Communities Discovering What They Care About: Youth and Adults Leading School Reform Together

A Dissertation in
Educational Leadership

by

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ABSTRACT

Youth have traditionally been excluded from decision-making because of societal conceptions about their roles and capabilities. This exclusion is reinforced by the fact that youth have no formal right to political participation in the United States and their rights in schools are not coextensive with those given to adults in schools. This study is an examination of the work of one organization partnering with high schools to support the use of youth-adult partnership as a tool for school reform focused on changing the positioning of youth within schools and to expand their role in educational decision-making. Using an embedded case study design focused on the organization Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together, an intermediary organization, and the work of its partner schools, the study explores how youth-adult groups pursue promoting change from their position within schools and how they navigate the intersection of their work with other types of reform discourses and pressures within schools. This work draws on 21 interviews, observations, and documents collected in 2012 as part of a ten-school evaluation of the YATST program, as well as 31 interviews, four months of observation, and documents collected as part of two in-depth case studies of Pinewood High School and Maple Valley High School’s YATST groups. The study finds that, in trying to create change from inside schools, groups must be more concerned with discerning and meeting the needs of all the various groups they wish to involve in the change process rather than single-mindedly focusing on advocating for their goal. In pursuing a “grassroots leadership of care”, the groups have to make key compromises and strategic decisions about whose needs they will choose to meet in the event that groups’ needs conflict, and
decisions about how to communicate the purpose of their work in language that is not easily co-opted by other existing educational reform discourses. I discuss the implications of these findings both for the work of researchers and practitioners interested in the expansion of student voice and youth organizing for school reform, as well as how this contributes to our understanding of the nature of schools as organizations. A central conclusion of the study is that the “why” of student voice in schools matters and adds a much needed multidimensionality to the question of how to best integrate student voice practices within schools that moves beyond the single dimension of authenticity.
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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Problem statement

In 1986, the Supreme Court issued a decision on the case of *Fraser v. Bethel High School*. The case itself had a touch of the ridiculous to it, but is certainly one that many administrators, teachers and students could likely find corollaries to at their own schools: Fraser, a high school student, had made a speech to the entire faculty and student body of Bethel High School, laden with strong sexual innuendo, nominating a fellow student for student council. As a result, the school suspended him and the matter was referred to the courts. The Supreme Court’s decision suggested that while students do enjoy some free speech protections at school (as determined in an earlier case, *Tinker v. Des Moines*), those protections are subject to certain limitations. Over the years, these limitations, or exceptions to the original *Tinker* ruling, have been determined by several cases in addition to the *Fraser* case, including *Morse v. Frederick* in 2007 (famously known as the Bong Hits for Jesus case), and *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier* in 1988 which ruled on the limited rights of students writing for school newspapers.

More telling than the decisions themselves, however, was the language that the justices of the Court used to describe both the role of schooling and the responsibilities of schools towards students in our society within these landmark cases for determining the protections to student first amendment rights. Student speech activities that are perceived to “interfere with the educational mission” become unprotected speech acts that students can be discouraged and prevented from engaging in, and ultimately disciplined for
The necessity of adult oversight of educational matters and mission and the subordinate position of youth in relation to this oversight is stressed in Robert’s (2007) *Morse v. Frederick* decision, in which he writes, that “the constitutional rights of students in public schools are not coextensive with the rights of adults in other settings.” Justice Thomas went further in his concurrent opinion, stating that, “in the earliest schools, teachers taught and students listened. Teachers commanded, and students obeyed” (*Morse v. Frederick*, 2007).

The Court’s justification of their decisions regarding students’ speech rights in school reflect the social reality that youth perspectives in the United States have long been marginalized because of adult conceptions about both the role and capabilities of young people and the responsibility of adults for socializing young people (Fullan, 2007). In recent years, however, listening to young people and understanding their perspectives has become of renewed interest to many school reformers and researchers interested in student engagement, motivation, and school improvement (Cook-Sather, 2003; Mitra, 2003; Rudduck, 2007). As a result, a research and practice community has grown around student voice and meaningful youth involvement across the globe. In some countries, significant progress has been made towards recognizing and protecting the rights of young people in the institutions, such as schools, that are meant to promote their best interests and development.

However, there are still significant impediments to the growth of practices supporting the expansion of meaningful student involvement in American schools. In addition to limited legal protection for student speech in schools, the United States has not ratified the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Cahill & Hart, 2007).
Some of the criticism and pushback that the treaty has received have been based around the strong cultural belief that adults are responsible for guiding children in their growth and development, and that declaring specific rights for children would, in some way, supersede that authority, or that young people would be unable to truly invoke and protect their own rights without guidance from adults on what rights actually are and what they mean (Smolin, 2006).

Despite these challenges, organizations and individuals in the United States have continued to experiment with methods for the integration of youth perspectives in meaningful ways in both schools and communities. Within this effort, youth-adult partnerships have been found to be a powerful model for the consideration and inclusion of youth voices both inside and outside of schools (Cook-Sather, 2010; Fine et al., 2007; Ginwright, 2005; Mitra, 2007; 2009; Zeldin, Camino, & Mook, 2005). Broadly defined, youth-adult partnerships are youth and adults working together towards a defined end, be it a special one-time project or a long-standing group conducting school-based action research (Wheeler, 2000). Unlike token or more passive strategies for incorporating youth voice, youth-adult partnerships go beyond the consultation of young people as data sources to involvement of young people as partners in defining problems and working on solutions within their communities (Bolstad, 2010).

Like other types of student voice, youth-adult partnerships are often defined by their distribution of power and the question of who defines the purpose of their collective efforts (Fielding, 2001; Mueller et al., 2000). In the United States, particularly, there has been a focus within the literature on subverting institutional norms to make space for youth voices and the structures that will successfully support their inclusion in decision-
making in the absence of rights-based protections. The focus has been on gaining acceptance for the idea of listening to youth and on documenting the ways that youth and adults meet with varied levels of success in overcoming these strong institutional norms (Silva, 2003). Often, this acceptance depends on institutional receptivity and support (Mitra, 2008), the ability to establish group legitimacy (Mitra, 2003; Silva, 2003), and the ability to establish good intra-group dynamics around size (Mitra, 2008), roles (Camino, et al., 2005; Cook-Sather, 2010; Mitra, 2003), and youth-adult relationships (Rudduck, 2007). Less well-studied are the ways that youth and adults conceptualize the purpose of youth-adult partnership and the way their conceptualization of purpose relates to broader institutional and cultural discourses about the role of youth, adults, and education within society.

Much of the literature assumes that student voice is a good in and of itself. This literature takes for granted that student voice programs, and particularly the youth-adult partnership, will naturally encourage relationships between youth and adults that favor “creative difference” over unproductive gridlock (Fielding, 2004, p.213). Within this framework, creative difference then leads to transformative ends: youth perspectives allow groups of youth and adults to tackle persistent problems of schooling with fresh eyes and energy (Fielding, 2004). In fact, researcher-created hierarchies of student voice initiatives demonstrate this assumption by putting student-defined and student-led or youth-adult led initiatives at the top, essentially creating Platonic models to which practitioners ought to aspire (Fletcher, 2005; Hart, 1992; Fielding, 2001). So much energy has been put into proving that student voice programs are good, however, that little research has been done on the various and competing justifications for why such
programs are good, and how the competition between those justifications might affect the outcomes such programs strive to achieve and their successful integration within their schools.

Very few case studies of student voice initiatives step back and move their analyses beyond an enumeration of the relative challenges and benefits of such programs to attempt to understand how the framing of these initiatives circumscribes the very possibilities of the initiatives themselves, or in other words, how the good that student voice is intended to create is defined. In the United States, this type of analysis has been difficult to do thus far because of the slow acceptance of youth voices as important.

In the United Kingdom, where student voice enjoys both recognition as a right as well as a much broader level of acceptance at both the government and school level, Fielding (2004) and Bragg (2007a) have found that student voice may work as a tool of co-optation as much as a tool of transformation that is able to challenge entrenched social injustices. Their analyses seem to suggest that student voice may function as a tool rather than an end in and of itself with its form and function determined by the user, rather than by the voices themselves. Both Fielding (2004) and Bragg (2007a; 2007c) provide some compelling examples of this: Bragg (2007c) discusses how student voice may be used as a furtherance of Foucauldian governmentality, i.e., as a tool which encourages students to consent uncritically to school not only with their bodies, but also with their minds. Fielding (2004) argues that, depending on the intentions of the initiator, programs are often enmeshed within informing discourses that speak to a certain philosophy of education. In either case, the underlying philosophical justification for student voice
programs is revealed to have a potentially detrimental impact on the desired outcomes of those same programs.

Within the American context, we are just beginning to reach a point where student voice, in some places, has reached a level of broad acceptance. Excellent models of youth and adults working together as equal partners have begun to emerge as educators increasingly look to meaningfully integrate youth voices into decision-making within schools. The creation of intermediary organizations designed to partner with schools to provide the necessary training and technical support to educators and students interested in experimenting with these methods has also been an important factor supporting the growth of these practices (Mitra, 2005; Mitra, 2007). Additionally, the research attention which these arrangements have received in the past ten years has allowed reflective practitioners to move beyond instinct, toward a program design that draws on the results of case studies of best practices. UP for Learning, a Vermont-based intermediary organization that supports the adoption of youth-adult partnerships within schools, is one case of such reflective practice.

**Background on UP for Learning**

UP for Learning works with schools to help strengthen their reform efforts by providing support and training towards the creation of youth-adult partnerships and conducts policy advocacy in order to affect decision-making around the inclusion of youth perspectives at the state level (Up for Learning, 2013). The organization started through the creation of its now signature program, Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together (YATST), and their website describes the YATST program as the “fullest expression of UP For Learning’s core values and principles” (2013, paragraph 2).
These principles include youth and adults fully sharing responsibility for learning, the leveraging of strengths for change, the assumption of positive intentions by educators, the pursuit of equity and justice, the employment of data to drive change, and the creation of open dialogue about school culture (UP for Learning, 2013). The YATST program currently runs in 14 out of 61 high schools in Vermont, and the organization works to provide technical assistance and training to these groups of students and teachers who are interested in working together, called YATST groups.

YATST groups conduct surveys of both students and school staff to gauge perceptions about the amount of rigor in the school’s expectations for students, the closeness of teacher-student relationships, the responsibility that teachers and students take for learning, and the relevance of the curriculum. The groups use the results of these surveys to pinpoint their school’s strengths, as well as “puzzling gaps” between student and teacher perceptions. They then, in conjunction with discussion with the broader school staff and student body, host dialogues with their school community about their findings and develop projects designed to address the puzzling gaps by leveraging their areas of strength. Once these projects have been implemented, the students and adults reflect on the action they have taken and re-do their initial survey to begin the cycle anew.

Many of the older groups have successfully achieved a high degree of integration within their schools through the gathering and presentation of data and the action they have taken based on their findings. This integration has been achieved organizationally in different ways across different school contexts, from YATST groups being offered as a credit-bearing class for students, to being designated an official professional development
group in which both students and teachers participate. In many cases, the groups work closely with administrators to plan professional development and in-service programs for teachers, all-school assemblies for students, and various other initiatives that bring their findings and projects to the attention of school board and community members.

To support the youth and adults involved in these counter-normative partnerships, UP for Learning provides training and technical assistance to these YATST groups. These trainings include a number of capacity-building efforts to support the work of the school-based groups. First, a yearly training for youth in facilitative leadership is offered, allowing them to improve their leadership, consensus building, and presentation skills. Secondly, UP for Learning provides a graduate class for adult members of school-based groups for Masters-level credit or professional development credit. The course asks the adults engaged in this counter-normative work to reflect on how to best support youth and bring an adult perspective to the group’s work without overshadowing youth voices. In addition to formal trainings, UP for Learning provides direct technical assistance to groups as they move through the action-research process, including assistance with analyzing data, formulating project ideas, and sharing best practices between schools.

As a model of youth-adult partnership activity, UP for Learning has both contributed to and been encouraged by the more broad-based support of the Vermont Agency of Education (VT AOE). The idea of youth-adult partnership, and UP for Learning's program specifically, has received the enthusiastic support of the VT AOE in the past few years. As one representative of the VT AOE stated of UP For Learning in an interview,
We absolutely believe that students should be at the center of the construction of their own learning experience. And for that to work, happen, be meaningful, it seems to me that meaningful student voice is essential. In terms of the development of a personal learning plan and also in the development of the school’s environment. That’s why it is so important to us that we make these kind of opportunities available throughout the state.

UP for Learning was one of the special interest groups consulted as part of the state’s application for an ESEA flexibility waiver (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), and has received state support to take one of their successful training programs—focusing on maintaining high expectations for students—to an expanded number of schools in Vermont. As the VT AOE moves forward with putting together a taskforce on personalized learning and flexible pathways pursuant to this passage of legislation earlier this year, UP for Learning has been identified as a provider of services for training to support the implementation of this legislation (Beattie, personal communication, 2013; 2014).

The existence of exemplary cases such as UP for Learning allows researchers studying youth-adult partnership in the United States to ask questions that move beyond how to successfully integrate and support youth-adult partnerships in schools and to think critically about how the warrant for the inclusion of youth perspectives affects the incorporation and use of those perspectives, as well as outcomes for youth who participate in these programs. Few studies thus far have examined the connection between the justification, or warrant, for student voice or youth-adult partnership and subsequent implementation; the few that do have focused largely on the rationale of the participants within the programs themselves and their subsequent implementation (Bragg, 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; Bolstad, 2010; Cook-Sather, 2010; Diversi & Mecham, 2005).
In my study, I explore how successful YATST schools that have established long-term youth-adult partnership groups are using their functional success. I seek to understand what types of goals they choose to set and understand the relationship between their rationale for their work, the ends they hope to achieve, and how they use their work to achieve outcomes in service of these ends. Fielding (2004) argues that youth-adult partnership is a tool which has a number of potentialities embedded within it. As an example, he outlines the tension between the use of student voice for democratic, emancipatory ends and neoliberal, market-based, or consumerist ends. Youth-adult partnership or student voice can be used to enhance inclusiveness and combat the marginalization of youth perspectives. It can also be effective against the double disadvantage that this marginalization can create for youth belonging to groups that already experience larger social marginalization or exclusion (Rubin & Silva, 2003). However, gathering perspectives in order to amass feedback and better enhance or personalize a product is a staple of market research. Youth are familiar with this alternative paradigm that is often used to justify the inclusion of their perspectives and voices (Fielding, 2004; Bragg, 2007a; 2007c; Kenway & Bullen, 2001).

There are many ways that these potentialities can define and circumscribe group action. While UP for Learning has a mission statement and a clearly articulated theory of change, both adults and youth may have their own reasons for participating in this work. These warrants for the work may draw on disparate paradigms of youth voice and be informed by different visions of the good that will result from youth participation. As this work happens within and through groups, each group must negotiate a path forward and reach a consensus for action. In these negotiations, certain voices or warrants may find
resonance with the group in ways that others do not, leading to action informed by one set of values or discourses over another and the inclusion and exclusion of particular agendas and aims. This negotiated vision, in turn, will guide the groups’ work as they work on voice-gathering and projects to promote student engagement. In my study, I document these processes and analyze the relationships between the rationale for youth-adult partnership, group process, and outcomes. In doing so, I attempt to provide thoughtful commentary on these relationships in ways that can inform the work of both UP for Learning and other student voice organizations.

**Research questions**

Three central questions guided this dissertation: First, *what were the warrants offered by UP for Learning support staff, administrators, teachers, and students for promoting youth-adult partnerships in their schools?* In order to study these processes, it was important to first ask what warrants actors both within the organization and within schools identify and draw on within their work. I closely examined the communication and messaging of the YATST theory of change at the organizational level as well as the individual warrants offered by those working within its purview.

Secondly, *how do youth and adults make sense of organizational warrants for youth-adult partnership work and negotiate the translation of those warrants into action?* In moving from theory to action in any program, there is considerable room for interpretation that is grounded in the sense-making of the implementing actors (Spillane, Reisner, & Reimer, 2002). In this case, it is the youth and adults working in partnership that are primarily involved in making sense of the program and situating what it is trying
to accomplish within the broader efforts of the school to facilitate effective teaching and learning. I was particularly interested in understanding in what ways the students and teacher groups working with the technical assistance of YATST situate and discuss the aims of their efforts within this structure, and what they choose to prioritize as they move from theory to action.

Thirdly, what contextual, personal, and philosophical factors enable and constrain the outcomes of YATST action-research projects? This question aimed to examine the specific contextual factors that influence the enactment of youth-adult partnerships for school change and shape the ways that certain pathways or actions become plausible or implausible to youth and adults around this implementation. These factors could potentially include competing reforms or priorities, the availability of resources such as time and money, group cohesiveness and effectiveness, and community factors such as the socioeconomic and democratic history and capacity of the community.

To answer these three questions, I examined both the structure within which these youth-adult groups were working and the enactment of the reforms by the students and teachers themselves. I was interested in the ways that YATST coaches, students, teachers, and administrators construct and enact the YATST vision of school reform.

**Dissertation organization**

This dissertation proposes and then elaborates a conceptual framework for understanding youth-adult driven school reform from an examination of the iterative process through which the YATST model has achieved its current form and, particularly, its contemporary expression of its purpose and informing values. I describe in this story
how the theory of change of the YATST program evolved into the “Guiding Values and Principles” that UP for Learning embraces today, through an iterative process of identification, rejection, and self-definition of particular projects, values, and relationships. Characterized by the “rapid prototyping” approach that YATST embraces, the organization’s core values have become more explicit and their theory of action has become better articulated throughout their six-year history.

In this dissertation, I argue that although the theory of change of the YATST model was interpreted by participating youth and adults as grounded loosely in values derived from the ethic of justice, as participating schools prototyped their evolving model, their interpretation of the program’s theory of change shifted to center itself to foreground practices informed by the ethic of care. Key concepts which informed this interpretation included: manifesting their interpretation of the program’s emphasis on shared responsibility for teaching and learning between youth and adults, starting from strength, assuming positive intentions, seeking equity and justice, employing data to drive change, and creating open dialogue. While these stated values draw on broad language that evokes a variety of potential pedagogical traditions and value orientations, this narrative account, constructed from organizational documents, as well as case study interview and observation data, demonstrates that certain of these articulated values came to inform the work more in practice than others and were operationalized by program participants primarily within an activism of care.

My dissertation proceeds as follows: Chapter 2 serves both to position the YATST program within the existing literature on both youth activism and youth leadership, as well as lay out the central concepts pertinent to the conceptual framework
that I propose in Chapter 4. In Chapter 3, I review the methodology for my study and introduce the subject of my case study, the organization UP for Learning and its signature program, Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together (YATST).

In Chapter 4, I address the important role of the tools that have been developed to support groups’ engagement with the action-research process as a change strategy in their leadership of school reform based in youth-adult partnership. I describe the conceptual framework that I have developed based on my analysis of the data to understand the case of YATST and the relationship between that framework and popular lenses for understanding the role of values and ethics in educational leadership. Using the concept of “turning points” from the life history literature, I identify three central turning points in the iterative development of the YATST program, in which new tools were introduced to the work that helped to clarify and elucidate the work of school change for participating YATST groups. I argue that each of the tools introduced at these turning points had a profound effect on the way in which participants sought to enact and balance competing values and priorities that they encountered within the work and ultimately affected the choice points that they made. In the conclusion, I draw parallels between the choices made by the groups and values derived from an ethic of care. I describe the potential of care as a lens for understanding the priorities of school-based, youth-adult partnerships working for school reform.

Chapter 5 introduces the case of Maple Valley’s YATST group. Through a narrative account of their group’s work within the action research cycle, moving from the analysis of their teacher and student survey data to the sharing of that data with key stakeholders, I describe how the group made key choices that foregrounded care for
teachers in the school change process, while the choices that the group made with regard to sharing their data with students reflected a different balance of values. Attention to the values of “starting from strength” and “assuming positive intentions” became the most important for the group as they sought to lead a dialogic change process within their school. The conclusion of the chapter explores how competing values are affected by institutional power dynamics and roles, and how that intersection with power can shape who benefits most from the work.

In Chapter 6, I describe the story of the Pinewood High School YATST group and pay particular attention to the way in which the metaphors used to describe their school change work have shifted over time. I suggest that as the groups’ strategies for sparking school change became clearer to the school community, new, unauthorized metaphors for the work emerged that did not reflect the informing values of the YATST program. I contrast these new, unauthorized metaphors that position students as consumers with the way in which the Pinewood YATST group understands their own relationships within the context of the model (as “family) and suggest that a discomfort with the informing metaphor of family may contribute to the opportunity for other unauthorized metaphors to arise.

Finally, I conclude in Chapter 7 with a discussion of what difference it makes for youth and adults to work to enact high school reform primarily from within an ethic of care, rather than other, more common value structures for student voice initiatives for school change that have been documented within the literature. I discuss the implications for the field, first in terms of the practical difference that a paradigm based not on the concept of rights, but rather needs, might provide and how such a concept might be
politically useful for groups working to renegotiate and change the institutional norms of schooling to include youth voices. Secondly, I discuss the way in which research on youth-adult partnership and student voice for school reform might adopt the lens of care as a useful one for highlighting new aspects of this work that could lead to future insights into both research and practice.
Chapter 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Both civic and organizational life in many western societies is characterized by a separation by age. Youth are often excluded from adult decision-making spaces, creating a delay in their assumption of civic and community responsibilities until they are perceived to be ready to assume such responsibilities (Zeldin et al., 2003; Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2012). With the cultural expansion of the concept of adolescence within the last 150 years, youth must wait for longer periods before being able to assume formal responsibilities within the public arena and within civic life (Rose, 2011). Increasingly, however, some adults and youth are recognizing the importance of elevating youth involvement in these arenas in order to gain clarity on the issues facing youth at the turn of the 21st century.

This literature review explores the ways in which youth-adult partnership has been used as a tool to achieve change in organizations and community life, and to look specifically at the way in which youth-adult partnerships have contributed to school change and reform. Contributions to our understanding of youth-adult partnership for school change have come from research communities interested in the expansion of student participation in schools and student voice, as well as the expansion of youth organizing and activism for school change. This literature review serves to both locate the work of YATST within these strands of literature and to acknowledge the limitations of the existing literature in acknowledging the influence of competing cultural discourses around school reform. This chapter also demonstrates the need for a study of the effect of
competing educational reform discourses and their intersection with the work of youth-adult partnerships working from inside of schools to spur school reform.

**Discourses that inform societal assumptions about the capabilities of youth**

Age, as a social category, plays an important role in the granting of rights and responsibilities within society. Several discourses arising out of different arenas of society have traditionally informed how we think about young peoples’ roles and capabilities. These discourses have been derived and reproduced within the thinking and research in the social sciences. Historically, young people have been positioned as the blank slates, or *tabula rasa*, of Locke’s (1823) political imagination. The purpose of education, within such a view, is to introduce young people to the salient and important concepts of public life and to develop in them the skills necessary to productively contribute to such a life (Cook-Sather, 2002). If young people are blank slates, then schools are meant to provide them with information, and, as Cook-Sather (2002) writes,

> The subsequent behaviorist models of psychology, most avidly promoted by B.F. Skinner (1969), plugged learners into bolted-down desks and lock-step curricula through which they were guided by teacher-as-skilled-engineer. (p. 4)

The corollary in social science research has been to position youth as “becomings” (Bragg, 2007a, p. 15), seeing them not as who they are in this moment, but rather as who they will become. In social science research particularly, Bragg (2007a) argues, youth have been the subject of research interest only because of how they will reproduce societal conditions as adults, rather than being seen as “producers of meaningful social and cultural change” (Bolstad, 2010, p. 5) in the here and now. This discourse serves to both inform and validate the way in which educators often discuss the
goals of schools as institutions, to seek to develop youth for their future as good citizens, productive workers, moral agents, and lifelong learners (Bragg, 2007).

However, a growing group of educational theorists, practitioners, and researchers have been advocating for alternatives to these dominant discourses about youth, both in society and in schools (Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2001; Freire, 1970, 1998; Mitra, 2004; Rudduck, 2007; Spring, 1976). Educational theorists such as Freire (1970) suggest that instead of viewing youth as empty vessels to be filled, that society ought to see youth as individuals that have interests, agency, and morality all their own, and that their role as decision-makers and change-makers within society ought to be recognized and acknowledged within all areas of community life, but particularly within education. Freire (1998) suggests that, in fact, all people are in a perpetual state of being “unfinished” (p. 51), and that rather than confining development to a particular moment in the life course, educators and society ought to recognize the ways in which we are all, at all times, in a processing of becoming.

As the research base supporting the inclusion of youth as agents has continued to expand to include the positive benefits for youth that come from such participation (Mager & Nowak, 2012; Mitra, 2004; Osberg, Pope, & Galloway, 2006), youth-adult partnerships have been found to be a powerful innovation that can serve to shift discourses about youth away from those that seek to position them as the recipients of adult efforts to improve, prepare, and educate them for adult life towards a positioning that sees them as agents and partners in community life (Mitra, 2004; Wheeler, 2000; Zeldin, Camino & Mook, 2005). In the following section, the variety of ways in which youth-adult partnerships have been used across organizational settings is discussed.
**Form and function of youth-adult partnership across organizational settings**

Youth-adult partnerships are not a specific program or model, but rather are a collection of principles that can be applied broadly to a range of activities in which young people and adults can participate together. There are several models which attempt to define the core components of youth-adult partnerships—those qualities which ought to be present regardless of the program or the setting in which they are being implemented. Zeldin and Petrokubi (2006) suggest that youth-adult partnership is defined by youth and adults engaged in a process of collective decision-making and action to address important community or organizational issues. Youth, within this literature, typically refers to adolescents under the age of 18.

Youth-adult partnerships have been the subject of investigation within many areas of community and organizational life. Empirical work has examined the positive benefits for participating youth in terms of their leadership development, sense of belonging, development of interpersonal skills, increased confidence and civic engagement (Angell, 1998; Denton, 2003; Furtwengler, 1996; Mager & Nowak, 2012; Mitra, 2004; Osberg, Pope, & Galloway, 2006). Additionally, studies have also documented the positive benefits for youth-adult relationships (Denton, 2003; Mitra, 2004; Patmore & McIntyre, 1999), improved outcomes for organizations (Alderson, 2000; Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006; Kaba, 2000; Osberg, Pope, & Galloway, 2006), and outcomes for communities (Zeldin, Petrokubi, & MacNeil, 2008; Yonezawa & Jones, 2006).

Zeldin, Petrokubi, and MacNeil (2008) suggest that youth-adult partnerships within public organizations serve a variety of functions, which range from governance and policy-making, to organizing and activism, to training and outreach, to service and
philanthropy. The shifts in youth-adult relationships that are required for such diverse integration into organizational activities require the adjustment of both private (personal or individual) relationships with youth as well as public (structural or institutional) inclusion of youth within organizational activities (Sinclair, 2004). As such, Zeldin, Petrokubi, and MacNeil (2008) and others acknowledge the need for training, tools, and on-going support that can expand the capacity of adults to engage in these reimagined relationships (Mitra, 2005; Mitra, Serriere, & Stoicovy, 2012).

**Youth-adult partnerships for school reform**

Schools represent a fertile context for the implementation of youth-adult partnerships because of the large role that they have in the organization of youth’s everyday lives (Sinclair, 2004). Sometime also referred to as “student voice,” youth-adult partnerships and the inclusion of students in school decision-making both refer to meaningful involvement of youth in school decision-making processes. However, schools, as public institutions with unique social and historical legacies, can also present a challenging context within which to implement youth-adult partnerships. Extracurricular activities and student councils have historically been sites of student leadership development; however, these activities are often treated as peripheral extras or, in the case of student councils, have been consigned to working primarily on social activities such as dances, bake sales, and fundraisers (Fielding, 2001; MacFarland & Starmanns, 2009). Attempts by students, or adults in partnership with students, to carve out a space that moves beyond these historical sites of student leadership can encounter significant resistance from administrators and teachers (Silva, 2003).
The research on partnership of youth and adults for school reform has been done largely under two umbrellas: that of youth leadership in schools, which includes research on student voice, service-learning, and also traditional leadership opportunities such as student council, and that of youth social activism (Mitra & Kirshner, 2012). These two strands of literature, with broad roots in community organizing, positive youth development, community psychology, and student-centered learning practices, are rarely brought into conversation with one another but share remarkable similarity in the content of their concerns and their positioning of youth as agents in their lives and their education. In the following sections, I summarize some of the major contributions of each of these strands of literature, including several models for understanding youth participation in school decision-making and school reform.

**Student voice and leadership**

Historically, youth leadership development in schools has been grounded in a belief of youth as becomings (Bragg, 2007b), or in a state of preparation for the realization of their leadership potential in the future. As a result, leadership development and opportunities for students have often been consigned to issues of only peripheral importance to the school community: school dances, pep rallies, and school fundraisers. A new paradigm of student leadership development has sought to involve youth in issues central to the communities in which they are situated. With roots in the field of positive youth development, this paradigm suggests that holistic youth development programs are more effective than targeted interventions that treat youth behaviors as problems to be excised (Zeldin, Petrokubi, & MacNeil, 2008). These new types of opportunities include the redesign of student councils to include issues of community well-being, discipline,
school climate, and teaching and learning, as well as the expansion of extracurricular and credit-bearing options in schools that address these critical issues through training, action-research, and service-learning (Beaudoin, 2005; Bickmore, 2001; Fielding, 2001; Pittman & Wright, 1991; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007; Zeldin et al., 2000). Student voice and participation in meaningful decision-making has also been shown to increase the capacity of educators to provide student-centered learning (Cushman, 2000; Kincheloe, 2007). Studies of student input into teaching and learning processes demonstrate that students can provide useful feedback on school climate and more engaging and inclusive instructional strategies (Levin, 2000; Mitra, 2004; Mitra & Gross, 2009). Teachers who have these conversations with students have been shown to be more inclusive in their teaching with greater thoughtfulness to students’ learning differences, and through a greater understanding of their students’ lives, are able to create lessons that are more relevant and engaging (Cook-Sather, 2003; Rudduck, 2007).

One of the objectives within the literature on meaningful student involvement in school decision-making has been to describe and define the shift in regard for youth capabilities and agency that is necessary for true, authentic inclusion of student leadership in schools. Through describing and defining these relationships, it becomes easier to support this shift as adults begin to differentiate between meaningful student involvement in decision-making and arrangements that continue to perpetuate more traditional relationships between students and school-based adults. As adults shift from a view of youth as the objects of adult custody and control to youth as agents with their own realized needs, desires, and goals, a shift towards a philosophy and sociology of childhood that embraces youth agency is necessary (Freire, 1998; Rose, 2011). There are
many models that attempt to document the sharing of power that happens within school settings as youth and adults work to realize this shift.

One such model is Hart’s (1994) ladder of young people’s participation, which has been adapted into Fletcher’s (2005) popular model of student involvement in educational decision-making. These models describe different methods of youth involvement in community or school decision-making arranged along the rungs of a ladder, ranging from non-meaningful forms of manipulation, exploitation, and tokenizing to authentic inclusion of students through student-led reform and youth-adult partnership. Although the concept of the ladder implies a hierarchy or ideal method of integration (with youth-adult partnership at the top; Treseder, 1997), Shier (2001) and others assert that the authentic forms of integrating student voice into school decision-making are not meant to be seen as hierarchical but rather appropriate for different situations at different times (Fletcher, 2005; Kirby et al, 2003).

Another model of levels of inclusion of youth in school decision-making is the pyramid of student voice proposed by Mitra (2005). The pyramid of student voice suggests that efforts to involve students in decision-making create the greatest benefits for both youth and organizations when these efforts move beyond simply allowing students to be heard (inviting student feedback, for example), and triggering student voice through adult efforts (collaborating with adults), but rather also building the capacity for student leadership within the organization.

Because of these efforts to describe and define the meaningful inclusion of youth within schools, many studies have been able to examine what types of practices are most successful in being able to support the levels of student engagement that are indicated by
the higher levels of these models, including looking at group size (Mitra, 2009), roles of youth and adults working together (Mitra 2008a; 2009b), collaboration with school leadership (Mitra, 2008b; Mitra, Serriere, & Stoicovy, 2012), and the necessary training and support (Mitra 2009a). However, because of the rarity of sustainable initiatives in the United States, there are still many questions about how such initiatives make themselves sustainable over time and what practices support their resilience within changing school environments.

Youth social activism and organizing

Another paradigm which has been used to approach youth-led or youth-adult led school reform has been that of youth community organizing and youth activism (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2006; Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006). Student activism within the United States has a long history of attention to both educational and community justice issues from the student protests of the Sixties and Seventies to the contemporary Occupy movement (Kenith & Keniston, 1971; Pelletier, 2011). While many of these efforts have been located within institutions of higher education, high school youth and community activists have also adapted strategies of community organizing (Checkoway & Gutierrez, 2006; Delgado & Staples, 2008; Ginwright & James, 2002; Kirshner, 2009; Sherman, 2002), and participatory action research (Cammarota & Romero, 2010; Christens & Dolan, 2011; Kirshner & Geil, 2010; Kirshner, Pozzobani, & Jones, 2011) to address issues of social justice within K–12 educational settings.

Such initiatives often address issues similar to those that youth leadership efforts address; however, youth organizing tends to explicitly situate these issues within the
context of broader societal struggles over racial, socioeconomic, and other types of injustice (Christens & Kirshner, 2011). There is a large body of research which points to the relationship between injustices within educational spaces related to race, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, immigration status, religion, ability, and other chosen and unchosen aspects of personal identity, and the experience of marginalization of many young people, leading to feelings of diminished personal agency, loss of voice, and loss of hope (Gardner, McCann, & Crockwell, 2009). Rather than treat inequities as “a set of technical challenges solved through rational deliberation or incremental change” (Mitra & Kirshner, 2012, p. 58), youth organizing approaches confront social and political barriers to community change, often by raising awareness of the experience of living, working, and learning in organizations that are governed by inequitable policies and structures (Fine, Torre, Burns, & Payne, 2007).

Research on the power-sharing necessary for successful youth-adult partnerships within the context of social activism share many similar features with the literature on student leadership. In fact, Tolman and colleagues (2001) make many of the same claims about youth organizing that advocates for student voice and youth leadership development make with regard to both positive organizational and community outcomes and individual positive outcomes for youth. Powers and Allaman (2011) similarly document the ways in which youth participatory action research strategies, a common feature of youth organizing, help support the development of new literacies, communication strategies, and expand youth’s abilities to build relationships with formal leaders in their schools and communities. Adult advisors within these contexts often grapple with some of the same challenges as adult-advisors of student leadership
programs, including knowing when to take the lead and when to let youth lead, how to maintain momentum and how to elevate youth perspectives in adult-only spaces (Fine & Cammarota, 2008; Powers & Allaman, 2011).

Youth-adult partnership efforts born from within this paradigm tend not to suffer from crises of identity around purpose in the same way that partnership efforts born out of the student leadership paradigm might, in part because of the strong foregrounding of social justice and the importance placed on addressing structural inequalities in schools and communities. However, as might be expected when inequitable power structures are challenged, youth-adult partnership work that seeks to directly address these issues can encounter significant opposition because of the conflict that such efforts create within communities and organizations (Alinsky, 1971; Christens & Kirshner, 2011). When this conflict happens within a school environment, students—subject to the custody and control of adults whose practices may be the subject of their attention—may be placed into vulnerable positions (Christens & Dolan, 2011; Taines, 2014). For example, Taines (2014) discusses the challenges that students attempting to advocate for social change faced from teachers who did not understand or were not supportive of their efforts for change, including disciplinary issues around their participation. She suggests that the youth activism paradigm could benefit from the exploration of cooperative strategies of organizing within schools that do more to buffer students from these vulnerabilities.

**Locating YATST in the literature on student voice and youth organizing**

Mitra and Kirshner’s (2012) model of the locus and focus of youth participation brings the literature from these two parallel research communities into dialogue with one
another. The model does this by identifying two distinct continuums to describe youth participation efforts that speak to the positioning of their efforts, or the locus (inside the school vs. outside of the school), and the purpose of the change effort, or the focus (youth leadership development vs. youth activism). Taken together, these two continuums suggest that activities that have been identified as contributing to school change can all be located within one framework, rather than being seen as irreconcilably different (see Table 1). Just as Zeldin and colleagues (2008) suggest that youth-adult partnerships are not any one model but rather a collection of principles applied in diverse contexts and programs, Mitra and Kirshner’s model is useful for teasing out the salient dimensions that govern differences in programs designed to increase the inclusion of youth in school reform.

Table 1. Mitra and Kirshner’s (2012) model of types of change based on philosophy of change and locus of change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working inside schools</th>
<th>Blended Focus</th>
<th>Social activism focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth leadership focus</strong></td>
<td><strong>Emphasis on structural change and developing youth skills</strong></td>
<td>Students working on school reform, often in partnership with school personnel and/or skill development with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working inside schools</strong></td>
<td>Student councils; student projects focus on changing things within schools</td>
<td>Community based organizations working within schools/partnering with schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blurred locus</strong></td>
<td>When activism leads to change and activists get a seat at the table</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working from outside schools</strong></td>
<td>Community-based organizations such as 4-H, Boys and Girls Club</td>
<td>Social change, social protest focus; driven by youth and community organizing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Social activism focus</strong></th>
<th><strong>Emphasis on structural change and developing youth skills</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blurred locus</strong></td>
<td>When activism leads to change and activists get a seat at the table</td>
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<td><strong>Working from outside schools</strong></td>
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This model is particularly useful for positioning the somewhat ambiguous role of the intermediary organization in supporting youth participation and providing technical assistance to schools interested in elevating the role of youth in decision-making. Students, teachers, and administrators also have many competing priorities that they must attend to related to the everyday work of administering, teaching, and learning. Supporting the wide range of change work necessary to redefine the most central relationships to the institution, therefore, can present a more daunting challenge than many schools or educational leaders are willing to take on alone (Beck, 1992; Fullan, 2001). One important innovation in this space, therefore, has been the role of the intermediary organization in partnering with schools to provide resources, training, and support to schools interested in exploring the possibilities of more equitable relationships with youth (Mitra, Sanders, & Perkins, 2010).

Intermediary organizations can take on a variety of roles that help to support schools in exploring the possibility of both student voice and youth-adult partnership. Mitra, Sanders, and Perkins (2010) suggest that intermediary organizations play an important role in both sparking the introduction of paradigm shifts around youth involvement in school decision-making and providing stability to nascent initiatives as groups attempt to shift perceptions of youth capabilities and agency within their schools.

Intermediary organizations’ work often falls into the “blended” or “blurred” space within the continuums delineated by Mitra and Kirshner. Because they are not located within the school, but rather support the efforts of youth or youth-adult groups located within the school, their support is mediated by the relationship that both they and the group are able to maintain with the administrators, teachers, and students in the partner
schools. Mitra and colleagues (2010), in their study of two such intermediary organizations, note intermediary organizations’ support efforts are often designed as one-time or short-term provisions of training and technical assistance. Long-term or multi-year partnerships between intermediary organizations and schools working to elevate youth voices have proven to be extremely rare, and as such, are a poorly understood and little-researched phenomenon (Mitra, 2009). In the next section, popular discourses governing school reform are discussed in reference to how they might inform the desire to elevate youth voice within schools which choose to partner with intermediary organizations designed to assist schools with such initiatives.

**Educational reform discourses and the positioning of youth participation**

As discussed in the previous chapter, although research on meaningful student involvement tends to reify arrangements and programs that serve emancipatory ends, political or practical interest in student voice may be driven more by other motivations. While noting the growth in political interest in the U.K. around youth participation and student voice, Fielding (2004) poses a provocative question:

> Is student voice best understood as part of a neoliberal project, as part of a resurgent democratic engagement, as part of a Foucauldian furtherance of ‘governmentality’, a mixture of all or some of these, or something quite different that needs to be named more eloquently and more convincingly than other discourses and frameworks currently allow? (p. 198)

In asking this question, he reflects on his own experience working with a students-as-researchers group not dissimilar to the YATST initiative and the problem of replicating the original spirit of that work in other high schools: “The brave and adventurous rupturing of boundaries and roles … in one school became a rather dull and
dutiful student-sanctioned conformism in another,” he writes (p. 203). In determining why such replication is challenging, he identifies and discusses three potential informing discourses for student voice: neoliberal, emancipatory, and post-structuralist. This section will examine the ways that those perspectives are discussed within the literature.

**Neoliberal approaches**

The neoliberal use of student voice has “contradictory, but ultimately synergistic” educational narratives (Fielding, 2004, p. 203). First, there is a repeated insistence on a focus on teaching and learning as the key for transformation, rather than a wide, multi-faceted engagement with young people (Fielding, 2010). The impetus for this sustained focus can be tracked back to the perception of the core purpose of the school: to raise student achievement in measurable and public ways (Fielding, 2004; 2009; 2010). Fielding (2004) notes how even citizenship narratives within schools are co-opted this way by the tendency to determine the merit of student councils by the extent to which they discuss issues of teaching and learning.

Secondly, the trend towards personalized learning experiences and youth development can be read as a part of this agenda: Hartley (2006) argues that the language of educational personalization is a product of a larger discourse of market-based customization and tailoring of services and, while the idea of choice may be personally motivating, Fielding (2004) notes that the illusion of choice in schools masks the ways in which options are actually constrained. Campbell and colleagues (2007) point to the ways that these constraints are a result of an increasing federal controlling interest in the purpose of education. The narrative of developing young people’s well-being, then, is
valuable because developing youth emotional intelligence contributes to the agenda of increasing measurable achievement (Fielding, 2004).

Bragg (2007a) expands on these neolibera\ally informed ideas about youth development in her historical review of the conceptualization of young people as “becomings” (Bragg, 2007a, p. 15; Oakley, 1994)—persons who are interesting not because of who they are now but rather what they will become in the future. She notes the ways that this idea is now shifting, and both Bragg (2007a) and Fielding (2004) link this shift with the expansion of neoliberal discourses in social and educational policy. All people, including young people, are increasingly being conceptualized as autonomous and individual within the policy imagination, and therefore must be more self-reliant. A complementary justification for consulting students, then, is the increasing positioning of students as consumers of their education whose demands ought to be articulated and whose needs must be met (Bragg, 2007a).

Fielding (2004; 2009; 2010) further discusses how the atomistic individualism of a neoliberal rationale and its instrumentalist perspective on learning can lead to an uncritical acceptance of voice as a unified or undifferentiated entity that can be gathered in order to ultimately enhance productivity and compliance. To demonstrate this, Bragg (2007c) uses the Foucauldian concept of governmentality as a lens to explain the ways in which youth-adult partnerships can be not only positive for students’ development but also can reinforce traditional power structures between adults and students. She notes that while projects including students-as-researchers are undoubtedly positive for students’ sense of autonomy and independence, the end result is often a school expectation that
requires that students consent to the means and ends of school not only with their bodies but with their hearts.

*Emancipatory considerations*

That consultation would be beneficial for youth makes sense for many reasons: when people feel more in control over their circumstances, they feel more empowered. Lack of empowerment has been shown to have negative academic and social outcomes: lower engagement, lower attendance, and drop out, among others (Fullan, 2001; Noguera, 2002). Student voice initiatives have been shown to yield increased engagement, as well as increased agency, belonging, competence, and discourse (Mitra, 2004; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Efforts framed as opportunities for youth marginalized because of race or poverty to be heard have been shown to make those youth feel more empowered (Ginwright et al., 2006; Ozer et al., 2010). Positive benefits have also been documented for teachers partnering with youth: more metacognitive reflection on their pedagogical practice (Cook-Sather, 2003), celebrating student diversity (Cook-Sather, 2010), challenging deficit-based perspectives for low-performing students (Diversi & Mecham, 2005), better professional development, and better teacher-student relationships.

However, if, as Bragg (2007c) argues, there can be positive benefits for student development while participating in an initiative that continues to reinforce traditional roles for youth and adults, why does the success of a program at subverting this hierarchy and furthering the emancipatory aims discussed by Fielding (2004) and reified by much of the research literature matter? The answer may perhaps lie in the way that the benefits of a youth-adult partnership or student voice initiative are distributed. Mitra (2009b) finds that youth-adult partnerships function best when the size of the group is relatively small,
usually 10–15 students per adult. However, most high schools greatly exceed this size, leading to a certain amount of representation where students in the group must consider the perspectives of, and speak for, other students. The nature of this representational role that youth play leads Zeldin, Camino, and Mook (2005) to recommend that youth-adult partnership groups attempt to incorporate a diverse group of youth so as to gain access to a variety of perspectives. However, under an emancipatory approach, the benefits of the program are meant to accrue not only to those who participate in the initiative, but also to all adults and youth within the school through a focus on transforming inequities embedded within the school culture and practices (Gunter & Thomson, 2007).

The vision of student voice as a transformative tool is premised on an idea of democratic and civic engagement that includes considering how to live well with others and takes community as the most important site of individual development (Fielding, 2009; Greene, 1988; Sandel, 2009). Incorporating a sufficient diversity of perspectives so as to create a democratically informed vision of public good, as opposed to a more “self-interested, calculative civic engagement” (Fielding, 2004, p. 207), requires collective structures for gathering voice and promoting dialogue, such as public, democratic spaces (Dewey, 1916), as well as a recognition of the act of interpretation and construction of others’ needs and desires that is implicit within representation (Alcoff, 1991). This recognition is important because, as Greene (1988, as cited in Fielding, 2009) writes, public spaces must be vigilantly maintained through attention to the role of the individual within the social and to do so, we need to “keep naming, to keep resisting what presses living beings into molds or categories” (p. 500). Therefore, the hallmark of a democratic, emancipatory approach is action mediated by reflection and a recursive attention to the
construction of the end-goal and the distribution of outcomes towards that end. By recognizing the value and uniqueness of youth perspectives, reformers interested in emancipation assume that the bringing together of youth and adult perspectives breeds creativity, productive conflict, and the ability to subvert traditional injustices in ways that either group alone cannot (Fielding, 2004).

*Post-structuralist approaches*

The third potential perspective on student voice that Fielding (2004) identifies is one which I will not discuss at length, largely because the institutional nature of schools keeps it from being realized (Fielding, 2004). However, from a theoretical standpoint, it stands as an interesting counterpoint to the other two perspectives outlined and thus ought to be included, if only to shed further light on the way the dichotomizing neoliberal and emancipatory perspectives can unnecessarily bound one’s perspective.

Post-structuralist approaches to student voice look to recognize the individual benefits for both youth and adults that can be derived from participation within these projects as well as the potential for broader societal transformation. The critique which a post-structuralist perspective offers to the emancipatory approach to student voice is to resist reifying collective action or voice and to complement these ideas with a recognition of the multiple and shifting identities that are associated with individual voices (Fielding, 2004). The post-structuralist perspective would perhaps champion an approach that looked for the opportunities for youth-adult partnership to occur organically, with local issue-based advocacy bringing youth and adults together rather than formal, standing collectivities designed for on-going action (Fielding, 2004). Given the difficulties that youth and adults already have in subverting traditional, hierarchical power relations
(Cook-Sather, 2007; Mitra, 2005), it seems unlikely that such organic unions of interest would occur; however, it does provide a vision for youth-adult relationships that is premised outside of the need to subvert traditional, existing norms, which in turn makes it an interesting thought experiment for thinking about the relationship between theory and action.

School reform discourses and youth-adult efforts for school change

These analyses suggest that framing discourse plays an important role in circumscribing the scope of the consultation that takes place and the practices that are perceived as legitimate incarnations of student voice. In practice, of course, the justifications for consulting students about their educational experiences are various, and an individual may draw on multiple or even conflicting rhetorical justifications as the foundation for engaging in this work (Bolstad, 2010; Camino et al., 2005). This creation of a warrant for the work can be encapsulated in the idea of articulating a rationale—an important part of gaining the clarity necessary for coordinated group action (Camino et al., 2005, Mitra, 2003). However, Bragg (2007a) warns of the risk that lack of value clarity has for allowing certain discourses to overshadow others in the face of conflicting justifications.

There are a host of ways in which we might surmise that an informing or framing discourse might influence the ways that youth-adult partnership work is enacted, though few, if any, studies exist that look specifically at the process of translating values into action. Rather, many empirical studies attempt to evaluate student voice and youth-adult partnership work for its authentic inclusion of youth voices without reference to broader
cultural, political, and institutional discourses which may play a part in shaping the school context and the programs themselves.

These considerations are particularly important for youth involved in action-research projects because of the variable ways that knowledge construction is considered legitimate within the context of these different discourses. For example, Bragg (2007a) discusses the ways that young people participating in youth-led research may be socialized into a school of knowledge construction that proceeds from a market-driven, youth-as-consumers perspective. Such work often draws from positivist assumptions with little discussion of the socially constructed nature of knowledge or acknowledgement of the role power plays in social relationships. Data, within the neoliberal tradition, is an unproblematised collection of information that can be better used to optimize organizational processes (Harvey, 1995). The problem of speaking for others requires a consideration of self in relationship to others and the co-construction that results from such a process (Alcoff, 1991). It also requires a reflective practice that recursively asks the participating individuals to think about the ways in which their own identities are informing the ways that they construct and engage with others (Guilleman & Gillem, 2004). Without such consideration, action-research with youth runs the risk of locating inefficiencies in the very people the project seeks to empower.

While others discuss similar theoretical concerns (Fielding, 2004), the majority of the literature on implementation of student voice and youth-adult partnership seems to focus on the best practices for managing relationships between youth and adults and subverting institutional norms (Mitra, 2005; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006), and focuses largely on demonstrating the positive outcomes for participating youth, adults, and
schools (Mager & Nowak, 2012; Mitra, 2004). By not looking closely at the connection between discourse, rationale, and implementation, this literature fails to account for an important informing piece of practice and its relationship to the types and distribution of outcomes that youth-adult partnership and student voice are able to yield.

This informing piece of practice becomes especially important in the context of an organization initiating, shaping, and providing ongoing technical assistance to schools. While UP for Learning includes a commitment to equity and attention to marginalized perspectives in their core values, schools may themselves be bound or subject to discursive demands that directly contravene these values. In examining issues of implementation and cooperative action, issues of relative power in the relationships of a diverse set of actors are important to consider, especially when the philosophical commitments of individuals or organizations may run counter to one another. Furthermore, the literature on student voice and youth-adult partnerships points out the myriad ways in which power, authority, and positioning play a role in whose voices are heard in what ways and what types of expression are sanctioned (Bragg, 2007a; Fielding, 2004).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the models of participation that undergird much of the research on meaningful youth involvement in schools, and in particular, youth-adult partnerships for school-based reform. In the next chapter, I introduce a grounded conceptual framework derived from the work of UP for Learning, the subject of my case study, to introduce a lens through which to think about value competition in youth-adult
partnership for school reform in the blended/blurred space that Mitra and Kirshner (2012) suggest exists between student leadership activities and youth activism, between insider efforts for school change and those located outside the school. As an intermediary organization providing technical assistance to groups located within schools, working for both youth leadership development and structural changes within their schools, the group’s motivations for engaging in this work are diverse and their position tenuous. The group must attend to many competing priorities at once as they engage in these change efforts. The framework that I have developed for thinking about this speaks to the groups’ decisions to attend to particular values at different times in order to navigate the ambiguity of their positioning.
Chapter 3
METHODOLOGY

Rationale for a qualitative study design

To explore the research questions laid out in the previous chapter, I conducted an exploratory, embedded case study in partnership with the Vermont based non-profit organization UP for Learning (Yin, 2009). Qualitative case study methodology can be useful when the line between context and the phenomenon of interest is blurred, as is the case in understanding the relationship between the values which inform efforts to include youth voices in school decision-making, and the way in which those values shape the work itself (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2013). Embedded case studies are appropriate when the study calls for multiple units of analysis, including some subunits of particular pieces, such as principals that work at particular schools or schools that partner with a single organization (Yin, 2009). It also allows different methods to be applied to data from any particular subunit and integrated with the case study as a whole. Therefore, an embedded case study design, focused both on the organization and the school-based experience of the YATST program, allowed me to explore the relationships between the organization’s transmission of its theory of change, the group’s decision-making processes and outcomes, and the effect of their work on the school culture and environment.

The qualitative methods used in this study are grounded within a theoretical framework of pragmatic inquiry, drawing on the work of Maxwell (2012), Biesta and Burbules (2004), and Morgan (2007). Pragmatism situates research within the dynamic relationship between understanding and experience (Biesta & Burbules, 2004). Methodology within such a relationship is driven by the needs of the inquiry. Thus, the
selection of specific methods and data sources were driven by my perception of what was necessary to adequately address my research questions. Data sources for the embedded case study consisted of previously collected data from an evaluation of the YATST program (conducted in collaboration with and under the supervision of Dr. Dana Mitra in 2012) with 11 participating schools, as well as individual interviews, participant observation, and extensive document analysis about both the organization UP for Learning, as well as for each of the two embedded cases of long-term YATST groups. In the following sections, I first discuss my motivation for selecting both YATST as a case, as well as my embedded cases, followed by my selection of specific data sources and the data collection strategies which I employed. Lastly, I discuss my approach to the task of analyzing the data, along with both the advantages and limitations of these approaches.

Case selection and background

This embedded case study of the youth-adult partnership network that constitutes UP for Learning’s YATST program consists of organizational-level data about UP for Learning, its administration of the YATST program, as well as the support and training provided by UP for Learning’s leadership team and YATST coaches. Consistent with an embedded case study design, the study also draws on 11 case studies of YATST schools participating in the program between September of 2011 and June of 2014. These 11 case studies were collected in 2012 as part of the evaluation of the YATST program conducted by myself and Dr. Dana Mitra (see Mitra & Biddle, 2012). The evaluation was designed in order to understand school-based YATST groups’ engagement with the YATST Theory of Change, as well as the way in which they handled the opportunities and
constraints of their school and community environments. Further in-depth study was conducted with two of these schools, Maple Valley High School and Pinewood High School (pseudonyms), in order to understand their daily practices, their engagement with their school and community environments, and their interpretation and enactment of core concepts in the YATST theory of change (see Figure 1).

![Diagram](image.png)

**Figure 1. Levels of analysis for embedded case study of UP for Learning/YATST**

*Selection of the YATST program as a case study*

The YATST program, administered by the organization UP for Learning, is dedicated to providing technical assistance to groups of youth and adults interested in partnering to lead educational reform within their schools. To participate in the program, schools make a long-term commitment to supporting a group of youth and adults in this effort. In exchange, the YATST program staff provide schools with on-going training in
facilitation, school change, and educational research, as well as curriculum and long-term site-based coaching.

The model that youth-adult groups participating in the YATST program follow to encourage school transformation is an action-research model based in a framework called “The 4Rs”, the central tenets of which are rigor, relationships, relevance, and shared responsibility. The YATST philosophy suggests that these elements of teaching and learning are the most important for supporting student engagement. The purpose of YATST groups’ work is to enhance attention to these 4Rs within their school, and as a result, to increase student engagement in learning.

To do this, YATST groups focus on creating, administering, and finally, analyzing the results of a school wide survey of both students and teachers on the presence or absence of the 4Rs within the current school practices and culture. Questions on this survey are designed to measure the degree to which teachers and students perceive students to be included in decision-making (shared responsibility); the degree to which student interests are at the center of teaching and learning (relevance); the degree to which students and teachers respect and confide in one another (relationships); and the degree to which students feel challenged in the classroom, but also supported in meeting that challenge (rigor). The results from student and teacher surveys are analyzed and compared to identify gaps in the perceptions of teachers and students on these issues, as well as to identify the school’s strengths and challenges in these areas.

The data that is collected is then used as the basis for facilitating dialogue within the school community about the strengths, challenges, and puzzling gaps that the YATST groups identify. YATST groups typically facilitate faculty dialogues and student
dialogues, either through the use of specific dialogue protocols or other means. These dialogues are meant to both stimulate community reflection as well as to better understand and interpret the quantitative survey data.

Finally, YATST groups formulate an action plan based on both their analysis of the data and the outcomes of the dialogues with the school community. These action plans take many forms, but are generally designed to leverage the school’s strengths to address some of the school’s challenges. Action plans in the past have included the creation of a mid-semester feedback form for teachers to use in their classes, public service announcements about credit options or alternative pathways that are little publicized within the school, or additional dialogues to go deeper on structural issues identified within the data, such as the culture surrounding assessment within the school. Once a group feels satisfied with their actions, they begin the process of action-research once again.

My selection of UP for Learning’s YATST program as the focus of my case study was informed by a number of different considerations. First, there were several practical considerations that informed my selection of this case: the organization’s reputation is excellent and has been shown by multiple university-based external evaluators to be clearly defined and of a high quality (Corbett, 2011; Downes, 2009; Goldwasser, 2010; Mitra & Biddle, 2012). The organization’s meticulous documentation of their work since their founding in 2008 provides a rich archive of documents and other artifacts to work with in analyzing their program and organizational history. Additionally, while the implementation of the YATST program model may vary from school to school, the general features of groups such as size, age of students, and action-research goals, remain
the same and thus are amenable to comparison. All of these considerations were important, as a less well-developed or more diverse program would not have allowed for the study of my particular research questions.

Secondly, there were several theoretical considerations that informed my selection of the YATST program. Through my work on the 2012 evaluation of the YATST program, I was made familiar with their distinctive approach to youth-adult partnership work. I was struck, in working through the analysis of the adult advisor interviews, at the way that some teachers, who obviously had a personal commitment to a critical pedagogy, felt disappointed by the lack of opportunity within their YATST groups to address issues of justice and power in the school environment. At the same time, in a period of organizational transition in 2013, UP for Learning defined and made public their core values—values which suggested potentially conflicting priorities and goals for YATST’s work, as well as a departure from those which seemed to inform other student voice models with which I had become familiar in the course of conducting the 2012 evaluation of the program. Therefore, the organization presented a rich case for an exploratory study of these issues that are left largely unaddressed in the student voice literature.

Selection of embedded cases and in-depth case selection

All schools participating in the YATST program in 2012 were asked to participate in the evaluation. Because of the nature of the evaluation, it was important to attempt to procure the participation of all involved schools to ensure an understanding of adult and administrator experiences with the YATST program across a wide variety of school
contexts. As a result, my study was able to draw on and benefit from the experiences and reflections of all of these YATST schools.

The selection of Maple Valley High School and Pinewood High School as embedded cases was also informed by several considerations. First, it was important to select schools that had been identified as mature articulations of the program model by UP for Learning itself in order to best understand the praxis, or the fullest expression, of the YATST model. The YATST director, Helen Beattie, identified both Maple Valley and Pinewood High School’s YATST groups as being exemplars of YATST work based on the longevity of their participation, their consistent commitment to deepening and expanding the work within their schools, and their resilience in the face of organizational challenges. Exemplars, or cases of best practice, were essential for being able examine mature youth-adult partnership work and ensure that some of the *sturm und drang* endemic to establishing youth-adult partnership work in schools (such as securing sufficient organizational resources in the form of time, money, and human commitment), did not prevent a full examination of the model.

Secondly, in framing the study, I was interested in selecting cases primarily based on duration of participation because of the likelihood that programs that have had an established and on-going presence at a school also have a rich history of program development and interaction with the school environment to study. Both Maple Valley and Pinewood had participated in the program for five years or longer and therefore represented fruitful longitudinal examples of YATST work. Lastly, these two schools were both on the cusp of administering their YATST survey to the school or were on the cusp of analyzing their data and sharing it with the school community. I had identified
this stage of the process as potentially a critical moment for the negotiation of the meaning of this work. Therefore, working with two schools both at this stage of the process was very appealing.

**Data Collection**

Two waves of data collected over a period of two years are drawn on for this study. First, as stated before, the study relied heavily on data that was previously collected as part of an evaluation. The second wave of data was collected in the 2013–2014 school year and consisted of interviews with UP for Learning staff, Vermont Agency of Education officials, as well as extensive interviews, observation, and document review of the two in-depth case studies focused on Maple Valley High School and Pinewood High School. I discuss the data collected within these two waves not in terms of the chronology of the data collected, but rather in terms of the level of analysis within the context of this embedded study to which they correspond: the organizational level, the school level, or the in-depth case level (see Table 2).
Table 2. Interviews conducted between 2012 and 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Level</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YATST Leadership Team</td>
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<td>VT Agency of Education</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Level</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kenner High School</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockbury Academy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Greenfield School</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Waterton High School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jackson High School</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Red Leaf High School</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creekside High School</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lock Hill High School</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>In-Depth Cases</strong></td>
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<td>YATST students</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YATST adults</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-YATST teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Maple Valley High School</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>YATST students</td>
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<tr>
<td>YATST adults</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-YATST teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administrators</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Board members</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*The organizational level*

Data collection to understand the decision-making, history, and motivation of the organization as it has evolved over its six-year history consisted of interviews with organizational decision-makers, including all members of the UP for Learning leadership...
team, observations of organizational trainings and interactions of members of the leadership team with organizational partners such as schools, other community-based organizations, and state agencies, and review of strategic, curricular, and publicity-oriented documents.

*Interviews:* The organization was founded in 2008 by Dr. Helen Beattie, who largely worked alone on nurturing the YATST program until other members of the leadership team were added as the organization grew. I conducted interviews with all current and past members of the organizational leadership team in 2013 in order to understand the way in which the identity and leadership of the organization has changed over time, to gain multiple perspectives on the way that the work is currently addressed, and to understand the way in which the leadership team itself works together to craft the work and organizational practices. This approach resulted in my conducting five interviews which variably lasted from 45 minutes to two and a half hours during the Fall of 2013. All of these interviews were audio-recorded.

In addition to these interviews with the UP for Learning leadership team, I drew on interview data with Vermont Agency of Education representatives in order to understand the relative position and acceptance of the UP for Learning approach to school change by the Vermont State Agency of Education. Two representatives of the Vermont Agency of Education were interviewed in 2012 as part of the evaluation of the YATST program. In 2013, I conducted a second set of interviews with these same Vermont Agency of Education representatives in order to discuss the extent to which their positioning of student agency or youth-adult partnership work had been enhanced or constrained by policy developments in the intervening year (including the introduction of
Act 77, a legislative mandate of personalized learning plans for all Vermont students from middle through high school, as well as the institutionalization of flexible pathways in all schools).

Observations: As the opportunity arose, throughout the Fall of 2013 and during a one week visit to Vermont in the spring of 2014, I was able to conduct observations of the UP for Learning leadership team in interaction with state agencies, as well as with organizational and school partners. These observations ranged from shadowing UP for Learning leadership team members in Agency of Education taskforce meetings to attending meetings between Dr. Helen Beattie and other community-based organizations with aligned change interests, to attending meetings between YATST coaching staff and school-based YATST groups. Additionally, I was also present at the majority of trainings and UP for Learning program offerings, inclusive of the YATST program trainings, throughout the Fall of 2013. During these observations, I generally assumed the role of observer. I was introduced to the participants of the meeting as a researcher working with UP for Learning (both for my dissertation study and also in the capacity of outside evaluator of two other youth-adult partnership programs being piloted at the middle school level). At organizational trainings, I sat apart from participating schools during all of the formal trainings sessions, and took field notes on my computer as well as audio-recording these trainings.

Document review: Because of my work with the 2012 YATST evaluation, I had access to previous evaluations, curriculum at various stages of development, organizational newsletters, exit cards from UP for Learning’s various YATST trainings, as well as reflections on the work from adult advisors participating in the YATST
professional learning community. Additionally, the organization’s newest publicity materials, blogs, social media account, and curriculum were made available to me during my fieldwork in the Fall of 2013.

*Relationship with Dr. Helen Beattie:* Because of the nature of this study, and because of the central role which Helen has played within both the past and current development of the organization’s approach to youth-adult partnership, it seems relevant to discuss my relationship with Helen as it evolved over the course of my study. I was introduced to Helen when I was asked by Dr. Mitra to work as a research assistant on the 2012 evaluation of the YATST program. Following our completion of that evaluation, I consulted with Helen about the possibility of returning to Vermont to work with her organization for the purposes of my dissertation study. During the time that I was putting my proposal together, we held several phone calls during which we discussed the organization’s current priorities and initiatives, the relative utility to the organization of several different topics of study that I was considering, and my dissertation proposal, which I sent to Helen for her review and input.

During my time in Vermont, my work with Helen transitioned from being that of an organizational partner to both friend and mentor. Helen extended the invitation to me to work out of her house, which doubled as the organization’s office, and invited me to local community events. Additionally, we shared many car rides to and from YATST events, traveling Vermont’s roads and sharing stories, discussing the organization’s work, their various different initiatives and plans for the future, and I shared the tendrils of ideas and reflections I was having about their work. I often took recorded or written notes after these conversations so that I could reflect on what we had discussed in memos or
remember to follow up on various strands of ideas. Most often in these conversations I listened to Helen’s reflections and posed questions about YATST’s practices.

I was wary during this time of several tensions in our relationship that I attempted to simultaneously navigate. First, my weekly work with the schools that were the subject of my in-depth case studies placed me in closer proximity, at that point in time, to their struggles, intentions, and opinions of organizational support than Helen, who was simultaneously working to support all YATST schools, as well as planning the variety of other initiatives that UP for Learning supports. Conversely, my frequent contact with Helen during this time occasionally meant that the school groups looked to me to provide information to them about various YATST trainings, programs, or practices. I had to decide the extent to which I was willing to serve as an intermediary for some of these communications, and how to communicate my position on this to both Helen and to the schools themselves. I was wary of appearing too closely aligned with Helen to the groups, or of appearing secretive about the groups’ work to Helen when I was in such an obvious position to fill a communication gap. I decided that when a question I was asked by one was purely informational, such as “When and where is [x] training happening?” or “What tasks did [x] group complete during this meeting?” I would answer with what information I had. However, affective questions from either Helen or the group participants such as “How is [x] managing with [y] task?” or “How do you think [x] feels about this?” I simply answered with “I’m not sure” or “I don’t know.”

Secondly, I found myself deeply in awe of the sophistication of the insights and the quality of the practice that Helen consistently demonstrated in working with all of the school, organizational, and state partners with whom I observed her interact. As my
project took a more clearly defined shape over the course of the semester, she and I spoke about my research design often, and she provided me with advice about what I could and could not reasonably accomplish within the time frame and resources that I had available. I was grateful for this mentorship. However, I was also aware of the differences in our philosophical commitments. I once heard Helen say that she has little use for critical frameworks for evaluating practice because of their predisposition to the paralysis of action; while sensitive to this view, I myself am deeply committed to applying a critical lens to understand how social forces shape our lives and frame or limit our thinking. I believe that it has been my desire to honor the integrity of both Helen and YATST’s regard for imperfect action and reflection over analysis-paralysis that has led me to explore the themes that are reflected in the following chapters. Therefore, if this work is guilty of bias, it is as a result of my admiration for the way in which Helen is able to continually live a cycle of action and reflection in UP for Learning’s work and a desire to portray what I see as the beauty of this approach in all of its complexity.

*Embedded case studies of YATST schools*

The 2012 evaluation, during which the majority of this school-level data was collected, was broadly focused around understanding the school-based experience of participating in the YATST program and was commissioned by YATST’s director, Dr. Helen Beattie. Specifically, the evaluation addressed how YATST groups conceptualized and implemented the YATST vision, how adults and youth responded to YATST training, as well as the longitudinal experience of the YATST life cycle, specific outcomes for youth, adults, and schools, and the long-term sustainability of YATST as an organization.
Interviews: Adult YATST advisors and school principals at all 12 YATST schools in 2012 were invited to participate in the evaluation. Out of the 12 principals to whom we reached out, nine agreed to participate in the evaluation, and out of the 16 YATST adult advisors to whom we reached out, 14 chose to participate. Special effort was made to ensure the participation of both adult advisors and principals at two schools that chose not to continue with the YATST program at the conclusion of the 2012 school year in order to get a full complement of perspectives on the merits and drawbacks of the program. At only one school, both the principal and the adult advisor of the school indicated that they were too busy to participate in the study. Therefore, 11 schools were represented in the 2012 evaluation interview data.

In these interviews, questions were asked about adults’ experiences working in partnership with students in YATST groups, the technical assistance provided by the organization, the effects of participation on YATST youth and changes that they had seen in classrooms, school culture, or school decision-making as a result of their efforts as a YATST group. In addition, principals were asked about the effects of the YATST group’s efforts on their leadership and what preparation they believed that teachers need to be supported in their efforts to engage more equitably with students.

Observations: Dr. Mitra and I observed three days of the YATST summer training institute which took place in Vermont on a college campus. The retreat is one of the most important YATST events of the year and is the time where teams gather to receive training for new and veteran members, have set aside planning time to set themselves up for success in the school year, and connect with other YATST teams. Dr. Mitra and I observed and took field notes for these three days of YATST training in
which five schools participated. Generally, we took on the role of observer, sitting apart
during both training sessions and team planning sessions and taking notes of group
activities and conversations on our laptops. However, the weekend also consisted of a
large number of team-building activities, including field games and a night-time
orienteering hike in which we assumed the role of participant observers.

*Document review:* School-specific documents were obtained both from the
school’s adult advisors and principals directly following their interviews as well as from
UP for Learning. UP for Learning provided Dr. Mitra and I with reflections from the
adults participating in their professional learning community, as well as blog posts about
the school’s progress posted on their website, newsletter updates, and exit cards collected
by UP for Learning staff from faculty and student dialogues. Schools often provided us
with copies of their surveys, copies of their analyzed survey data, summaries of their
goals for the year, as well as summaries of what they had accomplished in previous years.

*In-depth case studies*

Data for two in-depth cases at Pinewood High School and Maple Valley High
School included individual interviews with YATST students, YATST faculty members,
other faculty, district and school-based administrators, and school board members.
Additionally, participant observation data was collected through 16 consecutive weeks of
observation of school-based YATST meetings and other school-based activities, through
observations of group activities such as school-based planning meetings, school and
district presentations, and organizational-level trainings and courses, as well as through
document analysis of both Up for Learning’s organizational materials, and documents
created by the case study school groups.
Interviews: At Pinewood High School, I conducted 12 interviews in the Fall of 2013. The sampling strategy for selecting participants for these interviews was purposive, with an attempt to discuss the YATST group with youth and adults both inside and outside the group, as well as those who occupied formal leadership positions within the school and district. Participants included the adult advisor of the Pinewood YATST group and four of the core students involved with the program. Although I made attempts to arrange more interviews with students who were more peripherally involved with the YATST group, all of my interviews at Pinewood had to be arranged through the adult advisor of the YATST group, who, as the guidance counselor at the school and sole advisor of the group, was extremely busy and therefore only able to coordinate four interviews. As I had a great deal of interaction with peripherally participating students through my observations and casual presence at the school, however, I have been careful to attempt to contrast the perspectives of the core students with my perceptions of the experience of students who were more peripherally involved. Additionally, I made repeated attempts to reach out to two former youth leaders of the group via e-mail; however, no response was received to these attempts.

In addition to these interviews with members of the Pinewood YATST group, I also interviewed three teachers who remain unaffiliated with the program. These teachers were selected through the recommendation of YATST students. Throughout the semester, they mentioned many teachers in the school whose practices they felt incorporated student voice and shared responsibility in the classroom; I intentionally sought out these teachers in order to understand how they perceived the culture of the school, as well as to understand how, if at all, they perceived alignment between the current administration’s
priorities and student voice more generally. Finally, I spoke with a wide swath of administrators, both at Pinewood High School, and at the Supervisory Union level. These included the principal, superintendent, as well as two other administrators whose work specifically dealt with managing aspects of student life at Pinewood. These interviews were supplemented with two previous interviews with the current principal and current adult advisor for the YATST program that were conducted as part of the 2012 evaluation.

At Maple Valley, I conducted 13 interviews in the Fall of 2013 following a similar purposive sampling strategy. Five of these interviews were with students, including one student who chose to leave the YATST group half way through her first semester with them. The students I spoke with were purposely selected because they mirrored the demographics of the group as a whole, with an equal distribution by gender and grade level. Repeated attempts were made to reach out to one graduated student leader by email; however, these emails did not receive responses. Additionally, I interviewed two of the three adult advisors for this group. The third adult advisor of this group declined my request for an interview because of a busy schedule. I also spoke with the current principal of the school and a current member of the Maple Valley school board. These interviews were supplemented with several interviews conducted as part of the 2012 evaluation, including one with each of the adult advisors of the 2012 Maple Valley YATST group, as well as the interim principal serving at Maple Valley in 2012 (who himself was a former YATST adult advisor).

I was also able to speak with four teachers not affiliated with the YATST program by arrangement with the current Maple Valley principal, who offered to recruit four faculty to speak with me on a school in-service day. She promised to recruit four faculty
whose views would be “across the spectrum” with regard to meaningful student involvement in school decision-making. Each of these teachers participated in half hour interview with me during an in-service day late in the Fall semester.

Because of the importance of personal identity coherence to an individual’s process of sense-making (Weick, 1995), I developed interview protocols for both adult and youth interviews designed to gather data related to their personal histories (both residential and academic) as well as their perceptions of the relationship between youth agency, personal identity and development, and the work that YATST is engaged in. For adult interview protocols, I asked descriptive questions about their perceptions of the relationship between the community and the school, and the ways in which they believe their schools circumstances are affected by contextual factors such as the state context, size, and location. Protocols for student interviews were focused on eliciting their perspectives on group processes (such as recruitment, inclusion, participation, partnership with adults) as well as what motivates their continued participation in this work, what meaning they believe the work has for them, the long-term meaning for their school and community adults, and the ways in which they believe this work benefits their community (self-defined).

Observations: Because the action-research focus of UP for Learning implies cycles of dynamic interaction, it was important to incorporate observation of these dynamics and processes of negotiation into a study on these topics, particularly the discourse that is produced as a result, as it is primarily in such discourse that we can find evidence of the on-going sense-making of both youth and adults in this process (Weick, 1995). During my 16 weeks of observation in the Fall of 2013 as well as one follow up
visit in the Spring of 2014, I observed both the Maple Valley and Pinewood YATST groups within three contexts: their regular school-based planning meetings (weekly for Maple Valley, bi-weekly for Pinewood), formal presentations to local stakeholders (including at faculty meetings, to student groups, and at professional conferences), and in YATST-wide organizational trainings, such as the annual summer training, student facilitation training, and the new college level credit class that YATST offered on Communicating School Redesign Using a Youth-Adult Partnership Lens. These various contexts were important to observe for two reasons: first, the majority of the planning and project work in which the YATST groups engage happened within these contexts; secondly, the interactive negotiation and renegotiation of the meaning of this work happened within contexts where the individuals involved interacted, both within the group and with entities outside of the group (such as the school and the broader community).

During these observations, I was able to maintain a friendly, engaged, but generally separate presence from the activities that allowed me the opportunity to capture what was occurring through detailed field notes. Additionally, I used an audio-recorder to capture group interactions at most meetings, classes, and presentations that I attended, unless I felt that doing so would significantly disrupt the meeting itself. While at first, the visible presence of the audio-recorder was the source of some concern amongst the students, after the first meeting I attended, it generally seemed to be either forgotten or actively ignored.

Despite the fact that I established myself early on as primarily an observer, my opinion on issues related to data analysis, interviewing strategies, validity, reliability, and
research design were often solicited because of the natural association between the group’s activities (action-research) and my presence in the role of researcher. In some of the contexts in which I was observing, my help was formally solicited by Helen or the adult advisors of the groups with instruction or modeling of certain practices related to the research process (such as interviewing or qualitative data analysis). Where this participation is relevant to the group’s choices or my interpretation and analysis of the data, I note this in my discussion of the data.

Documents and artifacts: Documents collected for analysis included statements of the mission, purpose, and activities of YATST and UP for Learning, strategic documents relating to the short-term and long-term goals of the organization, curriculum and project guides that have been developed to support school-based group activities, as well as survey instruments, and data collected and analyzed by both Maple Valley and Pinewood. Other documents that I already had available for analysis from the 2012 evaluation included flyers, informational videos, pamphlets, training materials, and public social media activities, including regular blogs on the YATST website. In collecting these documents, I have paid attention to achieving parity around the number and type of documents and artifacts that were collected to avoid an unintentional confirmatory bias in the data that is culled from these (Yin, 2009).

Data Analysis

Broadly, my approach to the analysis of the data for this study was informed by the analytical procedures typically used in grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I began the analysis of my data as it was collected, through the use of daily memoing while
I was in the field. At first, I chose to use open coding strategies, in keeping with the grounded theory approach. However, I soon found that the breadth and depth of my data, spanning the six year history of the organization in the form of documents and interviews conducted at different stages in time, suggested that an approach that could better account for the longitudinal nature of the data was called for. Therefore, in keeping with the pragmatic framework for my study, ultimately, I chose to use narrative analytic techniques as well, followed by axial and selective coding (Polkinghorne, 1995; Saldana, 2013). In the following section, I provide an overview of both of these strategies for data analysis in allowing me to identify important ideas and concepts relevant to my research questions and to eventually fit these concepts together into the conceptual framework that I present in the following chapter.

Analysis strategies

The data itself was kept organized using the computer-assisted, qualitative data analysis software NVivo 10. The majority of my interview recordings were transcribed using a transcription service. On receiving the transcripts, I reviewed the transcription while listening to the original recording in order to ensure its accuracy and to ensure that notation of important non-verbal moments had not been omitted from the transcription. Recordings of my observations were selectively transcribed and combined with my field notes so that important exchanges between youth and adults could be preserved in their original language. All of these transcriptions, along with the field notes of my observations and organizational and school-level documents were organized into a database. In addition to these data sources, I also catalogued and continued to write the memos that are an important part of the grounded theory approach (Creswell, 2013;
Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These memos ranged from procedural memos addressing my plans to revise my interview protocols with new questions that seemed relevant to ask in light of my evolving understanding of the organization’s work to reflective memos on the consensus-driven decision-making strategies used by the schools, to analytical memos attempting to look deeply at a particular open-code.

Open coding: I began my analysis with the school-level data, using an open-coding approach endorsed by Strauss and Corbin (1998) to understand the topics addressed by my participants in their interviews and in the documents on school-level activities from 2008 through 2014. Through this approach, a coding tree was quickly developed (see Appendix A). It became clear that salient categories included the group’s relationships with the various different stakeholders in the school (with non-YATST students, with non-YATST teachers, the dynamics of the group itself, YATST student and teacher interactions outside of school, interactions with UP for Learning), the group’s process in working through the action research cycle (recruiting participants, designing the survey, collecting data, sharing data, setting goals, creating action-plans), and outcomes of the group’s work (changes in the participants, changes in individual others, changes in the classroom, changes in school culture, changes in power distribution between youth and adults). Additionally, context was an important category (relationships with administrators, school culture, staff and principal turnover, other youth voice avenues, concurrent reform, rural school issues), as well as meta-reflection on the work and important organizational concepts (including perceptions of student voice, of the purpose of YATST, the purpose of education, the 4Rs, the action-research
cycle, and rapid prototyping). Each of these coded categories demonstrated a variety of properties across the cases, and these emerged through repeated review of the data (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

*Narrative analysis:* It became clear during my analysis that through open-coding alone, it was difficult to address the change in key concepts over time and, even more importantly, to account for changes in their relative importance to the groups and to the organization over time. While I created codes corresponding to years so that data temporal queries could be run in order to view changes in the data over time, it seemed necessary to construct narratives in order to understand first, what changes had occurred over time, and second, what may have precipitated these changes. Because my research questions called for an understanding of how values are negotiated and that negotiation takes place between stakeholders over time, it became important to establish a chronological narrative in order to gain new insight into the data.

To address the temporal dimensions present in the data, I composed three chronological case narratives: one focused on the development of the YATST theory of change and the evolution of key features of the program that define its operation in the present, and two focused on the major actions taken by the groups that were the subject of the embedded case studies since their founding, one for Pinewood High School and one for Maple Valley High School. These three narratives were constructed using interviews, collected organizational documents including former newsletters, internal updates from the schools to the organization, yearly external program evaluations, curriculum, and digital artifacts such as screen captures from the YATST website in 2012.
and 2013 (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). All of these documents were reviewed in order to a) gain clarity on the timeline for the sequence and flow of events for both the organization and the two embedded cases; and b) to look for systematic changes over time in the work of the organization or the schools.

The first step in the construction of these narratives was the creation of matrices that established a timeline of major organizational and school-based events. In constructing this first matrix, which was a timeline of the introduction of YATST’s core concepts mapped against major actions taken by the groups in a given school year (such as administering their survey, starting an action research project), it was possible to see changes in the school YATST groups’ methods of data collection, approach to data analysis, and action-research projects undertaken as the key concepts of the organization changed. This finding, in and of itself, was not profound; one would expect and hope that the school group’s work would evolve and change as the organization’s own approach became better articulated and the work became clearer. However, in examining these changes, it was possible to see systematic changes in the ways in which the groups chose to spend their energy and with which stakeholders (community members vs. teachers vs. students). The nature of these systematic changes will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters; however, it is important to note that understanding these systematic changes in results, process, and relationships became the focus of the selective coding that followed.

Axial and selective coding: With this new understanding of the chronology of the organization’s work, the open coding that was accomplished in the first stage of data analysis was revisited and results, process, and relationships were examined with regard
to the three major changes to their theory of change that the organization made between 2008 and 2014. The insights resulting from these analyses are discussed in detailed in the following chapters. Both the school cases and the in-depth cases data was revisited in order to better understand the tensions in the model that precipitated these changes, as well as how those tensions shifted the groups’ understanding of their own relationships, process, and results.

Reliability and validity

Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that, regardless of method, there is no way to ensure objectivity within interpretative work. However, Hammersley (1995) argues that it is possible to achieve a subtle realism in qualitative work through working to establish confidence in one’s interpretation rather than “validity” as it is thought of within a positivist or post-positivist research paradigm. There are a number of standard practices that qualitative researchers employ in order to attempt to negotiate their perceptions, both their participants and the research community. Creswell (1998) suggests that in qualitative case study work, there are several ways that one can ensure validity and reliability within one’s work. These strategies include prolonged engagement, triangulation, member-checking, peer review, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher bias, thick description, and external audits. I have employed several of these in order to ensure confidence in my interpretation of the data.

Prolonged engagement: Over the course of the past several years, I have worked closely with the organization UP for Learning on the evaluation of YATST, as well as on several additional evaluations of youth mental models of teaching and learning and UP for Learning’s middle school level youth-adult partnership offerings. Through each of
these experiences, I have come to understand more about UP for Learning’s approach to youth-adult partnership work and am well known to many members of the YATST community.

**Triangulation:** In order to avoid relying too much on direct interpretation, or elevation of a single instance or incident, I have used the multiple levels of analysis of both the organizational case and the embedded school cases to ensure that as my hypotheses emerged during the axial and selective stages of my data analysis, I was able to test them by examining other incidents with similar or related characteristics to determine patterns within the data (Stake, 1995). Additionally, the multiple data sources (interviews, observations, and document review) ensured that key concepts indicated by one source could be explored for corroborating or contradictory evidence.

**Member checking:** In addition to the other strategies that I have detailed here, I also invited the adult advisors and one or two of the more senior YATST students participating in the study at each of the two case study schools to review my characterization of the story of their group’s work, as well as Dr. Helen Beattie. I did this to ensure that my interpretation of their experiences, constructed from my interviews and observation of their activities, accurately reflected their own interpretation of their experiences (Angen, 2000). To do this, the narrative sections of chapters pertaining to their schools were sent to each person for review, as well as relevant pieces from the narratives constructed to identify patterns within the data. While some of my participants communicated to me that they were satisfied with my narrative and only provided feedback on factual errors such as misidentified job titles, other participants provided
extensive written commentary and asked thought-provoking questions about my analysis of the data.

To these written commentaries, I responded, either in person, over the phone, or via email. The longest of these conversations was with Helen herself: a two-hour, one-on-one conversation resulted from her review of my findings, in which she asked me to clarify and explain many aspects of my interpretation of the data and provided much additional context for both the account of YATST’s development and her own view on how it had proceeded. I believe that the conversation resulted in new insights for us both, and I embarked on an extensive revision of some of the key concepts and relationships as a result of this conversation. One key change to my account, for example, was that I found in my attempts to convey the story of the development of the YATST theory of change (outlined in Chapter 4), I had, in effect, told the story of both my own developing understanding of the YATST program as I worked with the archival data I had available to me, rather than a living account of the complex interplay of the realization of Helen’s initial vision of the program, the influence of other outside factors, the organizational learning that happened as the groups enacted the work, and the creation of new tools to support the work. This realization prompted a return to the data to ensure that the story of that chapter was in fact about how the YATST school groups enacted the YATST program over time and how their enactment and their developing understanding of the concepts relevant to youth-adult partnership for school reform were influenced by the introduction of new tools to support their work.
Chapter 4
A CARE-DRIVEN MODEL OF YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIP FOR SCHOOL REFORM

“We kind of revise and revise and revise and revise and it’s just—we’re in a revision process over and over again. And, it just—it keeps going. We’re not ever going to find a solution, I don’t think, but... we always have to keep working at it, keep working at it to make it better and better as time goes on.” YATST Student

Introduction

Using an evocative and relevant metaphor, the director of UP for Learning described the contemporary work of the YATST program, now in its sixth year, as moving “out of adolescence and into maturity.” In youth-adult partnership work, the process and timing of adolescent development is a topic much contemplated, and seems a ready metaphor for thinking about the YATST program’s evolving definition of its purpose and identity since its inception in 2008. In youth development theory, moving out of adolescence and into maturity signals both an arrival and a foreclosure, as it requires settling into an adult definition of identity and self and therefore a foreclosure of other possibilities explored and rejected in the period of one’s adolescence (Marcia, 1966).

For an organization, defining a coherent purpose and theory of change is essential to transforming social practice and is key to being able to articulate the unique identity, or adulthood, of that initiative, particularly when the work of that organization seeks to challenge the trenchant, tradition-bound institutional context of schooling. Because of the social expectations and institutional norms regarding the roles and capabilities of young
people, it is not enough to simply decide to implement an initiative that involves student voices within the organization in new ways. As was discussed in a previous chapter, such initiatives require fundamentally changing the institutional roles assigned to youth and adults within these contexts. However, as Fielding (2004) notes, student voice initiatives in schools may be motivated and shaped by a variety of reforming impulses grounded in differing values. These differences, in turn, may shape the form and function student voice ultimately assumes within the school and what types of outcomes it is able to achieve for whom. As was explained in Chapter 3, many student voice initiatives are motivated by a concern for justice or critique of current practice within the school environment.

Further complicating the process, the values which inform the initial vision of organizational change are not always the values which inform the introduction and ultimately the execution of such a change initiative. The process of translating an initiative from theory to practice requires embracing the process’s natural dynamism (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2010; Fullan, 2007; McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001). As Datnow and colleagues (2010) write, change-agents must expect not only to change the context of their intervention, but must be prepared for their interventions to be molded by the context itself. In the case of elevating student voices, it is not enough to expect that merely by envisioning new ways of involving students, grounded in particular ideals, that the resulting student involvement will achieve the realization of these ideals. As becomes clear in the case of the YATST program, a vision, once implemented, requires revision, and that process affords both opportunities for greater clarity and the possibility of a gradual drift away from the original intention.
The chapter proceeds as follows: first, I provide an overview of both deliberative democracy and a morality of care, explaining the relationship between care theory, an ethic of care, and the values which inform the practice of a morality of care in contrast with the values central to a practice of deliberative democracy. Second, I present the story of the development of the YATST theory of change, constructed from interviews and document analysis. I describe in this story how the theory of change of the YATST program evolved into the “Guiding Values and Principles” that UP for Learning embraces today through an iterative process of identification, rejection, and self-definition of particular projects, values, and relationships. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of how the articulation and operationalization of the contemporary YATST program’s values, although not explicitly conceptualized as such, are shaped by a morality that foregrounds care, infused by the values derived from an ethic of care. I conclude with a discussion of what difference it makes to frame a student voice initiative from within an ethic of care, rather than other, more common values structures for student voice initiatives that have been documented within the literature. I propose using this framework as a lens through which to understand and evaluate the work of the YATST program.

Contrasting deliberative democracy and care theory

Despite linguistic differences, calls for elevating youth voices within schools, authorizing student perspectives, meaningfully involving students in decision-making, and increasing student voice are all aimed at changing the way in which young people are regarded within schools as institutions—in translating, as Cook-Sather (2002) writes, the
deeply ingrained roles into which both students and teachers are socialized into school-based, youth-adult relationships. In the following section, I discuss two models for reimagining those roles: the first, a deliberative model which has been often invoked in the student voice literature under appeals for more “democratic” incorporation of student perspectives, particularly through dialogue. I explore the assumptions ingrained in such a model and discuss these assumptions as they apply to young people. The second model I describe, based in care theory, has been little discussed within the student voice literature, but provides a different reimagining of both schools as communities and the role of adults and young people within them. Through this discussion, I aim to make clear the assumptions and value commitments upon which each model rests, and compare and contrast the assumptions about both youth and adults inherent in these.

Approaches to student voice derived from a deliberative democratic model of school communities represent an attractive method for elevating youth voices as they focus on dialogue between stakeholders within a community. Through dialogic practices, either directly or through representatives, community members or citizens come to both understand and respect each other more while arriving at more just policies to govern living and working together (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Gutmann and Thompson (2004) suggest that the practice of deliberative democracy allows citizens to resolve the inevitable moral dilemmas around the allocation of resources, standards for behavior, and other disputes which arise in the process of living collectively. At its heart, deliberative democracy rests on making rationales for action explicit: through the giving of reasons, decisions that will affect collectives are better understood by all and can, in turn, be negotiated to produce more acceptable outcomes. Individuals within such a system ought
to be “free and equal citizens” (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004, p. 24), and rational actors who can, in turn, produce reasons for their decisions and articulate the values and outcomes which must be weighed against one another within such decision-making.

Such a conception of democratic engagement is in turn derived from liberal conceptions of freedom and equality—when people come together, their rights as individuals (such as freedom of religion, non-discrimination, etc.) must be secured in order to engage in free, equitable, and just practices as a society. Through deliberation, then, individuals may work together to choose policies that are moral—often with a focus on what is just and fair—while protecting their individual rights and minimizing harm to themselves and others. In the case of student voice, the justification for including students, then, is to ensure that they, as community members in schools, have the opportunity to negotiate policies that govern their daily lives and ensure that their individual freedoms are being maximized and their rights protected within the context of a community engaged in their education. Adults within schools, in turn, listen to students because they recognize either a) their right to participate as equals or b) the rationality of what they are saying.

Care theory, in turn, is best understood in contrast to such thinking (Noddings, 1984; 2002). While rights-driven theories traditionally concern themselves with ethical decision-making based in rational thinking in order to achieve a just society, care theory begins with the concerns of the home and relationships as the starting point for the development of morality. Care theory takes the self not as an atomistic individual concerned with the maintenance of rights, but rather places the self into interdependent relation with others and centers moral thinking around the concerns of both giving and
receiving care (Noddings, 2002; Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Tronto, 1993). The need for care, in this view, is derived from the basic principle that all people have expressed or inferred needs, and that those needs can be met through relationships with others. In a morality of care, providing care for these expressed or inferred needs that must be met becomes a primary ethical concern in one’s encounters with the world. All people require both giving and receiving care as a fundamental part of their basic existence.

The giving of care in response to a recognized need is characterized first by the careful attention of the caregiver to the cared for and second, by the displacement of the caregiver’s own motivations for the goals and motivations of the person to whom care is being given (Noddings, 2002). The cared for, in turn, negotiates their receipt of this care through dialogue with the caregiver, a process which both clarifies the need attempting to be met and provides additional opportunities for caring relations in the provision and acceptance of guidance. One classic example of such an encounter might be between a teenager and a parent talking about taking college preparatory mathematics (Noddings, 2002). Noddings (2002) gives the example of Ms. A (parent) and Ben (teenager) discussing Ben’s disinclination to pursue a third year of college preparatory mathematics. “Elite University” has been “the tacit college choice” for Ben up until this point (p. 65). She presents the following as an example of care negotiation within such a situation:

1. Someone in a position of responsibility or authority (in this case, Ms. A) assesses the external conditions (Elite U. requires three years of college prep math) and the available resources [Ms. A has access to the resources necessary for Ben to attend this school].
2. From this evaluation, a need is inferred. Ben needs a third year of math (or, it is in Ben’s interest that he take a third year of math).
3. Negotiation takes place. The next steps depend on the outcome of the negotiation.
4a. The cared-for (Ben) may convince the carer that the prospect of a third year of math is too horrible to entertain seriously. He may even persuade his mother that, given his present interests and capacities, Elite U. is not the best place for him. The need is rejected as irrelevant; that is, it remains the case that any student aspiring to Elite U. needs a third year of math, but Ben—having rejected Elite U.—does not.

4b. The cared-for may reluctantly accept the need as argued by Ms. A. In doing so, he may elicit promises of assistance and support—for example, tutoring help, understanding and sympathy—if he cannot earn As, and the like. The need is accepted. (p. 65)

From this basis, the values derived from an ethic of care are able to be discerned: responsibility to others, attentiveness and reflection, connection, trust, dialogue, and constant regard for the outcomes of care that has been given (i.e., was a caring relationship established? Does the cared-for agree that caring has occurred? Was there growth?). Values derived from an ethic of care differ significantly from the values which are derived from the liberal ethic of justice which often undergirds democratic school practices (Noddings, 2002; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). While an ethic of justice is concerned with balancing the rights of the individual with the potential harm to other individuals, it often errs in practice on the side of upholding negative rights, which require no action from the one possessing them, rather than positive obligations or responsibilities (Glendon, 1991; Noddings, 2002). This practice stands in contrast to the values central to an ethic of care, which instead confer positive obligation to both caregivers and the cared-for to take responsibility for the well-being of others.

**Analytical frame for the conceptual framework**

There are three central components that I examined in my longitudinal review of the YATST theory of change. These three components are loosely based on the “spine of
collaboration” model of relationships, process, and results argued for by the Interaction Institute for Social Change. The IISC model (2009) suggests that any kind of collaborative project for social change involves managing the changing definition of roles and relationships, defining and working with an explicit change process, and being able to articulate the desired results of both these new roles and processes. This framework is useful because of the way in which it discretely defines the interactive and mutually informative nature of these elements. As one changes, so the others too must also change and adapt. I apply these broad concepts to my longitudinal analysis of the YATST theory of change by specifically focusing on these three factors at different points in time, namely: 1) How the theory of change defines the roles and responsibilities of youth and adults over (Relationships); 2) How the theory of change describes the action that the groups will take (Process); and 3) The vision of transformation that is defined by the YATST Leadership team (Results). As can be seen in Figure 2, a substantive change in any one of these components posits a similar shift to the other components.
Turning points in the life course of YATST

In the following narrative of the development of the YATST theory of change and the eventual development of the Guiding Values of UP for Learning, it is possible to see how the YATST program makes many strides in establishing what it is not—distancing itself from certain practices and ideas in order to maintain its developing identity—and how YATST uses the practice of the work to inform and reform a sense of what the program actually is and what it stands for. I argue that, within this praxis of action and reflection, the program’s practices shift from being centered within values derived from the predominant deliberative democratic model of student voice to being centered within what I term a “morality of care,” or actions informed by values derived from an ethic of care.
The construction of this narrative is informed by both longitudinal case research focused on organizational change as well as case study research using the life history method. Abbott (1988) suggests that understanding organizational change over time must begin with a chronological narrative, rather than a thematic analysis, as it is only through a time-based narrative that the relevant sequencing of events can begin to inform the researcher’s understanding of the antecedents to climactic and important decisions in an organization’s history.

Life history research concerns itself with the construction of an understanding of the events and direction that happen within the life of an individual (Reimer, 2014); rarely has it been applied in the study of organizations. However, I use the specific concept of *turning points* derived from such research to center this narrative, highlighting moments in the history of the YATST program where shifts in practice or a revision of concepts occurred in order to trace the evolving nature of the program’s informing values (Verd & Lopez, 2011). Turning points in developmental life history research describe “a substantial change in the direction of one’s life” (Elder et al., 2004) and are often responsive—an event or circumstances leads to an agent’s adaptation, which in turn begins a new trajectory for the agent (Verd & Lopez, 2011).

Turning points are differentiated from other types of changes because of the introspection that they prompt and the changes in self-interpretation that they inspire (Rosenthal, 1997). Since its beginning, YATST has embraced a rapid prototyping approach to the development of this work. “This is such a dynamic organization,” said one of the leadership team members in an interview in 2014, “we are never in a steady state.” Within a rapid prototyping paradigm, there is the acknowledgement that no
program will be perfect and therefore it is useless to strive for perfection, but rather to simply reflect on and refine the work as it unfolds. Similar to an individual navigating and adapting to the circumstances of their life, the YATST program has always embraced an “act first, reflect afterwards” approach to their work, while also trying to embrace and operationalize key values and principles. Action is prioritized to maintain forward momentum and excitement, with theory following after in order to communicate the lessons of the work to new schools and stakeholders.

Because of this approach, recognition of shifts in the operationalization of key organizational ideas or even systemic changes within those organizational ideas and practices tend to lag behind the implementation of those shifts, leaving the definition of the organization’s work constantly in a state of catching up to the forward momentum of the work itself. Helen acknowledges this trend, and likened the organization to a “plane that is already going where we’re just trying to grab onto the wing.” The story of the development of YATST’s theory of change, then, is a story of action followed by reflection, followed by action, in a sequence of iterative revision that changes both theory and practice simultaneously. The concept of the turning point as applied in life course research is useful within this context for understanding organizational behavior based in the rapid prototyping paradigm because of the similarities between the way in which responsive action and reflection shape the changing trajectory of the organization.

The founding and conceptualization of the YATST program

As discussed in previous chapters, youth-adult partnership consists of two important components. In addition to describing a more equitable and mutually respectful
relationship between youth and adults, in contrast to traditional youth-adult relationships based primarily around custody and control, youth-adult partnerships are about young people and adults working together towards a defined end (Wheeler, 2000). In the case of the YATST program, groups consisting of both young people and adults were established at partner schools as a long-term entity that could continue to work on the issues of meaningful student involvement in a sustained and on-going way as cultural insiders (Mitra & Kirshner, 2012).

The impetus for the YATST program originally came from the Vermont Principals’ Association (VPA), a statewide professional organization interested in working to meet a need that many schools had expressed to elevate the role of student voice within their schools. According to their website, the mission of the Vermont Principals’ Association has been to coordinate the collective interests of the network of educational leaders interested in improving the quality of educational opportunities for Vermont’s youth. While the VPA had previously supported initiatives to develop the capacities of student councils, the organization felt that more could be done to support partnership between students and teachers around learning, school policy, and school-community relationships (Downes, 2009). According to the VPA in 2008, “the ‘forces have never been better aligned to successfully orchestrate a plan to transform Vermont schools through the development of authentic youth-adult school partnerships and collaborative decision-making - Student Voice” (Downes, 2009, p. 1).

Dr. Helen Beattie was asked to take the lead on this initiative because of her extensive prior experience working with Vermont schools on a variety of youth development initiatives, including programs focused on enhancing the capacity of student
councils, community building, building school-community connections, or enhancing students’ sense of place. Helen had worked as a school psychologist and educational consultant for 15 years prior to joining forces with the VPA to work on this initiative. The work of cultivating long-term, in-depth youth-adult partnerships for school reform, however, was new to both her and the VPA. Schools recruited into the program were required to make a three-year commitment to the work of youth-adult partnership as coordinated by the YATST program. Initially, four schools participated, each convening a group of students and adult advisors to create what were referred to as “Student Voice Groups” in the first year.

The initial mission of the YATST program was to,

Increase student engagement in learning and desire and capacity for civic engagement, by shifting the culture of Vermont schools from one dominated by rules and adult control, to a culture of joint ownership of learning through collaborative decision making. (Downes, 2009, p. 8)

As the Executive Director of the VPA stated at that time,

The ultimate goal of [this] Student Voice [program] is to establish self-sustaining, student-adult decision-making teams at each school that will be replenished with new students every two years as seniors graduate. (Fall Newsletter, 2008)

The means to achieve this mission was conceptualized as an “action research model” to change embedded “attitudes, culture and structures” (Downes, 2009, pg. 8) that limit student involvement in curriculum design, school structures, policy development, and civic engagement opportunities. Success measures were defined as the number of students reporting that they had a “say in their education” (Downes, 2009, pg. 9), definitive changes in school culture, a decrease in discipline referrals, an increase in
student academic performance, and the meaningful inclusion of students in decision-making areas traditionally reserved for adults.

From the beginning, the central concerns of the YATST program were both ends and means oriented. While the broad reform goal was to establish a new paradigm for youth-adult relationships within participating schools, the statement of the Executive Director of the VPA indicates a recognition that it would take the dedicated efforts of educators and students working together over many years in order to be able achieve this. There was a recognition that the “culture of joint ownership of learning through collaborative decision-making” envisioned in the mission statement would not be achieved overnight and that the “Student Voice” groups which were being formed at each participating school would be working for change over time from the inside by modeling youth-adult partnership and working to expand its reach.

From these early statements of purpose, the centrality of student engagement to the mission of YATST can be easily discerned in the primacy placed on teaching and learning concerns as well as concerns about student life, climate, school culture, and school-community relationships. There was a reliance early on in the YATST teams’ work on the writing of Fletcher (2005) and his definition of meaningful student involvement. Aimed at practitioners, Fletcher’s (2005) guides to student voice practice invite adults and students to “envision school classrooms where teachers place the experiences of students at the center of learning, and education boardrooms where everyone can learn from students as partners in school change” (Fletcher, 2005, pg. 4).

Fletcher’s work approaches student voice from the perspective of both creating a culture of deliberative democracy within schools as well as increasing a focus on
marginalized perspectives—both aims that the YATST program seemed to include within the scope of what they hoped to achieve at the outset of the program’s creation. The emphasis on community, inclusive of both residents and of the school board is clear. Given the strong public discourse of local decision-making and community-driven accountability in Vermont, it is perhaps unsurprising that the initial statements of the program’s purpose place it firmly within such a discursive tradition.

However, as observed by McLaughlin and Mitra (2001), moving from the initial conceptualization of a reform to implementation often introduces new, unexpected elements in the translation from theory to practice, sometimes fundamentally changing the conceptualization or scope of the reform itself. As YATST school teams began to take the early core concepts of the program and put them into practice, it is possible to see subtle refinements to these concepts in their translation and operationalization.

Navigating uncharted territory the first and second year

While the goal of increasing the role of youth in decision-making in schools was clearly shared amongst all of the first year YATST participants, the extent to which the participating groups were able to articulate the desired ends defined by the VPA is unclear from the documents generated during this early period (which Downes (2009) alludes to in his evaluation of the program). However, the overall goals of the groups were discussed at the initial training provided by Helen. One teacher reflected upon the conclusion of that training,

It will take both the teacher and student’s ability and willingness to listen to those voices that have long been suppressed by fear of judgment or the fear of just not being heard at all. I believe the common cause, to learn how to speak up and be willing to listen, was established during these
three days. Now it is up to us to make sure we sustain this ability in order to be successful in our goal.

It is clear from this teacher’s reflection that the first and most important work of this new “student voice” group, prior to contemplating school-wide reform, was to establish equitable, mutually respectful relationships amongst themselves, to relearn how to relate to one another. In order to use youth-adult partnership as a tool for change, it was necessary for the groups to be able to use this tool effectively amongst themselves.

The first public report of YATST’s early work is detailed in the Fall newsletter in 2008. The overview given in the newsletter makes reference to its “fuzzy” quality, comparing the collection of student voice within each school to a “fishing expedition”. The newsletter implied that a clear focus was, in fact, still either in development or that the transmission of the defined purpose from Helen to the schools was still a work in progress. As one principal is quoted as saying in the same newsletter,

Through this work we are challenging the status quo. However, we are not sure of what we hope to put in its place. It comes back to trust. I’m thankful that I am not doing this alone.

With the desired results of this work so broadly conceived (i.e., increase student engagement through student voice) and the process still being determined by the participants themselves, there was a diffuse quality to the work in the first two years. The question of how to define student engagement and civic participation as laid out in the mission statement remained a question for the groups largely to define themselves. While all of the groups worked within the loosely defined boundaries of an action research model, collecting youth voice in order to create action plans to address youth concerns, the means of collection and the resulting action varied significantly between schools.
The Fall newsletter recounts how one group created a box for student suggestions, called the Student Voice Box, while another group conducted focus groups. The groups felt free to concentrate on whichever issues their participants were interested in, which ranged from changing the dress code, to how teachers were changing their instruction to adapt to the new school schedule, to the relationship between the school and the community itself. The charge to the groups was the elevation of youth concerns and the collection of student voices, and they went about pursuing this goal with an excited determination to transform the school, but little idea of what transformation ultimately ought to embody other than increased attention to youth voices (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. YATST Theory of Change: Relationships, Process, Results
All of the participating schools gathered at a conference in the late Fall of the first semester to reflect on the strategies that they had chosen to collect student voices and to conduct a “data analysis day” through which student needs able to be addressed through action plans could be identified. Downes (2009) notes that students who initially participated in the retreats had learned skills for conducting focus groups and engaging other students in this work; however, by this retreat, the groups realized that they were having difficulty using these strategies to get students who had not attended the trainings and were not a part of the YATST group excited about the idea of student voice. As one student Downes interviewed noted,

We were doing all of these activities and stuff with people who were sort of like in the group and interested in changing things, but when we actually had to do it with people who weren’t in our group and who weren’t that excited about it, it was just like it didn’t really help that much. (Downes, 2009, p. 32)

Historically, YATST has always struggled to involve students who themselves struggle with school. Many adult advisors characterized the participating students as being primarily the “high-flyers”, the “grandmasters of school as a game”, “type-A, college-bound students”, or, at one school, “white, middle class females.” As one YATST advisor put it,

We really, really wanted it to be as representative of our demographic population as possible. We started from there. We tried to find kids who maybe were more disenfranchised. We tried to find kids who maybe didn’t come to school all the time, and all those sorts of things. What we discovered is, those were the kids that were gonna struggle to come to school longer to be in a meeting, or to do something school type in the summer. You know, "Hey, we're gonna do a school activity for two days in the summer. Won't that be fun?" Those kids are like, “I don't think so.”
As the participating schools entered into the second semester of this work in the first year, in an attempt to address this issue of engaging the voices of all students, Helen advised all of the teams to adopt a data-driven, survey-based approach to the collection of student voices. This approach was modeled on the strategy devised by one of the four school groups in the first semester. Groups that had previously attempted to collect voice in other ways gradually began to move away from those projects and to focus on the development of a survey tool that could be administered to the entire student body or to identify existing survey data (such as previously administered climate surveys).

_Growing tensions in defining relevant concerns_

As the change work that these groups were undertaking began to garner momentum and attention, areas of tension in moving from theory to implementation began increasingly to reveal themselves. One of these tensions included some pressure on these newly created YATST groups to better differentiate themselves from existing student groups, such as the National Honor Society, the Student Council, or the Key Club. These groups also purported to enhance student voice and leadership through student decision-making and community involvement. It was difficult for groups to articulate what their action-research approach really brought to the school that student council, for example, was not positioned to provide. Articulating the institutional legacy and the historical positioning of student council versus what youth and adults saw as the unique contribution of YATST was not an easy task for many YATST members and occasionally led to turf wars between these organizations within schools.

This conflict seemed to be exacerbated in some of the very small public school environments unique to Vermont. For example, at Kenner High School, a high school
consisting of fewer than 50 students, the YATST program faced a great deal of opposition despite a faculty of only five people because the adult advisors of both the student council and the National Honor Society felt that YATST’s large membership and the service learning activities that it was engaging in (mostly for team-building purposes) were too similar to what those organizations were attempting to offer to students and that the school could not support sufficient membership in all of these organizations. Ultimately, the principal had to be involved in resolving the dispute between these organizations.

Even within the groups themselves, it was clear to some adults by the second year of the program that better boundaries were needed in order to more effectively leverage student voice as a tool for institutional change. In Goldwasser’s (2010) Year II evaluation of the program, one principal was reported as saying,

I don’t think that everybody had gotten the vision of the cycle or what the work was really about. I mean I know this [YATST] is like a student advocacy voice which I have always felt is a hugely important piece of any school climate and culture. But just getting the idea of how do we make this systematic and really address actual needs in the community rather than saying, “Well let’s get a student lounge.” (Goldwasser, 2010, pg. 5)

For this adult, the diffuse focus of the purpose of the groups seemed to mean that all needs expressed by students ought to be given equal consideration as important. Contemporary YATST participants, particularly adults, also often remarked on the tension over differentiating between responding to needs expressed around improving teaching and learning and climate or lifestyle concerns of students. As one adult advisor told me while reflecting on the early work of her group,
We [the adult advisors] felt like the YATST work needed to be different than...doing activities to get Styrofoam out of the kitchen or whatever. We wanted a group that focused on how do we make meaningful change in the classroom. We learned that from not being diligent about that focus the first time around.

Other adults discussed students wanting to change the cafeteria food, or used examples of other “student voice” groups in the school that had advocated for more relaxed standards around senior privileges or sports participation being pegged to grade point averages. One adult advisor made this distinction when she talked about what had initially excited her about YATST in comparison to her previous experience with other student groups,

With student government, [it was] always trying to figure out a way to make that have more clout in the school, so it wasn't just let's have a raffle, and let's have a bake sale, and let's paint the cafeteria. When I was approached about... this initiative and read the first description, I was immediately on board. It looked to me like the thing I had been yearning for, a way to really develop youth and adult partnerships that could change meaningful things in the school, things that mattered to kids in the classroom.

One of the school board members I spoke with at Maple Valley, citing his own experiences as a parent, seemed to capture the underlying dilemma that many of the adults that I spoke with referred to by saying,

There is a body of life experiences that occurs over time that positions you to be able to make informed—have important—have more or less informed options. I think that (pauses)—I’ve done a lot of work around service learning and voice and choice, and as you think about the middle school level for example. [A teacher says], “What do you want to do? Let’s do this service learning project for the school. Let’s do something for our school as a community. What do you want to do?” And if the students don’t have necessarily a sort of a broader framing of how they would pursue that then they say, “Let’s bring in vending machines with junk food.” I mean, kids really want junk food. And you’re kind of saying “Well, you know, I think that’s sort of outside the bounds of what’s possible in this context.”
The point that this board member makes suggests that, when given all the possible issues that one could talk about with regard to schooling, young people’s experiences may point them in directions that seem, to adults, unimportant, unless provided with scaffolding that directs their attention in other ways. I often heard this referred to in the YATST community as students’ “learned passivity”. The term seemed to imply the belief that, given sufficient scaffolding and the benefit of adult perspective, youth would naturally gravitate to issues that were more important to the central mission of schooling, such as teaching and learning.

*The tension inherent in liberal democratic approaches to student involvement:*

The tensions expressed by adults participating in piloting this youth-adult school change effort suggest the difficulty of authorizing student perspectives while also recognizing the role of youth experience and cognitive development in shaping those perspectives. Within the context of an institution whose express purpose, they felt, was to both provide students with new experiences and to scaffold their cognitive development, it was difficult for adults to authorize student change initiatives, such as changes in cafeteria food or the creation of a student lounge, that were grounded so centrally in the concerns of their school’s youth culture. Change of the institution, they seemed to imply, ought not to be based in these peripheral concerns, but rather ought to be based on the adult-defined mission of the organization.

This tension belies the difficulty of basing youth participation in decision-making purely within a liberal democratic, or a rights-driven framework. Research on youth culture suggests that youth develop their own lifeworlds and culture within schools, a culture that is both intersectional with and separate from the latent custodial prerogative
of most schools, the “rules and control” alluded to in YATST’s early mission statement (Levine & Youniss, 2006; Warikoo, 2011). Because of the balance of power our society sanctions between youth and adults, and in particular, the way that this manifests in schools, youth concerns about issues of bodily control, personal expression, or everyday experience that result from the intersection of youth culture and school rules have little opportunity for redress within the school system (Warikoo, 2011). Historically, student councils have dealt with these concerns, although the lack of support, training, or procedural efficiency of these student advocacy bodies, combined with the obvious adult discomfort in addressing these issues (a discomfort which is possible to see here even in participating YATST adults), means that little is done to address these issues.

In light of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that, when equipped with sophisticated training, support, and opportunity, some students use this capacity-building to advocate for these issues. Within a democratic or rights-driven framework, it is difficult to address or redirect these issues without fundamentally falling into the trap of tokenizing, ignoring, or only partially authorizing student participation in decision-making. The redirection of student attention that often happens within school-based youth-adult partnership practice driven by democratic or rights-based justifications is difficult to interpret without understanding it as the selective, discretionary exercise of adult authority and boundary-setting.

As these concerns were raised, the YATST leadership team was discussing the creation of a focusing framework for the work—a framework that could help to distinguish YATST from other groups purporting to enhance student engagement, as well
to address the rising tension between “cafeteria”-level concerns and concerns centered on teaching and learning.

**Turning Point #1: The introduction of the Rs**

Towards the end of the program’s second year, Helen unveiled a new guiding framework for the organization’s work—the three R’s, or Rigor, Relevance, Relationships, and a fourth R introduced several months later, Shared Responsibility. The 4R’s framework has become one of the defining features of the YATST approach to youth-adult partnership work and was introduced by the YATST leadership team as a way to “focus” the work. These R’s were chosen based upon research which Helen felt had demonstrated that by increasing the quality of student-teacher relationships, introducing greater rigor through developmentally appropriate challenges, and ensuring authentic connections between students and the content of the curriculum, students’ engagement with school could be increased (see Cushman, 2013; Dewey, 1938; Dweck, 2006; Hattie, 2009; Medina, 2008; Ormrod, 1999; Sousa, 2006; Toshalis & Nakula, 2008; Willis, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978).

The effect of the three Rs upon the relationships, process, and desired results of the YATST theory of change substantively served to narrow the focus of YATST teams from all possible concerns raised as a result of collecting student voice to working specifically with concerns that could reasonably fall under the banner of rigor, relevance and relationships. In essence, this focus suggested several key reimaginings: first, restricting the focus to teaching and learning suggested the legitimacy of adult concerns about the relative importance of these issues versus others, and in turn, repositioning the
youth-adult relationship as one that, while still a partnership, had parties who brought different life experiences and strengths to it. Secondly, this recognition prompted a reimagining of the data collection process which had come to inform the YATST action-research process. Instead of focusing uniquely on student concerns about school, adult perceptions now needed to be considered as well, and the focus of the process shifted towards understanding the differences and gaps in the perceptions of these two groups. Lastly, the desired outcomes were similarly restricted to outcomes that resulted in greater engagement of students in teaching and learning specifically (see Figure 4).

To these three initial Rs, a fourth was later added: shared responsibility. The story of how shared responsibility came to be considered a fourth R is a popular and familiar story within the YATST program that is often shared at orientations and trainings. A student in the program, after being presented the framework of the three R’s based on reviews of educational research, questioned how this framework related to the partnership model that YATST embraced as part of its theory of change. From this questioning, the fourth R, shared responsibility, was born, meant to embody the sharing of responsibility
necessary for engagement in teaching and learning by both youth and adults.

Figure 4. YATST Theory of Change after introduction of the Rs

The organization’s training materials were revised to reflect the central position of this new framework. Additionally, the mission statement of the organization was revised during this year from the initial mission statement crafted at the outset by the VPA Student Voice Committee to the following:

The mission of YATST is to increase student engagement in learning and voice in decision-making by creating a partnership between students, faculty and the community to increase rigor, relevance, relationships and shared responsibility in learning through action research.

Notably absent from this revision were prior mentions of “civic engagement” or a description of the school environment as one characterized by “rules and adult control”.
The authorization of adult experience:

In adopting this framework, adult perspectives derived from their life experience no longer needed to conflict with their desire to involve students meaningfully in school decision-making. Instead, the basis for determining the purpose of youth involvement (increased student engagement) was, in essence, outsourced to that of adult researchers, framed in an adult-defined, societally sanctioned understanding of youth-development. With the purpose of the initiative so defined, the positioning of adults’ unique contributions to the work changed. Within the work of attempting to elevate youth perspectives on schooling as an institution, it was difficult for adults to find a place for themselves in a partnership that included issues exclusive to youth culture or lifeworlds. However, with the aims of the group defined so that all of the group’s work touched on concerns that were also important within adults’ school lifeworlds and professional identities, namely, the engagement of students in teaching and learning, adult experience with these issues suddenly became an extremely salient and important perspective for YATST groups working for change. As one adult advisor from Maple Valley put it, I think the teachers know a lot, and it's our job to help kids learn what we know. There's a lot we don't know. I mean, I always say the longer I live the more I realize what I don't know… I think in terms of having a voice in what they're learning, and having a voice in how they're learning it, that doesn't necessarily mean that their voice vetoes. It's having a voice and partnership with the adults, and being able to have their opinion, and being able to give their feedback. It's not youth's voice is vetoing and saying, "This isn't how it's gonna be." It's youth's voice in a way of developing and understanding. Sometimes when the youth comes to the table and says, "I don't understand this. I think it's wrong." The adult has the opportunity to say, "Here's the why." Then you find your common ground.

Similarly, one of the students from the Maple Valley group told me,
Working with the adults is being able to go to them, ask if [what you’re feeling] is an actual serious problem or just a complaint, cause you are having a bad day, and see if they have an idea, and if you have an idea, working together as a way to improve it and build upon it so that it’s better for others, so when they go and talk to the adults that they have relationships with, they can find something else and a different perspective and check out something else that you may have missed.

In restricting the concerns of YATST groups to the concerns of teaching and learning, there seemed to be an acceptance between both youth and adults of the YATST groups that adults could bring their life experience to bear on the definition of salient problems for the group to work on in within the institutional context of school. Many of the YATST students that I spoke with were quite explicit and self-aware about the ways in which they perceived their perspectives were limited by their lack of life experience or their myopia when trying to look at the big picture. As another Maple Valley YATST student told me,

We [youth] have a very—not skewed, but different outlook on life. And sometimes it leads us to say or think things that may not completely make sense to other people who haven’t experienced emotionally or whatever what we feel and think. Because we perceive things very, very differently than adults do. And you just need to ask [youth] why they feel that way and then try to find that little piece of information that is at the end of the tunnel of emotion.

Several youth with whom I spoke talked about the utility of adult perspectives born of their life experience as the most salient and important feature of youth-adult partnership, rather than the skills that adults brought in terms of helping youth organize their meetings.

*Change in the focus of concerns*

Introducing the 4Rs became an effective way to address the tension that adults were expressing around addressing the issues in school which were most important (to
them) by cultivating a shared understanding amongst participating youth and adults that issues related to the 4Rs were the only ones that would be addressed through the data. Therefore, the issues derived solely from youth culture or lifeworld concerns fell outside these new boundaries and could be taken off the table in most cases without much dispute.

It did prove difficult for some groups to embrace the 4Rs as a guiding frame for this work. At Greenfield Academy, for example, the students in the YATST group insisted that the dress code was an issue that they felt ought to be addressed, particularly the issue of whether students should be allowed to wear hats in school. The YATST coach assigned to this school attempted to work with the group, trying to convince them that attempting to change the dress code did not really serve to increase the presence of any of the four R’s within the school; however, the students could not be dissuaded. The resulting impasse, in combination with some changes within the school, resulted in the school finally deciding to take a sabbatical from YATST work in the following year, to “wait for those students to graduate,” in the words of the YATST coach.

However, most schools embraced the framework as a guide for the work. In some sense, by having a focusing framework provided, YATST adults were freed from worrying whether or not the purpose of the work would be compatible with their perception of the mission and purpose of school as an institution and allowed them to focus on leveraging their professional training and experience to provide a contextualizing perspective and organizational support for student-led change efforts. As one adult advisor said
YATST provides this great foundation so there’s kind of a clear idea of the overarching purpose of what we’re doing without really knowing what each step is going to be and what the action is we’re going to take because we don’t know, it has to be guided by the data but that there is this really clear process … so there’s no kind of confusion about what everybody is doing there. I think there’s a real sense of purpose that those kids bring to the table when they get together.

In addition to changing the focus of the action-research projects that youth and adults undertook, the introduction of the 4Rs suggested new understandings for both youth and adults of their roles, both in the group and as change agents within their schools. One of the students I spoke with talked about how coming to understand the 4Rs reframed some of her and her peers’ personal experiences such that she saw the need for change in a new, urgent way,

When I started YATST earlier this year, I had no idea what the 4Rs were when I read them in the very big packet that came in. I still didn’t completely understand till we talked about it at [that training]. And that kind of made me realize that just for schools—[the 4Rs] are actually much more important than they may seem. I think that recognizing the personal experiences with [the 4Rs] that you’ve had and that you’ve seen other people have makes it so that it kind of gets under your skin and you want to make it better.

For another Maple Valley student, a long-time YATST participant since his freshman year, the 4Rs framework had come to completely define his sense of the essence of student voice. In his words,

Student voice is the act of students trying to take control of their education and trying to make it relevant, rigorous and trying to get relationships out of it. Just the 4R's in a nutshell and just trying to make it an experience that benefits both them and the society if that makes sense.

One teacher with many years of experience facilitating action-research projects to address issues of social justice in a credit-bearing class expressed the difference in focus
brought about when her class, as the first credit-bearing YATST class, began to focus on the 4Rs:

[Previously] student action projects were not targeting educational reform but in effect the process was that of educational reform in that students were able to practice participatory action research within their locus of control. So, prior to our focus on the “4 R’s” students might have been moved by issues of hunger in a global or national sense but felt the most effective way for them to complete an action was to bring it to a local level. Developmentally that was a really effective way to bring about change and commitment to the students’ sense of place… After our increased clarity in the 4 R’s and focusing on the most immediate community students participate in, our work shifted to make our schools more responsive to students’ educational needs and issues of injustice. By doing so, we found ourselves meeting a more desperate need and relevant need of students.

It is possible to see the increasing clarity that such supports provided in helping schools to use the action-research process to translate the 4Rs-driven approach into action within their schools. A comparison of the action projects which groups undertook in 2009 to those undertaken in 2011 makes this clear. As can be seen in Table 3, the projects in 2009 address a broad variety of school and community needs, reflecting the focus at that time on both civic and academic engagement that took a broad view of the definition of the community. These included the nutritional, academic, student lifestyle, and relational needs of both students and their families. By 2012, the focus had clearly shifted towards concerns bounded by the framework of the 4Rs and the dialogic model of change. Groups’ efforts are focused on hosting student-teacher dialogues on a broad range of teaching and learning topics, establishing good youth-adult dynamics within their groups, attending to systems meant to enhance opportunities for students and teachers to assess
their performance of their respective roles in the classroom, and creating systems to increase the relevance of curricular material.

Table 3. Comparison of YATST projects from 2009-10 to YATST projects in 2011-12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of YATST Team Projects in 2009-10</th>
<th>Examples of YATST Team Projects in 2011-12</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earned the privilege of ‘outdoor lunch’ for students</td>
<td>Hosted a ‘fishbowl’ dialogue between teachers and students about the format of mid-term exams and how they could be restructured to meet more students needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created a Principal Advisory Committee of four students to assist in the creation of school policies</td>
<td>Hosted faculty and student wide dialogues about survey data; hosted follow up dialogues with small groups of 10-15 teachers and students to better understand root causes and solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created student-teacher feedback forms</td>
<td>Created student-teacher feedback forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased the number of families eligible to enroll in the free and reduced price lunch program</td>
<td>Raised money for service learning trip to NYC in order to build a better YATST group dynamic in a small school setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raised money to buy new gardening tools in order to create a school garden and raise awareness about proper nutrition</td>
<td>Presented a skit at a faculty in-service day to introduce research on how the brain processes information to faculty and administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created a ‘muscle your way to school’ campaign to promote healthy lifestyles</td>
<td>Created a video through interviews of teachers, students, administrators, and parents about the power of self and teacher expectations in shaping students’ learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created a curriculum for the Teaching Advisory System to improve teacher-student relationships and mentoring</td>
<td>Created a system for mapping 9th grade students’ interests to the curriculum in order to make more relevant connections between student interests and the curriculum</td>
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</table>

However, in 2013, it was clear that in YATST schools which had been participating in the program for a long time, such as Maple Valley and Pinewood High Schools, that this framework for understanding their efforts had, to a certain degree,
become clear to non-participating faculty. Although one non-participating teacher at Pinewood told me that he “didn’t really understand what YATST’s goals were,” he understood that they wanted to make change and that it was different than “fighting for a pop machine,” which he specifically identified as something a student council might do.

However, in spite of this modicum of acceptance and differentiation, some of the YATST adult advisors with whom I spoke with told me that they were still worried about the way in which student voice initiatives that were not informed by the 4Rs would affect the way that the YATST group was perceived. This was particularly true at Maple Valley High School where other institutionalized, less bounded avenues for youth voice existed. At Maple Valley, a previous principal had instituted a community-wide process for proposing a change to school policy. Christened the “Maple Valley Change Process”, the process allowed any student, staff or faculty member to submit a proposal to the administration that they would then present to the students and to the adult department heads to vote on. Whatever the community decided on through this process would then be binding for the whole community. One of the adult advisors described a recent attempt to do this and his perception of the risk of YATST being associated with those efforts:

I was having a conversation the other day, when somebody had said, you know, student voice—[this was] a naysayer—who was saying student voice is not doing anything good in this school. On the contrary, it’s hurting the academic integrity of my class. The only thing I see that student voice has accomplished this year at Maple Valley was loosening the requirements for free time, to be able to access free time, which we call up time here. You need to, if you had anything below a C minus you lost your free time I should say, your kind of choice to go wherever you want. You needed to go into a structured study hall. Okay? Not YATST, but a group of students had a conversation with the administration, and they got that loosened up to more than, it’s like up to two grades lower than a C minus or something like that. They worked the [Maple Valley Change Process] to get less rigorous standards implemented in that. That
is not something that was not good advertising, and we made sure that people were not making the connections to YATST with that because that’s not what we’re about… We have to be careful as to how we navigate.

Other change initiatives originating from students that did not advance the goals of the 4Rs were seen to be a threat to the receptivity of student voice in the school. During the time that I spent at Maple Valley, students and adults told me of other ways in which students had chosen to use the Maple Valley Change Process, including instituting a “no-homework” rule over school vacations without prior notice and creating a student lounge. Perhaps because of this, one of the Maple Valley YATST students reflected on a visit that he had taken to a “transformed” school on a YATST field trip.

When we were visiting the school in [town name] and I saw that they were rewriting the handbook, I thought that that was a little weird because that handbook is set up as, it's the ground rules of the school and if you're changing the foundation of it then that might be a little too much. Especially things regarding consequences for actions and such, I think that should be set by an adult panel or board. Some things should be kept out of the hands of students because frankly, our brains aren't developed. We're not thinking amazingly clearly. We do think clearly, but it's not at the same place, if that makes sense. It's not at the place of adults.

In his statement, this student suggests that, because of the nature of adolescent brain development, he may not have a right to participate in the negotiation of the rules and consequences that govern the community in which he spends the majority of his day.

It is clear from youth and adult comments here that the 4Rs were indispensable for helping to create boundaries for what constituted worthwhile concerns for youth and adults to address together from those that seemed to be purely the concerns of youth or those that seemed to be, according to some of the YATST youth, beyond their developmental ken. However, it is also possible to see the ways in which these
boundaries cut both ways: the comments of YATST youth suggested that they felt less entitled to speak up about issues of school culture that were not related to teaching and learning, citing the limitations of their own cognitive development.

*Development of a shared language for change*

Perhaps one of the most widely recognized effects of the introduction of the 4Rs in supporting the work of YATST was the common language it gave youth and adults to communicate about their experiences of teaching and learning in school. Corbett (2010), in his evaluation of the YATST program from the student perspective, mentions that unsolicited, many students brought up the utility of the 4Rs for increasing their ability to express concerns that they had previously sublimated or been unable to describe aside from vague unease. As one student he interviewed stated,

> When I understood the framework more, I realized that there were identifiable things about school that I couldn’t articulate but had been conscious of. YATST gave me a language to talk about what I vaguely found wrong. (Corbett, 2010, p. 6)

Mitra and Biddle (2012) similarly concluded in their evaluation of the YATST program in its fourth year that the 4Rs served as a common language between youth and adults in the YATST program, allowing students entry to traditionally adult-only spaces and giving them access to a language of pedagogy to which teachers were willing to listen.

It is possible to see this in one Maple Valley student’s account of her experience facilitating a small group at a faculty meeting that in which her YATST group shared the data that they had collected from their survey of students and teachers. She explains how
being able to explain the 4Rs contextualized some of the survey data, which indicated that 40% of students felt that there were no systems in school for their voices to be heard.

I think when we were starting it, at least one teacher I know, when I was talking to him and his group, he didn’t completely understand, he was looking at the positive aspect of the fact instead of the negative part. Because it was like 40% thinks this and 60% thinks this and he was looking at the 60% that was more positive instead of looking at the fact that 40% of the student body felt that there wasn’t a system for student voice. And being able to bring it back to the 4Rs and why the 40% was still not a good number and why the 4Rs were there and why it wasn’t an acceptable number to us because we were still trying to transform our—I think they understood a bit more as to what we kind of based our ideas and our thoughts on.

The framework provided some self-sufficiency to the students through providing them with a vocabulary to explain the justification for their desire for school reform and change in a way that teachers seemed to accept as valid. Similarly, the principal of Pinewood High School described how, once the students were able to facilitate conversations with faculty in faculty meetings using these concepts,

There was a growing sort of mutual sort of appreciation, I guess, and faculty were very, very receptive and kids were very excited feeling like they were being heard and that their thoughts were valued. It sort of took off in that way.

As a result of this shift in frame, youth and adult groups were positioned to begin to speak to each other about teaching and learning in new ways. Although adult-defined understandings of what constituted important issues of schooling (namely, those originating and deriving from the adult lifeworld and culture of the school) were the ones which predominated through the application of this frame, the introduction of the 4Rs allowed youth, with some training and fluency in the shared language that it created, access to conversations with adults that would previously have been impossible.
Turning Point #2: Introduction of the dialogic change model

By the beginning of its third year, the program’s rapid changes included its disaffiliation from the Vermont Principals’ Association and its new association with the Vermont Rural Partnership. The impetus for this change is described in Goldwasser’s (2010) evaluation of the program as a growing divide between Helen’s goals for the work of YATST and those of the VPA. He writes,

A major difference between the two models of student voice seemed to be that Helen wanted to continue take the work of YATST deeper into schools while the VPA wanted a program that could scale up to reach a wider number of schools and see how sustainability for student voice would work across the state of Vermont…The VPA confided that, in November of 2009, a conversation they had with Adam Fletcher, while he was conducting a workshop for YATST, influenced their thinking on the future direction of student voice in Vermont. According to the VPA, Mr. Fletcher told them that he thought that pre-existing structures such as Student Councils were easier to work with to initiate change rather than the creation of new cultural forms (re: YATST). (Goldwasser, 2010, p. 28-29, emphasis mine)

The disaffiliation of YATST from the VPA signaled a break with not only the VPA’s desire to scale the work to schools more quickly, but seemed also to signal a break with the previous reliance on the work of Fletcher and the creation of youth-adult councils that would govern student voice opportunities. Instead, Helen began to focus on leveraging the shared language being created by the 4Rs framework.

This shift in thinking was reflected in Helen’s choice to invite Daniel Baron, a nationally recognized facilitation trainer, to speak at the annual YATST Fall Conference at which Adam Fletcher had spoken the year before. During this time, Baron provided a two-day workshop for youth and adults on facilitation, including introducing them to the
use of facilitation protocols. The National School Reform Initiative, from whose work some of these concepts are drawn, defines protocols as,

> Structured processes or guidelines to promote meaningful and efficient communication, problem solving, and learning. Protocols used within a group that shares common values, permit an honest, deeply meaningful, and often intimate type of conversation which people are not in the habit of having, building skills and culture needed for successful collaboration. (National School Reform Initiative, 2014, paragraph 34)

The choice to train youth and adults more deeply in facilitation skills moved them away from becoming a vehicle through which concerns could be addressed by taking action (similar to the role of student councils), towards becoming the facilitators of interpersonal dialogue that would allow youth and teachers to come to a clearer understanding of each other’s needs within the school environment using the shared language of the 4Rs (see Figure 5).
YATST groups began to move towards the use of protocols in their presentations and interactions with the school community. Chalk talks, for example, became a core feature in presentations of the data in both faculty meetings and student assembles. The chalk talk protocol typically included the sharing of important data points on large pieces of paper, set up in a gallery format in a large room. Next to each major idea from the survey, broad questions were posed such as “What are the root causes contributing to this?” and “What possible solutions are there?” Participants were expected to ponder the prompting piece of data and then write their response to the question on the paper, with others both writing their original contributions and their responses to each other’s
comments. The resulting silent dialogue allowed for the expression of everyone’s opinions without the fear of blame, recrimination, or judgment.

Youth and adults on school teams described the dialogues resulting from these sessions as extremely powerful. I spoke with a non-YATST teacher who participated in a dialogue facilitated by a YATST team at her school, who observed,

I think what always surprises all of us is the discrepancy between what students think about a particular issue and what teachers think about a particular issue. You know, where the teachers think their students are so engaged, the students maybe report they’re not that engaged. Those are always the kind of wow, moments of like, “How are we that different?”

From the introduction of the use of these protocols, the data-driven component of YATST’s theory of change, which had been a central element from the program’s conception, was fundamentally repositioned as an instrument to promote dialogue within the school community. This shift can be seen in a training which was observed in YATST’s fourth year in which Helen explained to participants the rationale behind the design of their survey:

The goals of the YATST survey are generally pretty clear. Our whole task is around assessing rigor, relevance, relationships and shared responsibility, so that’s a pretty easy frame for us, we’re not out there trying to define that. And, our wish is that we both look at teacher perspectives and student perspectives. And that means if our goal is these four things and we want to be able to compare student perspectives with teachers, it doesn’t mean every question [on the student survey] has to have a mirror [on the adult survey], but a lot of them should to get the richest data because the best dialogue comes when we see differences and how teachers and students perceive them.

As Helen expresses here, the power of a dialogue-based model becomes the ability of the YATST groups to increase youth and adults’ awareness of how aligned their perceptions of the needs of the community are. Action, within this context, becomes
about making structures more responsive where the student and teacher perceptions are the least well-aligned. One adult advisor summed up both his definition of the power of the dialogic approach, as well as the effect he has observed in his school as the YATST team has implemented it by saying,

There’s a shift I think…I think that it’s opened the minds of more of the professionals in this building to consider students and what they think. We kind of avoid using the word student voice. Although it’s an element of the relationship obviously—I mean adult voice and student voice. This is not all about student voice. It’s about having a conversation, and discussing, partnering, and seeing how we can make a better experience for everybody, particularly in the classroom. I think that is what has improved is that more adults are open to that, and actually get excited about it.

Reflected in this adult advisor’s experience is the shift in the youth-adult relationships defined by the theory of change away from an attempt to elevate youth concerns because of a recognition that youth ought to have an equal say in the “rules” which govern the school and the collective community, towards an understanding which places youth and adults in an on-going conversation about youth needs in the classroom. Within this conception, there is a recognition of the necessity of youth voice in describing and defining those needs. The refinement of youth as initiators of this conversation within a context of an institution made up of adults working to meet their needs is central to this understanding.

**Turning Point #3: Values identification and the creation of UP For Learning**

The focus of the fourth and fifth years of the program was bringing the program to scale—not in the sense expressed by the Vermont Principal’s Association, which focused merely on the number of schools which would be reached by YATST, but rather
in the sense argued for by Coburn (2003), which considers scale from many dimensions, including depth, sustainability, spread, and ultimately, a shift in reform ownership (see Biddle, Mitra, & Beattie, forthcoming; Mitra & Biddle, 2012). With five new YATST teams and seven veteran teams at the start of the fourth year, as well as a growing repertoire of documented best practices, the zeitgeist of this time was one of growth, optimism, and forward momentum.

While many new schools were joining the program, some of the veteran schools were beginning to work on revising and re-administering their initial school-wide survey. The first training of 2011 offered sessions that were tiered to the needs of both the veteran and the newer youth-adult partnership groups. The 4Rs were showcased in the opening sessions and a detailed ‘Best Practices and Self Assessment Tool’ included a rubric that painted a picture of what a “transformed school” that had embraced the 4Rs would look like. By the fifth year, teams were using the Self Assessment Tool as a way to center their work for the year, rating themselves on the provided rubric to see where their school fell in embodying the 4Rs.

At 14 single-spaced pages, the Self-Assessment Tool provides an exhaustive list of examples of action plans and suggested evidence YATST teams can use to evaluate the extent to which the school climate has been transformed. The tool focuses exclusively on changes within school systems related to teaching and learning, the practices of classrooms, and particularly describes the necessary qualitative changes in the way in which teachers and students approach their roles as teacher and learners. Partnership is emphasized as the cornerstone for these classroom changes, a repositioning of the teacher-student relationship that is dependent on the shared responsibility of students to
be communicative about their learning needs and articulate in discussing their learning, as well for teachers to be focused on assessing student needs through multiple channels: at a systems level, at a classroom level, and at an individual level.

Despite the introduction of these supports, however, schools were reporting ongoing difficulty in being able to quickly communicate the purpose of YATST to relevant stakeholders (especially non-participating students). To tackle this issue, Helen began to make the creation of a stronger communications strategy an organizational priority, with the hope that identifying such a strategy would help students and teachers alike to explain both the organizing logic and the desired outcomes for their work more clearly. Her pursuit of this communications clarity, as well as the maturation of several YATST-related side projects, ultimately led to a complete redefinition and rebranding of the organization.

In 2013, the YATST program was subsumed under a newly created organization, led by Helen, called Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning, or UP for Learning. UP for Learning was founded on the recognition that not all schools were ready for the intense commitment to long-term reform represented by the YATST program, but could perhaps take on shorter-term initiatives addressing specific needs within their schools through youth-adult partnership. Over the previous six years, a number of smaller initiatives had been piloted under the title of the YATST program, including programs aimed at raising teacher expectations and student self-expectations, as well as action-research projects for middle and high schoolers based around the Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey; however, UP for Learning was created in order to be able to give these initiatives room of their own to grow and mature outside of the YATST program, as well
to expand the types of technical assistance that the organization could begin to provide to schools, the State Agency of Education, and state-level professional organizations.

As part of the process of initiating this organizational transition, Helen engaged an outside consultant to work with the leadership team to focus on identifying the mission, vision, core values, and guiding principles of the new organization. As Helen explained,

[The outside consultant] had a series of questions that [the leadership team] all wrote out around—What’s your problem statement? What are your resources? What are your scope of services? What are your values and beliefs? We drafted those, but then we had a day retreat which was where we did our own definitive mapping. I think one of the most powerful things to bring off of that was our list of value statements. What drives every aspect of our work? What defines what we won’t do as well as where we’ll invest the most of our time by those values. Then we did the mission and vision which was similar to YATST, but broader.

This process was largely about making explicit the values serving to define the boundaries that Helen and YATST teams had already been in the process of establishing for this work since its inception. The values which were identified through this reflective process can be seen in Table 4.
Table 4. Excerpt from UP for Learning organizational materials defining Guiding Values and Principles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding Value or Principle</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Share Responsibility</td>
<td>The process of change must be transparent and must be driven by adults and youth, in equal measure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start from Strength</td>
<td>Students, educators and parents possess the wisdom and capacity to orchestrate change. Beginning with what’s working—as opposed to what’s not—provides hope and energizes a community to embrace change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assume Positive Intentions</td>
<td>Educators truly want to serve young people. Young people are ready and able to commit to their learning and be involved in its design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek Equity and Justice</td>
<td>The most effective learning environments are ones in which youth and adults are equally valued and heard. Those who have been most disenfranchised have the right to aspire to a more meaningful education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employ Data to Drive Change</td>
<td>Research is a powerful means to create a shared understanding and a vitally important way to build credibility between youth and adults. When a community works together to make meaning of their own data, they are strengthened by what they learn and emboldened to take action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create Open Dialogue</td>
<td>Deep conversation is central to changing school cultures. Young people are particularly able initiators of this dialogue, creating a shared vision for education and the learning process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The values and guiding principles laid out during this process reflect a great deal of reflection on the rapid prototyping and organizational learning that had occurred in the previous five years, and Helen reflected that it was not that defining them created
something new or different, but rather encapsulated that learning in a way that could be made public. Defining these was, according to Helen, “a significant step for our organization to feel like we were reaching a level of maturity. We’ve gone through adolescence where we are early adults, and are now positioned with enough pieces now to be credible in a higher level domain of the work.” While these values do not redefine the key components of the theory of change, they rather serve to refine and make explicit specific elements of these aspects more clearly (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. The YATST Theory of Change and the YATST Guiding Values and Principles

As part of this rethinking of the work, the mission of UP for Learning was defined in this process as well, as it obviously needed to become more inclusive of the broader scope of the organization. Drawing from the previous YATST-only mission statement, the mission statement of UP for Learning became to,
increase student engagement by developing youth-adult partnerships in learning to ensure that each and every student has the skills, self-confidence, and opportunities to assume meaningful roles in shaping their learning and their lives.

The central concepts of a learning focus and a partnership between youth and adults are present in this iteration of the organization’s mission statement, as well as a clear focus on the role of the organization in developing the skills in youth and adults to engage more thoughtfully within this partnership. In addition to this mission statement, the organization also added a vision statement, which read,

We envision a time when students will take responsibility for their own learning by collaborating with adults in the educational system to reach their own goals.

This vision statement is, perhaps, the most succinct statement of the intended transformation towards which the YATST program and UP for Learning’s other programs are meant to work. This vision statement conjures up a student-driven system in which students can clearly articulate their needs and learning goals, and adults serve as partners to fulfill these.

The expansion of the scope of the organization meant a necessary repositioning of the YATST program within the organizational structure. In Helen’s words, it has become the “Cadillac”, the fullest expression of the organization’s guiding values and principles. She reiterated to me that while not all schools were ready to make a long-term commitment to reform by participating in the YATST program, the ideal would be for schools to commit to reform centered on these values undertaken through youth-adult partnership. “It is the best and deepest way of doing our work,” she explained.
Conclusion

To begin a discussion of the implications of the shifts in values described by this narrative of the development of the YATST theory of change over time, I want to frame the discussion using an interview given by Dr. Beattie in 2014 where she discusses her background in health and its influence on her subsequent experience with both youth-adult partnership and the YATST program. In this interview, she states,

I worked for the American Cancer Society, an independent nonprofit, … [as] a coordinator of the Cancer Information Service, a toll free hot-line. All day I listened to phone calls from patients and family members about their experiences with their healthcare institutions. I wasn’t based in one hospital or clinic; in fact, I was hearing from patients and family members throughout Massachusetts, about what was happening for them. So a lot of my understanding and my deepening concern about the loss of empowerment and voice of people in the healthcare system came from those professional positions.

What made my going to the cancer society so meaningful was that my dad had just died of cancer. I had had some very powerful experiences both with extraordinary providers and a couple of horrifying instances when he was utterly stripped of his dignity in situations where professional power and personal ego played big roles. So I guess if you really peel this all the way back, my passion and my intolerance comes from that as much as anything. I’ve just followed that thread throughout my life.

The system of medicine in general offered very few opportunities at that time for patients to raise their questions and concerns, or to be partners in decisions about their health. They were basically passive recipients of their care delivered by well-intended practitioners—who really do have this extraordinary field of knowledge to do their work. And so much like the parallel in education, there was the power structure. Though inadvertent, often in both situations the outcome is learned passivity, helplessness, hopelessness, and the devaluing of one’s voice. Individuals start to believe quiet compliance is the only way they can survive in the system. (Dzur, 2014, paragraphs 3-5)

This poignant parallel between patient advocacy and student voice serves as a fertile starting point for discussing the evolution of the YATST model into a program
based in a morality of care. As a society, we are willing to accept the place of care within a patient/healthcare practitioner relationship as necessary and even natural. The very term for this—healthcare—makes our acceptance of this abundantly clear, regardless of the current neoliberal trend within healthcare to maximize efficiency and treat patient care as a series of boxes to be checked. Patients, in their immediate state of convalescence or illness, are vulnerable and in need of care from others in a position to care for them.

However, within the student-teacher relationship, the role of care is less clear. While progressive educators might champion the role of adults in positive youth development and the necessity of such development to education, care in the student-teacher relationship is not necessarily “natural” when considered within the historical context of an industrial-era education model where custody and control during instruction are some of the primary organizing principles of schools as institutions (Tyack, 1974).

Beattie’s emphasis in this interview on the role of the patient, and analogously, the student, in negotiating their care is an idea very much in line with the principle of mutuality outlined in care theory and is indicative of the way in which Beattie conceptualizes youth-adult partnership, a conceptualization which has strongly shaped and molded the practice of YATST teams in the past six years while in turn being shaped and molded. In the following section, I discuss the development of the YATST theory of change and its guiding values with reference to the care literature to demonstrate the ways in which, as the organization went through the careful process of revision and gradual boundary setting around what YATST is and what it is not, the organization came to situate its work within a morality of care. I use the term morality here because of the lack of explicit connection between the program’s purported values and those
represented within an ethic of care; rather, the program’s values seem to be, in practice, informed by values derived from an ethic of care, and are used by both YATST organizational leaders and participating school teams as guides for decision-making and priority setting throughout the school change process in which they are engaged.

*Tensions, turning points, and meeting students’ needs through care*

The turning points outlined in the narrative of the development of the YATST theory of change were all preceded by tensions that the introduced changes were seeking to resolve. In the early years of YATST, the diffuse and loosely defined theory of change situated the work of youth-adult partnerships within a discursive framework popular to the field of student voice, that of deliberative democracy, a paradigm within which students ought to be given the opportunity to make their concerns known and have a right, essentially, to have their ideas heard as equal members of the school community. However, as can be seen in the narrative presented here, the classic tension of how to prioritize the concerns uncovered in the ‘collection’ of students’ voices, created unease in participating adults. The early projects in which YATST teams engaged were focused on anything and everything, from basic needs of school families as a result of community poverty to the desire of students to have a longer school lunch. Adult advisors, as evidenced by their comments, felt that the concerns being put forward were not, in fact, of equal importance, and that it would be more fruitful to address concerns that touched directly on the business of teaching and learning, rather than on climate and student lifestyle issues, such as the food in the cafeteria or creating a student lounge. This created a great deal of tension, as educators, even those who deeply believed in the necessity of
student voice, grappled in partnership with students to define group priorities that felt important and legitimate to both parties.

Ruddick (1980) argues that the primary goals of care in adult-child relations are preservation, growth, and acceptability. She writes that at birth, adults’ responsibilities for care are centered around preserving the life of the child who is helpless and dependent; however, as children age, the focus of those care responsibilities shifts from merely protecting the child’s life to facilitating the child’s growth and promoting the child’s acceptability (or socialization) within the circles which the adult perceives to be most healthy (Noddings, 2002; Ruddick, 1980). Mayeroff (1971) similarly suggests that growth is a primary goal of care-giving. As Noddings (2002) argues, being able to achieve these goals of care comes from being able to first practice true care through the attention to the cared for’s expressed and inferred needs.

Noddings (2002) describes the difficulty of sorting through the needs of the cared for, and to demonstrate this, presents how needs and wants might be separated by a caregiver within the context of what she terms “the ideal home” (p. 66), or a model of perfection she creates as a reference point for a paradigm of care:

Needs judged as basic are met unconditionally and are never deliberately withheld. Fervent wants are heard, interpreted, modified, approved contingently (often on grounds of desert), and satisfied. Inferred needs are articulated, heard by the cared-for, perhaps resisted, perhaps again modified, accepted, assisted, and met. The process of identifying and satisfying needs is thus a highly complex process.” (p.66)

There is a strong value of shared responsibility within an ethic of care that is tied to the idea of mutuality, meaning that both the caregiver and the cared for share responsibility for achieving mutuality in caring encounters. While the caregiver must be
attentive to the cared for and through this attention notice and attend to their perceived needs, the cared for must be ready to engage in dialogue with the caregiver about his or her own needs and consequently accept care that works to meet those negotiated needs (Noddings, 2002). This mutuality, or connection, is essential for caring to occur: care is not truly care if a relationship between the caregiver and the cared for is not established, or if the cared for rejects the caregiver’s definition of his or her needs (Noddings, 2002).

For adults engaged in the process of working explicitly in partnership with students, the focus on deliberative democracy which framed the initial conception of this work, seeking first and foremost to elevate the concerns of students within the community, came into conflict with their own values of wanting to encourage student growth and provide care for students through the principal definition of purpose of their professional roles, namely, teaching and learning. While the expressed needs and wants of students, such as the creation of a student lounge or reforming the dress code, were arguably important in an institutional setting that exercises strict control over students bodies, some adults felt that care for their perception of student’s inferred needs, such as more responsive and student-centered teaching practices, ought to take precedence.

From the lens of democratic practice, then, the elevation of student voice within the YATST model after the introduction of the Rs as a defining frame for the work does not seem to meet the standard of elevating youth concerns and treating them with seriousness. There is an implied imperative, within such a frame, to accept rational concerns as important within the lifeworld of students as long as young people can reasonably argue for their importance. However, through the lens of care, if youth are positioned as the cared for and adults are positioned as caregivers, adults’ inference of
youth’s needs taking precedence over youths’ wants can be seen as valid and responsive, just as youth’s attempts to negotiate that adults’ definition of those inferred needs in order to achieve mutuality is an essential aspect of achieving caring relations between them. Youth voice, within such a paradigm, becomes a vehicle for negotiating the receipt of care and establishing mutuality in a caring relationship between youth and adults. Thus, the first turning point within the YATST theory of change by using the 4Rs as a focusing frame for the work of the YATST teams, was to establish both a hierarchy around expressed and inferred needs and wants, as well as a common language for youth and adults to employ in order to more effectively achieve mutuality and relational care.

Spurred by the breakthrough in the creation of a shared language (the 4Rs) to negotiate the giving and receipt of care for the inferred needs of students that teachers are constantly striving to meet in a school setting, it seems natural that the new focus might become opportunities and spaces for increased dialogue between youth and adults, spaces where this shared language might be practiced and used. Where before there may have been a failure of adults and youth to communicate about their attempts to establish caring relationships in their encounters, leading students in the school to conclude that teachers do not care for them, students familiar with the 4Rs were now able to initiate dialogue about their teaching and learning needs to help facilitate their own growth in these areas, areas whose axiomatic importance could be inferred from the lived experience of the adults and their understanding of the skills and knowledge that students will need in the future. Thus, a shift towards dialogue based change, or the creation of opportunities to engage in such negotiation, was now paramount to expanding these opportunities to greater and greater numbers of youth and adults within YATST schools.
However, dialogue based in care differs in significant ways from dialogue derived from other sets of values, such as a transformative paradigm or a rights-based paradigm. The type of voice which is expressed and listened to, and the topics which are considered legitimate, will be different within each of these paradigms. Thus, training in facilitation could be based within any of these paradigms, but the direct and explicit acknowledgement of them as part of the creation of UP for Learning helped to explicitly refine the dialogic model such that it would almost have to be centered around the establishment of caring encounters between youth and adults in order to be fulfilled. Value statements such as “assume best intentions” serve to demarcate the boundaries of what constitutes legitimate, productive expression of concerns within these interactions. Such a value statement, likely crafted in pursuit of maximizing respect for one another in these encounters, makes a dialogue aimed, for example, at restorative justice between students and teachers largely outside the realm of possibility for the model. Instead, these refinements through value clarity served to direct adults and youth into certain patterns of interaction in their encounters, patterns that closely mirror those described in care theory. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, there are both advantages and disadvantages to creating boundaries around what constitutes meaningful youth involvement in schools in this way.

It is possible to see, in the development of the YATST theory of change, a vision of school reform as viewed through the lens of care. Schools, from this perspective, are in the business of attempting to discern and meet students’ needs; however, caring within these contexts is often frustrated or subverted because of a) the inability of adults to effectively fulfill the obligations of care (attention and motivational displacement) and
the lack of opportunities or structures through which students can negotiate caregiver’s perceptions of their needs. Youth voice or meaningful student involvement, within this vision, becomes the means through which young people are able to negotiate adult’s understandings of their needs. Through dialogue, inferred needs attempting to be met are made explicit and can be discussed between the caregivers (teachers) and the cared for (students). It is important to note that, from the lens of care, the primary concern for the school-based change-maker becomes not the distribution of power between youth and adults, but rather the opportunity for caring relationships and the roles of caregiver and cared for to be enacted and fulfilled.

Within the complex architecture of informing values, process, role definition, and more clearly defined desired outcomes that YATST has worked to achieve in its six year tenure, we see that the elevation of youth voice has come to mean elevating student concerns in a specific way, with a very specific tone. The tone is not one based in rights, and although the model concerns itself with equity and justice, it is an equity and justice that is focused on the meeting of teaching and learning needs within the framework of the 4Rs than with protecting or enhancing attention to students’ rights. The boundaries set, then, have important implications for both the possibilities of the model, as well as its constraints within a school setting. In the following chapter, I will use this framework to examine the implications of this focus on care through an in-depth case studies of the Maple Valley YATST group as they work within their school to bring a vision of a care-based school community and care-based student-teacher relationships into being.
Chapter 5
HANDLE WITH CARE:
THE POLITICS OF TONE IN A STRENGTHS-BASED MODEL OF
YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIP

As discussed in the previous chapter, YATST embraces a “strengths-based” approach to their action-research work. Often used in programs centered on positive youth development, a strengths-based approach is meant to counter prevailing deficit models that position inefficiencies within entities themselves, such as seeing schools as “failing”, youth as “troubled”, and communities as “depressed.” A strengths orientation suggests that by focusing on the strengths of communities, schools and youth, the possibilities for the future are better able to be imagined, inspiring hope, which is a key ingredient of successful change (Wheatley, 2002). The YATST statement of its guiding values and principles outlines these two integral aspects of the YATST approach as “Starting from Strength” and “Assuming Positive Intentions.” Like all of YATST’s guiding values and principles, these two values serve to draw boundaries between change practices that are in keeping with the YATST theory of change and those that are not. The way in which this boundary definition is performed by the groups themselves as they navigate their work will be explored in greater depth in this chapter.

In Chapter Four, I established that, in practice, YATST groups seek to meet the varied needs of all the groups within the school as they navigate the change process. My analysis in this chapter particularly examines perceptions of the Maple Valley High School YATST group about the needs of youth and adults in their school as they work to change teacher and students’ perceptions about their roles and responsibilities towards each other in school. I examine this by looking at the decisions that the group made in the
course of analyzing and sharing the data which they collected as part of their 2013 YATST student and teacher survey. As the group moved through the action research cycle, they grappled with how to meet the needs of both students and teachers when those needs conflicted.

In resolving the challenges that arose in these processes, it is possible to see the effect of the values that are meant to shape the enactment of YATST change work. This chapter explores the implications of this enactment by examining how the strengths-based focus influences how groups resolve whose needs are met in times of conflict. I also examine the way in which a strengths-based focus curates the tone and tenor of youth voices in the dialogue-driven change approach that the YATST program embraces, and raise questions about the utility of the expression of what Freire (1998) calls “legitimate anger” (p.45) within these dialogues.

The Case of Maple Valley High School

Background

Maple Valley High School is a rural school which, like many Vermont high schools, is located off of a major roadway in the area, roughly equidistant to the various communities that it serves. A school board member told me that the school has a good reputation for arts, music and athletics, but like others in the area, struggles with declining enrollments and rising costs. According to the most recent state data, Maple Valley serves approximately 544 students in the 9th through 12th grades and as such is considered a somewhat large school by Vermont standards. Twenty percent of the students attending the school receive free and reduced price lunch, though this number
was rumored amongst the participants to be a bit depressed as I was told that high school students in the area tend to under report.

One student I spoke with described growing up in Maple Valley as “an interesting duality of community atmosphere and isolation.” Another student put it a bit differently: “It’s the middle of nowhere” he said matter-of-factly. Maple Valley, as a whole, is not so much a place as it is a loose association of rural towns. In fact, the mission statement of the Supervisory Union (Vermont’s equivalent of the school district) which administers this area’s schools includes a statement about respecting the unique identities of the communities which are served. The towns themselves vary in size from roughly 1,200 to 4,900 and are spread out over a 40 mile radius, the largest of these being Snowton. As a result, many of the students who attend the high school attend different elementary and middle schools and only come together when they reach high school.

A community member with whom I spoke characterized the changing nature of “the Valley” as he’d seen it in his lifetime.

It’s always been very diverse as far as the socioeconomic piece, probably much heavier on the affluent and the educated and wealthy end, but I think that the Snowton side has shifted a lot. There’s still a lot of very economically needy families in that area, but not as much as before.

A longtime teacher at the school told me that there was a sort of divide between the Valley proper where there is more “money and privilege” and the Snowton side. “I’m not really sure what the rift is,” he said, “but it’s been going on for a long time.” He elaborated,

There’s a diversity of kids who come here [to Maple Valley High School] because some of the parents are these laid back hippie types and the kids kind of follow in their footsteps, and maybe the parents are a little too laid back and relaxed, and then there’s the Vermonter kids whose parents grew
up here and they don’t go to Paris on vacation. They don’t leave Vermont, some of them.

Another teacher commented on how she saw this divide essentially playing out in the school:

Maple Valley…is like two different schools under the same roof, because I feel like we’re segregated here. There are the kids that go through, like who go through on the honors' track, they have a different experience than kids who struggle intellectually or academically and who go through without those advantages and without maybe the support of things that other kids get at home, that come along with those social and economic advantages.

The YATST program was introduced to Maple Valley at the conclusion of YATST’s first year of collaboration with the Vermont Principal’s Association through a connection between Dan Gould, Maple Valley’s civics teacher, and YATST’s director and founder, Helen Beattie. Dan and Helen had worked on some other projects throughout the years and together brought the idea to Patrick Tierney, Maple Valley’s principal at that time who had been in his position for several years and was by all accounts quite supportive of initiatives to create a more dynamically democratic school environment. Together, they tapped several other teachers to get involved. One of these adults, Sara Miller, was one of Maple Valley’s academic support staff and had already been working with the student council. She described her reaction to the program initially by saying,

With student government, I was always trying to figure out a way to make that have more clout in the school, so it wasn’t just let's have a raffle, and let's have a bake sale, and let's paint the cafeteria. When I was approached by Helen through Dan…about this initiative and read the first description, I was immediately on board. It looked to me like the thing I had been yearning for, a way to really develop youth and adult partnerships that could change meaningful things in the school, things that mattered to kids in the classroom.
I've listened to lots of kids say, "That class is boring. I don't like that teacher." You hear it all the time. Trying to figure out what's going on and how we can make students feel like they have more control over what's happening to them in the classroom, and more opportunities to work together in concert with their teachers. That's how I got involved, because it looked like that was the thing.

The other adult who was asked to participate, Ben Kaye, was a teacher of foreign language and himself a graduate of Maple Valley High School who had chosen to return after living abroad for many years. He described his initial interest in the program by saying:

I was flattered that I was one of the first couple of teachers that the particular administrators at that time thought would be appropriate for the job. They approached me at the end of the school year. It was one of those things where it was exciting, and had a lot of promise, and I like to get involved with things like that, so I did.

By the time I joined the Maple Valley YATST team in the Fall of 2013, they had already completed one full cycle of the action-research process (spread out over the previous four years). This cycle consisted first of creating and then administering a school-wide survey designed to measure teacher and student perceptions about the presence of the four Rs (rigor, relevance, relationships and responsibility) in the school. The school-wide survey actually consisted of two parallel survey instruments, one for teachers and one for students (see Appendix D for samples of survey questions). The goal was to administer the survey to all teachers and students at Maple Valley. A link to the survey was sent to all of the faculty and verbal encouragement from the two adult advisors was used to help promote survey participation. Students were administered a paper copy of the survey in their homerooms and then these surveys were manually entered into an excel spreadsheet for analysis. These strategies yielded a very high rate of
participation on this first survey: 76% school-wide, giving the group a great deal of confidence in the findings from this early survey.

Once the survey had been administered, the group used the result of these dialogues to facilitate dialogues amongst the faculty at a faculty meeting and a select group of students by inviting representatives from each homeroom to a pizza party to discuss the findings. Once these faculty and student dialogues had been hosted, the group looked at their notes from these dialogues and decided on three action priorities: 1) a publicity campaign for flexible pathway programs in the school, such as independent studies and internships for credit (to increase relevance); 2) the design of a voluntary mid-semester student-teacher feedback form that teachers could use in their classes; and 3) the revitalization of a student-teaching assistant program that allowed students who had taken a course previously apply to assist teachers with the course in the following year. In the year just prior to my arrival, they had redesigned the survey and then administered it at the very end of the spring semester. With results of this most recent survey in hand, they were now ready to begin the process of analyzing of the data.

My first encounter with the Maple Valley YATST team as a whole was at the annual YATST retreat that serves as a marker of the beginning of every new YATST school year. The group introduced themselves to me and to the rest of the gathered YATST groups according to YATST tradition: through the creation of a pipe-cleaner sculpture. Pipe-cleaners are a staple of YATST culture, with Helen ordering them in bulk at the beginning of the year and including them at every table at every YATST training. Together, the Maple Valley group created a pyramid and explained that they had attached each of their individual pipe-cleaners to this pyramid according to their role in the group,
with the organizers at the bottom as the foundation and the fine-tuners and the
communicators at the top, ready to refine and broadcast the message of YATST out to the
school. They said their goal for the year was to just keep moving forward.

Many of the Maple Valley YATST students that attended the retreat were brand
new to the program, though I discovered a solid group of veteran students once I started
attending the group’s regular Wednesday morning meetings. The group as a whole was
considered diverse, particularly in terms of the grade distribution of participating
students, with a roughly equivalent number from each grade. Ben said that this was a
result of Sara taking a very proactive role in recruitment, explaining

Thank goodness, she does, because she sees a larger cross-section of kids
than most teachers do, so she’s in a perfect position to have those kinds of
conversations. In the conversations she has, she gets those little flags that
might pop up and make her think that that student might be great for
YATST because there’s some discontent over the system or there’s some
desire to do this experience, the school experience, a little bit better,
whereas in my class that doesn’t always come up.

Sara did tell me that she had recruited every student who was participating this
year, a fact that was reiterated by each students themselves in their interviews. Students
were quick to tell me what “those little flags” to which Ben alludes were: Chris, a
sophomore, had been noticed by Sara for being a great public speaker; Colin, a freshman,
had written an editorial in the paper in which Sara read about an important issue for the
community; Claudia, a senior, had been in a class of hers and said Sara could not believe
she had not recruited her earlier.

“I love the dynamics of this group,” Sara told me in an interview,

I love the diversity of this group because they’re really different. We have
Chris who is really grounded and down to earth and—[looks out the
window at the setting sun] he’s probably hunting right now —and I mean
he kind of represents this whole dynamic of the student population that we’ve never had in the group. Then you’ve got Claudia who is really a forward thinker… and Nicki and Taryn, they’re all so different. I just feel like we’ve brought a really unique bunch of kids together and they seem to be complementing each other really well and getting along way better than I expected they might. They really listen to each other and value each other and I don’t know, and it’s really neat to see people like Sean stepping up to the plate and saying I’m going to take some leadership here, I’m really going to take advantage of this opportunity and I’m going to get everything out of it I can. I think some of the kids are starting to see that which is really cool.

Although many Maple Valley YATST students told me that it was Sara who had recruited them, many of them felt that it was their passion for change that kept them involved. As one student told me, “Students who get involved with YATST really want to see a change. They’re students who don't think, "Oh, I'm just here for four years and then I'm out of here. It doesn't really matter."

Sean, a junior, was identified by many of the YATST students as one of the student leaders of the group, though Ben expressed some happiness at seeing Claudia, a senior and a first year YATST student, stepping up and taking leadership over some of the group’s activities early in the year. The freshman and the sophomores, Lyndsey, Chris, Taryn, Colin and Derek, tended to take on supporting roles, though they did not seem to hold back in group discussions or decision-making.
Table 5: Maple Valley High School YATST participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ben Kaye</td>
<td>Adult Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara Miller</td>
<td>Adult Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicki</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lana</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyndsey</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derek</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taryn</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over the course of the 2013-2014 school year, the group grappled with the analysis of their survey data and eventually, the sharing of that data with their school community. The process began at the end-of-summer retreat, an annual overnight training that YATST hosts to allow schools to orient their new members to the YATST theory of change, to participate in team-building, and to give the teams some concentrated planning time.

**Maple Valley data analysis process**

During an early fall weekend at the YATST retreat, the task before the group was to analyze the data from the survey that they had administered to teachers and students the previous spring. Several one or two hour long blocks had been dedicated over the course of the weekend to team-based work, and the team sat in a cozy student lounge on the college campus where the retreat took place as they took their first look at the tabulated results of their teacher and student surveys. It fell largely to Sara and Ben to...
explain to the students, most of whom were brand new to YATST, the way in which the data would ultimately be used to further the action-research cycle.

The YATST approach to school change is, first and foremost, reliant on a data-driven approach: collecting (primarily) quantitative data from the school population on topics related to student and teacher perceptions about the 4Rs (rigor, relevance, relationships and shared responsibility), and then using that data as a jumping off point to try to stimulate dialogue on the zeitgeist of the school community related to these topics. Because of this, the reliability and validity of the data itself are an important topic for groups to address as they analyze their survey results and Helen actively encourages groups to think through these issues throughout their survey design, administration and analysis.

During the initial analysis of the Maple Valley survey data, the group had to grapple with the meaning of several issues related to reliability and validity for their work, such as the composition of the survey participants and the possibility of response bias (was any grade overrepresented on the survey?); the response rate (is 33% of the school an adequate response rate?); and some issues of study design around the integration of qualitative and quantitative data from their survey. While the group had followed a similar survey design process as they had in the first action-research cycle, they had made an effort to eliminate some of the difficulties associated with manually inputting student survey data and to facilitate a quicker turn-around time for the analysis of the survey data by only administering the survey online. This choice, however, had made it more difficult to systematically reach a similarly large number of students and had significantly decreased their overall response rate.
In discussing these issues, the values guiding the group were made explicit and, for the first time, I observed the group’s collective construction and negotiation of their perceptions of the needs of the school community with regard to the YATST action-research model.

*The dilemma of an adequate survey response rate*

The group spent a significant amount of their planning time that weekend discussing whether or not the survey, which had been administered during Spirit Week the previous year, had gotten an adequate response rate. It was determined that the overall response rate to both the teacher and the student surveys was roughly 30%. On hearing this, Sean, a junior, piped up and said that, according to what he had learned in statistics, 30% was acceptable. As soon as Sean expressed his confidence in that number, the following conversation between the youth in the group ensued:

**Sean (Y):** I feel confident with 30%.

**Chris (Y):** I do too, I just feel some teachers might not be.

**Sean:** Well, I think some teachers who will challenge this aren’t gonna go out of their way to go challenge this, because YATST does have a degree of credibility at Maple Valley that I don’t think is present everywhere else.

**Taryn (Y):** I feel like the teachers, the ones that would challenge it are the ones that are like—they’re the ones that want to be right, that are like “oh no, this data can’t be true about our teaching,” they’re the ones that want to be the best teachers they can be. And I feel like the ones that challenge, maybe if we say something, like an example in here is, “My teachers give me time to redo my work.” And the students, the students’ answers might be low because the teacher might not give it, and [the teachers] might take offense to that. I really feel like that’s another thing that the teachers might get defensive about.
Claudia (Y): I think if you figure out how to present the information--

Taryn: —Correctly, yeah.

Claudia: —that doesn’t take them full in the face.

Sean: Like waiting to present it to make sure they don’t go into their panic zone.

Claudia: Yeah!

Sean: That’s when they get really defensive, and that’s when they start fighting against YATST.

Sean, as a veteran YATST member, had experience interacting with teachers about their teaching at Maple Valley and likely because of this, he speculated here that because the YATST group has had such longevity at Maple Valley High School, they were likely to receive a good reception at the faculty meeting and would not encounter too much resistance. However, many of the other students, all new to the group, were skeptical. The students speculated about what would throw teachers into the “panic zone”, a concept they had discussed in an activity that had been done earlier in the day by all the YATST groups present at this training. The panic zone, it had been demonstrated, was what one entered when pushed to an emotional place so uncomfortable that constructive dialogue or action could no longer happen. During the activity, the students had taken turns responding to prompts such as “singing in public”, “spiders”, and other potential fears to self-assess where on a continuum of completely comfortable to panic it put them.

At this point in the group conversation, Ben broke in with his thoughts about how, the first time that they presented their survey data to the faculty, no one had actually asked for their survey response rate, but because it was so high (70%), they had
highlighted it as a way to improve teacher’s confidence in this new initiative. Helen, who was also present for this discussion as she made her rounds to different groups at the retreat, added her thoughts about this to the conversation:

I think you can say that you got a third, and there’s no reason to think that—correct me if I’m wrong—that there was any one group who did not take this, or did take it any more than others. That’s the thing, did you miss special education, some students who had trouble accessing because of language issues. Like you want to just have some thought process of did you try to reach out to everybody and likely get a sampling of all the cross section of your school. But the bottom line here guys, is that a third is a respectable number for survey response, and this is about provoking dialogue and further discussion to explore these issues. So, it’s not like you’re saying—no, you didn’t have one hundred percent, but this is the beginning of a discussion. It’s flagging certain areas that lead you then to name them as strengths or concerns. And you have total legitimacy, given this, and a third response rate, to do that.

Later in the conversation, as the group expressed some relief about not having to collect more data, she added,

I mean, you’ll have teachers that want to—if somebody wants to negate this, they’ll negate it, but if you’d gotten a 70% response rate they’d negate it and those are your resistors and you’re not worried about them anyway.

“Resistors” in YATST parlance are teachers who remain unconvinced by the merits of youth-adult partnership and continue to believe that teachers ought to make decisions on students’ behalf without input from students. Helen’s point, here, was that it would not be possible for the YATST group to reach this group in their presentation and so it would not be productive to worry about their reaction to the group’s research and research design.

_The dilemma of the qualitative data_
The next issue that arose was related to both the research design and survey instrument construction. The survey had been designed the previous year by a committee of youth and adults. An attempt had been made the previous year to institutionalize YATST as part of the school’s professional learning communities for teachers, so many teachers who were not explicitly affiliated with YATST had helped to design the survey. The result was a survey that had four sections, each centered around an R (Rigor, Relevance, Relationships, and Shared Responsibility) that was slightly different from the first survey that the group had administered in 2010. A decision was made to add, at the end of each section, an open-response question meant to elicit qualitative comments from both teachers and students on the topics of each of the 4Rs. The prompting question for each of these sections was: “The questions in this section have to do with [Relationships / Rigor, / Relevance / Shared Responsibility] at Maple Valley. What other comments do you have about [Relationships / Rigor / Relevance / Shared Responsibility]?”

From the point of view of the Maple Valley YATST adult advisors, the comments from these sections of the survey varied in their usefulness. On both the teacher and student surveys, some of the responses reflected participants’ constructive criticism of the school culture around these issues; however, a few were nasty, at times biting comments about specific individuals, or expressive of a more general apathy to the issues being asked about. Examples of the range of comments in the “Relationships” open response section included [capitalization, spelling, punctuation, and grammar of these comments have been left uncorrected to preserve the visual rhetoric of these comments]:

Overall I think the relationships between adults and youth at Maple Valley
is very open and many people are honest. Adults can be an awesome source of help.

Both students and teachers should remember that respect needs to be earned and not demanded.

i feel that as high school students we deserve to be treated more like adults especially as students about to graduate the school give us a little credit as adults and you can argue that yes we may be disrespectful at some points but only is we feel disrespected and treated like children i haven’t had an adult in my life telling me what to do like that for years i don’t appreciate being monitored and micromanaged. also i feel the dress code is unfair and you need to start giving some of the little pre madona 12 year old hookers some just because I fill out a shirt better then them doesn’t mean I need to start shopping for a new style of clothing if you fucking wanna buy my clothes for school then be my fucking guest because i don’t have the money. also the fact that we can’t listen to music in the cafeteria is bull shit we should be able to listen to what ever we want just because you feel it isn’t appropriate we aren’t children. Forty years ago jim morrison was consider widely inappropriate at one point times are changing.

Teachers at maple valley are just as bad as the kids when it comes to judging people. like with tattoos or just dont look like what the teachers want.

Teachers don’t care about student problems, except for a select few.

Well it’s hard to generalize about all the teachers on a survey like this because every teacher is different and every student-teacher relationship is different. For the most part I think that the teachers aren’t respected as much as they should be by students, but that has to do with the individuals that make up Maple Valley’s student body.

Other comments in this section included reflections that relationships with teachers were fine, allegations that certain teachers were bullies, personal stories about perceived slights from certain teachers, as well as lists of teachers that students perceived could be trusted and those they felt could not be. The three other open response sections included comments which ranged similarly with regard to word choice, presentation, and perspective.
Understandably, the adult advisors in the group felt uncomfortable with some of these comments, and there was some confusion about how to interpret the range of perspectives represented by them. Both Ben and Sara mentioned this to either me directly or to their student partners as they analyzed the data in pairs over the course of the morning. Their confusion and discomfort was further drawn out in a conversation over lunch that day with Helen, who had also been particularly struck by the comments while looking at the Maple Valley survey responses. I was also invited into this conversation to give my perspective as someone who deals with interpreting open response data on a regular basis. Here, Sara had just read aloud a comment that said, “Many students do not feel that they have a trusted adult, many don't really need one very often, but when they do, they do. I also know that many adults don't feel they have the time to building relationships.”

Sara:  We should be worried about these comments.

Ben:  Right.

Sara:  You know, that one I read—the spirit of that comment is very clear, that's not just somebody going "They're all idiots." So I think there's some—and that could be a place where we lean on you guys [indicates Helen and myself] in terms of the qualitative data that comes out of those comments. How do you discern good qualitative data from potentially scary qualitative data?

Sara’s worry, here, was that these comments contained valuable information and though it might be tempting to brush off some of them as being too “scary” and inappropriate to share with teachers, there were many that reflect thoughtfulness about the 4Rs from students, a thoughtfulness that she characterized later in our conversation as
uncharacteristic of student behavior on surveys, which she suggests is usually just “bam, bam, bam, bam, skip the comments section”. Ben added his thoughts to this discussion,

Ben: So, what I'm thinking is—I'm thinking, you know, school board, administration and everything—I probably don't want to share that with them. But what I do want to share is stuff that we glean off that's legit, that we create this new document or whatever and that's going to become the operating document that we draw statistic of the week and—you know "Maple Valley teachers think this about student engagement and THIS is one of the comments," and it’s positive. Or something like that. But we're not—we're keeping those [indicating the printed surveys] in a box somewhere, we're not letting them go.

He later characterized the “legit” comments that they would want to use as the “politically correct ones.” Both Sara and Ben mentioned their fear that these comments might push teachers into the “panic zone.” Helen ultimately ended up suggesting a path forward that everyone agreed with, which was to analyze the quantitative data, see what puzzling gaps and concerns the group ended up identifying, and then look to the qualitative data for quotes that related to those puzzling gaps and concerns. “That totally culls them,” she suggested, “and it may give you a mix but at least it's culled it and then you choose from that mix.”

Following this conversation, however, the qualitative comments were never addressed with the group as a whole, except for once at the very beginning of their session dealing with data analysis, when Sara suggested that they be tabled for the time being. Ben, that afternoon in his pair work with Lyndsey, suggested that they go through them and pick out the positive ones so that they could be paired with the data as a kind of “public relations” campaign. In doing this, Ben started to describe to Lyndsey the criteria that they were looking for in going through the comments:
So, basically we want to see—is the comment appropriate? …Because, one, we’re not going to unleash all the information and two, certainly there is some inappropriate stuff in there and we want to make sure that it’s pretty solid, what we’ve chosen to manipulate, if you will.

Ben and Lyndsey were not the only pair that went through the comments on their own to see what insights they might yield. Although another group (of two students) had included comments from the survey to illustrate their classification of particular survey responses as strengths, neutrals, or concerns, these were not alluded to in either of their presentations to the whole YATST group and did not come up when the group discussed the data again back at school with the entirety of the Maple Valley YATST group several weeks later.

The team’s closing conversation for the weekend, however, emphasized how potentially explosive the data was as a whole, both quantitative and qualitative. As Ben collected all of the teacher and student surveys, he and Sara cautioned the students that this information ought to remain confidential,

Sara (A): [To everyone] Remember that this is wicked confidential! You know something that nobody else does and it’s really important to keep it confidential.

Taryn (Y): Until we let it out?

Sara: Until we do it in the official share. Because you don’t want it to leak out to one person because you know the game of telephone, right?

[Everyone chimes in with an affirmative].

Sara: We tell one person that half of the Maple Valley population think stereotyping goes on, by the time it gets to the fifth person, um, you know, 90% of Maple Valley are bigots. That’s what happens.

The specter of the “panic zone”
Fullan (2001) writes that all change requires “loss, anxiety, and struggle” (p. 21). It is clear from these conversations around reliability, validity, and the action research process that Maple Valley’s adult advisors and YATST students had been made sensitive to the possibility of the throwing teachers into “the panic zone,” or a place of overwhelming anxiety. Keeping teachers out of the panic zone, therefore, was a top priority for both adults and youth engaged in contemplating and planning this change process. The attention to planning the introduction of the data in a way that attempts to minimize the anxiety and struggle of the change process belies the tenuous nature of the groups’ insider/outsider status. Through pursuing change practices with this level of sensitivity to the “scary” factor of the change process, the group has been able to achieve, as Ben noted in his interview, a certain level of acceptance within the organizational culture of the school. However, even in their fifth year of existence, the group still is hesitant, and even, as indicated by their tentative language, a little bit afraid to use what inroads they have made to push the faculty too much or too hard within this process.

This concern seems to be not simply born out of the possibility of the group losing ground or credibility within the school. One interesting role reversal which results from the YATST’s dialogic approach to their data is that it places youth in the position of having to teach adults how to listen to students by asking them to practice listening to YATST students in public meetings. Learning a “discipline of silence” (Freire, 1998, p. 105) is the first step towards authentic dialogic communication; however, youth are put in the position of teaching adults to engage in this discipline as they contemplate youth needs from youth’s own perspective, rather than the paternalistic, bureaucratic lens that is encouraged by the institutional norms of schooling. This creates tension and uncertainty,
because youth often are still in the process of developing their nascent leadership and facilitation skills and, even in these teaching interactions, youth still have needs that they are hoping will be met by adults—validation, support, and encouragement. However, adults also have needs as they learn these new skills, and youth facilitators must be adequately equipped to assess and meet these needs.

One example of a story about the difficulties that can come from these situations comes from the training offered at the retreat the same weekend that the Maple Valley team was analyzing their data in a session called “The Change Process.” This training was co-facilitated by a YATST coach and a veteran YATST participant from another school in the YATST network. In her facilitation of this workshop, the student recounted a story of her own experience with a particularly recalcitrant school board:

Two years ago now, I was the student on the technology committee at [my school]. So I had to go to a school board meeting and just present a couple slides and just be like here’s how we use technology at [my school]. And then later, we presented possible ideas, talked about the budget, in the future, and it was a room full of resistors. Every single person there was, “Nope, can’t be done, won’t happen, can’t happen, not going to do it because of x, y, z, and a, b, c.” And no one would even give anything a slight chance of if it did happen, then what. It was immediately “No, we’re done with this now. Because it’s inconvenient for us to take the time to think about it.” We just wanted more money for technology. For the computers that are in very high demand. And we made a whole argument and presented our facts and justified, it wasn’t that we just—“we want it cause we want it.”

As part of this training, this student reflected on how this experience had affected her enthusiasm for school reform work:

It was just a really negative, defeating experience to where I swore off school board meetings because I mean, once there’s some turnover, new members, maybe it was just a bad day for people, hard week, I understand that, that everyone’s always bringing baggage, no matter where they go, but it was just really deflating, to go and have that experience and it was
like “Wow, why did I do that if it didn’t do anything, it just made me feel bad?” So, that was what I experienced with resistors. But it’s kind of an outlier, most of my experiences are very positive.

This youth facilitator acknowledges in telling her story that this was atypical of her experiences taking leadership in adult decision-making spaces. It was further acknowledged in the conversation that followed amongst the training participants that, in the majority of the collective experience of both youth and adults in the room, teachers typically were on their “best behavior” when students were presenting, that a natural desire to care for students is, in some sense, present in these encounters. However, the specter of putting young facilitators in a situation similar to the one experienced by this veteran YATST student remained.

*Controlling discourse*

Navigating this tension largely falls to the adult advisors of YATST groups, who must both work with the students to develop their leadership and facilitation skills, and ensure that youth interactions with teachers in these public meetings will meet adults’ need to have their intentions to be caring as educators acknowledged and affirmed. It was clear in the interviews that I conducted with Ben and Sara in 2012 and then again in 2013 that this was an important issue to them—caring for both the needs of their colleagues and for the youth in their groups. Their comments were littered with language about how roll the data out in a “gentle” way, to prevent teachers “from getting defensive” and “from freaking out”. It is possible to see this concern highlighted clearly in Sara’s explanation to me of the careful planning that they had done for the faculty meeting in which they had shared their first survey:
Sara: The curriculum guide wasn't developed then; Helen was developing it along the way. She'd brought all this material to us, and taught some of the students some activities, taught us some activities, helped us to develop this training so that it was engaging and rolled out the data in a gentle way. Some of it really was going to be hard for teachers to see. 90 some odd percent thought their class was engaging, 60 some odd percent of the students would agree with that. That could be pretty devastating as a teacher. We needed to come up with a way to really roll that data out constructively, and in a way where it could be heard. Then we could start to say, "This is why it's really important that we work together.

Cat: How was the analysis that you presented received when you first presented it?

Sara: Really, really well. Again, it was—we were—we did things very cautiously. We used some activities. We didn't get to the data until we were an hour-and-a-half into the training. We used chalk talks, which I think are incredibly valuable experiences, because it just allows every voice to speak. [Afterwards] It was just amazing the number of people that started saying, "This is what I can do to take action on this." I—no one was freaked out. No one was upset. It was really, it was well received.

Adult advisors across the organization agree that the YATST trainings do an excellent job in helping to support the successful leadership of youth in adult-only spaces (Mitra & Biddle, 2012). However, the tension of meeting both youth needs and adult needs still creates the specter of teachers in the panic zone and stories from across the YATST network of adults receiving youth poorly in these spaces, although greatly outnumbered by stories of success, still haunt the decision-making of teams as they contemplate sharing their data.

It is clear that such a possibility lurks in the background of the concerns of both Ben and Sara as they confront the meaning of the data, and in particular, as they puzzle over how to handle the tone of some students’ thoughts in the qualitative comments. Their ultimate decision to ignore the qualitative data suggests that the tight control of
student discourse, and particularly the tone of that discourse, within YATST-sponsored
dialogues is one way of helping to avoid potentially explosive or disillusioning
experiences for both youth facilitators and adults. This can also be seen in the strengths-
first approach, which is important for deciding what data will be introduced at what time
in youth-adult dialogue. The idea of using positive data as a softening strategy to increase
the acceptability of the data as a whole was repeated by both Maple Valley youth and
adult advisors in thinking through how to introduce their survey data to the faculty, in
particular.

The data analysis process endorsed by UP for Learning itself encourages these
tactics by asking youth and adults to narrow their analysis to the identification of three
strengths, and three concerns or puzzling gaps. I have heard Helen suggest that this
approach is important for youth developmentally, as it helps them to balance a teenager’s
natural inclination towards skepticism with a recognition of the positive aspects of their
school community. It is clear that both youth and adults feel that this approach is also
important for adults who are processing the data for the first time. The tabling and
eventual neglect of the qualitative data suggests the importance that YATST youth and
adults place on tone and language choice in increasing the acceptance of the data and by
extension, their endeavor to increase the profile of youth voice as a whole.

The discussion in this section has been largely devoted to the groups’ perceptions
of what it would be like to roll the data out to teachers. In the following section, I
examine the group’s interaction with teachers and students about the data when it was, in
fact, shared.
Sharing the data with the Maple Valley faculty

Following this September weekend of intensive data analysis, the Maple Valley YATST group spent the greater part of the 2013–2014 school year planning and then rolling out their analysis of the data to both the faculty and the students. A second data analysis session was held early in the school year at which the group reviewed the data analysis that they had done at the retreat with all the members of the group, including the students and faculty who had not been able to attend the summer retreat. As part of this retreat, which was facilitated by Helen, the group voted on the top three strengths and top three concerns/puzzling gaps that they saw in the data. These were:

STRENGTHS:

Teachers and students both agree that they have positive relationships with one another (Teachers: 100% strongly agree or agree / Students: 84% strongly agree or agree)

82% of students say that they have at least one adult in the school that they have talk to about a problem or concern

Students and teachers agree that students are able to advocate for their needs within their classrooms (Teachers: 89% strongly agree or agree / Students: 81% strongly agree or agree)

CONCERNS/PUZZLING GAPS:

Although there is high agreement among teachers and students that students should have a voice in decision-making, 40% of students indicated that there are no systems for that to be a reality.

Student survey question: My classes allow me to show and explore my interests while applying the skills I’ve learned 67% agree, 33% disagree; Teacher survey question: I provide opportunities for my students to show and explore their interests in order to apply skills they have learned, 89% agree, 11% disagree

Student survey question: I have been recommended for / put in courses too rigorous for me, 25% agree, 75% disagree; Teacher survey question: I have had students placed in classes that have been too rigorous for them,
67% agree, 33% agree; I have had students placed in classes not rigorous enough for them, 77% agree, 23% disagree.

Student survey question: I am given opportunities to provide feedback on their practices and their courses, 39% agree, 61% disagree; Teacher survey question: I provide opportunities for my students to give feedback on my practices and my classes, 84% agree, 16% disagree.

Although this was never discussed explicitly, as the group began to discuss sharing the data with the school community, everyone in the group was in agreement that it was best to present the data to the teachers first. This seemed to have gained the status of a YATST best practice, and in an interview conducted in 2012, one adult advisor explained this to me by saying that it was partially out of respect to the teachers. As a result, the group began to move forward with a plan to roll their analysis of the data out at a Maple Valley faculty meeting.

Presenting the data to faculty

Nicole Collins, Maple Valley High School Principal, gave the group an hour at a fall faculty meeting to facilitate activities related to the data. The planning for this meeting happened over the course of two or three weeks and was led by students, but was largely facilitated by Ben.¹ Ben worked with Claudia (who stepped up to take student leadership of this initiative) during a few free periods to plan the structure of the faculty meeting and also, when no students offered, took charge of creating the various materials

¹ Although Ben and Sara typically both worked with the Maple Valley YATST group, in the Fall of 2013, Sara was present for after-school YATST activities and weekend YATST trainings, but did not attend the weekly meetings because she had received a fellowship which allowed her to take a semester-long sabbatical to do an independent research project related to redesigning the Teacher Advisory program at Maple Valley. As a result, Ben was the primary adult advisor working with the students on planning and day-to-day YATST activities.
that would be needed for these activities. It was decided that the structure of the meeting would largely mirror what the group had chosen to do in their first action-research cycle, meaning the facilitation of a chalk-talk (semi-structured silent dialogue) as well as a short discussion about the experience of participating in the chalk talk and reactions to the data.

On the day of the chalk talk itself, the library of the school was abuzz with the excited and nervous energy of the students. The large room had been set up for the meeting with chairs in rows on one side, enough to accommodate the 80 or so faculty, and on the other side of the room, the library study tables had been arranged to accommodate small groups. Large pieces of colorful butcher paper had been laid out on each table with prompts describing the puzzling gaps and concerns that the YATST group had identified in their analysis of the data. Markers had been strewn about to facilitate the written dialogue called for by the chalk talk protocol.

A student was stationed by the door to the library and as teachers arrived, handed out colorful strips of paper with the strengths that the students had identified typed neatly on them. These strips of paper were meant to serve two purposes: first, to introduce faculty to the strengths that the YATST group had identified, and secondly to randomly assign them to the tables where they would begin the chalk talk experience. After several minutes, the majority of the faculty had arrived, and Principal Collins called for the meeting to begin. She explained that the students would be presenting, that they had worked very hard on this project, and joked that it was important not to heckle them.

Interestingly, after the amount of anxiety that, prior to this, the group had expressed over how the teachers would react to their analysis, the data itself was rolled out without a great deal of framing from the group, and certainly less than Sara told me...
had been used when they shared the data from their first survey with faculty several years earlier (or than is present in several videos available in the YATST archive of that first faculty meeting). Chris, a YATST student who enjoys presenting, briefly explained the purpose of YATST, and then Sean explained the purpose of the chalk talk and sent the teachers to their tables. Teachers rotated in groups through several chalk talk “stations” before being asked to stop and have a short five or ten minute discussion with their group facilitated by a student at the station where they stopped.

Teacher reflections on the puzzling gaps/concerns identified by the YATST group were elicited as responses to two questions written out on the colorful butcher paper: 1) What are the root causes of this? and 2) What are some possible solutions? Teacher responses to these questions, as might be expected, reflected a wide range of perspectives. Examples of the silent “conversation” that took place in response to one of the YATST groups prompts included [the arrows here indicate that the thought is a “response” to the previous thought, as written in the chalk talk]:

PROMPT:

Student survey question: My classes allow me to show and explore my interests while applying the skills I’ve learned [67% agree, 33% disagree]

Teacher survey question: I provide opportunities for my students to show and explore their interests in order to apply skills they have learned [89% agree, 11% disagree]

What are some of the root causes?

- Sometimes challenging to individualize with 100+ students ← or 6 preps!
- Is this preparation for what is expected at higher levels of education and in the world of work where choices are limited?
- Life is full of examples when you must apply skills to areas that don’t interest you personally
- Driver’s Ed wants to keep students alive. Sorry, not much time for interests.
- Sometimes there is no choice in content, even for teachers… the interest may only be addressed in the method of demonstration, not the topic
  ← sometimes “method of demonstration” is not a choice either
- Perhaps our school focuses too much on academic intelligence at the expense of other forms of intelligence?

What are some possible solutions?

- Possibilities/opportunities may go unspoken but could be discussed more explicitly.
- More money for education so we have lower student:teacher ratio—so teachers are not so overwhelmed
- Means for teachers to “know” students’ interest, learning style, readiness start, school year
- Have assignments provide multiple options for students to demonstrate their work, while recognizing this is not always possible
- Survey students about their interests
  ← get to know students better
- There ARE opportunities to explore interests at Maple Valley. But these pathways are HIGHLY stigmatized by both staff and students. We need to move beyond the stereotype of something being “alternative”.

The responses presented here are merely a selection of the many which were present in these chalk talk conversations. For this prompt alone, teachers provided 28 responses to the root causes question and 30 responses to the possible solutions question.

At this point, Claudia called for the teachers to stay at the table they were currently gathered around in order to engage in a short verbal discussion facilitated by a YATST student of the written discussion that they could see in response to the prompt in front of them. I observed a conversation at one of the tables with the prompt above about students being able to show and explore their interests, facilitated by a freshman YATST student named Colin.
Colin opened the discussion with a general question, “Thoughts? Feelings? Reactions?” The six or seven teachers gathered around the table were silent for a moment or two, before one teacher who suggested that there seems to be a theme of personalized learning reflected in the responses to the data on relevance. Another teacher pointed out a tension between teachers and students around what can and cannot be personalized. The adults at the table began to circle around this idea, with another giving an example of how she personalizes her class, and yet another wondering how in the world they as teachers are supposed to meet standards and still personalize their teaching?

As the conversation gained momentum, Colin attempted to mirror back what the adults were saying so that he could take notes. The conversation took a turn when one teacher raised the question of whose responsibility it was to personalize and make learning relevant—the teacher’s? Or the students’? Students ought to know their learning style, she suggested; they have to advocate for themselves; they have to take responsibility for their own learning, as well as teachers individualizing. One teacher who had to this point not yet spoken pointed out that her students are often unable to advocate for themselves, for whatever reason. She said she had a student just recently who told her he was literally interested in nothing. The teachers’ conversation here reflects both an engagement with the ideas represented in the data, as well as confusion about a way forward. While it was clear that some teachers felt that they could use the collective reflections on the data as a jumping off point for reflections on their own practice, others reiterated the tensions between what they do and do not have control over with regard to their own practice.
At the close of the meeting, the teachers returned to their seats and Sean facilitated an all faculty discussion about the experience as a whole. At this time, the group shared the strengths that they had identified. Some light cheering and supportive murmuring (‘that’s really good!’) from the faculty accompanied the announcement of each one as it was read. The floor was then opened up for discussion and teachers were allowed to provide comments or ask questions. On the whole, the comments given were very positive—teachers thanked the YATST students for their hard work on administering and analyzing the survey data. However, one issue that did arise during this time was a persistent line of questioning advanced by several teachers in the crowd about the reliability and validity of the survey. “Did you all talk about valid and reliable research?” One teacher asked, “We’re talking about that in our grad class.” Another teacher asked about the sampling strategy and the response rate for the survey. At this point, the Ben stepped in to explain the research design and to talk about the sampling strategy.

Afterwards, YATST adults and youth expressed several common beliefs about the power of the chalk talk as a way to roll out data to the school community. Sara said of the chalk talk protocol,

It was just—it was incredibly powerful, just incredibly powerful. You know what's interesting is, what's hard for the kids is for them to see how powerful an action that is, because it doesn't really feel like action. You can't visibly see something change. You're just starting to change attitudes. That's always been interesting for me, because that's a huge action.

Sara’s observation here was reflected in some of the students’ reflections on the chalk talk in their individual interviews. All of the students felt proud of themselves for having facilitated it successfully, though some had their doubts about its actual impact on
practice. However, Claudia, one of the senior members of the group, suggested in a reflection afterwards that the power of the chalk talk really lay in the opportunity it gave teachers to react silently to the data,

I think that instead of just all of a sudden forcing data onto them, and having them go on the defensive about things that may be a negative, that we want to highlight and learn more about, I mean, our way of kind of easing them into it was letting them slowly walk around and have their own personal thoughts and look at what they perceive as a negative and then just quietly write down. Because then no one specifically is being what they may feel is attacked and they all have their opinion.

As can be seen in the chalk talk responses themselves, the format seemed to serve several purposes for teachers: first, the responses made explicit teacher beliefs based in their own experience about the topics under discussion (e.g. “Life is full of examples when you must apply skills that don’t interest you personally”); second, it was clear that some teachers took the chalk talk as an opportunity to reflect on the systems in place that contributed to the issue (e.g., the stigmatization of alternative pathways or speculation about what is necessary preparation for post-secondary opportunities); and lastly, some teachers used the chalk talk to reflect on their individual practice and opportunities for personal change (e.g., explicitly suggesting discussion of opportunities for personalization with students more or more opportunities for personalized assessment).

Sharing the data with Maple Valley students

Presenting the data to the faculty was completed by mid-October. Coming off of the momentum and energy from successfully accomplishing this goal, the group began almost immediately to discuss the logistics of organizing a similar event for students.
Obviously, a parallel meeting of this type represented a much more massive undertaking, given the fact that the student body numbered almost 550 in the 9th through 12th grades.

In the first action research cycle, the group had arranged for representatives from each Teacher Advisory (approximately equivalent to a homeroom) to participate in a chalk talk around the data at that time. The event had been advertised as an ice cream social to reward students for their participation and had been, overall, considered a success by the YATST adults and teachers. Sara told me that the group had netted several new members from that event (some of whom were still involved with the group in 2013). Ben, while recognizing the success of that event itself, expressed some hope that this time around, the group would be able to get an even broader swath of student reflection on the data.

This year I’m really psyched about the way they’re thinking about this Student Chalk Talk because it’s been a hit, a huge percentage of this building, and I think that’s awesome, whereas before it was 50 kids. It was a kind of cross-section, but it was 50 kids. This will definitely be, I don’t know, more representative or fuller, but I don’t think that they think that we represent them in some way.

Planning for the student chalk talk became a much more difficult endeavor than anticipated and ended up consuming the group’s agenda and energy for the rest of the year. When I left Vermont in December of 2013, there were plans to hold the event once the group returned from winter break. However, due to a combination of students’ winter sports participation, snow days (a common hazard of the locality), and the lengthy process of thinking through some of the potential logistical challenges (such as how to accommodate several hundred students in common spaces across the school), the student chalk talk did not end up taking place until the first week of May.
At the YATST end-of-year celebration in April, the Maple Valley team spent this time sequestered away from the celebration in a conference room at the hotel where the event took place, putting the final touches on their facilitation plan, which was rolled out to the students over the following two days. Even at this planning session, there was disagreement between Sara and Ben about whether or not the group was ready to facilitate this event. Although Sara’s point that they would lose momentum and leadership if they waited any later in the year ultimately pushed the group to do it, Ben’s worry about how the group would be perceived if this event was done poorly was well-taken and the group spent an hour talking over the final details and completing a facilitation script that the youth would use to run the activity.

A significant part of the conversation that took place, in addition to confirming the logistics of facilitating chalk talks for almost 250 students a time, was how to communicate to the teachers who would be accompanying the non-YATST students to the chalk talks how to best support the YATST student facilitators. The students seemed adamant that they wanted to be able to facilitate the direction giving for the event themselves; however, they recognized that they would potentially need help with behavior management. Mostly, students seemed worried that in trying to help, teachers would “take over” facilitating the activity, effectively cutting the YATST students out of their role in the dialogue. It was decided that when Ben and Sara announced the student dialogue event at the faculty meeting that afternoon, they would explain how the teachers could best support the student facilitators.

*Presenting the data to students*
The student chalk talk was organized as a two-day event in order to accommodate the large number of students that would be participating. The first of the two days was organized only for the freshman and sophomore classes, although the same set of activities were repeated the following day for the juniors and seniors. Eight large common spaces, including hallways, locker areas, the auditorium, and the gym were commandeered by the group for the endeavor. Because of, in part, the indecision leading up to the event, the adult advisors ended up taking responsibility for much of the preparation. As Ben told me the morning of the chalk talk itself,

Make sure that all the planning that goes into this behind the scenes gets into your study. For every event that we do, there is ten times more planning that happens behind the scenes.

Ben told me how he had prepared over 50 chalk talks, made an announcement at a faculty meeting the night before, and composed and sent an email to the entire Maple Valley faculty detailing the procedures for the event. Additionally, he had met Principal Collins before school in order to review the details for the event.

The event itself took place during the Teaching Advisory period, and Teacher Advisors shepherded their students into the spaces that had been assigned for their classes, assignments which had gone out in an email the night before. I observed Sean and Taryn co-facilitating two large advisories of students in one of the common spaces near a locker area, a large open space with a lot of light streaming in from the windows set into the high ceiling. As the students walked in, they congregated in the center of the room, standing about waiting for direction. In the midst of this, a teacher approached Sean and Taryn. Addressing them both, she began to berate them in an angry tone about how inconvenient the communication for this event had been. “That e-mail went out at 9
“o’ clock at night!” She told them, “What was I supposed to do? Keep checking till then?” Both Sean and Taryn apologized to her and tried to explain that they had not meant for this to be inconvenient. She then turned to Taryn and chastised her for being late to school, telling her that it would have been totally within her rights to report her absent.

Only moments later, Sean addressed the whole group, explaining that he and Taryn are from YATST. “Can you explain what YATST is?” one of the teachers asked. “Not everyone here knows what it is.”

“Sure,” Sean said, “YATST stands for Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together. Taryn and I are some of the members, and Ms. Miller and Mr. Kaye are the adult leaders, er, adult constituents. So, that’s a little bit about YATST.” He went on to explain that the students should split themselves into groups of ten around each piece of paper. This led to several minutes of chaos as students scattered to various parts of the room, with Sean, Taryn and the adults in the room walking amongst them and trying to get them to settle around the chalk talk prompts. Eventually, one of the teachers called for quiet so Sean could continue to give the directions. He explained that the students should look at the prompts and write down their reactions to them. “I’m going to ask one thing. Please be silent for the activity. No talking. Do all your talking with your hands,” he explained. “We’ll do this for six minutes and then we’ll share.”

I observed the group closest to me contemplate the large piece of butcher paper on the floor in front of them. The group was seven students, three boys, four girls. At first, none of them said anything as they looked down at it. For a whole minute, no one picked up a marker or made any move towards the paper. At minute two, one of the girls picked up one of the markers and began to write on the “root causes” side of the paper. One of
the other students, a boy, jumped back in mock surprise at what she wrote, laughing. She put the marker down.

Around the room, there was a constant, low murmur of chatter. Sean walked around to the groups, alternately asking them to stop talking and seeing if they needed anything. Taryn was keeping time on her phone. The talking, however, continued to get louder, and I noticed some teachers approaching some of the groups and kneeling down with them, engaging with them over the prompts. I watched as one teacher worked with the group that had been hesitant to write anything on the paper. “There’s a pretty big difference between what the students think and the teachers think here,” he said. “What do you guys think about that?”

At last, one of the teachers rang a small bell that she had with her, which silenced the room. “Hey guys?” She began, addressing the whole room, “I think Sean was pretty clear about not talking.” She turned to Sean. “Maybe you wanna explain why. Because some people aren’t sure why they can’t talk. They want to discuss? They’re not just chatting.”

Sean turned to the group. “So, the best way capture the discussion,” he began, “is by putting it on the paper so that we can keep track of it and see what your thoughts are and we can take it back and help it inform our solutions to these problems. So, if you guys can discuss it on the paper, it makes our work that much easier.”

After 20 minutes, most students were still gathered around the pieces of paper, though few were writing and most were talking. Several students had disengaged from the activity completely and were seated along the wall of the room playing with their phones. Realizing that it was time for the students to return to their classes, Sean gathered
everyone’s attention for one final time to facilitate some sharing. He had each group go around and had a representative report back what themes had come out of the discussions.

One group shared that they felt that the administration had a lack of respect for the students. Another group shared that they felt there was a real power struggle between the administration and the students this year because of a lack of freedom resulting from all the new rules. Yet another group said that they felt that there is a lack of interaction between teachers and students, and that teachers need to give students opportunities to provide feedback. Another group shared briefly that they weren’t given time for such activities.

As the students left, I asked Taryn how she felt it had gone. “Eh,” she told me. Another student facilitator in the group building told me afterwards that this was the hardest thing she had ever done in the three years that she had been at Maple Valley. She had been facilitating alone in a hallway not far from where Sean and Taryn had been. Her session, however, had not lasted the entire time allotted and the teachers had taken their students back to their rooms half way through the activity. "Kids will be kids,” she reflected, “and we're doing this for them, so if they don't take it seriously, what can you do?” When I asked her what she thought would have made it more successful, she told me that better prefacing by the teachers whose advisories were participating might have made it more successful, if they had explained why the students were participating in it and what it was.

The responses culled from this exercise seemed to mirror many of the comments that the group had gathered on the qualitative survey. The critiques levied ranged in their
constructiveness and, although briefer, some were no less vitriolic in tone. Examples of responses from facilitating this activity for the freshman and sophomore classes were [again, no correction to punctuation, grammar or spelling has been made to preserve the visual rhetoric of these comments]:

PROMPT: Although there is high agreement among teachers and students that students should have a voice in decision-making, 40% of students indicated that there are no systems for that to be a reality.

What are some of the root causes?

- student government is lame
- major changes are made without student body knowing
- teachers not allowing students to talk
- students with a lack of interest and care
- teachers stereotyping good students versus bad
  - giving different grades to students based off of favorites
  - not listening to kids because of who they are
  - "smart" vs. "not smart"
- the stupid administration
  - what she said
  - I agree

What are some possible solutions?

- Impeach the administration
- have the administration tell us what is being done because there is bad communication
- a real discussion needs to happen, not a one-way conversation
- teacher/student UN - representatives from each grade and teacher/faculty depts
- if students don't CARE nothing will change
- make students vote on things and following up on their voice
- NEW administrators
- listen to the kids … all of them!
- have a student board whose input is actually considered
- Can't be student meeting and teacher meeting. Teachers and students need to talk to each other directly and see the effect of what they are discussing

The strengths that the group had uncovered in their data analysis process were left unmentioned in this presentation of the data to the students. Unlike the faculty meeting
that the students had facilitated earlier in the year, there was little opportunity to debrief the experience of participating in the chalk talk with students, in part because of the time constraints and also in part because of lack of facilitators. At the faculty meeting, there had been a 1:8 student to teacher ratio—at the student dialogue, there was one facilitator per 30–50 students.

The comments in response to the prompt about opportunities for student voice overall reflect an anger with little outlet for expression. Many of the comments here certainly fall into the “scary” category that Sara expressed anxiety over in looking at the qualitative comments on the survey. However, it is also possible to see that there is a real sense of injustice which students are attempting to express. This idea is perhaps best captured in a long comment that was written along the bottom of one of the pieces of chart paper dedicated to this issue. One student wrote,

A way to resolve this issue of communication would be to go to the source. I feel like the administration, especially the past couple of years, this year in particular, have been making and enforcing rules that are completely unnecessary. There's so many that the teachers don't even know them all and that leads to issues in communication, because the teachers aren't on the same page as the administrators, how can the students be expected to be. I'm just afraid there is such a power struggle between the students and the administration that it's leading to further respect issues. Some students may react to the obvious disrespect with vandalism and more disrespect, which is not the answer, but it's in our nature to fight back. Only, we wouldn't need to if there was more mutual respect and freedom.

This student’s comment is, in some ways, an eloquent request for administrators and teachers to try to look beyond the lack of respect in students’ self-expression to see through to the issues they are attempting to express. Examples of the type to which this student is referring—real, important equity issues cloaked in disrespectful language—can
be found within the chalk talk itself: accusations of teacher’s engaging in ability profiling, favoritism, and a recognition of the impotence of some of the formal outlets available to students (such as student council) to address these issues.

Conclusion

Although presented as parallel processes, the student and teacher dialogues seem to serve very different functions with regard to forwarding the aims of the YATST program. In this section, I will discuss the differences between the group’s approach to the faculty and student dialogues and the effect of these practices in determining who benefits and in what ways from the dialogic component of the YATST theory of change in practice. Although much could be said about the content of the concerns raised by both students and teachers in the dialogues presented in this chapter themselves, I will reserve the discussion here for the process of using youth-adult partnership for data collection, analysis, and dialogue for school reform at Maple Valley.

The primary purpose of the Faculty Dialogue process seems to be to invite teachers to practice the discipline of listening to students in a public forum that is made to feel safe for teachers. This invitation is extended in the form of the chalk talk protocol as a way to engage with the data, a facilitation tool that gives teachers the opportunity to process student critiques of their practice in stages: first, silently, then with a small group of peers, and lastly with the faculty as a whole. The purpose of sharing the data (which itself has been carefully vetted and sequenced so as to be as non-threatening as possible) in this way is to invite teachers to engage with a skill necessary to confront the way in which their practices may position youth in non-agentic ways (reflection) so that they can
then practice this skill on their own. The data points to opportunities where this practice would most effectively address student concerns.

This process of practicing and reflecting is done in the company of YATST students who present as both passionate about school change and unthreatening because of their articulate manner and the appreciation of the challenges of classroom teaching with which the YATST training equips them. Students’ speech that might be perceived as threatening or unappreciative of teachers’ best intentions, are excluded from these dialogues. While YATST students and teachers do not believe that this approach will be able to sway “resistors,” or adults who feel “they know best” (and, in essence, reject the idea of youth as agents entirely), the careful cultivation of this safe environment likely caters to teachers self-belief (that they are here to facilitate the positive development of youth), while still calling on them to reflect on the ways in which they could better meet student needs. In this way, through working with a group carefully selected and trained not to offend, teachers are exposed to student willingness to negotiate around the issues which teachers feel are most important: teaching and learning.

The exclusion of student voice that suggests blame, anger, discontent, or anything other than teachers’ good intentions is acknowledged by YATST adults and students as an important part of successfully engaging with teachers in this type of reflection, in swaying them to a new practice of care in their teaching. There is an acknowledgement, however, that these tactics will not engage those who reject the very premise of youth as partners and believe that “adults know best.” However, because of the public nature of these meetings, and the possibility of exposing youth facilitators to the skepticism of this small subsection of the faculty, it is important not to alienate this group.
The aim of the student dialogue, by contrast, does not seem to be instructive. It is facilitated by youth for youth. YATST adult and student reflections on the purpose of the student dialogue suggest, instead, that it serves to a) fill the gaps in the perspective of YATST youth and to b) possibly recruit new members to the group. The tightly controlled dialogue strategy that was deemed necessary for the teachers, the worries about rolling the data out without the strengths, none of these seemed to be perceived as possible concerns in rolling the data out the students. Although the dialogue could potentially be a space in which students practice speaking in ways that teachers could accept, the student chalk talk was not framed by the Maple Valley group as such.

Students are approached with the assumption that they are simply waiting for any opportunity to speak up and have their voices heard. However, the difficulties that the YATST group encountered in the student chalk talk around student engagement with the activity, as well as the feedback that they received, suggest that using the same approach with students as was used with teachers does not necessarily yield similar results. While the faculty chalk talks facilitated by students suggest student willingness to engage with the faculty, and as such serve as an invitation to the faculty to renew a commitment to student-centered teaching practices, student-facilitated chalk talks were largely unsuccessful at convincing students that adults are, in fact, willing to engage with them, or that adults care about their perspectives or their needs. Students’ need to feel heard and have their perspectives and feelings of anger and alienation validated were not met in this dialogue process. The “legitimate anger” (Freire, 1998, p. 45) that they wished to express, or anger that derives from their awakened consciousness that the way that schools have
positioned them, has actually denied them an ability to understand themselves in some fundamental way, and thus, their legitimate anger was not heard or recognized.

As we can see in the case of Maple Valley, the values which inform the YATST model guide youth-adult leadership towards specific discourse practices, practices that have allowed the group to gain acceptance amongst the school’s adults, but have also led to some challenges to the groups’ ability to expand and deepen their change efforts within the school, particularly with students. While YATST students widely maintained that if more students simply knew about the group, more students would participate, they, sometimes in the same breath, acknowledged significant barriers to the participation of their peers in these efforts. Not every student, it seems, can work to lead this change effort in partnership with adults; however, that does not mean that not every student can benefit from the reforms for which YATST is advocating. However, the result is, in some sense, that the rich get richer: the engaged remain engaged, as youth in YATST reap the benefits that typically come with participating in such leadership activities: increased self-confidence, the development of a critical perspective, a strong sense of belonging, and many of the positive development assets that have been identified in other research on the benefits of student voice work.

In this chapter, I have focused on the dilemmas of leading care-based school reform in partnership with youth, and in particular, the challenges of winning both teacher and student acceptance of the concept of shared responsibility, or mutuality, as a central principle of teaching and learning while using the YATST action-research cycle. As we have seen, the power structure of the school itself often leads YATST groups to focus their efforts on adult populations to the neglect of students. In the next chapter, I
examine the paucity of language available to teachers and students to describe and define the work of YATST.
Chapter 6
MIXING METAPHORS AND SHIFTING SYMBOLS:
THE INADEQUACY OF DISCURSIVE OPTIONS FOR YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIP

Metaphors are an important way in which we understand the world (Phillips, 1996). By analogizing in order to represent complex relationships, metaphors help us to make sense of the interconnection between our personal experience, our beliefs, and our understanding of future action. However, Phillips (1996) cautions that while metaphors allow a simple way to express complex relationships through framing our thinking, these frames can also create boundaries that limit our thinking or keep us from creating new connections or insight in reflection on our experience.

In the previous chapter, the experience of Maple Valley’s YATST group suggests that, in the face of conflicting needs, YATST groups tend to focus on the needs of teachers in the change process rather than those of non-participating students. This is, in part, a necessity that results from the pressure that neoliberal discourses about teaching and learning place on teachers, who, in an era of “student feedback” for teacher evaluation, feel the need to defend their professionalism.

In this chapter, I discuss how the Pinewood YATST group has used metaphor as a way to introduce and advance the idea of youth voice, leadership, and agency into their school in ways that draw on discourses about participation with which students and teachers are familiar—particularly the symbolism of civic participation, but also others about school success, hope, and student rights. Reflected in this array of symbols are many different potentialities for youth-adult partnership within schools. Using the case of
Pinewood as a lens for thinking about what language we have to understand shifting the role of youth in schools from passive recipients to agents, I pay particular attention to the relationships between competing educational discourses and their relationship to the ways that the rationale for student voice is conceptualized.

The Case of Pinewood High School

Background

Pinewood High School is a small, rural high school with a vibrant, five year old YATST program located in Pinewood, a small town with one elementary school located right on Main Street. The high school is a short walk away up a mountain road that meanders past the small town library and, up on a hill, the police station. The high school, according to the NCES Common Core of Data, is classified as “rural, remote.” In practice, this means that the town is located at the convergence of two Vermont state roads, which run through this area of the Northeast Kingdom, Vermont’s most rural corner. By the standards of this region, Pinewood is actually a fairly large community, adjacent to a few smaller towns that feed the high school and provide recreational opportunities in the summer to families from Massachusetts and other areas of New England.

Historically, the town was the center of a thriving granite industry that led to the development of its main street and its reputation as a “tough” town where granite workers went to drink on the weekends. As the granite industry declined in the 1970s, along with other industrial activity in this corner of Vermont, the community experienced many of the challenges that have affected other rural communities across America, including
declining population, a shrinking local economy, and a rise in community poverty. One of the administrators with whom I spoke referred to the town as a “bedroom community,” saying that because of limited employment opportunities, many people commuted to other towns to work. Another administrator reiterated this, explaining that the school is the largest employer in the area. In the last decade, however, the town has been the center of some attention for its devotion to the revitalization of its downtown, including the opening of a community-supported restaurant, an independent bookstore, and a number of other small businesses. Budding social entrepreneurial ventures around local food economies have attracted a small community of twenty-somethings to the area to work on local farms and participate in a movement to make the area a thriving local food economy, attracting both local and national attention.

Not every resident, however, has benefitted from or is in support of this movement. Poverty rates for Pinewood hover around 11 percent according to the 2012 American Community Survey, with rates at 17–20% for children under 18. Nearby towns feeding into Pinewood High School have even higher poverty rates, between 15 and 22% of the population. Almost 30% of the town lives below 185% of the poverty line, or the level at which their children are eligible to receive free and reduced price lunch. Average educational attainment for the town stands at roughly 50% with a high school degree or less, 25% with some college or an associate’s degree, and 25% with a bachelor’s degree or higher.

One local resident, who grew up in the community and has returned there to work, described how social standing in Pinewood has always been able to be divined by last name. He explained to me that the original French settlement of this area led to
families with French last names that had been in the area for decades upon decades.

Teachers at the school teach generations of students from the same family, he said, and students were judged based on their family names. A student I interviewed said something similar. “It’s a small community,” he said. “You know people—you know people’s names.”

The high school and middle school are housed in the same school building. The middle and high school are “union” schools, which means that towns other than Pinewood feed into them. Rivertown, River’s End, and Pinesdale are a few of these: all have their own elementary schools governed, in the characteristic Vermont way, by independent school boards. The supervisory union (Vermont’s equivalent of the school district) office is located in downtown Pinewood, just a short walk away from the high school. The superintendent explained to me that he essentially has 43 bosses in the form of the nine different school boards to whom he is held accountable as a result of this system.

The school building is surrounded by a view of the mountains that characterize this region. A long-time resident of the community told me he remembered back when the high school was moved from the downtown to this location in the 1970s. The residents of the town, in order to keep the costs of building the school down, helped to level out the building site so it could be constructed. Perhaps in keeping with this, a mural with the words “Community, Identity, Stability” are painted on a rock wall just outside the school. Just adjacent to the school is a small regional technical center at which a variety of students choose to pursue technical training in forestry, business, and other
subjects, which many Pinewood High students look forward to attending when they become eligible in tenth grade.

The front hall of the school is dominated by large banners which detail the achievements of the students and staff at Pinewood in the past several years. Among these is a mention of Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together (YATST) and the results identified as strengths from the first survey which the group administered several years ago. The banners flank the entrance to the guidance office suite, where Allison Oakes sits in her office at her desk, surrounded by YATST posters regarding brain research, a large American Indian symbol of balanced leadership, and flags from universities, both in and out of state. Allison has been the lead adult for the Pinewood YATST group for three years. Prior to her tenure, the current principal, Catherine Michaelson, was in the position of guidance counselor and was the founding adult leader of the Pinewood YATST group. Allison described her introduction to YATST to me by saying,

When I was hired here, one of the students on the interview committee was a YATST member and so he explained it a little bit in the interview and then asked me my perspective on student voice, so I guess it was the way I must have answered my question because the next thing I knew, not only had I been hired, but then I was asked if I would help coordinate the YATST group, so I said yes because obviously, student voice is something that I’m passionate about.

The YATST program had come to Pinewood four years previously because of Catherine Michaelson, the guidance counselor at that time. Of her reasons for wanting to get involved in YATST, Catherine said,

Guidance has always been very student-centered… Initially, I just thought it would be a good thing for students to write about on their college applications, but as I got more involved and the students got more
involved, it went beyond just a leadership opportunity to really having an impact on our practice.

In her first year, Catherine went about tapping a few students whom she thought might be interested to attend the YATST trainings. These included the president of the student council, who also happened to be the student member sitting on the local school board. He went about recruiting some of the other student leaders, about six students in all. This small group attended the YATST summer training, a three-day retreat where the students and adults learned about the action research process and the fundamentals of the YATST theory of change. The students, Catherine told me, came out of that experience with a sense of purpose: "Student voice is essential," one student said at that time, "because we are the ones learning."

“Your voice, your vote”: Citizenship as the establishing metaphor for YATST’s work

Working off of the momentum of that first summer training, the newly formed group put together two parallel survey instruments designed to measure student and teacher perceptions about teaching and learning by early October of its first year. The group designed one survey to gather student perceptions and another to gather teacher and administrator perceptions on "the 4Rs," a framework focused around rigor, relevance, relationships and shared responsibility that had just been introduced by the YATST leadership team a few months previously. The group did a short pilot of the student survey using a “Pizza Session” to which they invited a representative group of students to participate in taking the survey and providing them feedback on the questions before they administered it to the entirety of the school.
In order to create buy-in for the survey across the school community, the group advertised it as an opportunity to "be heard" and put up intriguing “Your voice, your vote” signs all over the school to promote participation and pique curiosity. The group was interested in taking this approach in order to link the survey and YATST to the idea of civic engagement and participating in the community. The signs were successful at piquing student interest, and, on the day that the survey was administered, each class visited the gym where voting booths used in town elections had been borrowed from the town council and arranged around the room. Each student had to come in and register, just as one does with actual voting, and then had their turn to go to a poll station and fill out a YATST survey on a computer (See Figure 7).

Figure 7. Pinewood High School students taking the YATST survey

This strategy for establishing themselves within the school turned out to be extremely successful on a number of fronts. First, it established the group's presence within the school. The campaign is still remembered today by Pinewood’s current seniors, only eighth graders at that time. Additionally, the group found that the act of
taking the survey itself was one that definitely piqued some students’ interest in participating in the fledgling initiative. A few students reported being surprised to be asked questions like "Do you think students here have a say in how a teacher teaches? Or what the curriculum is?" Students who were interviewed for a local video segment just after taking the survey said it had never occurred to them that those might be things that they could have a say in.

Given the strong discourse about local control and citizenship in small, rural communities in Vermont (Jennings, 2000; Jennings, Swidler, & Koliba, 2005; Mansbridge, 1983), introducing the initiative by associating YATST with civic-mindedness seemed to be a politically expedient way for the Pinewood YATST group to tie the group, which was introducing an unfamiliar concept (meaningful student involvement in decision-making about teaching and learning) into the local culture, through marriage to a concept familiar and acceptable to the community as whole. By analogizing an individual’s survey participation to a vote, the initiative was cloaked in values that were compatible with those of the community—a community with a school board for every school, and whose town meetings govern the passage of the school budget.

**Creating teacher buy-in through cultivating diverse metaphors for Pinewood YATST’s work**

Concurrent to the administration of the survey at Pinewood and the “Your Voice, Your Vote” campaign, the YATST program offered their first training with dialogue for change expert Daniel Baron to support their school transformation work. The Pinewood YATST team attended this training and, as a result, were anxious to use their new data as
a stimulant for school-based dialogue centered around increasing the presence of the 4Rs in their school. As part of a session that they had held to analyze the data, the group had voted on which of the strengths, concerns, and puzzling gaps were the most important for the school community to discuss as a whole. They began to plan opportunities for faculty to participate in a dialogue about the data.

With the help of Catherine, the group was able to secure time in a Pinewood faculty meeting to share the strengths that they found in the data, and to formally introduce YATST and its goals to the faculty using an activity called “Why Bother?” Presumably, there was a recognition by either Helen or the early Pinewood YATST group that faculty might need additional framing that went beyond a discourse on citizenship to make the idea of incorporating youth perspectives and concerns about teaching and learning into their own consideration of their practice. The “Why Bother?” activity asked the faculty to choose amongst a variety of reasons that they felt that youth voice was important for teaching and learning. These included [capitalization has been reproduced exactly to retain the visual rhetoric of the posters used for these activities]:

- Doing this work together is a RIGHT and a part of being a CITIZEN in our democracy
- Doing this work together will improve ACADEMIC SUCCESS
- Doing this work together PROMOTES OWNERSHIP
- Sharing this work RENEWS HOPE
- Through this work students transform being “OBJECTS” to “INVENTORS”

Each of these posters had quotations from either prominent writers on each of these topics or excerpts of state-wide data that underscored the importance of that point. A video taken of the faculty meeting in which this activity was facilitated by the
Pinewood group shows the faculty walking around the auditorium stage, examining posters which had been set up on easels. The teachers were asked to stop at the poster they most identified with and to discuss in small groups what about that poster had connected with them individually. One teacher shared that he himself felt that the rights-based justification resonated most with him because of the sentence, “The students must have an active role in learning if their learning is going to be meaningful and lasting.” He said,

It isn't just about teachers doing better, better, better—it really has to do with students coming in to learn and the teachers helping you when you get stuck. There’s no way to teach students if they aren’t motivated and engaged in their own learning. So, I came over here hoping that we get more engagement, somehow. However that works.

For another teacher, the fact that this work can “renew hope” was most important because she felt “students have dreams and it’s important to us to figure out what those are.” A third teacher reported that he was struck by the quotation on the poster about changing students from objects to inventors which stated, “There is a radical and wonderful new idea here, that children could and should be inventors of their own theories, critics of others’ ideas, and analyzers of evidence and makers of their own personal marks.” Of this, he said,

I'm here doing student teaching, and I was all excited to share with this group, that this is very much a part of the curriculum that I'm living with right now, that my real role as a teacher is not to be a dispenser of knowledge but to partner with children and share in an educational experience. And then someone pointed out that this quote was from 1955. [Some laughter around the room] And I think that's all we need to say about that.
During the years I have worked with YATST, I have seen this activity repeated many times with these same posters. When I observed this activity at the YATST summer orientation in 2013, Helen mentioned to me that she likes the activity to introduce the necessity of YATST because “no matter what you choose, you have to choose that youth-adult partnership is important.”

The group was delighted to see that the feedback from this in-service was extremely positive, with one teacher writing that it was “the best in-service that I have ever attended!” The Pinewood YATST group held the concerns and puzzling gap data back until a second faculty meeting towards the end of the school year in which they were able to facilitate a chalk talk, or silent dialogue strategy, asking faculty to respond to the concerns and puzzling gaps in the data with their thoughts on the root causes and potential solutions for these issues.

By the following year, as they contemplated moving into the action phase of the action-research cycle, the group had doubled in size to almost 15 students and Catherine, having transitioned into her new role as the principal, was now in a new position to work with the YATST group and to strategically align that work with other work that was happening within the school. A number of projects were proposed to address the concerns that they identified within the data. One such project was the creation of a teacher-student feedback sheet that could be used for students to self-assess their own responsibility for their learning as well as what their teachers could do to improve their teaching. Another was a video project interviewing school community members about the role of self-expectations and others’ expectations in teaching and learning. However, the project
which gained the biggest traction actually did not originate as an idea from the team, at all, but rather through another channel.

Emergent metaphors for understanding youth-adult dialogue for change

As the Pinewood team was attempting to figure out in which direction to take their action-research project, a faculty member approached Principal Michaelson and expressed her opinion that mid-semester exams were a waste of the Pinewood students’ and faculty’s time. She asked for the opportunity to discuss this issue within an upcoming faculty meeting. Catherine agreed to her request, but asked the YATST group to take the lead in facilitating the discussion of the issue with the faculty.

Allison recounted in her interview how the YATST group approached this faculty meeting, facilitating it as a conversation between students and teachers using a fishbowl protocol. An inner ring of a few students and a few teachers were given time to speak about the current mid-semester exam schedule while an outer ring of students and teachers listened to the inner ring speak. After a predetermined amount of time, the inner ring switched with the outer ring, who were then allowed to discuss both their thoughts and opinions about what they had heard from the inner ring. Allison described the students who participated in this particular activity as being of “various cognitive and social abilities” in a reflection she wrote about the experience. She also told me,

They really brought up a lot of points about exams and how they’re assessed and why they’re assessed in the way they are and it really led to a lot of discussion between faculty and kids about that type of assessment… I have some kids that are kind of—disenchanted with school. They participated in this fishbowl activity and they were very vocal about what school and exams meant to them.
The process, she said, gave teachers an opportunity to “see learning through the eyes of their students.” As a result of this dialogue, the leadership team met and decided to provide teachers the opportunity to change the format of their midterm exams and design alternative assessments for students. While not all teachers chose to take advantage of this opportunity, some teachers did choose to offer students the option to complete performance-based assessments or projects that demonstrated learning as opposed to a formal exam.

Allison described the outcomes of this effort overall as mixed. She recounted, “It kind of backfired a little bit in that it wasn’t a unified front, and it was kind of this blended approach of old and new.” The schedule ended up having some kinks in it, with too much time allocated for some teachers’ assessments and too little for others. In one case, some students had to take their math exam over several periods rather than in one long block, which some of the YATST students reflected was difficult. However, in an end of the year reflection, Allison wrote optimistically,

This is one example of how Pinewood took a step toward transformation by engaging learning and student voice in decision making. It also provided some teachers, who were willing, with the opportunity to engage in deep personal reflection and a commitment to pedagogical changes based on new understandings. The evidence of this was teachers who gave project based assessments instead of mid-term exams.

The dialogue facilitated by the YATST teams, Allison felt, had led teachers and students to engage with each other in a new way, a way that prompted some teachers to engage in deep personal reflection on their practice, and ultimately, to adjust that practice in order to better meet the expressed needs of their students.

_The consumer-service metaphor for student voice_
Although the change to the midterm exam schedule was not a lasting change, Allison reported one teacher’s reaction to the fishbowl dialogue as evidence of the success of the dialogue. On her exit card, this teacher wrote,

I think the fact that students felt that the bulk of exams are memorization and recall tasks is information we should use to improve our practice. We should hear from students on other issues as well. After all, they are the consumers of the service we provide and who better to provide us with feedback.

The metaphor that this teacher uses is one which I heard not infrequently to describe the work of YATST and the necessity of integrating youth voices into school decision-making. For example, Allison told me in an interview in 2012 that she believed strongly in the idea of “students as our consumers” and that because of their ability to provide user feedback, this was an important reason for working with students in partnership. The students I spoke with occasionally positioned themselves similarly, citing the fact that their efforts were meant to improve an education that ultimately was “theirs”. “Schools are there for students,” one student told me. Their desire to provide teachers with their thoughts was often analogized to a consumer-driven feedback model, one connoting the positioning of students as consumers and teachers as service-providers with an obligation to meet students’ needs and wants adequately.

Other YATST adults and youth sometimes used this turn of phrase as well. A YATST teacher at Kenner High School told me that, “Students are basically our consumer and our product. If they don’t like what they are getting, and they make that clear, then things will change.” A principal of another nearby YATST school told me that incorporating student perspectives into teaching and learning practice was like “going
back to the consumer, and getting the consumer to give some input in how things could
work best.”

During my work with the YATST program, I heard youth and adults alike
describe the work of YATST and the paradigm shift that it represented in teaching and
learning in a variety of ways. This diversity seems to be perceived as an asset, as is
reflected in Helen’s earlier comment on the “Why Bother” activity and the importance of
a forced acknowledgement of the necessity of youth-adult partnership. There is a pride in
the ability for the program to be many things to many people, to connect with many
people in many different ways. Undergirding this diffuse logic of justifying the necessity
of youth-adult partnership is an assumption of the interchangeability of the relationship
between justification and “the rightness of student voice,” or the sense that student voice
is an inherent good (Fielding, 2004). Within this flexibility, however, also lies the
potential for co-optation.

Two aspects of this analogy were particularly puzzling. First, the consumer-
service analogy for student voice is not one that UP for Learning’s materials or faculty
ever use or endorse. The “Why Bother” activity, for example, used by Pinewood YATST
group facilitated for their faculty to introduce the necessity of YATST and to invite
faculty to connect their own practice to its aims, does not suggest an instrumentalist
approach to voice as a means to “improve education as a product” or to suggest that
teachers are providers of a service and ultimately are accountable to students as
individuals for their service provision. However, the analogy persists.

Secondly, it seemed clear to me that the instrumentalist positioning of student
feedback that their language implied was not the image or model that participating
YATST teachers and students meant to invoke, a fact evidenced by the projects that they undertook and the relationships in which they engaged. For example, at Pinewood High School, the YATST team designed a student-teacher feedback tool that was not only meant to be an opportunity to give teachers feedback from students on their teaching, but also designed to give students an opportunity to reflect on their contribution to the teaching and learning dynamic of their classes, through posing questions to students about their own responsibility for their learning and engagement. Implied in the construction of this tool is a positioning of students not as entitled consumers, demanding their needs be met by smiling, subservient teachers; but rather, a recognition of the need for both teacher and student engagement in critical self-reflection for engagement in learning to occur. However, the language of a consumerist model seemed to be invoked by some teachers and students exposed to the YATST approach for lack of a better language.

The gap between language and practice exemplified in student and teacher attempts to described what they are seeing and experiencing as they both direct and participate in the YATST model suggested the need for further examination of the nature of the change that the YATST groups attempt to embody and engender. The contemporary work of the group serves as a useful reference point for examining how the group describes the lived experience of these relationships, and the paradigm shift that they are seeking to inspire within their schools. Therefore, the next section of this chapter is dedicated to examining the way in which the Pinewood YATST group today describes their work and demonstrating the inadequacy between the metaphors that YATST participants use to describe the goals of their work and the way in which they describe the
relationships which result from participating in the work. Because changing the nature of the relationships between youth and adults is a key aspect of the paradigm shift that YATST groups are working for, understanding key differences in how the overall goals of the work are articulated and the nature of the relationships derived from the work itself is key to understanding the inadequacy of the current discursive options available to youth and adults for describing the partnerships aspired to through the YATST theory of change.

“Family” as a contemporary metaphor for Pinewood YATST’s work

Today, the Pinewood YATST group meets every other week in a small conference room down the hall from Allison’s office, supplemented with half and full day retreats for planning, often on holidays or in-service days. Students come to the group any number of ways. Some are recruited by their friends, others are recognized by their teachers or the principal as being good candidates, often because of some parallel advocacy they take on for change (See Table 6 for a list of Pinewood YATST Participants).
Table 6. Pinewood High School YATST Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Grade/Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allison Oakes</td>
<td>Adult Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Core members</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>11th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anya</td>
<td>11th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>10th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanette</td>
<td>10th grade</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maddy</td>
<td>10th grade</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other members</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9th grade</td>
<td>0 students</td>
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<tr>
<td>10th grade</td>
<td>4 students</td>
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<tr>
<td>11th grade</td>
<td>2 students</td>
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<tr>
<td>12th grade</td>
<td>3 students</td>
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Nanette, a bubbly sophomore, described her introduction to the YATST group in this way, demonstrating the contemporary perception of Pinewood YATST as the place articulate students with school reform ideas ought to go:

Well me and one of the other girls, we had noticed a problem in our classes when we had substitute teachers. A lot of the times students would act as if their teacher had no say in what was going on in the classroom. They would act crazy, not follow the rules, get out of their seating charts, not do what they were supposed to, treat them with really bad respect. So me and this other student went to go talk to the principal and we, well I made up a whole little slide show and everything. We met with her and she told us that we should join YATST, because of our involvement already. She brought us down to Miss Oakes and said, "Two more recruits."

**YATST group dynamics**

In talking with me, students' reflections on the dynamics of the Pinewood YATST group indicated strong feelings of allegiance and commitment to both the work of the group and to each other. While many of the students described the goal of the group as simply "making a change within the school" or "making education better," this idea of
making change, of raw agency, was clearly a powerful motivator for many of the students. The students spoke passionately and warmly about the group, describing their YATST peers as deeply invested and committed to the work. Lewis, one of the most energetic young group members, told me about the way in which he first identified with the dynamic energy of the group:

It was just like there was this elite group of kids that just—like the first couple of weeks of high school, I was like "(blandly) okay, high school is great. I'm going to get an education" but then I went and I was hearing all these people talking about what they want their education to be and what we could do with our education...I was really excited about that I guess—Just there's this group of people that were talking about what they were passionate about and that's kind of what I was passionate about as well, so it worked out well.

A deep belief in the commitment of members of the group was a common theme mentioned by all the participants. "Commitment," one student said, "is like the biggest thing this year in our group." Allison agreed. "The students are really committed," she said, "I just see them as being like, ‘We really want to change the school, and we want to make a difference.’" Emily, a junior, told me,

We’re all kind of more involved in it now, like we’re really invested instead of, like I was really in and out before, but now this year I’m in it and I haven’t missed a meeting or anything like that.

This renewed sense of commitment is likely a reflection of what Principal Michaelson characterized as a lag time the previous year. The group was going through a transition as the dedicated upperclassmen leaders, those who had founded the group and steered it from the beginning, graduated and passed the baton to a younger group of students. In the previous year, these new leaders had focused on putting together the new survey, but it was a disjointed effort that one student described as “too much talking and
not enough doing." Allison characterized this year's students as a core group of very enthusiastic younger students, with a periphery of older students who had more competition for their time. In the meetings that I observed, this did seem to be the case: many of the older students, particularly the juniors and seniors, would leave the meetings early because of competing commitments to other treasured activities like chorus, peer tutoring, or the play. A core of five or six students made up the group that consistently attended meetings; however, these students did not seem to begrudge the peripheral students' lack of attendance or consistent participation. As Lewis, one of the younger leaders of the group, said,

I've noticed that it's like on a school wide basis, there's a small group percentage of people at the top of all the different clubs and everything that are involved and it's always the same people that are in everything so it's hard for those people that are involved in music and sports and this YATST and other things to be all like the ones that are carrying everybody around, I guess.

Allison put it a different way, explaining that she had come to terms with the idea that at any given time, some students would be more involved than others and it was good for different students to attend YATST trainings and get the benefit of some of the ideas that were being discussed in those trainings.

We try to establish norms for our group. We try to make it so that this group is pretty cohesive and the understanding is that people will contribute what they can when they can and you’re not looked down upon because you won’t be able to make every meeting or every project. We establish that in the beginning.

The core students often mentioned that they valued the closeness and intimacy within the group. One student summed up many of the students' comments about the dynamic of the core group of students by saying, "We're like a little YATST family."
This ideal of family as a metaphor for the group’s relationship was reflected in the themes that the students expressed in their interviews: a high level of trust, a strong sense of connection, an emphasis on the importance of maintaining relationships and a shared pride in the group’s identity and purpose. One student described the qualities of the group by saying,

I’d say we’re a group of funny, serious, helpful, loving, very into our work, passionate about what we do, caring about our school, loyal to the work we do. I feel we have very much pride in our YATST. We’ll go around and say, yeah, we’re part of YATST. I feel like that’s our group.

The students’ sense of connection and importance in maintaining positive relationships with one another came out clearly in their description of their group decision-making processes. Emily, a more verbal student, described how the group goes about making a decision in the following way:

It’s not usually like a majority thing because I think we usually come to terms on the same thing. It’s usually unanimous. If someone does disagree, we usually try to explain to them why we think [this thing] might be more important right now but we always go back to [their ideas]. To that other person’s thing we always go “How about we do this after?” … When I hear someone say “This is important to me,” I go “All right, I’m going to help you with this”. And, like if I have something to talk about, I just, like, hold on to it because I know they’ll come back to it, I know they will. I trust them to do that for me.

Anya, a quieter student in the group, talked in her interview about her experience contributing to the group process in a way that seemed to echo much of what was observed by this more verbal student. She and I discussed her experiences as a quiet person in the group in the following exchange.

Interviewer: What do you see as your role in the YATST group?
Student: I think, as I said before, I’m pretty quiet, but I do have like stuff that I want to be heard, so I think just my opinions maybe because everyone has an opinion to have it heard, but sometimes it’s hard to have your opinions heard because there are so many other people who are louder and stuff and are more willing to talk than you. I think maybe just my job I guess is sort of getting opinions from people who don’t normally talk, maybe?

Interviewer: Do you feel like there’s space for you as a quiet person in the dynamics of this YATST group?

Student: Definitely. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. What are the things that they do to make you feel comfortable?

Student: I know a lot of the people who are in it, and they know me as being a quiet person, so they—I’ll raise my hand, somebody else will be talking, and then someone will look over and be like, “Oh, hey, Anya wants to talk,” and they’ll acknowledge that because I don’t normally have a lot to say. When I do, they’ll really listen I guess.

Other students talked about their commitment to getting quiet students in the group to be heard, with Nanette even going as far as saying that “it’s the quiet ones have the best ideas.” The group process described here is in keeping with a unitary, consensus-based decision-making model (Mansbridge, 1983). Because of their shared commitments, the group can take for granted, to a certain extent, common values that undergird their participation and focus on building consensus around group actions that are derived from those values. For all of the participants, these values seemed to be derived from their understanding of the goal of the YATST action research process, namely, to use data and dialogue to drive change, specifically around increasing the presence of the 4Rs.

The dynamic which Anya describes can also be seen in Emily’s comments on her way of being in YATST versus her way of being with her friends.
I think whenever I go to a YATST meeting or something it’s always really comfortable, like the vibe is. I don’t ever feel like I shouldn’t say something because it’s too controversial or too “not what they were talking about” or like it’s a disagreeing topic… I always feel confident and I always feel like they’re going still be my friend.

In Emily’s comments, it is possible to see the high value that the connection has for her.

Nanette expressed how this feeling of connection and belonging extended beyond the bounds of formal YATST activities into students' everyday lives and friendships. In her words,

We're creating a bigger bond than I think everyone realizes. Having spent so much time with each other, you wouldn't think that we'd create a bond with other people that we don't work with every day. We are there for each other when we least expect it, even when we're not in YATST.

This strong sense of belonging and connection is often a by-product of student voice work (Mitra, 2004). Through their connection to work that feels very important and urgent, students come to feel more connected to one another, despite differences in age or grade. Within this connection, there is a trust that each person's ideas will be equally considered, that each person's priorities will be acknowledged and heard.

Relationship between YATST students and their adult advisor

These feelings of strong connection, intimacy, and closeness were present not only between the YATST students, but also between students and YATST-trained adults in the school. YATST students, overall, felt that they that they were listened to in an authentic way that was unlike other encounters that they had with adults in their schools.

Emily told me that in her experiences with all YATST adults,

[YATST] teachers listen to me on a level and to me it’s like—it almost makes me want to cry because I think, “Wow, I wish teachers were like this in my classroom, I wish I was learning from my teachers all the time.” [I want] to make that for everybody, make that happen for everyone, make
everybody want to cry about it. Because for me, just being valued is huge. I think, I feel like I’m not valued here [at school] sometimes and that makes me sad when I come here sometimes.

Lewis also felt that this sense of personal connection and being valued was demonstrated by YATST-involved adults, including the administrators making up the Pinewood Leadership team. At the beginning of the 2013 school year, Lewis, with the encouragement of Allison and other members of the YATST team, petitioned to become a member of the Pinewood Leadership team—a group of administrators including the principal, dean of students, guidance counselor, and several teacher leaders. When I asked him how he felt about his relationship to this decision-making group, he told me that he felt that they were like “friends”.

In the past year I’ve been let into this new community of the teachers actually listening to me and valuing me as a person, and I didn't really think that kind of happened—not to say they weren't respectful of me or anything, but it felt like I was just a person talking to a person and let into this community of all these people... All the staff are great. They're like friends. They really are. It’s great to be in that community.

I often heard Pinewood YATST students jokingly refer to Allison as the “mother” of the YATST group. Allison, for her part, explained her role as providing the “nurturing” that the group needs to establish effective dynamics that help them move forward in the action-research process. She explained that she has to walk a line between providing direction for emerging student leaders and helping them to more fully develop their leadership skills. To this end, the YATST trainings aimed at developing students' adeptness with their change model have been extremely helpful in assisting this effort. As Allison observed,

They do have opportunities to—there was Daniel Barron. They were trained. I brought some kids to that facilitator training, so they learned
facilitation skills. The training part of it is important because we want them to be leaders, but we have to give them the training and the skills to become leaders.

Because she can rely on the quality of the YATST training to equip students with the necessary skills base to navigate the action-research cycle (Mitra & Biddle, 2012), Allison sees a big part of her role as an adult advisor for the group as balancing the asking of guiding questions and the modeling of effective leadership practices when back at school. When I asked her how she participates in this type of skill building with students, she told me,

There are meetings that I will set the agenda, but then there’s other meetings where I’ll say, "Okay. This is your meeting, you guys. Make sure you bring the agenda. Someone’s gotta take notes." I think modeling is really important, but I also—you have to give them the chance to do it, so I think that’s an important piece. I also try to—I don’t really know how I do this, but you’ve got to sit back a little bit. Their ideas and their voices are so important and if it’s going in a direction that doesn’t feel very comfortable for where we need to be going, I mean, I may pose questions to get them back on track, but never to say, oh, we can’t do this. It’s really just to get them to think about where this really needs to go and they’ll come around to it, but the guiding questions and modeling I think is really important.

To Allison, setting limits on what the students can and cannot do in this context is not youth-adult partnership. However, she can leverage her experiences as an adult to provide guidance to students in finessing and adapting their ideas for the realities of the school environment. Allison also sees part of her role as making sure that students are experiencing growth from their participation in the group. She described one encounter that she had with a student to me in this way,

I’m thinking of one girl in particular. She’s very quiet. She’s not very outspoken. She comes to all the meetings and she finally said, “What I’m good at is organizing things.” She said, “So let me schedule all the appointments. I will get the memos out to everybody reminding them of
when their appointments are and make sure they sign their releases, but I don’t want to do any other interviewing.” I was like, “Great!” I think we’re trying to see what their strengths are, but I also pushed her at our last workshop to do a little bit of public speaking and I knew it made her feel a little uncomfortable, but we also talk about if we don’t take risks, we don’t learn from that. I do see it varies for different kids, but I think I’ve seen growth in all of them, even the kids that don’t come on a regular basis.

In many ways, Allison, as the adult for the group, tends to the needs of both individual and group growth, by looking after the leadership dynamics of the group as a whole and by looking after the individual needs of the students. In this interaction she describes, the student expressed her discomfort with what she was being asked to do and proposed an alternative that would help her meet her need to be part of the group. Allison agreed that this student should contribute in a way that used her strengths, but also inferred, based on her own life experience, that this student would eventually need to develop other leadership skills in order to continue being involved with this type of work in the future. The student accepted this need and attempted to do this within a context which felt safe: the family-inspired context of the YATST group.

The qualities that YATST students most valued in their relationships with YATST-involved adults, the ones they wanted all students to experience and to “make everyone cry about,” could also be seen in their comparison of these relationships to their relationships with non-YATST adults. While many students expressed the belief that all teachers were concerned with student learning (citing as examples anonymous suggestion boxes in classrooms and opportunities to revise work), Anya told me that she felt that a lot of teachers “want to help students but they don’t know how.” The students were candid in their descriptions of what qualities encouraged and discouraged their desire to
work in “partnership” with adults around issues of teaching and learning. Emily told me that, in contrast to her experience with YATST teachers, who make her feel valued and understood, occasionally the adults in her life treat her in ways that she feels dismiss her opinions and beliefs.

My parents, they do this thing—it’s rather rude—but they talk about me in front of them and they say “Oh, she’s just tired today or something,” and I feel like that’s what teachers do sometimes behind our backs. So, they must get on this idea of theirs about us, but they’re not hearing it from us, they don’t really know, they’re kind of guessing about things they could have the answer to instead of asking.

Here, Emily tries to define why it is that adults do not listen to young people, and in describing it, she talks about how adults’ preconceived ideas about youth and about what youth need in a particular moment are based around their own ideas of how youth’s beliefs are shaped by their current moods and caprice. Her criticism of this attitude towards young people by adults seems to be that these beliefs obscure adults’ ability to see the opportunity that they have to consult with young people about what they need.

Allison also characterized the continuum of perspectives around youth-adult partnership amongst the Pinewood faculty in relation to this ability to use student perspectives as a springboard to critically reflect on their own practice. Of faculty receptivity, she told me,

I think there’s always a continuum of perspectives. I think we have some teachers that really believe in student voice and are able to take what kids say and reflect on their practice and therefore, what we saw right after the fishbowl is a lot of teachers kind of took it a step further and then had classroom discussions with all kids ’cause the fishbowl was obviously only 12 students. A lot of teachers kind of broadened the discussion with their students and then some actually went ahead and changed their midterm exam. Then, there’s the other end of the spectrum, that said “You know what? I’ve always done it this way. I’m going to continue to do it
this way. This is what kids need when they go to college ‘cause they’ not gonna give ‘em other types of assessments.” So, we have a continuum.

For Allison, what separated the adults who were able to build on this initiative from those who were not was their willingness to use student perspectives on their learning needs as an opportunity for critical reflection on their practice.

**Conclusion**

This chapter considers the role of metaphor as symbolic of the changing discourse surrounding youth-adult partnership at Pinewood High School, and also as a way of surfacing the gaps in the language available to youth and adults to discuss the endeavor in which they are engaged. The strong, clear symbolism of “voting as voice” used by the group in establishing themselves tied the work that they were doing to a local discourse with which both teachers and students were familiar—that of citizenship development and civic participation. However, it was clear in discussing the meaning and focus of the work with contemporary group participants that the absence of this metaphor of voting and civic participation meant that it did not undergird their understanding of their own work today. Although the discourse of civic participation in the context of small town Vermont was one which obviously resonated with the school community, the shift away from a strong civic emphasis and its complete absence in descriptions of the work by contemporary participants suggests that such an understanding of the work may have become either increasingly irrelevant or inadequate for fully describing its nature.

Certainly, as the group worked to build faculty buy-in for this work and shared the survey data that they had collected, the discourse of civic participation, and in particular the idea of the individual vote, was not carried through in these early dialogues.
Rather, the group employed an approach which allowed faculty to select between a variety of justifications for working in partnership with youth. This approach, combined with their presentation of the data using a strengths-based approach, seems to have been successful in building acceptance for the authenticity and necessity of the group. Teacher comments reflected an engagement and personal connection with the necessity of including student perspectives.

However, as the group continued to employ dialogic strategies to create both personal and policy change within the school, the comments that youth and adults used to describe the work belied the emergence of a new and unauthorized metaphor for the work, that of the customer demanding quality service. It is possible that without strong, intentional framing of the work, both adults and participating youth in the school began to attempt to describe the work using whatever existing mental models for feedback that most closely approximated what they were seeing. Because the group’s approach to youth-adult partnership, with its use of dialogue to focus on teacher praxis particularly, closely approximated the relationship between customer-service oriented feedback models where the recipients of a service provide user feedback to service providers, this metaphor for the work was one lens through which both participating teachers and students could understand the change work in which they were engaged.

Curiously, though, when asked about the lived experience of working in partnership for change, the contemporary Pinewood group spoke not at all about service provision or accountability of teachers to students, and rather focused on describing the nature of the close, trusting relationships that they were able to establish as a result of the work: the family atmosphere of the group, and the friendly and, in the case of their adult
advisor, maternal relationships that they had established with school-based adults. There
is a clear sense within their comments of how much they value these aspects of the work
and how they felt that the trust, collegiality, and shared responsibility for improving the
school was central to the nature of the work itself. In this, it is possible to see the
foregrounding of specific relational qualities as both central to the work and central to the
larger paradigm shift which the group is trying to achieve within the school.

The story of these shifting symbols and metaphors for the paradigm shift in
youth-adult relationships that the group was hoping to spur is, in some sense, a story of
inadequate or imperfect language for describing the particular approach of YATST to
youth-adult partnership. It is possible that the metaphor of youth as consumers is the
closest language that adults and youth have available to them to describe the type of
strengths-based, 4Rs driven, dialogic model that YATST employs to incorporate youth
perspectives into teaching and learning. By contrast, the familial language that Pinewood
YATST students and adults employ to describe their relationships with one another and
the type of relationships that they are hoping to see writ large within the school is not a
metaphor for youth-adult partnership that is often seen used, either by non-participating
youth and adults or within the literature as a whole.

“Family” as a metaphor or analogy for school-based, youth-adult relationships is
one which might inspire unease in some educators, particularly those who conceive of
family in the narrow sense. Popular conceptions of teacher professionalism might lead
some to believe that such a relationship with one’s students crosses the boundary of
appropriateness, or more extremely, propriety. Students come to school presumably with
actual families, or at minimum, voluntary or state-appointed guardians whose societal
role is understood as oversight of that young person’s growth and the making of decisions related to that young person’s well-being. To presume, as a teacher, to do similarly, is to potentially step on the proverbial toes of actual parents or to presume intimate knowledge of a young person’s life that one may or may not have.

Beyond this legacy, there is a formal and widely accepted separation of the public, institutional context of school from the private, family-dominated context of the home. Expectations regarding obligation within relationships that originate within these contexts differ widely. For teachers, professional norms originating within the publicly overseen, institutional context of school imply the acceptability of maintaining a self-defined line regarding one’s obligation to engage one’s students within this context. Teaching within such a context is a job—a job whose professional description includes the positive development of youth; however, it is still, at its heart, work. Thus, to imply an obligation to one’s students that approximates the type of intimacy found in ideal familial relationships might, for some educators, imply an obligation incompatible with their understanding of teacher and student as institutional roles.
Chapter 7
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

When we think about changing the perception of young people, we butt up against the historical weight of how young people have been perceived and positioned for centuries. This dissertation has covered the litany of challenges, both conceptual and practical, that groups face in attempting to subvert the enmeshed structures that contribute to the intransigence of change around perceptions of young people in the high schools in which YATST works. These cases point to minefield of possible derailments that these groups face, even in their maturity, even when they are able to survive some of the organizational challenges that stop many reform efforts before they begin.

One important point of this dissertation is to point out that not all student voice programs are created alike, and not simply because they integrate student voices in more "authentic" ways nor not, but because they are based on radically different theories of action. Rights beget radically transformed relationships, or radically transformed relationships beget rights. Understanding which of these cause-effect relationships are at play dictates the pace of change, the strategies employed, and the focal points of the change efforts.

This study has endeavored to answer three research questions through an in-depth look at the work of Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together. These questions were the following:

- What were the warrants offered by UP for Learning support staff, administrators, teachers, and students for promoting youth-adult partnerships in their schools?
How do youth and adults make sense of organizational warrants for youth-adult partnership work and negotiate the translation of those warrants into action?

And finally, what contextual, personal, and philosophical factors enable and constrain the outcomes of YATST’s model?

In this chapter, the findings from this study will be summarized with regard to these three questions. The chapter proceeds as follows: first, I will discuss YATST’s care-driven approach to youth-adult partnership and the success that this approach has had inviting adults into a conversation about school reform and youth’s position within a transformed school. I will then discuss the issues that the case of Maple Valley raises about the implications of YATST’s care-driven approach, particularly around the kind of compromises that this approach requires them to make in the face of conflicting needs in the change process. I will then discuss the lack of discursive options and metaphors that adequately approximate the approach to youth-adult partnership that YATST envisions and how the absence of sufficient language leads to the possibility of co-optation by unauthorized metaphors deriving from other educational reform discourses. Finally, I will discuss the limitations of the study and several directions that this study suggests for future research.

**Care as a lens for describing and defining the everyday enactment of strengths-based youth-adult driven school reform**

Change in schools is difficult. Fullan (2007), writing about the phenomenology of change in schools, describes the sense of loss, the anxiety, and the struggle to adjust to a new paradigm of action that embracing change entails. Embracing an agentic conceptualization of young people requires just such a change—the letting go of old practices, and the recognition—despite one’s good intentions—of the ways in which such
practices have positioned youth as less than agents, as empty vessels (Freire, 1970). The most important balance that individuals seeking to change schools need to strike, Freire (1998) argues, is sending the message that change is difficult, but possible.

The YATST approach to stimulating this change through the action-research process allows and expects this process to be gradual and slow. There is room within such a process for the grief and confusion of teachers, and for the experimentation, failure, and rapid prototyping of new school structures that the action-research process brings. The grounded conceptual framework for youth-adult partnership outlined and defined in this study based on the work of YATST schools suggests that this is an important and defining feature of sustainable approaches to working for the advancement of meaningful youth involvement within school contexts. While it may be tempting for youth and adult allies to focus on the radical change they hope to bring about from their advocacy for the rights of youth to participate within school settings, the experience of YATST partner schools suggests that advocacy for meaningful youth involvement approached from the perspective of meeting the needs of all groups in the change process that such a paradigm shift entails is a more sustainable approach.

Chapter 4 outlines in detail the ways in which the guiding values and principles informing the change process that YATST embraces have been successively clarified over time through the introduction of new tools that have aided schools in enacting the YATST Theory of Change. By tracing this development and gradual clarification, it is possible to see the ways in which the YATST-informed change process has been increasingly geared toward assessing and meeting the needs of different groups in the change process, as well as realizing the enactment of a vision of youth-adult partnership.
based in the idea of mutuality, or care. This orientation, I argue, bears similarity to principles of school leadership derived from a morality of care (Beck, 1992; Noddings, 2002). In refocusing the change process around meeting these needs, rather than focusing single-mindedly on the establishment and maintenance of youth’s right to participate, the YATST approach has found a change model that is able to more or less survive within the changing and turbulent context of schools as organizations and that invites teachers to consider making incremental changes in their practice to move towards a vision of student-centered teaching and learning.

The needs of youth and adults have, through the evolution of the enactment of YATST’s theory of change, come to be met in the change process by YATST groups in a number of ways. First, YATST has made the use of a survey a standard practice across all of its schools. Using quantitative data as the driver of dialogue in the change process has been an important innovation in keeping the conversation (particularly in small, rural schools) focused on depersonalized trends rather than making the impetus for change a response to the needs of any specific individuals or sub-groups. For teachers, these depersonalized trends, when combined with facilitated dialogue, are enough to spark dialogue without being overwhelming, while for students, seeing the feelings that they have experienced mirrored in a survey which confirms they are felt widely can be incredibly validating.

The second way in which the YATST change process meets the needs of the school population in the change process is through the authorization of adult experience. Cook-Sather (2002) calls on schools as organizations to authorize student voice. However, as early YATST participants saw in working through the action research cycle,
when presented with opportunities to express what issues were important to them, student concerns ran the gamut, including many issues primarily situated within youth lifeworlds with little intersection with the adult lifeworld of schools. Adults seemed to feel alienated by or separate from issues related to the dress code, cafeteria food, or other rules governing the custodial control of students within the walls of the school. Therefore, a framework based around societally (and therefore, adult) definitions of what “counts” as a teaching and learning issue was introduced as the focus of the work. In drawing boundaries around the work in this way, the types of projects that the groups engaged in changed over time to be focused on facilitating dialogue around issues related to the exchange of information, pedagogical strategies, skills, content, and youth-adult interactions. Youth and adults could potentially both see the relevance of these issues to their lives within school; therefore, these were fruitful issues upon which youth-adult partnership for action and change could be built.

To support the engagement of both of these groups around issues of teaching and learning, it became necessary to develop a method of communicating about these issues to overcome the professionalized language that shut youth participation out of teacher spaces previously. Therefore, the 4Rs became a way for youth and adults to communicate effectively about their experiences around the aforementioned teaching and learning issues in new ways. Equipped with the language of the 4Rs, students were able to communicate the importance of change in a language that was decipherable to teachers.

Lastly, the introduction of facilitated dialogue into the YATST action-research process ensured that there would be opportunities for the sort of reflection that could actually shift the beliefs of both teachers and students about each other and about
themselves. Facilitated dialogue strategies, like chalk talks and fishbowls, gave both youth and teachers the opportunity to reflect on the implied imperatives of the data to which the YATST survey data pointed—namely, the shift from beliefs grounded in traditional discourses about youth’s role in school and capability for decision-making to beliefs that embraced the idea of youth as agents in their education and to student-centered learning practices.

The common YATST practice of presenting the data to the faculty first, and then presenting the data to the students in a separate chalk talk gives both of these groups the space to process the data, its meaning, and its implications separate from one another. This is important because of the variety of responses that the data, which speaks to an inherent inequity in the way in which youth are viewed in school settings, can push the bounds of what is safe for groups. Adults can feel challenged by the strength of emotion that comes up for students when they are finally given a chance to speak, and students can feel silenced by the presence of the adults because they have been accustomed to being silenced.

All of these innovations allowed YATST groups to fulfill the implied promise of the recently articulated YATST guiding values and principles more clearly. However, in developing and pursuing these strategies that are compatible with the school environment, the groups have had to make several compromises. The two in-depth cases of the Maple Valley High School YATST group and the Pinewood High School YATST groups serve to illuminate the types of compromises that these groups have to make.
The politics of tone within a strengths-based initiative for school change

One of the most notable features of the YATST program’s approach to the change process is its focus on strength. In order to combat the pervasiveness of deficit discourses about schools, teachers, and students, YATST teams commit to starting from strength and assuming positive intentions of all those that they involve within their work for change. Starting from strength is important because the data that YATST groups present to teachers can be difficult for teachers to hear. Providing several things that the school does well with regard to youth agency allows the data that showcases the challenges to be heard and understood from within a context of strength and hope. Additionally, however, there is a practical benefit in the sense that starting from strength, particularly in the context of faculty-wide dialogues, puts youth facilitators at less of a risk for difficult, reactionary conversations that could follow such a presentation if teachers are pushed into their “panic zone” by the data. Hope, therefore, can be maintained on both sides of these dialogues—teachers have space to ponder alternative practices and youth feel successful in their facilitation of dialogue for change.

Starting from strength and assuming positive intentions seem to be an integral part of practicing an advocacy and leadership of change that is informed by care. To this end, the work of the veteran YATST school, Maple Valley, provides an interesting context in which to explore the implications of these two values for the care-driven change process that YATST embraces. Some of the experimental choices of that veteran team in both their survey design and dialogue facilitation strategies in their second round of moving through the action-research process highlight an aspect of the change process that is conspicuously absent from that endorsed by YATST—that of student anger. The case of
Maple Valley provides a glimpse of the challenges that are avoided, but also the possibilities that are foreclosed, to groups that follow the YATST approach to the change process.

The “scary”, “explosive” comments provided by students on both the qualitative portion of the Maple Valley group’s survey, as well as during the silent chalk talk point to an anger that many students feel about the way in which they are positioned within schools. While the Maple Valley YATST group demonstrated a preoccupation with not sparking resistant, defensive reactions from teachers within the change process, the team was unsure how to make meaning from the anger that students were so clearly feeling about the current state of the school with regard to how it positioned with youth. This confusion on the part of the team with how to handle this qualitative data from students—data that could potentially be hurtful to teachers—suggests a key compromise that groups working through the YATST change process must negotiate. In a care-derived approach to the change process that focuses on incremental change and meeting all participants’ need for safety and validation, what are groups supposed to do when the needs of different groups conflict? How do they decide whose needs are the most important to meet?

It is clear that students have a need to have their anger, resulting from being denied an opportunity to participate in decision-making, to be heard and validated by those with relatively more power within the school environment—namely teachers and administrators. Freire (2005) suggests that this kind of legitimate anger—the kind that results from the awakening of one’s consciousness to the ways in which one has been kept from understanding something fundamental about oneself, is an important part of
any change process aimed at changing the structures which have denied the recognition of that fundamental understanding. In the case of students, when given the opportunity to be heard, even in facilitated ways designed to speak to “strength” and “positive intentions”, it seems natural that anger of this type would surface.

However, one of the interesting strategic choices that was made by the Maple Valley team was to distance themselves from these expressions of anger. The “mistake” of collecting qualitative data on the survey was acknowledged and the words of students on these were set aside as too explosive for teachers to be able to see or hear. The words of the youth facilitator following the facilitation of the student chalk talk points to another manifestation of this. She says that “kids will be kids” and if they are going to be angry when YATST is trying to help them, what can YATST really do? Their anger, this student suggests, is a manifestation of their immaturity, and should not be taken seriously.

The words of this YATST student echo rhetoric that we see in the feminist literature and that of critical race theory. In an attempt to deny the words of those whose consciousness has been awakened to the way in which the structural conditions have kept them from being recognized as agents, tone and semantics are often invoked as a way of avoiding confrontation of the unjust implications of the structures to which they seek to draw attention. For women, their attempts to be heard have been characterized as irrational, overly emotional, or have been ascribed to histrionics (Murphy, 2002; Thomas, Smucker, & Droppelman, 1998). People of color seeking to confront issues of racial injustice are often accused of being too angry, a manifestation of white discourses about their inherent aggression (hooks, 1991). In the case of Maple Valley, we see anger in
youth equated to immaturity, that there is a difference, as YATST students would say, between kids who do things, and kids who complain.

The way in which the Maple Valley team negotiated this conflict, through distancing themselves from student anger and even actively suppressing it when possible, suggests that power is the biggest deciding factor in negotiating whose needs to meet in a situation where needs conflict. The need of teachers to not have their practices criticized in a particular tone superseded the need of youth to express and have their anger over their positioning within schools validated.

However, the decision to cater to teachers in particular, to validate their intentions to facilitate positive youth development through their work, may be a good strategic choice because it recognizes the relative power that teachers have over students while at the same time acknowledging the marginality of teachers within both the school and society. Teachers face a great deal of censure and criticism within the context of the public discourse about education in this country, with critiques that range from their work ethic to their professionalism (Apple, 2001; Connell, 2009; Luke, 2004). In this sense, their power over youth is intersectional with their position as laborers and as professionals within the broader societal discourse about schooling. Lortie (1975) acknowledges the importance of psychic rewards for teachers—the knowledge that even if they are not compensated well and if their professionalism and motivation are questioned by political actors and the media, at least they know that they are helping students in the best way that they can. Therefore, hearing the anger expressed by students about their practices—practices which are themselves the result of a confluence of discourses about the purpose of schooling, beliefs about young people’s capabilities, and
the importance of motivation and achievement—could take away one of the primary methods through which teachers seek meaning in their work.

This case raises the question of what role, if any, legitimate anger can play within school change. The answer to this question is, in part, dependent on what type of organizations and communities that schools aspire to be. Schools, in some sense, have a dualistic nature—they are community institutions, located within communities that they seek to serve well by democratizing the conversation about how schools should work. However, schools are also organizations that are subject to the pressures of institutional norms, standards, and policies that position them as professionalized bureaucracies (Arum, 2000; Merz & Furman, 1997; Schafft & Biddle, 2013).

Educational leaders, teachers, and students seeking change within schools, therefore, must navigate the ways in which this dualistic nature can be strategically invoked to enhance or hinder their efforts for change. To what extent is it possible for educational leaders or teachers to hide behind expectations about the role of emotion in a professionalized place of work, or to invoke the discourses about youth that are built into such a conception of the organization to categorize their expression of these emotions as “inappropriate”? We see in the case of Maple Valley that YATST groups, in order to navigate this duality, must distance themselves from emotion in order for their methods to remain viable strategies for change.

**Family as a metaphor for student engagement**

In Chapter 6, the story of the discursive positioning of the YATST program within Pinewood High School suggests the paucity of useful metaphors for describing the
potential for youth-adult partnership that reflect a care orientation, rather than a rights orientation, within school settings. As a result, while the Pinewood YATST group emulates youth-adult partnership relationships that they describe as being like “family” and embracing the values of trust, commitment, and intimacy, there is little attempt to use family as a framing metaphor for their work in conjunction with their efforts to help faculty and students at Pinewood better understand the paradigm shift in youth-adult relationships that they are attempting to initiate.

It is possible that one reason for their hesitance is that family, which is generally considered to be a matter of the private sphere (Noddings, 2002; Tronto, 1993), is a metaphor for youth-adult partnership work that may have limited cache within schools, which are typically considered by society to be instruments of the public (Tyack, 1974). In fact, the role of schools in socializing youth into the public sphere as citizens and workers is often explicitly referred to as one of the most important goals of schooling (Noddings, 2002). Furthermore, the rejection of feminized notions of teaching and learning (resulting from one room school houses overseen by female school teachers) by the movement to modernize schools in the 20th century leaves behind the legacy of a conflicted definition of what it means to care for one’s students within the context of a professionalized educator identity (Tyack, 1974).

As discussed in Chapter 6, educators who have worked to cultivate a professional identity within the school environment may not welcome the obligation that is implicit in the conceptualization of youth-adult partnership as emulating the relationship between parent and child, or family relationships more generally. There is a societal expectation that, with such relationships, comes obligations that may supersede what educators feel is
a reasonable limit for the expectation of youth-adult relationships within a public context of professional labor.

Moreover, the metaphor itself is challenged by the historically ambiguous regard of educators for families, and in particular the deficit-based construction of the families of the socially marginalized, such as families living in poverty or racial and ethnic minorities (Fitchen, 1991; Iceland, 2013). Given the prevalence of such deficit-based social discourse, there may be some question about the desirability of emulating family relationships within a context in which one’s home, or place in the private sphere, is constructed as a disadvantage to one’s educational progress (Lareau, 2011; Noddings, 2002; Oakes, 1993).

It is understandable, then, that despite a description of the work of YATST which emphasizes the idea of family as a metaphor for the type of relationships engaged in by youth and adults, there may be some hesitance to use this metaphor as an explicit method of framing the youth-adult relationship that groups are hoping to achieve between teachers and students. Therefore, there is an opportunity for alternative metaphors, or discursive options, to creep into and frame these relationships. References to students as “clients” or “consumers” suggests a positioning of youth as the receivers of services, a positioning which has been consistently challenged for its advancement of a neoliberal educational agenda (Fielding, 2004; Bragg, 2007a).

Language is an essential part of how we understand the world, and metaphors are an important part of how we construct our mental models of teaching, learning, and the purpose of education. The differences in language choice in the Pinewood case used to describe their own relationships versus those that they hope students and teachers will
develop suggests both the problematic nature of the metaphor for the school environment, as well as a lack of satisfactory metaphors outside of the traditional civic, liberal-democratic tradition for thinking about the development of youth-adult relationships.

Limitations of the study

There are several limitations within this study. One such limitation of the study is that it skews toward the adult experience of the program purely because of the imbalance between the number of adults and the number of students that participated. No students participated in the evaluation because Helen had commissioned a separate evaluation of the student experience in the program, conducted by Corbett (2010), two years before. Turnover of student participation is a natural feature of long-term youth-adult partnership work as students graduate or as new activities take priority in their lives. Therefore, the majority of the students who participated were either new or had been participating at most for two years. While attempts were made to interview students who had been involved in the group and had graduated, none of these students replied to these efforts to contact them. The interpretation of the data which relies on a longitudinal perspective, therefore, has been primarily constructed using documents and interviews with adults.

Another limitation of the study is the fact that I was not able to include interviews with students who did not participate in the YATST program. While the perspectives of these students are represented, at least in the cases of Maple Valley and Pinewood, by their participation on the respective surveys of those schools, and in the case of Maple Valley, their reflections in the chalk talk dialogue, this study could have benefitted from the inclusion of interviews with students who had either participated in and then left
YATST or students who had no connection to the program. This limitation suggests the need for future work that looks at the perspective of non-participating young people on programs such as YATST in their schools.

Lastly, because this study uses an embedded case study design of a particular organization with a particular program model and a very particular set of values, the findings of the study may be idiosyncratic to the context and are likely not generalizable to other student voice programs or, in the case of Pinewood and Maple Valley High Schools, even generalizable to other YATST schools (particularly those that embrace models that integrate the group into the school in ways other than an extracurricular activity, such as a credit-bearing class or senior exit project, for example). However, the findings do suggest that the relationship between values, practice, and outcomes may be a salient question for other student voice and youth-adult partnership programs in other contexts to contemplate.

**Directions for future research**

I see several future directions for research building on the work of this study. One such direction is examining the way in which the YATST groups’ continued presence within the organization, combined with the incremental pace of change that they embrace allows the groups to plant seeds that are able to grow as room within teachers’ zone of acceptance for youth agency gradually expands. YATST’s groups’ sustainability within schools over long periods of time suggests an opportunity to understand what types of leadership gambits are most successful in expanding adult acceptance of youth agency.
One of the real strengths of leadership shown by YATST’s founder, Helen, is her ability to see possibilities for strategic marriages between the work of UP for Learning and district and state level reform work in schools. For example, the Vermont Agency of Education recently passed Act 77—a piece of legislation that mandates the introduction of personalized learning plans for every student in Vermont from seventh grade onwards. UP for Learning has offered their services to the Agency of Education to help support the roll out of this piece of legislation. Specifically, youth and adult teams are working on creating communication strategies that help to shift administrator, teacher, student, and community beliefs about the roles and capabilities of young people from traditional discourses about youth as being in preparation for adult decision-making to discourses that embrace youth as agents. This work is using the disruptive nature of this reform legislation as an opportunity to support the expansion of student-centered learning practices and beliefs about young people as capable of making decisions about their education. Initiatives such as this one serve as fertile ground for the building of understanding through research on the opportunities and challenges to using policy change as a window to expand acceptance for youth involvement in educational decision-making.

Another question which the case of the YATST program raises is the extent to which the values and change strategies that the program embraces are an artifact of the rural, New England context. New England communities, particularly in Vermont, have a strong tradition of local control, community agency in education, and collective decision-making. In fact, these types of collectives loom large in the national public imagination as models for the importance of local control and small town democracy. However,
Mansbridge (1983), in her multi-year ethnographic study of a rural community’s town meetings in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, describes the ways in which the strong bias towards consensus and unity in such communities (in order to avoid open conflict) can be a tool that silences some people’s participation within the town meetings—meeting which are meant to serve as a forum for collective decision-making. Jackson (2010) similarly suggests that small communities which desire to maintain the appearance of harmony may end up socially excluding those that do not fit into their conception of harmony.

There is no evidence in this case that there is a relationship between the anger-avoiding tactics employed by the YATST program to inspire school change and the ways in which the communities in which these schools are located seek to mediate decision-making and conflict. However, the youth organizing literature suggests that in urban areas with strong histories of community organizing, youth organizing and community activism is more common because of the familiarity with the concepts and strategies for such activities. Given the suggestion in the literature on rural community conflict on the emphasis on conflict avoidance, and the relationship in the literature on youth organizing between such activities and the community’s history of organizing, a fruitful avenue for future exploration might be examining the extent to which schools seeking change inherit the legacy of community tools for mediating or avoiding conflict.

Lastly, YATST’s sustainability in the face of organizational change is impressive, and the longevity that it has achieved in several of its schools, including Maple Valley and Pinewood, provide the opportunity for longitudinal work on the effect of its model on a school’s culture over time. As there are so few models of youth-adult partnership work
for school reform that have achieved such longevity, there is likely much that can be learned from looking at the types of support that YATST has provided and continues to provide to the youth-adult groups working in the schools that it partners with, as well as how it renegotiates that support relationship over time. One attribute of the work that I noticed is the remarkable similarity of the support that was provided by YATST to schools in the second iteration of the action-research cycle, to the support that was provided to them in the first action-research cycle. Further work with a larger number of schools is needed to understand the necessity and desirability of providing such support in the long-term to schools that intend to continue with this work well into the future.

The final word

In closing, a central question of this study has been to examine the success of an approach to integrating and expanding practices that privilege student voices in the educational process. This examination has led to a dissection of student voice and youth-adult partnership practice that goes beyond questions of whether student voice practice is “authentic” or not. This study has established that “authenticity” is not necessarily the single dimension of these experiences that ought to be the central focal point—that the “why” of student voice in schools matters and adds a much need multidimensionality to the question of how to best integrate student voice practices within schools.

This dissertation suggests that one way of determining the “why” of youth-adult partnership initiatives or student voice initiatives involves looking in-depth at the theory of action of a program. By examining and comparing theories of action, better typologies of student voice programs can perhaps be established that will allow the community of
practitioners and researchers committed to its more widespread adoption a better understanding of the systems and conditions that support its expansion.

Exploring additional dimensions of student voice practice tied to the “why” of student voice naturally raises additional questions. What does it mean when rights are used as a lever to establish change? How do you gain acceptance for paradigmatic change to people's conceptions of a category of people? Are rights protections the first and most important part of that process? Does that win hearts and minds? Or is it important to change the culture? Do rights protections spark culture change?

We've seen in the intransigence of social change in the face of legal frameworks that have attempted to force that change—segregation in schools for example—that without attempts to spur the kind of dialogue that radically changes relationships, legal frameworks merely provide recourse in the face of such intransigence. The stickiness of traditional sociological concepts about youth make change difficult and so scholars call for change (Rose, 2011), and yet there is no path forward. YATST shows us a path forward for such transformation, a path forward that rejects a recourse to rights, though of course welcomes the respect of those rights as the realization of its ultimate goal: youth-adult partnerships based on mutual respect in schooling.
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Appendix A
Coding Tree

Relationships

YATST youth to teachers (Non-YATST)
Perceptions of YATST students
YATST youth to YATST adults
Group dynamics
Non-YATST student buy-in
YATST student perceptions of others
Teacher to teacher relationships
YATST groups to Helen
YATST youth to parents
Levels of involvement
Non-YATST students to Non-YATST teachers

Processes

Action project processes and outcomes
Sharing findings
Process of data analysis
Group future plans and goals
Recruitment
Defining values or desired outcomes
Survey creation and administration
Pace
Other group projects

Outcomes

Individual outcomes for students
  Development of a critical perspective
  Empowerment
  ABCDs
School-level change
Teacher learning
YATST inspired teacher-student interaction
Alignment with leadership priorities
Burn out
Cross-school connections
For Non-YATST students
State-level change

Context

Administrative support
Group-school integration
Rural, small schools
Issues with time
Other school change/reform
Dept of Ed support
Other youth voice avenues
Vermont
YATST organizational issues
Perceptions of YATST
Staff turnover
PLPs

Vision

Purpose of YATST
Definition of voice
Motivation for YATST involvement
Purpose of education
Limits of student involvement
The R’s
Good YATST adults
Research-based
Rapid prototyping
Policy entrepreneurship
Larger community focus

Participant Values

Democratic processes
Marginalized experiences
Issues of representation
Empowerment
Data
Community
Dialogue
Personalization
Student as consumer
School reform
Partnership
Student growth
Real world learning
Competing priorities
Appropriate voice
Protest
Changing world
21\textsuperscript{st} century skills
Ownership
Equity
Citizenship
Curriculum coverage
Collaboration
Access to a new world
Strengths-based approach
Completing action-research cycle
Appendix B
Adult Interview Protocol

Personal background

Are you originally from around here? If not, where are you from?  
How long have you lived here in [town]? What brought you here?  
What do you think it’s like for your students to grow up here?  
How do you think growing up here in Vermont is different from growing up in other places?

Individual Involvement

Tell me about how you got involved in YATST.  
Why did you get involved? Why have you stayed involved?  
(if follow up) What do you think has changed since we last talked about your YATST group?

Focus/ Meaning of the work

How would you describe the current focus of the group’s work?  
Specific Projects? One of the 4 R’s?  
Why did the group choose this as their focus?  
How do you think YATST work changes school for the students who aren’t in YATST?  
Why is this work so important?  
(if follow up) Last time we spoke, you said that [x] was the reason you did this work – do you still feel that way? Why or why not?

Group process

How would you describe the current dynamics of the group?  
Who are the leaders? Why?  
What other roles do you think group members play?  
Why do you think the other students got involved in this work? Why do they stay involved?  
Tell me about a time the group decided something (prompt with specific decision from observations).  
How did you feel about [the issue]?  
Were you satisfied with the decision which was made? Why/why not?
Contextual Factors

I know some other schools have struggled to integrate YATST in their school culture. What do you think accounts for the longevity of your YATST group? (if follow up) The last time we spoke, you said [x] about your administrator. Do you still feel this is the case? Why or why not?
What other changes are happening in your school right now? How do you think these changes affect the work of YATST?
In what ways has your YATST group adapted to these changes? Will this change the kind of work your group is able to do? In what ways?

Outcomes

What is the thing your group has accomplished that you are most proud of? Why? How do you think the group’s work is perceived by students outside the group? Other teachers?
What do you think is the most important thing for your group to work on next? Why?
Last time we spoke, you said the work had changed you in [x] way – Is that still the case? What else have you learned?
Has your perspective about the purpose of education changed? If so, in what ways?
Has your perspective about your students changed? If so, in what ways?

Big ideas/Final reflections

Do you think all of the staff and students at your school reap the benefits of your group’s work equally? Why or why not?
What does student engagement mean to you?
What is the most important thing for an adult who wants to partner with youth to know?
What do you hope this group will have accomplished in 5 years?
What do you think the purpose of a high school education these days is?
What do you think it means to do this work in your rural school/community?
What is the school’s relationship to the community?
Appendix C
Youth Interview Protocol

Personal background

Have you always gone to [name of school]?
How long have you lived here in [town]?
What is it like growing up here?
  What do you like about living here?
  What do you wish could be different?
How do you think growing up here in Vermont is different from growing up in other places?
How would you describe your school to someone who wasn’t from this area?
What are your plans for the future?

Individual Involvement

Tell me about how you got involved in YATST.
Why did you get involved? Why have you stayed involved?
What do you like best about working in your YATST group?
What do you think could be improved?
What do your friends think about your YATST work? Your family?

Focus/Meaning of the work

How would you describe the main focus of your group’s work?
  Specific Projects? One of the 4 R’s?
Why did your group choose this as their focus?
Why do you think the teachers and administrators here are interested in youth-adult partnership?
How do you think your work changes school for the students who aren’t in YATST?
Why is this work so important?

Group process

How would you describe the dynamics of the group?
Who are the leaders? Why?
What other roles do you think group members play?
Why do you think the other students got involved in this work?
Why do you think [adult leaders] got involved in this work?
What do you see as your role in the group?
Tell me about a time the group decided something (prompt with specific decision
from observations).

What was your opinion about [the issue]?
Were you satisfied with the decision which was made? Why/why not?
Do you ever feel frustrated with the group? (If yes, ask about specific time/why)
Do you feel like the group has changed in the time you’ve participated? If so, how?

Outcomes

What is the thing your group has accomplished that you are most proud of? Why?
How do you think the group’s work is perceived by your classmates? Your teachers?
What do you think is the most important thing for your group to work on next? Why?
How do you feel you’ve changed since participating in this work?
Has your perspective about your education changed? If so, in what ways?
Has your perspective about your classmates changed? If so, in what ways?

Big ideas/Final reflections

What does student engagement mean to you?
What is the most important thing for an adult who wants to partner with youth to know?
What do you hope this group will have accomplished in 5 years?
What do you think it means to do this work in your rural school/community?
Appendix D
Examples of Maple Valley 2013 Teacher and Student Survey Questions

Possible survey responses include: Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

RIGOR:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Survey Instrument</th>
<th>Student Survey Instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have high expectations for all students</td>
<td>Teachers have high expectations for me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My classes provide opportunities for students to revise their work</td>
<td>In my classes, I revise my work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encourage my students to take classes that challenge them</td>
<td>I am supported to take classes that challenge me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My classes provide opportunities for students to analyze their own thinking</td>
<td>In classes, I analyze my own thinking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RELEVANCE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Survey Instrument</th>
<th>Student Survey Instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skills my students learn in class can be applied to real situations outside of the class</td>
<td>I understand how the skills we are learning are applied in real situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I provide opportunities for students to show and explore their interests in order to apply skills they have learned</td>
<td>My classes allow me to show and explore my interests while applying skills I’ve learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My classes build on what students have learned in previous years</td>
<td>My classes build on what I have learned in previous years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I connect my teaching to what students are learning about in other classes</td>
<td>My teachers connect what they are teaching to what I am learning in other classes</td>
</tr>
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</table>

RELATIONSHIPS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Survey Instrument</th>
<th>Student Survey Instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I respect my students</td>
<td>Adults in the school respect me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I treat my students fairly</td>
<td>My teachers treat students fairly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults in this school stereotype students as part of a group/clique</td>
<td>Teachers stereotype students as part of a group/clique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have spoken with students in school about whom they want to become</td>
<td>Adults talk with me about who they want me to become/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## SHARED RELATIONSHIPS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Survey Instrument</th>
<th>Student Survey Instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I provide opportunities for students to give me feedback on my practices and classes</td>
<td>I am given opportunities to provide my teachers feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The curriculum is open to student-teacher collaboration on what we are learning</td>
<td>The curriculum is open to student-teacher collaboration on what we are learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important for students to be involved in decisions that are being made about them at school</td>
<td>It is important for students to be involved in decisions that are being made about them at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are systems in place for students to be involved in decision-making at school</td>
<td>There are systems in place for students to be involved in decision-making at school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VITA
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