Your Future Depends on It! Exploring Youth Engagement in Inquiry and Action toward Educational Change

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Your Future Depends on It! Exploring Youth Engagement in Inquiry and Action toward Educational Change

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Abstract

The purpose of our research was to explore how youth involved in participatory action research (PAR) understood PAR and their role in the research. A central principle of PAR is that knowledge construction toward the study of social problems and the formulation of solutions benefits from involving those most impacted by these problems. Data collection occurred over a period of four months during after-school sessions with the youth and an intensive two-day research camp. Participant observation was used as the method of data collection, with field notes and video footage as data sources. Initial findings suggest youth saw themselves as involved in something significant in terms of its potential to improve education. Also evident was their engagement and demonstration of agency, particularly in their development of film products addressing issues in education. Informed by critical social theory, our discussion considers the analytical use within PAR of history and policy to more fully explore with youth the conditions they experience in their schools. This work promises to offer new insights within education and psychology concerning youth engagement in school change, research methods that are participatory and action oriented, and understanding lived experience in relation to historical and structural conditions.