

The Diffusion of Youth-Led Participatory Research in Urban Schools: The Role of the Prevention Support System in Implementation and Sustainability

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Research Program Objectives

- To develop and test innovative models of involving local stakeholders – particularly youth -- in the planning and implementation of school-based violence and substance abuse prevention programs.
- Local “fit” of empirically-supported programs (Study 1): Focuses on how schools and districts balance potentially competing demands of limited resources, “fit” with cultural backgrounds of students, and the push for the use of empirically-supported programs.
- Evaluation of youth-led participatory research (Study 2): Focuses on strengthening rigor of implementation and evaluation of youth-led participatory research as a means of:
 - Promoting youth development
 - Engaging adolescents in planning, implementation, evaluation of violence and other prevention programs

Focus of Paper Presented Today

- The paper presented today examines the diffusion of youth-led participatory research across public school settings with specific attention to the kinds of capacity-building necessary to support this effort.
- This article draws on the new Interactive Systems Framework for Dissemination and Implementation (ISF) developed in collaboration with the CDC and its university partners (Wandersman, et al. in press) to analyze the kinds of capacity-building needed to support the diffusion of this innovative intervention.
- The ISF model describes the dissemination of preventive interventions in terms of three interactive systems – Prevention Delivery, Prevention Support, and Prevention Synthesis and Translation. The Prevention Support System must build capacity, both general and innovation-specific, to implement the new intervention.
- This article (Ozer et al. in press, *American Journal of Community Psychology*) briefly describes the youth-led research process and its potential benefits. It then describes challenges and responses in providing support for the diffusion of this model in 6 secondary schools. The settings are urban public schools with a majority of students of color from diverse ethnic groups: Asian-American, Latino, and African-American.

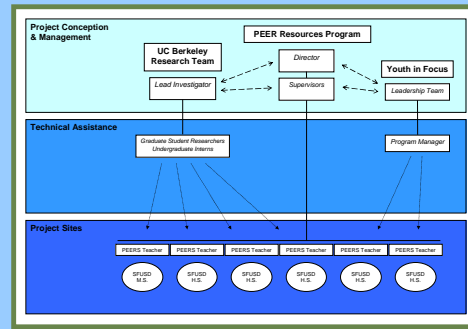
Youth-Led Participatory Research

- In youth-led participatory research, youth are trained to:
 - Identify major concerns in their schools and/or communities
 - Conduct research to inform understanding of problem and possible solutions
 - Take leadership to improve the conditions in which they live
- Participatory research is a promising and rapidly-growing approach to engaging stakeholders in intervention development.
 - Potential benefits include increasing the relevance of interventions; targeting interventions to identified needs of community members; and developing interventions that incorporate community norms and values into scientifically valid approaches (NIH, PAR-05-026).
- While this innovative process of participatory research is being diffused across many community and school settings, we know little about supporting effective implementation.
- Refining innovative intervention models and understanding the contextual factors associated with successful implementation in a range of settings is a critical step in diffusing interventions in complex settings (Biglan et al., 2000).

Students present their research findings (right, before a school district committee meeting; bottom, at a student conference) -- Photos courtesy of San Francisco Peer Resources



Collaborative University-CBO-School Partnership



This project constitutes a collaborative partnership with a university school of public health and community-based organizations (CBOs) to build capacity for long-term, sustainable implementation of this innovative process within the local school system.

Key Findings

- Special features of youth-led participatory research made specific demands on the Prevention Support System in the diffusion effort in public high schools, such as:
 - Youth lead with “scaffolding” by adults – Requires that adult facilitators be comfortable sharing power with youth, and have skills in providing structure for youth to work and make decisions in groups
 - Flexible, iterative process of research & action – While teachers used a curriculum, guiding a research and action process requires flexibility depending on the research questions identified, timeframe, types of research methods used, and political climate of the school and community.
 - Technical knowledge – Adult teachers and their supervisors required technical assistance to help conduct credible and high-quality research to be used to inform policy and program recommendations.
- These special features also provided unanticipated benefits and building of both innovation-specific and general for the CBO partners and schools.
 - While the flexible, data-driven process was initially stressful for teachers, it resulted in meaningful professional development and satisfaction – particularly in current educational climate focused on standardized testing.
 - Process strengthened CBO’s general capacity in use of research evidence and methods across all programs.
 - Change orientation of process led to development of student-adult committees at schools that provide more sustained opportunities for student involvement.

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