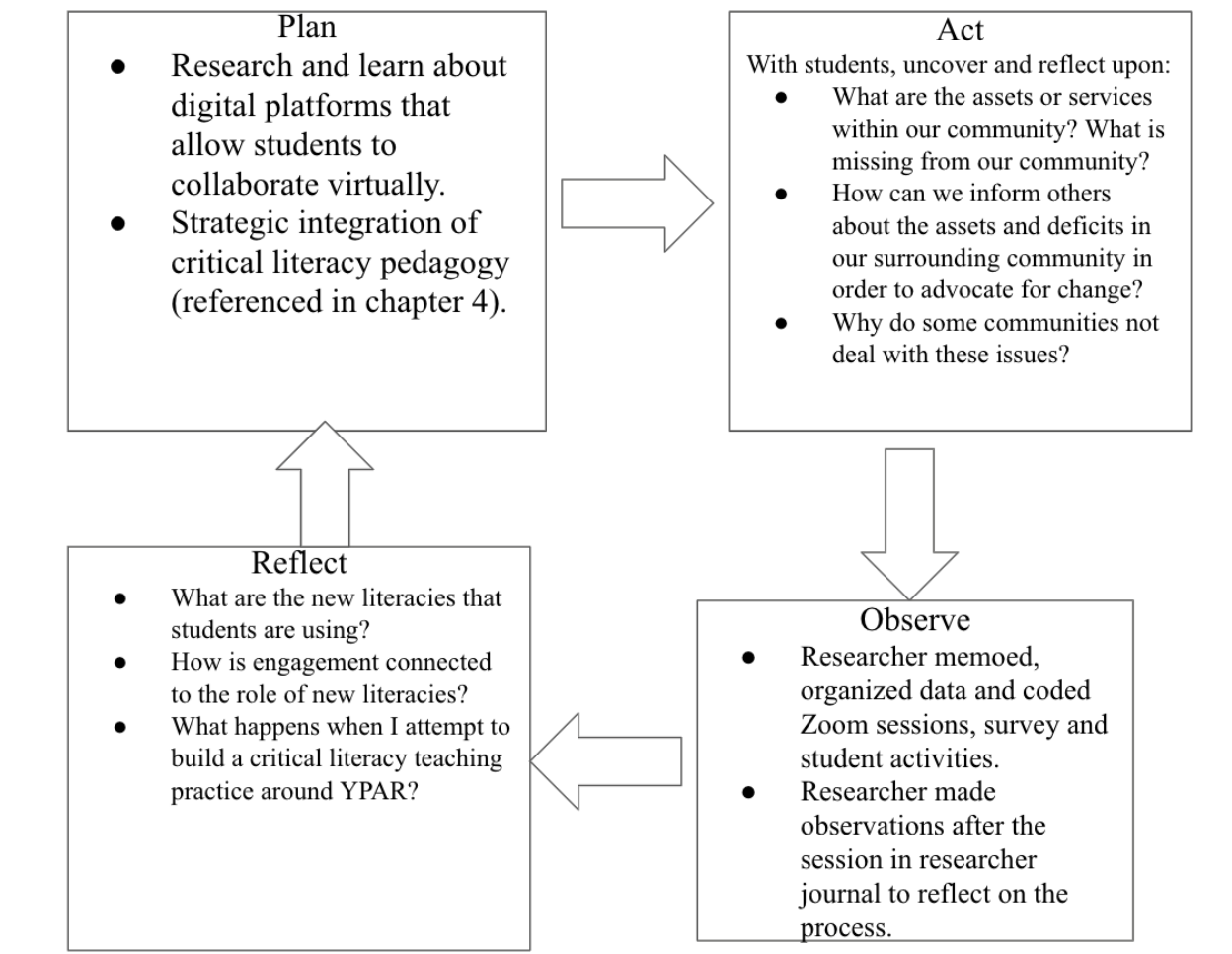


Figure 19*Aspects of Teacher Researcher's Cycle #2*

Through research cycles, I have found out how students: (a) interact with online learning tools in the context of a school-embedded YPAR project; and (b) develop and enact critical literacy practices with others in that context. For educators, while some may feel the need to restrict digital platforms in the classroom and reduce digital literacy to a collection of skills, new literacy studies challenge us as educators, to help youth contribute to the flow of interaction and collaboration outside of school in digital spaces. With little research existing on the ways that

YPAR within an online environment, excluded in formal classroom spaces, this dissertation unfolds the challenge of investigating civic topics, seeking change, and dissecting power through social institutions in a Reader's-Writer's Workshop classroom.

Considerations for the Future

Continuing into the 2020-2021 school year, students had the choice of entering a hybrid learning model where they would be in virtual classes Monday through Wednesday and could be in-person Thursday and Friday. With only a very small percentage of students returning to in-person learning, many of my students remain virtual for the remainder of the school year. This study revealed that teaching and learning was put under pressure in large ways throughout the last year but revealed that the study was a unique attempt at facilitating YPAR in a curricula context online.

Over the course of this study, students learned to express their voices. They were empowered to make changes in their community and share their opinions in a safe space. Even though what they sought to change in their communities may have been derailed by a global pandemic, the intent was there to change something meaningful to them and I hope that they continue to feel empowered and like the experts they are. When the world returns to normal, I hope that students will take the pieces of the critical literacy learning as they continue to be critical readers to navigate texts and the world around them.

The Effect of this Research on my Practice

As previously described, YPAR must maintain a balanced focus on teacher and youth facilitation to ensure that youth are empowered and have opportunities to develop expertise in issues that matter to them. In an attempt to foster both of these elements of YPAR, I focused on building critical literacy practices using new literacy strategies in an online learning and teaching

space. Marrying these two frameworks was important in facilitating YPAR in a virtual teaching and learning environment even though a true implementation of YPAR was not achieved.

Literacies are social practices; and yet, schools tend to treat literacy as a technical skillset within an autonomous system (Alvermann, 2010; Ito et al., 2010). I argue that the social practices facilitated and described in this study, even in an online environment, motivated and generated engagement and collaboration among students in ways that contrast with traditional conceptions of literacy.

When reflecting on how new literacies work together with critical literacy, it is important to look at them not as two single entities, but two entities working together to produce goals for a targeted, informed audience instead of writing for the hypothetical, generic audiences that students may be used to writing for (Curwood, 2013).

Thinking Critically as a Teacher

Personal and social transformation can happen through critical literacy practice by evaluating structures of power and through the promotion of action-oriented dialogues around problems of oppression, equality, and justice. It was difficult for many students to analyze power through critical literacies and some of the struggles that we had during this process included not having a clear idea about how power worked associated with their chosen issue. The process of interrogating power through YPAR is harder than we think it is. However, building a space for students to develop conscientization and how critical literacy gets me to thinking about practice and teacher education.

While there are variations of how educators use new literacies and critical literacy pedagogy, the work still focuses on knowledge and tools within social practices where participants are undertaking challenges and pursuing literacy practices in the world beyond

school (Lankshear & Knobel, 2013). For the purposes of my own reflection on my practice, from a conceptual and theoretical perspective, my identified theoretical frameworks of new literacies and critical literacy work together in tandem to facilitate students' participation to create and communicate specific digital tools themselves outlined throughout the study. In many ways, it is apparent through this study that the social nature of learning and literacy was expanded from the interaction of social, historical, and cultural contexts (Rogoff, 2003) even through the virtual context. As my students circulated information on their own challenges, connecting them to societal challenges, they are reminding us that participatory expression is linked with their identities and societal power structures (Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2014).

There are now more texts, more kinds of texts, more tools, more creators, and a greater range of quality of texts (Coiro, 2020) that can be both supportive and challenging for students to navigate. This technological world demands that educators reimagine classrooms, including shifting the ways in which we design spaces, interpret results, and use those results to inform learning experiences. The new literacies lens prompts educators to go beyond simply teaching students how to use digital tools and practices to support traditional literacy aims.

In order to strengthen my practice, the research methodology of practitioner inquiry was woven together in my action research plan. As mentioned earlier, practitioner inquiry is a powerful way to create new knowledge by teachers for teachers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Practitioner inquiry also has the power to allow teachers to be researchers of their own practice by playing a part in the research process with the goal of facilitating change in school settings.

Naturally, YPAR effectively informed my practice because it directly involved me in the process of connecting theory to a methodological approach. Youth Participatory Action Research also effectively helped students ground their work in the critical literacy framework and engage

with new literacies that were necessary for the success of YPAR participation and also the virtual learning environment.

If it was not for the collaboration, sharing, and writing during the learning experiences throughout the class sessions, I would have been making generalizations about the experiences of my students. Youth Participatory Action Research, in essence, created opportunities for my students to work as researchers alongside me.

Building on practitioner inquiry as a methodology but also as a framework, it's participatory stance explicitly positioned this research project as emancipatory given that I was not only the researcher but a full participant in the emancipatory work. This type of action research generated new knowledge because it was deeply grounded in the realities of not only critical literacy pedagogy, and engagement with new literacies, but also new knowledge about participating in virtual educational settings.

Recommendations for Researchers

As a researcher conducting action research during the COVID-19 pandemic, I think it is important to note that challenges were inevitable. Unexpected shifts cannot be ignored and will change the way the study is facilitated but should not alter the intent and goals of the study. Though the context may change and not be the original focus of a study, it absolutely affects qualitative research which should be recognized, discussed, and considered in data analysis. While I did not intend to facilitate YPAR with my students in a virtual environment, the pandemic changed the teaching and learning platform and I could not ignore that there was a new reality for educators and children. During the study, the pandemic affected my instruction, as well as my own personal learning, but also the learning and engagement of my students. For

researchers, I recommend recognizing the context so this can provide additional insights about yourself as an action researcher, your participants, and the study.

Thinking outside of responsive pandemic teaching, participation in new literacy practices like social media (in particular, but also others) teachers and researchers can work to construct an environment where all involved understand that engaging in learning experiences that create and honor student voice and choices, extend engagement in literacy practices.

Recommendations for Practitioners

For teacher researchers, we are reminded daily of the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has added to our jobs, as well as of the need to consider teachers' expertise and judgment in the future of education. If this pandemic has done nothing else, it has shown the disparities that urban and rural districts, in particular have been dealing with for years. The lack of technology/up-to-date technology limited digital resources, and the lack of financial resources has hindered the ability for many school districts to quickly springboard into a digital teaching model. Many children in underserved communities have working guardians who are essential workers and often left with little to no assistance at home.

Another important recommendation that I have for future teacher-researchers is to not be afraid to break structures that may be laid out by your context. For example, analyzing my data to uncover themes to make claims about my project, uncovered my one student's motivation and engagement even though he did not fit the curricular pathway. I would not have been able to help him find success through the YPAR process and beyond.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

In this chapter, I present the conclusions of the study and highlight its key findings. I also present the limitations of the study, the study's implications, and its significance for the field of education and future research.

Highlights of the Study

Noticeably absent from the critical literacy field are accounts of critical literacy written from the experience and perspective of teachers. I originally designed this action research study to explore how facilitating YPAR around a critical literacy pedagogy surfaced the literacies (new literacies) that students and I used in a virtual teaching and learning environment. Given the virtual teaching and learning environment and restrictions of a school building, a crucial tenant of YPAR was absent from this study. Students were not able to engage in the community outside of the school walls. Furthermore, there is an abundance of research that supports how critical literacy practices and new literacies support youth and even though accomplishing that main tenant of YPAR did not happen, critical literacy was still accomplished within this project and made possible from the support of digital tools.

Building on the existing literature, I designed an action research study to engage a group of students in YPAR with the intent of unearthing literacy practices, enhancing my critical literacy pedagogy and most importantly, to allow a space for youth to have choice and a voice within a school environment to then create change in their community. However, I set out to create a YPAR experience for my students, there were unique conditions in the uncommon setting of the virtual setting that created barriers as a teacher and as a researcher. The conditions that were in place were:

- Students understood the very real injustices that themselves or other peers face.

- Students already had the technology and knowledge of the digital tools.
- Students already had access to each other and members of their community

The study was conducted in the fall semester of 2020, over a 4-month period. There were eight participants in the study, all of whom were assigned to my class. The YPAR process took place 12 times throughout the time period. Given the nature of YPAR and the attempt to give students the time to unearth and learn about what justice and injustices were, we began to discuss strengths and challenges within their communities. After one learning experience, it became very clear that my students did not need me to teach them about the injustices that urban youth face each day. Students had very real experiences to share. These challenges, depicted by the data in chapter 4, told me that students faced racism in their school buildings from an early age, experience acts of crime or had family member's lives taken by acts of crime, experienced loss of parents through custody battles, felt a pull to make their community a cleaner and more beautiful place or wanted to make a difference in the housing opportunities for marginalized groups. As a teacher and as a researcher, I did not have to make a list of challenges nor explain them to students, and I did not have to probe students to choose a challenge that meant something to them. They naturally made a list of social justice issues based on their lived experiences.

The second condition that was already in place that I did not anticipate was that students already had a grasp and deep knowledge of the digital tools that I was asking them to use. Borrowing from Lee & Ting (2015), the Media Informational Literacy (MIL) concept integrates media literacy, information literacy and technology skills and it is known that the age group of my students had a set of competencies that allowed them to access, retrieve, understand, evaluate, and create information in all formats using various digital tools. It is clear the digital

tools aided in critical literacy, but it was unnecessary for me as the teacher to teach students about the digital tools used throughout the learning experiences.

The third condition that was already in place at the start of this research was how students already had access to expert community members relating to the topics that they were researching. For example, one participant's father is a school district board member and known activist for the Black community. A fundamental characteristic of YPAR is facilitating community connections with youth. This participant had someone living in the same household as her. Other participants also tapped into their lived experiences and already had an excellent knowledge base on their topics and they too, had family members, siblings, and community members that they could reach out to.

If these three conditions were not already existing, I would have had to teach about justice and injustices, teach how to use each digital tool and connect students with community members. What did I do then? I had to re-imagine the work and adapt to the conditions in place. Lytle & Cochran-Smith (1992) refer to this dilemma in teacher/practitioner research and supports the ways that teachers redefine the notion of knowledge for teaching, alter the locus of control for the knowledge base, and realign the practitioner's stance in relationship to knowledge generation in the field" (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992). I needed to move away from my fixed notions of teaching and my students (what they know and do not know) and fixed notions of curriculum and best practices. Instead of assuming that I had to teach the three conditions, instead I created spaces for youth to capitalize on these three conditions. This requires critical literacy pedagogy.

What does this process of being adaptive look like? I could be adaptive while juxtaposing my three goals of this research. I was trying to do YPAR in an online setting while teaching

critical literacy. Adaptivity was trying to modify common tools during uncommon times and the adaptive thing that I did as a teacher, was having to drop the major goals outlined by YPAR because in an online environment during a pandemic and within the school parameters, we could not achieve every goal of YPAR. What I could do was build trust with students and give them a space to maybe not reach the goal of YPAR of enacting change but set students on a path to social justice thinking and action. These students produced text in unique ways bringing together the technological tools that they already knew while teaching them some new ones. Students also achieved the goal of text production and they learned to use literacy to understand how power oppresses them and used literacy practices known and taught, to write letters, post on social media, create videos and narratives. The data supports strong claims for critical literacy happening vs. YPAR which has been a tension all along.

Implications of the Study

This study can support other teachers who are seeking authentic learning opportunities within their school contexts. For example, the seventh-grade math department reached out to me to see how I could best help them to conduct YPAR for a new performance task with the hopes of making mathematical connections within a critical literacy framework for their proportional reasoning unit of study.

The study quickly disrupted my understandings of YPAR and literacy. Quite frankly, following the proposal defense, I did not have a clue about how to engage in critical literacy online. I had many questions such as: What do I do first? Is YPAR really going to work? Is YPAR really what I am trying to do with students? Do I do both YPAR and critical literacy? I had many questions without answers. Early on, I thought critical literacy was a pedagogical approach to teaching and learning, something teachers did for kids, such as a best

practice or instructional activity or unit. I had read multiple accounts of the transformative outcomes of critical literacy and it seemed to be something that I could do in the Workshop model since I had the flexibility of curriculum unlike Read 180. For me, it was also an important “thing” to do and study because it seemed real, relevant, and transformative for students and myself in unprecedented times. It was a way to increase the relevance and meaningfulness of school.

Yes, I was able to add to the body of research pertaining to New Literacy Studies and critical literacy in a way that marries the two together to show how educators can weave in technology with reading texts, student creation of texts, collaboration (New Literacies) but also showing how educators have room for transformative teaching and adaptivity.

After this study, what do we know now? One of the most crucial understandings evolving from this study is that we don’t have to be in person to do this work! Yes, I had a unique context not only in a virtual setting but also have the freedom at East as a literacy teacher. In the context of the EPO, all students have an ELA class and a literacy class. An uncommon factor that allowed me to do this work is that I do not have a set curriculum, I can be adaptive to students’ needs, styles and experiences. In the context of teaching within the critical literacy framework, it also happened online, and it’s possible. Strong construction of critical literacy happened in spite of the pandemic.

Limitations of the Study

Action research aims to produce knowledge at the local level within the researcher’s own practice site; therefore, limitations are inherent by design. A single study is not able to produce fully generalizable findings and given the COVID-19 global pandemic, the initial study design changed multiple times, but the goals of the study did not.

Many teachers during the pandemic were frustrated that they could not walk around the room to work with students or glance at their work. Many students experienced network or video lag and did not feel comfortable asking to pause while they resolved their technical issues. Many students simply did not participate in virtual learning because they simply did not have access to an internet source. There is also little that a teacher can do if students are distracted because they may very well be acting as the caretakers for their younger siblings who could also be learning virtually, while guardians are at work. There is a bottomless list of limitations to online environments but there are also meaningful realizations as well.

The major limitations to my study which I discussed in Chapter 4 was engaging students with YPAR processes virtually and carrying out the intended community advocacy and change. While I had no choice to structure my study virtually because of the pandemic and the fact that my school was running remotely, I believe I would have gotten different data in-person.

In connection to unveiling critical literacy, personal and social transformation did happen through critical literacy practice supported by digital tools because participants evaluated structures of power around problems of oppression, equality, and justice. But it was difficult for many students to analyze power through critical literacies and some of the struggles that we had during this process included not having a clear idea about how power worked associated with their chosen issue. The process of interrogating power through YPAR is harder than we think it is especially when the school walls and pandemic stop youth from enacting real change in their communities which is a core component of YPAR.

Future Research

When reflecting on new literacies, a theoretical contribution of this dissertation study has been to bridge critical literacy pedagogy and new literacies while attempting to integrate youth

participatory processes. Regarding this, Lankshear and Knobel's (2006) that "new ethos" overarches other important theoretical constructs which gives me the reason to make connections between critical literacy pedagogy and new literacies in my analysis. I not only used each of these constructs to make sense of the data, but also attempted to understand in relationship to each other in a participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2009).

Regarding critical literacies, I developed a theoretical model for engaging students in critical literacy documenting how students and myself used new literacies for navigating, negotiating, meaning making of, and working towards change in their communities.

Through my findings on new literacies surrounding a critical literacy practice in a virtual environment, this model provides specific and additional insights into what participation and participatory culture might look when engaging in critical literacy practices. This work is ongoing for me and my teaching practice and expect to continue my analysis and application of the connections among these theoretical constructs. It is my hope that my work with students in a virtual teaching and learning environment, while mandated, can help other educators and literacy scholars as well as we expand the vision of education post-pandemic.

It is imperative that the field of critical literacy gets a seat at the table of teacher professional development programs in order to facilitate the development of critical dispositions in teachers and future teachers. If the field wants to see critical literacy developed in schools, then the development of critical dispositions in teachers needs to be a priority. The field of critical literacy education needs teachers to engage in critical literacy work, develop critical inquiry dispositions, and make their work public. While there is an abundance of research and literature describing the critical literacy work of teachers, often in community with university critical literacy educators, there is an absence of research and literature from teachers. The

partnerships of critical literacy researcher and teachers would facilitate the development of critical literacy education in schools. Though this work is at its infancy, it is much easier to take risks and take up new stances when in partnership with others. With the unique partnership of the University of Rochester and East Lower and High school, teachers have the space and flexibility to begin or refine critical literacy work. While the study came to a close, the critical literacy endeavor continues. My critical and inquiry stance that emerged continues to be cultivated in the work I am doing alongside colleagues and our students.

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Appendix A

Unit of Study

STAGE 1: Desired Results		
<p>Standards CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating an understanding of the subject under investigation</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1.B Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.</p> <p>CC.W7.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style</p>	Transfer	
	<p><i>At the end of this unit, scholars will use what they have learned to</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Read often and widely from a range of global and diverse texts to understand the world around them and how language is used. 	
	Meaning	
	<p>Enduring understandings: <i>Students will understand that...</i></p> <p>Understanding 1: Informing oneself about challenges persistent in their local community requires inquiry, research, purposeful reading, and making connections.</p> <p>Understanding 2: Effective advocates communicate about important issues using strong claims, evidence, providing analysis, and synthesizing connections in order to solve issues.</p>	<p>Essential questions: <i>Scholars will consider such questions as:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What are the assets or services within our community? What is missing from our community? ● How can we inform others about the assets and deficits in our surrounding community in order to advocate for change? ● Why do some communities not deal with these issues? ● How can I use other places as a model to solve issues in my own community?
	Acquisition	
<p><i>What knowledge will scholars learn as part of this unit?</i> Students will know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - That advocates analyze people and places and make connections to identify persistent community issues. - That a claim is clear and is supported by relevant evidence 	<p><i>What skills will scholars learn as part of this unit?</i> Students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be able to use critical/features of informative writing and argument, claim and analysis) including: topic sentence, summarizing evidence, analysis 	

are **appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.**

CC.W7.5: With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by **planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.**

CC.W7.6: Use **technology**, including the Internet, to produce and **publish writing** and present the relationships between information and ideas efficiently as well as to interact and collaborate with others.

CC.W10.6-10: Write routinely over extended time frames (**time for research, reflection, and revision**) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CC.L7.2: **Demonstrate command of the conventions** of Standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

- How to **advocate** for an issue in their community to an outside audience in a way that is *convincing, supported with **credible evidence***, contains *analysis of what caused the problem* and **identifies** possible *solutions*.
- How to **identify** assets and needs of a community
- What **evidence is relevant** to their claim

- **Explain/summarize an issue** in their local community.
- **Interpret data to analyze** how that issue *supports* their chosen issue
- Scholars will read, **interpret**, and **discuss** mentor texts to **take an inquiry** stance about an issue in their community.
- **Synthesize** what they have read and discussed to **make personal connections** and connections to other places to make suggested solutions about the issue.
- How to **revise** for correct verb tense
- How to **conduct research** and how to look for reliable sources
- How to **skim resources and pick out important details**
- **Use tier 2 vocabulary** appropriately in writing

Appendix B

Stage 2: Performance Task

STAGE 2: Determine Acceptable Evidence	
	Assessment Evidence
<p>Criteria to assess understanding: <i>(Connect to goals and standards listed above. This is used to build the rubrics for each graded product).</i></p> <p><u>CEPT Rubric</u></p> <p>Argument: Scholars will identify a chosen issue that they would like to advocate for by explaining the issue, making a claim, identifying the significance, supporting the issue with evidence through research</p> <p>Ideas: Scholar synthesizes their research by making connections and recommending solutions.</p> <p>Organization: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</p> <p>Conventions: Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</p>	<p><u>Performance Task</u> focused on Transfer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Through investigating issues in the Rochester community, scholars will identify a chosen issue that they would like to advocate for by explaining the issue, making a claim about the issue, identifying the significance, supporting the issue with evidence through research and synthesizing their understanding by making connections and recommending solutions through a letter to the Rochester city council members. Students have the option of creating a second, supporting piece to their letter such as a spoken word poem, presentation, vlog, FacebookLive event, Tik Tok, Instagram story etc. to educate others on the community issue. <p>Other Assessment Evidence: <i>What specifics products will scholars produce?</i></p> <p>Arc 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Decide, Debate, and Discuss: Written reflection on EQs and discussion teacher notes ● My Map: Students create own map of community to find 10 resources in their community ● Ranked Resources: Written reflection about what resources their community has and lacks and what is most important ● Comprehensive Plan Google Survey: Students complete google survey to assess student’s comprehension of the plan and to make connections. ● Research Reflection Connection Graphic Organizer: Students read 5 articles about 5 top issues and complete graphic organizers. <p>Arc 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Claim: Students draft a claim about an issue of their choice ● Research Reflection Connection Graphic Organizers for OWN research: Students must find 4 credible sources and complete the same graphic organizer as practice with previous 5 articles. ● Relevant Evidence matched claim: ● Praise Question Suggestion: student models

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Solutions/Call to Action:● Letter outline or letter graphic organizer: Students will plan their letter using either the outline or if needed the graphic organizer● Draft of letter: Students will type a full draft of their letter.● Identify an Audience: Students will go through list of city council members (or other person) and identify an audience for their letter. Revise their letter to match their audience.● Praise Question Suggestion using rubric: Students will engage in PQS protocol to give helpful feedback to a peer using the rubric.● Publication/Conventions: Students will revise for final publication using feedback from teacher.● Mailing: Address and send letters● End of Unit Reflection: Students will reflect on their writing throughout the unit and the essential questions.
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Appendix C

Learning Experiences

A, M, T	E U S	LTs	STAGE THREE: Learning Experiences	
			Learning Activities:	Assessments and Success Criteria
A	U 1	I can define Assets and Deficits/needs and think of assets and deficits/needs in our Rochester community through the decide, debate, & discuss protocol.	<p>Lesson 1: Decide, Debate, Discuss: Using their background knowledge about their community, students respond to the prompts in their sourcebooks or in a shared Google Doc first. Students then use the MAC protocol (Decide, Debate, Discuss) on the line of tape labeled “strongly agree” or “strongly disagree” and use the sentence stems to communicate about the prompts:</p> <p>Rochester has assets/resources that benefit everyone. Rochester has assets to support all people’s success. I believe all people in Rochester should have equal access to assets. Rochester has assets but I believe that there are deficits (needs) too.</p> <p>Sentence Frames that students use for discussion: I agree with _____ because I believe that _____ I respectfully disagree with _____ because _____ I see what _____ is saying because _____</p>	<p>Assessment: Decide Debate and Discuss: Written reflection on EQs and discussion teacher notes</p> <p>A high-quality response should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make connections with the essential questions to self and community ● Use language from activity (assets, deficits, community) ● Add to written reflection after DDD and makes connections to a comment from a peer

A/M M	U 1	I can identify resources in my community through a Google Map inquiry.	<p><u>Lesson 2: Introduce EQs and MyMap Inquiry CEPT intro & Google Map Inquiry-Bird's Eye View:</u></p> <p>Students go back to their first written reflection about the EQs from the day prior and revise their thinking after the discussion protocol. Connect previous days learning to the essential questions:</p> <p>-What are the assets or services within our community? What is missing from our community? -How can we inform others about the assets and deficits in our surrounding community to advocate for change? -Why do some communities not deal with these issues?</p> <p>Teacher will tell students that the CEPT for this unit will ask students to write a letter to a Rochester city council member (or other audience) about an issue you think needs to be solved.</p> <p>Teacher will ask students to explore the essential question: "What are the assets or services within our community? What is missing from our community?" Using a Google map inquiry. Students must find 10 resources in their community that they use often and color code by importance.</p>	<p>Assessment: Personal map on <u>MyMap</u></p> <p>A high-quality response should: Be thoughtful Have a community map with 10 or more resources identified that impact the student and color coded by importance.</p>
A/M M	U 1	I can identify important resources in the Rochester Community with my group and rank the resources for order of importance.	<p><u>Lesson 3: Resource Mapping:</u> Students will then create a resource map about our Rochester community with small groups on chart paper. "With your table, use your chart paper and markers to build a map (like your personal home one) of Rochester & label all of the resources. Please use Google Maps if you're unsure!"</p> <p>Students will rank resources in importance.</p> <p>Students will end with a writing reflection responding to the essential question: "What resources does your community have? What is missing? What may be some issues in your community?"</p>	<p>Assessment: Group resource map/list and writing reflection.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A high-quality resource creation of community map/list includes 10 or more resources identified and agreed upon by group that are considered important to the

				<p>community and utilized often.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A high-quality written reflection thoughtfully addresses what resources the community has and responds to what the community is missing. Students also begin to form an idea of what issues are important to them.
M	U 1	<p>I can analyze the data from the Rochester 2023 Comprehensive Plan to identify 5 of the top topics for improvement through a Google Survey</p>	<p><u>Lesson 4: Rochester 2034 Comprehensive Plan:</u> Students will reflect on and identify themes in the data that came from 2018's community survey (7th grade scholars last year participated in this survey when it was open). When students are done, they will reflect in the Google survey and discuss with their group about what they agree with and what they believe needs to change in Rochester. Students will ultimately choose an issue that persists in Rochester.</p>	<p>Assessment: Reflection Questions in <u>Google Survey</u></p> <p>A high-quality response should have: Students fully develop responses that connect the community addressed issues to their own experiences. Students identify what issue is important for them to advocate for at the end of this learning experience and be able to fully articulate why this issue is important to address.</p>

A	U 2	<p>I can analyze the task for the CEPT and create a To Do list for myself.</p> <p>I can analyze two local news articles about Rochester's housing crisis.</p>	<p><u>Lesson 7: Introduction to CEPT & Article #1 Housing Crisis:</u> Teacher gives the students the task for the CEPT and asks students "What would you need to do to complete this task?" Students will create their own TO DO list and then compare it to Ms. Basile's <u>CEPT checklist</u> and begin thinking about what is important to them in their community to eventually choose a topic that they would like to advocate for.</p> <p>Students will use the graphic organizer as they read the two articles about Rochester's current housing crisis that the teacher provides.</p> <p><u>Article #1</u> <u>Article #2</u></p>	<p>Assessment:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CEPT task annotated and To Do list 2. <u>Article Graphic Organizer</u> <p>A high-quality response should: Have a clear to-do list with steps that align to the task.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifies the author's purpose - summarizes the main points - makes connections - cites specific evidence - asks questions that were unanswered in the source.
M	U 2	<p>I can analyze two local news articles about transportation and sustainability issues that persist in the Rochester Community.</p>	<p><u>Lesson 8: Article #3 and #4:</u> Teacher provides two articles: one is about transportation in Rochester and one is about sustainable environments in Rochester. Students read and annotate independently and then independently complete the graphic organizers.</p>	<p>Assessment: <u>Article Graphic Organizer</u> A high-quality response: -Identifies how this article contributes to topic -Identifies the author's purpose, summarizes the main points, -makes connections, -cites specific evidence, -asks questions.</p>

	<p>I can analyze a local news article about problems that persist in the Rochester Community.</p> <p>I can analyze the needs of Rochester using evidence from the articles in the decide, debate & discuss protocol.</p>	<p><u>Lesson 9: Article #5:</u> Teacher provides additional articles about healthy communities in Rochester. Students read and annotate independently and then independently complete the graphic organizers.</p> <p>Class will participate in Take a Stand protocol again using the same prompts as before and now students will use evidence to support their stance.</p> <p>Students will then do a writing reflection/exit ticket that address the EQs again. -What are the assets or services within our community? What is missing from our community? -How can we inform others about the assets and deficits in our surrounding community in order to advocate for change? -Why do some communities not deal with these issues?</p>	<p><u>Assessment: Article Graphic Organizer</u> A high-quality response: -Identifies how this article contributes to topic -Identifies the author's purpose, summarizes the main points, -makes connections, -cites specific evidence, -asks questions</p>
	<p>I can identify a persistent issue in the Rochester community and create a claim that communicates the importance of the issue.</p>	<p><u>Lesson 10: Choosing an area of Advocacy & writing a claim:</u> Students will identify their area of advocacy and write a claim stating the importance of that issue.</p>	<p><u>Article Graphic Organizer</u> -Identifies area of advocacy & claim</p>
	<p>I can identify credible sources that help me better understand my chosen issue.</p>	<p><u>Lesson 11: Choosing Credible Sources:</u> After students have identified their area of advocacy, they will find a credible source about that area. Students will use the graphic organizer as they now begin to find their own 4 sources for their own research topic.</p>	<p><u>Article Graphic Organizer</u></p>
	<p>I can analyze student models to identify characteristics of a proposal letters and strengths and weaknesses</p>	<p><u>Lesson 12: Assessing Student Models:</u> Students analyze two models of proposal letters. Students break up into two separate large groups. Group 1 will individually go through the Praise, Question, Suggestion Protocol while using the success criteria/rubric with one student sample as Group 2 goes through the same protocol with the other student example. Students then discuss their findings, choose</p>	<p>Praise, question, suggestion protocol</p>

		using praise, question, suggestion protocol.	two presenters, each student example goes under the document camera as the 2 presenters from each group critique their model.	
		I can craft a draft of my proposal letter using the outline, success criteria, my own research, and student models.	Lesson 13: Begin Drafting: Students using the proposal outline to begin drafting their own letter with their research findings, claim, personal connections.	draft
		I can explore solutions that other areas have used to help combat persistent community issues.	Lesson 14: Solving persistent issues: Students explore what other places in the United States have done to combat issues in their community such as poverty, funding for education, pollution, transportation, crime, school violence etc. (articles will vary from class to class depending on issues that students are researching.	Possible ideas for solutions about chosen topic.
		I can identify the appropriate audience for my proposal letter.	Lesson 15: Choose an audience and continue drafting: Students explore the Monroe County City Council members and decide who to write their letters to.	Chosen audience
			Lesson 16: Revising drafts Based on student models	
		I can assess a peer's proposal letter and give feedback that is kind, specific and helpful.	Lesson 17: Revision: Students work with a partner to assess one another's proposal letter on the rubric and giving them feedback in Google Docs that is kind, specific and helpful.	revision
	U 2		Marking Period 4-Student Reflection- students will reflect on the process of writing to inform and reflect on the writing process and their reading. Students will also reflect on themselves and their identity as a reader and a writer	Self-Reflection Google Classroom Survey

