

Youth-Driven YAPS in Agricultural Education

A Phenomenological Exploration of Agricultural Teachers' Experiences

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Purpose of Study

- Explore youth-adult partnerships (YAPs) in agricultural mechanics classrooms
 - Three agricultural secondary-level teachers
 - Group of 82 high-school students
- Evaluate experiential results of youth-driven YAPS
- Collaboration with students to improve safety
- Engagement model for teachers, students, and community to build and install cost-effective rollover protective structures (CROPS)



Study Process

During the study, a team member with a youth development background observed that the project:

- Promoted an experiential, communal/collective nature
- Nurtured collaborative YAP relationships
- Will benefit from further study to understand better the significance and usefulness of such partnerships within an agricultural education context

Student-Centered Learning and Engagement

Student-centered approach to learning offers more value than just content awareness

YAP capitalizes on important dimensions of learning:

- Social, emotional, cognitive
- Logical and intuitive
- Intellect and feelings
- Concept and experience
- Idea and meaning
- Facilitates both content and holistic development

Study Method

- Examine teachers' experiences with students
- Utilize phenomenology: a qualitative research method used to describe "the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon."

Study Background

- Agriculture ranks among the most hazardous jobs in the U.S. (Tractor overturns are a leading cause of death).
- Much of the workforce exposed to hazards is under age 20. Farm jobs have highest rate of fatalities and injuries of all types of teen employment. A child dies every three days from an agricultural-related incident in the U.S.
- Seatbelts combined with rollover protective structures are 98% effective at preventing tractor operator deaths

Health and safety education is one of the most important responsibilities of an agricultural educator

Researchers evaluated feasibility of involving high-school students and agricultural educators from three Appalachian county programs

- Southeast Center for Agricultural Health & Injury Prevention
- University of Kentucky College of Agriculture

Reasons for YAP Approach

Definition of YAP: *"collaborative learning environments where young people and adults come together in groups, with the willingness to share authority, accept responsibility, and highlight individual members' abilities and contributions"*

- Participants work toward a common goal and vision, aiming for meaningful community-based change
- Collective and communal

YAP Benefits

- Civic and personal engagement
- Students' belief that they will be recognized and rewarded
- Students feel they make a difference in their communities
- YAP experience promotes student engagement
 - Students have the chance to develop their own interests and satisfy their motivations.
 - Students insert themselves into the context of the community, experiencing a collective reward based on making a difference.

- Identify a phenomenon to study
- Bracket out assumptions and biases
- Collect data from individuals

Procedures: Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews

- Telephone interviews with each teacher three months after CROPS project completion
- Allowed time for teachers to reflect on the experience, and identify areas of impact
- Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

On-site observations

Researcher visited site, noting teacher-student interactions, both in the classroom, and in the field



Findings

- Experiential YAP elements included:
 - Motivation
 - Improved work performance via persistence
 - Value of intellectual work and real-world products, promoting individual responsibility
- Small groups worked together with common goals.
- External community members valued students' work.
- Results related to valuing and legitimizing students' input, student-teacher collaborations, and participation of the students in leading.
- Experiences mitigated unequal power distribution.

Putting YAP into Practice

There is a significant challenge for teachers to engage students as collaborative partners in youth-driven learning structures; therefore it is imperative that teachers:

- Examine their own attitudes in sharing power and enabling the student voice
- Address the power dynamics at play and the existing structures and norms that create them
- Seek opportunities and experiences for students to participate in decisions that affect them
- Garner support from the power-wielding adults in the school and community early on in the project to drive the project direction

Analyze transcripts: Three-step method

- Careful read-through of all collected data (reduces chances of selective data selection)
- Generation of explanatory themes (simplified by the existence of identified phenomena)
- Application of themes to the research questions

Discussions and Conclusion

Post-project interviews with teachers suggest:

- CROPS project aligns with all three YAP model elements: experiential, communal/collective, youth-driven
- YAP model promotes high-quality student engagement
- Students become engaged and benefit from learning opportunities, or demand more from themselves
- Teacher reflections indicate favorable results, warranting the evaluation of more YAP in agricultural classes.

Comments and Recommendations

- Power difference pervasive in most school environments hinders collaborative relationships between students and teachers
- YAP design varies in power distribution
- CROPS project was designed as a youth-driven YAP, aligning with both a liberal and reformist power orientation.
- Youth-driven YAP model (see Figure 1)
- Provides educators with a framework
- Posits a pivotal role for YAP-driven engagement for student achievement in agricultural education

Youth-Driven YAPs in Agricultural Education

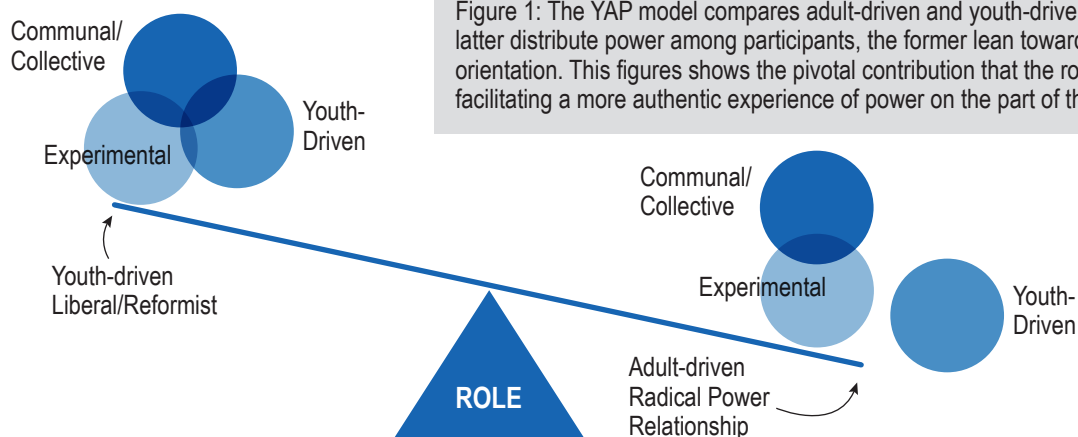


Figure 1: The YAP model compares adult-driven and youth-driven YAPs. While the latter distribute power among participants, the former lean toward a radical power orientation. This figure shows the pivotal contribution that the role can play in facilitating a more authentic experience of power on the part of the participant.