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Dismantling the Education-Survival Complex: A Qualitative Case Study of How High School Youth Resist Whitestream School Policies and Foster School Change Through a Youth-Development Organization

Tracie Trinidad
University of Denver

Dismantling the Education-Survival Complex: A Qualitative Case Study of How High School Youth Resist Whitestream School Policies and Foster School Change Through a Youth-Development Organization

Abstract

The aim of this study is to critically examine how youth resist whitestream school policies and foster educational change through community sociopolitical youth-development organizations. The methodology for this study is a qualitative case study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990; Merriam, 1988), as I am focused on participant perceptions and experiences, and how they make sense of their resistance experience through participation in sociopolitical youth development organizations like Youth for Social and Political Activism (YSPA). In total, eight participants spoke about their racial identity through their lived experiences in public school and YSPA programming.

The data and analysis are presented in the non-evaluative and transparent collective response of testimonios, organized by research question using quotes from the data. To express the findings of the present research, a collective testimonio—also known as a polyphonic testimonio—highlights the lived experience of many (Kiyama, 2017). I highlight five themes as foundational pillars to ways youth resistance is evolving: power and voice, white supremacy, healing justice, resistance, and abolition. Further, this study offers recommendations for ways policymakers, district leaders, and community organizations should employ youth voice in creation and development of policy at all levels of governance.

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Second Advisor

Doris Candelarie

Third Advisor

Johnny C. Ramirez

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Tracie Trinidad

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Advisor: Dr. Lolita Tabron

Author: Tracie Trinidad
Title: Dismantling the Education-Survival Complex: A Qualitative Case Study of How High School Youth Resist Whitestream School Policies and Foster School Change through a Youth-Development Organization
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Chapter One: Disrupting Whitestream Education Policy

Give the power to the people or we takin' it

Mexica

No soy hispano no soy Latino y ser un dios es mi destino

Es mi destino

No soy hispano no soy Latino y ser un dios es mi destino

Es mi destino

We built the pyramids, yet you call us primitive

I'm the sun

I'm the moon

I'm the earth

I'm the wind

Mexica

—*Prayers*

I grew up in a diverse and culturally enriched environment in Brighton, Colorado. As a young Xicana[1], I learned from teachers who shared my skin color, and I listened side-by-side with peers who looked like me. My town was culturally affirming and

[1]US born daughter to parents of Mexican descent. Spelled with an X and not Ch to honor indigenous languages

Latino-centric. Yet, my education did not reflect my culture. Day-by-day, class-by-class, I was spoon-fed a Eurocentric and essentialist curriculum that neither honored nor recognized my culture. My classmates and I were so fully immersed in what Salazar (2013) called the *whitestream curriculum* that it was hard for us to see.

Cultural erasure and genocide were occasions for celebration in the whitestream environment, as when my elementary school hosted our annual November *thanks-taking*[2] lunch. Students were assigned to dress either as a pilgrim or an "Indian." My second-grade teacher dared not ask for our preferences; she already knew that nobody wanted to be an "Indian." They were "the bad guys." As, she assigned roles, little girls rejoiced in being pilgrims, as they got to make bonnets and play white. Youths assigned the Native role complained about their paper-bag costumes and staccato English. No one corrected our confusion or misunderstanding about Native and Indigenous peoples. The coded instruction that *white equals good* and *Brown equals bad* was not an accident.

As youths in a Brown town, we were never taught the significance or beauty behind the headdresses; it was not part of the curriculum. The Mayflower's "discovery" was the curriculum; the pilgrims' hardship and resilience was the curriculum. Most students at my school identified as Chicano—yet, we were not taught our Indigenous history and culture. We learned about religious freedom—yet, we never learned about the religious suppression my *gente*—the Aztecs—endured. Instead, I learned to celebrate the

[2]Reframing from the thanksgiving holiday to acknowledge the genocide that took place on sacred native land through settler colonialism.

people who colonized and murdered my people. Instead, I was taught that they were the saviors of the "new world."

Yosso (2005) reported that when youths hear their own stories and learn their history, they become empowered participants in their education. As I reflect on my public-school education, I see that my history was withheld from me on purpose and by design. I come from the Aztecs—those who built the pyramids on this continent. I come from a grandmother whose land was stolen from her, and I come from parents whose culture and language were robbed from them in the name of progress and advancement. Had I learned about the resilience, resistance, and strength of the Mexica[3] people when I was younger, I might have learned that I too carry this strength—the strength to be an active participant in my community and school.

My parents, on the other hand, told me the truth. At the dinner table, I heard testimonios of their schooling experience. My dad was locked in a closet by his kindergarten teacher because he did not speak English. My mother hid her homecooked burrito under the cafeteria table during lunch, for fear the white kids would see it and spit on her. Because of these experiences, my parents enrolled me in community programs where I could learn Chicano history and become connected with community leaders. It was only through these experiences that I learned that public schools were designed to uphold white supremacy; and that community programs were spaces where minoritized youth like me could organize.

[3] Mexica are the indigenous people of Aztlan, the land that is and was Mexico prior to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which includes California, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Colorado, and Texas. Mexica is often used interchangeably with Aztec.

Background on the Problem

In the late twentieth century, Giroux (1983) described how class and power connect with the production of dominant cultural capital—not only in the structure and evaluation of the school policies, but through the passing and keeping of oppressive policies from national to state levels. Examples abound, from No Child Left Behind to school dress-code polices. For example, school culture maintains white supremacy when Black youths' natural hair is labeled "distracting" or "unprofessional." Even in the face of dominance, however, youths stand up. For example, in 2019, young people across the U.S. advocated for legislation to protect students in wearing their natural hair. Because of their organizing, legislation passed in nine states—a victory against workplace and school bias against natural hair (CROWN Research Study, 2019).

Black and Latine history courses are not included in state or national requirements for high school graduation. Minoritized youth recognize what is communicated through these state standards: Black and Latine history has been considered inferior to whitestream Eurocentric perspectives, also known as master scripting (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The time has come to truly disrupt whitestream school policies. More specifically, there needs to be a shift away from tired educational discourse that merely questions prejudiced behaviors and stereotypes, but fails to generate the action needed to transform dehumanizing schooling practices. For instance, some schools may have a morning advisory conversation about "diversity"; an elective course with curricula acknowledging

minoritized populations; or a "do-now"[4] classroom exercise, designed to foster "tolerance" of youths of color. However, these activities require *no social action* and serve only to maintain the status quo (Yosso, 2004). Yet, now more than ever, youth of color know they matter and are demanding action that shows their school community believes that minoritized youths matter too.

In the summer of 2020, youth organized *en masse* across the United States to protest the murder of George Floyd (Dunn et. al, 2021). Youth of color recognized their power, organized, and pushed the legal system to eventually hold a white supremacist police officer accountable for the murder of an innocent Black man. Through this power, youth changed more than just their neighborhoods. Though it was a difficult summer for Black and Brown bodies, minoritized youth learned that through grassroots organizing efforts like the 1968 L.A. walkouts and the 1969 Denver West High School walkouts can change the world (Kosena, 2009). This type of organizing is also happening at the state level, school-district level, and within individual schools.

In Colorado, youths across Denver and Aurora are demanding change in their K–12 schooling through various initiatives, including youth-led resolutions in Denver and youth-led town halls for community leaders' youth in Aurora and Denver. Youth are fostering critical discourse with government and community leaders about abolishing oppressive and racist systems—from policing and school safety to curriculum—and centering the lived experience of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in the

[4] Do-now activities are ice breakers or reflection assignments completed at the beginning of class to help students get adjusted to class time. Often, these activities are graded on participation only, not as major assignments.

U.S. Students are reclaiming their education through youth-led action. In response, schools have ended contracts with school resource officers (Daniel, 2020), and enhanced ethnic studies programs. Until now, youth voice has been the missing piece in policy planning at all levels of governance.

Problem Statement

Research is lagging behind young people's progress in how their skills and lived experiences can change education policy. It is unclear how sociopolitical youth-development organizations support development of youth leaders. As well, little is known about how community organizations provide youth opportunities to cocreate education policy at the state, district, and school levels. Schools often maintain youth advisory boards and youth council spaces; however, districts and schools can easily censor and punish youth, when they do not share the same vision of status quo schooling. Likewise, while resistance to oppressive policies has been better researched in higher education, scant research highlights youth advocacy or youth resistance in K–12 public schools through participation in policy creation. Through resolutions like "Know Justice Know Peace"—a Denver Public Schools resolution that requires teachers to participate in culturally responsive training and provide culturally responsive curriculum—youths have an opportunity to cultivate the knowledge and skills to address everyday injustices (Cammarota & Romero, 2006). Thus, youth voice must be included when creating policy that directly affects them.

Moreover, Aurora Public Schools (APS; a district adjacent to Denver) is racially comprised of 56.7% Latine students, 17.9% Black students, 13.4% white students, 4.9%

Asian students (Aurora Public Schools Demographic, 2022). APS serves a largely racially minoritized student body; thus, it is necessary to cultivate school policies that support students from diverse cultural backgrounds and include youth voice in the creation of these school policies. Because the school districts in Denver and Aurora are diverse, community organizations have been actively working to create change. For example, Padres & Jóvenes Unidos shifted how school resource officers operate in Denver Public Schools (Garcia, 2021).

Purpose of the Research

The aim of this study is to critically examine how youth are resisting whitestream school policies and fostering school change through community sociopolitical youth-development organizations. Current school settings and policies serve to silence youths—specifically minoritized youths. Youths of color are kept from freedom dreaming, learning their history, and participating in critical dialogue with school and community leaders. Building on the premise that education policy that maintains hegemonic schooling structures is an act of white supremacy, the purpose of this research is to learn how youth are dismantling white supremacy through sociopolitical youth-development organizations that provide opportunities for them to engage with policymakers (Gillborn, 2005).

Organizations like Denver's Youth for Social and Political Activism (YSPA) encourage and support disengaged and underserved youth to participate in their communities socially and politically, in order to make changes within their communities. In this sociopolitical youth development organization, for example, youth are reclaiming

their education by demanding that districts maintain transparency around memorandum of understanding (MOU) agreements made with school resource officers. In addition, YSPA supports students to build self-efficacy, and pursue social-science degrees and social-justice careers. YSPA further develops youth into civic leaders through summer social science and policy institutes, where youth learn about topics ranging from racial justice, to environmental justice, to art and healing justice.

The YSPA youth council meetings generate youth abolitionists, as they conduct their own research to learn about equity in their schools. Through youth coalition meetings, Black and Brown youth engage district leaders on they do not have access to ethnic studies and are presently reviewing equity reports to guide their workshops when interacting with potential school-board candidates. Furthermore, these youth-led groups are seeking out opportunities to conduct youth participatory action research (YPAR) projects focused on educational inequities within their community, as well as engaging in dialogue with school leaders through the YSPA youth council. The present study will look specifically at how YSPA youth are dismantling the education-survival complex (Love, 2018).

Research Question

The purpose of this study is to examine how YSPA—a sociopolitical youth development organization—is not just disrupting whitestream school policies and school culture but is *fostering resistance* among minoritized youths. Three key questions explored in this study were:

1. What shifts, if any, has sociopolitical youth-development organization YSPA had on whitestream education policies?
2. In what ways have sociopolitical youth-development programs increased youth activism in schools?
3. How are youths resisting racist and oppressive educational policies?

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

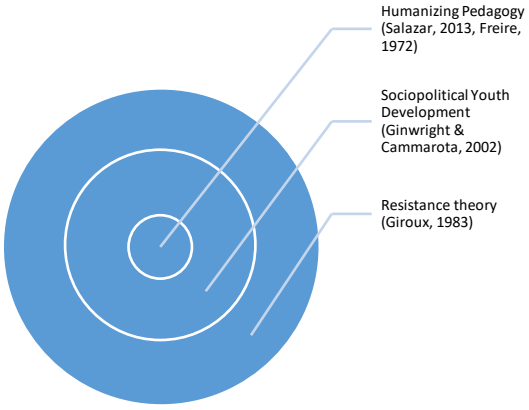
The conceptual framework for this study merges sociopolitical youth development, humanizing pedagogy, and resistance theory. These frameworks are foundational in developing humanizing, critical, and conscious youths. Resistance theory promotes actions taken by youths to oppose power hierarchies that reinforce systemic inequity related to class, gender, race, and sexuality through the imposition of curricula, school policies, and school culture (Giroux, 2001). Resistance can be supported through humanizing the youth experience; thus, humanizing pedagogy informs resistance theory, and resistance can be cultivated in humanizing spaces. Sociopolitical youth development and humanizing pedagogy supports the development of student resistance, as it seeks to sustain linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism in response to whitestream curriculum that forces assimilation and the loss of cultural and identity (Salazar, 2013).

Furthermore, humanizing pedagogy respects and uses the reality, history, and perspectives of youths as an integral part of educational practice (Bartolome, 1994). Freire (1972) encourages educators to listen to youth and build on their knowledge and experiences to engage in contextualized, dynamic, and personalized educational approaches that further the goals of humanization and social transformation. This idea

also holds true in community youth organizations. I would also highlight that through this theoretical framework, a humanizing pedagogy is crucial for the academic and social resiliency of youths (Fränquiz & Salazar, 2004; Reyes, 2007). For these reasons, I utilize sociopolitical youth development, humanizing pedagogy, and resistance theory to examine the ways in which youths are dismantling whitestream education policies. This conceptual framework informs my research on how youth seek to perpetuate and nurture cultural diversity by negotiating education policies while nurturing the growth of resistance capital (Paris, 2013).

Figure 1.1 visualizes the interaction between humanizing pedagogy, sociopolitical youth development, and resistance theory in the present study. Humanizing pedagogy is at the core of this framework, as co-creating and supporting youth agency can support the development of sociopolitical youth development. Sociopolitical youth development is a humanizing act, as it allows youth to be both active agents in their learning and participants in creating an education where their voices are heard. As active participants and agents in their learning, youth have the space to resist education oppressive policies. Therefore, sociopolitical youth development is humanizing and supports development of youth resistance behaviors. Resistance theory promotes actions taken by students to oppose power hierarchies that reinforce systemic inequity related to class, gender, race, and sexuality through the imposition of curricula, school policies, and school culture (Giroux, 2001).

Figure 1.1 ***Theoretical Framework***



Significance of the Study

YSPA works in the Denver metro area to connect youths with school districts and community leaders using a model that youth-serving organizations and schools districts could replicate to amplify youth voice. YSPA supports students in connecting with community leaders in all levels of governance from school leadership, district leadership, city council, to state legislators. Many social-justice oriented, youth-serving organizations center youth identity, acknowledge BIPOC lived experience, and promote youth resistance culture without censorship. By contrast, schools have not nurtured resistance behavior in the K–12 public school setting. YSPA is leading the necessary changes to create space where youth voice is centered, and critical analysis of schooling is shared. Bartolomé (1994) emphasized the need for educators to acknowledge youths as knowers and active participants in *their own* education. Through this lens, youths can become active subjects in their own learning—instead of passive objects waiting to be occupied with material that does not contribute to the development of critical thinking (Bartolome, 1994). Youths have sought out organizations like YSPA because they encourage students

to be active agents in their education and offer expertise around how education policies directly impact youth.

Assumptions

I have designed the proposed study with the assumption that minoritized youth benefit from participation in sociopolitical youth-development organizations. Through humanizing pedagogical approaches and becoming agents of change, youths develop into strong community leaders and become active participants in disrupting oppressive policies that harm their communities. Through resisting whitestream education policies and having voice in policy changes, youths see that their voice is powerful, thus, resulting in the cultivation of skills to disrupt other oppressive structures in their communities.

Limitations

The present research centers on youths involved with YSPA programming. YSPA is currently partnered with three school districts who implement programming in different ways and to differing degrees; therefore, the ways that individual schools hold space for YSPA youth is not uniform. For this reason, I conducted a multi-site case study to observe how YSPA supports youth in creating necessary changes to their school environments. Since I was conducting interviews and focus groups, some youths may have been hesitant to participate for fear that their identity may be revealed. Ultimately, this may have limited participation.

I triangulated my findings as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), as I could not measure a phenomenon, but I could assess between data collected to data observed. Therefore, I made connections between focus groups and interviews to highlight relevant

findings. Finally, individual student's experiences can vary; therefore, to get a true account of the lived experiences of YSPA youth, I conducted interviews and focus groups, to member-check for consistency with interviews.

Delimitations

In learning how students negotiated changes in school culture and school policies, it is important to highlight how successful and humanized youths felt when being asked for their opinions about school and education policy—which, in turn, supports engagement, identity development, and abolitionist school/community leaders. Therefore, I only interviewed BIPOC YSPA participants. In addition, I met with youth groups alone (i.e., no other adults were present) to ensure participants were comfortable enough to offer a true account of their experiences, and I did not collaborate with other youth programs. By design, this study amplifies and highlights the lived experiences of BIPOC youths only.

Key Terms

Abolitionist: A style of teaching or engagement that is "built on the creativity, imagination, boldness, ingenuity, and rebellious spirit and methods of abolitionists to demand and fight for an educational system where all youths are thriving, not simply surviving" (Love, 2018, p. 184)

BIPOC: Acronym referring to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

Education-survival complex: A "system built on the suffering of youths of color in which they are never educated to thrive, only to survive" (Love, 2018, p. 24)

Freedom-dreaming: A creative process of fostering critical and imaginative dreams of collective resistance (Love, 2018)

Humanization: The "process of becoming more fully human as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons who participate in and with the world" (Salazar, 2013, p. 126)

Latine: A gender-neutral term for Latin Americans (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), embraced by members of Latin LGBTQ communities to identify themselves as people of Latin descent possessing a gender identity outside the male/female binary. The *-e* ending utilizes an existing gender-neutral ending in Spanish like *estudiante* or *gente*.

Power: Youth participants created a working definition articulated in chapter four

Resistance capital: The "knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80)

Xicana: A U.S-born daughter of Mexican origins.

Whitestream: An uncritical pedagogy, marked by deficit perspectives of BIPOC youth (Salazar, 2013)

White supremacy: Youth participants created a working definition articulated in chapter four

A Note on Language

Throughout this dissertation, I do not capitalize white in the context of race. Gines (2014) stated that to keep *white* in lowercase is an intentional disruption of the norm. Gillborn (2006) brought attention to the tendency of language like *norm* and *traditional*

to refer to whiteness and white supremacy. Further, Gillborn (2006) asserts that the preservation of normalcy and the idea of normalcy referrers to whiteness. Therefore, to intentionally resist white supremacy in my writing, I do not capitalize *white*.

As well, I use Latine when referring to Latinos. The *-e* ending is gender neutral in Spanish (e.g., *gente* is a gender-neutral word referring to people). Finally, in referring to myself as a Xicana (Chicana), a first-generation daughter who upholds the keeping and passing of political and social justice culture, I use the Indigenous spelling (with an *X*) to honor the indigenous language of my ancestors.

Conclusion and Study Organization

Youths are rejecting whitestream school culture and policies, thus bringing attention to truth, justice, and most importantly, the need to abolish racist education policies. As well, youth are demanding to be cocreators and leaders of their education through youth-led action. In this dissertation, I highlight youth-led initiatives school and community partnerships take to ensure equitable schooling for BIPOC youths. Youth voice is vital to policy development, which in turn, provides opportunities for youth to learn to organize and develop solid theoretical and practical approaches for addressing social injustices everywhere (Rodriguez & Smith, 2011).

In chapter two, I review the literature that supports humanizing pedagogy, resistance theory, and the need for sociopolitical youth development. I discuss why sociopolitical youth development, humanizing pedagogy, and resistance theory are frameworks to support minoritized youths in dismantling the education-survival complex. In addition, I offer a historical timeline of how youth have resisted white supremacy and

situate today's youth leadership and resistance on an evolving spectrum. I examine how college-age youth have been successful in making the necessary changes for campuses through resistance capital (Yosso, 2004), and explore how high school students, too, can make changes to their school system.

In chapter three, I discuss my positionality and the epistemological framework that guides my research approach and findings. I review why I chose YSPA as the site to conduct my qualitative case study and discuss why methodologically, I have selected to study focus groups, interviews, and material artifacts. In chapter four, I discuss my findings, which are presented as a testimonio. Finally, I conclude in chapter five by reviewing learnings and providing recommendations based on study findings.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Mi única verdad es no ceder

Soy suficiente, soy muy valiente

Poco obediente, intransigente

Como un clavel, soy frágil también

Sigo en mi propio riel

Soy esa voz que habita el dolor, acaparadora

Controladora como un vaivén, débil, fuerte a la vez

No voy a complacer

Arco en el cielo

Agua en el suelo

Cerco de luna

Agua segura

—Denise Rosenthal and Mala Rodríguez

The literature informing this study explores various areas of humanizing pedagogy, sociopolitical youth development, and youth resistance. In this chapter, I highlight literature exploring the role of white supremacy and forced assimilation in U.S. schooling and outline the evolution of youth resistance from 1950 to present day.

In the first subsection, I explain my literature review methodology and structure. Next, I offer historical context on education policies that promote white supremacy and cultural eradication. Following, I highlight both the oppressive policies in education and the potential of K–12 youth- and sociopolitical-development needed to dismantle them. In the second subsection, I provide an overview of the paradigm shifts in education that have led to humanizing the youth experience through humanizing pedagogy. I discuss development of transformational resistance behavior to whitestream education policy and whitestream school culture. Then, I discuss how sociopolitical youth development through sociopolitical youth development partnerships are leading the necessary changes in education policy. In this, I reveal the need to support transformational resistance behavior, as it supports the dismantling of an education system which does not promote excellence among minoritized youths. Next, I outline my conceptual framework, examining the relationship between humanizing pedagogy through sociopolitical youth development and cultivation of transformational resistance behaviors.

Finally, I analyze the public education literature theoretically and empirically, highlighting the need to learn more about how sociopolitical youth programs are supporting youth in transforming their schools. Based on a review of review of extant literature, I highlight a need for researchers to explore the ways resistance supports the dismantling of public education by fostering sociopolitical development through community partnerships.

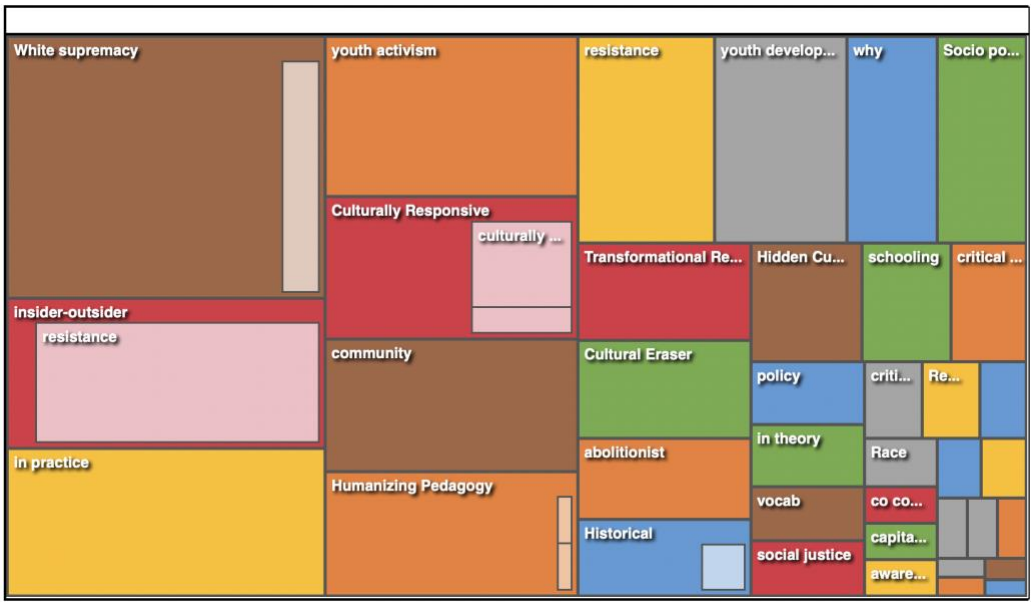
Literature Review Methodology

To conduct this literature review, I first employed DU's cross-disciplinary search tool—Compass—to search across databases in the main University Libraries collection using variations of keywords and phrases including, *resistance capital in K–12*, *whitestream school culture*, *youth-led school policies*, *white supremacy in education policy*, *white supremacy in school culture*, *youth abolitionists*, *hidden curriculum*, *sociopolitical youth development*, *community youth development*, and *youth liberation*. In addition, I conducted a backward-forward search on topics ranging from white supremacy in schools to resistance in schools, using the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) database.

Based on these searches, I located 131 sources related to the present research. To further filter those findings, I focused on sources highlighting the importance of resistance behavior in minoritized youth that deploy and asset-based, anti-deficit, and anti-essentialist perspective. I also included articles that bring attention to the historical abuse and oppression of youth of color through education policies and the suppression of resistance behavior. I excluded articles that spoke to resistance behavior through a deficit lens or located resistance as a self-defeating act. Moreover, I intentionally sought peer-reviewed journal articles on Paolo Freire from 1970 to present day to highlight the need for research that supports ways sociopolitical youth-development organizations cultivate youth leaders through resistance to white supremacist school policies.

Once I gathered my key sources, I used the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo, to organize text themes and methodologies. Reemerging topics were sorted into nodes to assist in multi-dimensional categorization. For example, if school policy surfaced in a reading about white supremacy, I created a node in which other readings that also spoke to white supremacy in school policy could be categorized. Thus, through NVivo, I was able to locate which themes emerged more often. Through a hierarchy chart in NVivo (see Figure 1.1), I visualized which topics (codes) needed more research and identified themes I encountered more often. Some articles discussed curriculum; however, the focus of this literature review is sociopolitical youth development, resistance behaviors, and the dismantling of white supremacy in schools. Figure 2.1 offers a visual representation of the three pillars of my review: white supremacy, youth activism, and community. The figure served as a guide in outlining major topics to highlight in this chapter and supported the order in of ideas in the present review of the literature.

Figure 2.1 ***Hierarchical Matrix of Nodes***



Cultural Eradication

Education has long been touted as "the great equalizer," and a way for all to accomplish greatness in the United States (Borck, 2019). Meritocracy undergirds this ideology, suggesting that if you work hard, you will be successful. However, this has not been the case for minoritized youth in the United States. Giroux (1983) defined K–12 education as a space to eradicate the culture of minoritized youths and located education policy as an act of white supremacy. Later, Gillborn (2005) pointed out the embedded nature of cultural eradication: "although race inequity may not be a planned and deliberate goal of educational policy, neither is it accidental" (p. 2). This cultural eradication of minoritized populations take many forms—from Native-American boarding schools (Goldberg, 2002), to English-only policies (Mutua, 1999), to present day lies and

propaganda around the purpose of culturally sustaining curriculum rooted in critical race theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings, 2010; Lopez, 2021). Many fear this will further divide the school community and society. Organizations like No Left Turn—a conservative, anti-CRT group—believe we should go back to "traditional" or mainstream schooling.

Of course, the problem with traditional schooling, as imagined by conservative organizations like No Left Turn is that it promotes white supremacy (Lopez, 2021). Sleeter (2017) highlighted the neutral structures of schooling through the reinforcement of whiteness and the interests of white people. Schools reproduce dominant ideologies, create uniformity, and erase diversity in their attempt for "colorblind sameness" (p. 161)—a perspective that harms minoritized youth (Sleeter, 2017). Further, colorblind ideology impacts issues of race and outcomes in schools, from perpetuating colorblindness through children's literature (Thomas, 2016; Winograd, 2011), to the dominant cultural narrative that race is not a significant issue in education (Mitchell, 2013; Pollock, 2005). Argued for by white, right-wing parent groups, colorblind educational policy is a form of race subordination that denies current and historical contexts of white domination and violence (Harris, 1993).

Schools have not been a place where youths thrive; yet, they have been places where youths survive (Love, 2018). Borck (2020) asserted that education is about teaching students how to adjust to the system, not change it. Institutional racism in education policy is not accidental; it is *by design*. Due to the intention of

maintaining white supremacy in schools, race equity is a consistent fight and a significant topic for education policymakers. Thus, education policy plays a key role in reproducing white supremacy (Gillborn, 2005). White privilege and white supremacy are maintained through invisible, insidious operations of power that foster whiteness and racism. Examples of this are visible in racist education policies which enforce the teaching of whitestream curriculum, and school culture (Salazar, 2013). Urrieta (2006) stated that the so-called "mainstream" is really "whitestream," which is code for enforcing the hidden curriculum and white supremacy in schools.

Manifestations of White Supremacy

Harris (1995) noted that through Black subordination and white dominance, historical forms of domination have evolved to reproduce subordination in the present. Thus, white supremacy is no longer enforced primarily through physical violence (though it occurs every day). Instead, it is hidden in acts and agendas like education policies (Kohli et al., 2017). As Joseph, Viesca, and Bianco (2016) point out, the privileging of white knowledge, skills, language, and dispositions in school contexts has contributed to persistent inequities plaguing American public schools. In turn, white supremacy and white privilege have tangible advantages to white youths and communities. Examples of this can be seen today in Arizona, where youths cannot speak Spanish in schools, nor take ethnic studies courses (Cammarota & Romero, 2006). Similarly, both

Idaho House Bill 377 and Texas House Bill 3979 ban youths from learning the true history of systemic racism in the United States. These are but a few examples of how schools serve as sites that further perpetuate and sustain oppression of those who have been othered. Youth who do not see themselves in textbooks, teaching, and leadership in schools begin to struggle with how they matter (Love, 2018).

Schools have been central in perpetuating this system through curricular choices around core content, electives (vs. required course), or worse: what content and narratives are excluded altogether. It can be difficult for white parents and leaders to see these injustices, as power does not collapse into an all-encompassing construct of ideological domination (Giroux, 1997). Rather, through curriculum and everyday classroom social relations, schools inculcate youths with the attitudes and dispositions necessary to accept the social and economic imperatives of a capitalist and racist society.

Gillborn (2005) considered the role of education policy in actively sustaining racial inequity, including curriculum and standardized testing, but also through dress codes, language enforcement, hairstyle regulation, and other policies. Research has brought attention to how schools are a microcosm of larger issues in our society (hooks, 2003; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Matias, 2013; Tatum, 2003). Moreover, racial biases that inform school values, content, and curriculum—when paired with the uninterrogated perspectives, beliefs, and

positionalities of teachers—contribute to the social divide and distrust within schools and in society (hooks, 2003).

Implications of White Supremacy

White supremacy robs minoritized youths of their intellectual promise, while systematically creating problematic school expectations rooted in racial abuse. Consequently, if minoritized youth do not conform to white standards, schools punish them for misbehavior via mechanisms like detention and suspension (Tallent et al., 2020). The same system produces racialized achievement patterns that favor those who benefit from white supremacy (Allen & Liou, 2019). Researchers have documented that neoliberal-driven policies that promote racism against communities of color endure in K–12 education through practices such as standardized testing, school choice, charter-school development, and lack of funding in public education (Buras, 2009; Gay, 2013; Prins, 2007). For example, it is well documented that racial biases in standardized testing lead to lower scores among minoritized youth (Harris, 2005; Kohli et al., 2017). Consequently, lower test scores lead to fewer post-secondary options—effectively upholding and protecting capitalism.

Minorized youth are likely to encounter more obstacles to school achievement when they think, behave, and express themselves in ways that resist school and mainstream cultural norms (Borck, 2020; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Gay 2013; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). Liberation of racial identity is as much a part of the struggle against racism as it is about the

elimination of racial discrimination and inequality (Giroux, 1983). Through racist, meritocratic messages, youth are told they are not successful because they did not try hard enough or study long enough. However, by honoring and acknowledging their lived experiences and identities, youth can liberate disenfranchised communities—not just their fellow youths (Freire, 1993).

Resistance and Power

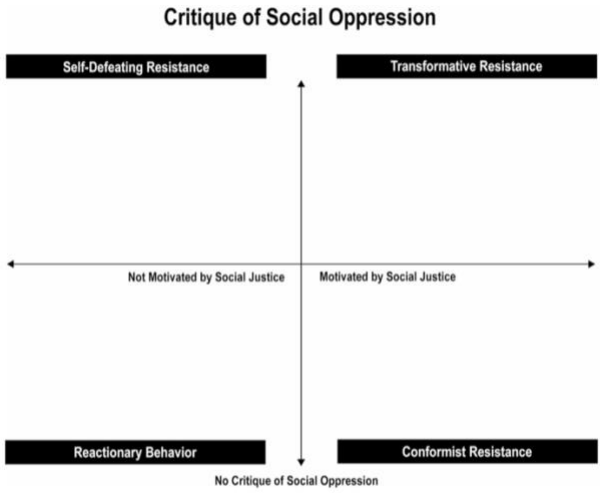
When analyzing youth culture and young people's relation to authority, *resistance* is often used as a conceptual tool to discover and describe representations of social movements and of cultural change (Johansson & Lalander, 2012). Moreover, the notion of resistance often has had a negative stigma attached to it. For example, Tuck and Yang (2011) argued that when youth resist, there is a possibility their resistance may be misinterpreted, leading to further marginalization or cooption within colonial structures. Likewise, Hidalgo (2011) brought attention to the fact that though youth acts of resistance often resulted in suspension or expulsion from class, they were simultaneously acts of self-preservation. Solórzano and Bernal (2001) define this as "self-defeating resistance" (p. 317).

Youth resistance has the potential to offer other decolonial possibilities that would enrich existing theories of change (Johansson & Lalander, 2011, p. 17). Resistance can be viewed as a contribution to progressive transformations and radical changes in social and cultural structures. However, resistance is not just used against injustice. It is also used by white supremacists to secure the

continuance and longevity of their privilege, and to maintain whitestream school culture (Johansson & Lalander, 2012).

Transformational resistance disempowers ideas harmful to minoritized communities. It can be subtle or even silent—an internal resistance that occurs within the context helping overcome "challenges and obstacles" (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001, p. 117). Moreover, Solórzano and Bernal (2001) describe transformational resistance as a critique of oppression and the desire for social justice. Transformational resistance should be a value we support, foster, and sustain in youth. Solórzano and Bernal (2006) highlighted how researchers often focus on the self-defeating resistance of minoritized youths without acknowledging or studying the more positive outcomes of school resistance. Using an anti-essentialist perspective, researchers should reflect on the level of consciousness and awareness youth have toward transformational resistance behavior and how transformation is evolving in 2021 and beyond.

Figure 2.2 ***Social Oppression Critique Matrix***



Source: Solorzano and Bernal, 2001

Youth Resistance Is Not New: It Has Evolved

While present-day resistance efforts are often positioned in media and educational spaces as the first of their kind, they are actually part of a long legacy of youth resistance. In 1950, Barbara Johns led a walkout that unfolded amid a rich postwar legacy of young people leading direct-action, social-change movements. Youth in Selma led protests to secure voting rights for Black Americans. Four years before Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 1963 March on Washington, Civil Rights leader Bayard Rustin (himself a product of the Young Communist League) led a youth march for integrated schools in the U.S. capitol (Hosang, 2002). And in communities around the South in the 1960s, youth violated segregation laws by sitting at lunch counters in white establishments (Ginwright & James, 2002).

The U.S. social movements of the 1960s and 1970s—fighting for antiwar, feminist, gay rights, and free-speech perspectives—drew on the leadership of politically committed youth activists. Similarly, in 1968, youth resisted unfair and inhumane treatment in schools via the L.A. Walkouts—also known as the L.A. Blowouts. In these protests, youths demanded that their public schools invest more resources into students and called for curricula that represented their identities. Youths also called for a more humane school experience, where they could use the restrooms during lunch and not be forced outside. In response to the trauma Chicana/os endured in their education, organizations like Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (*MEChA*), La Raza, and League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) were created. Due to this legacy, youth organizations on college campuses continue to serve as important sites of resistance, For example, Denver youth-development organization La Raza—a byproduct of the Chicano Movement—continues to engage youth in leadership and teach Chicano studies.

Similarly, the Black Panthers directed their youth and community to consider the political nature of knowledge. They took an indirect, but pointed, approach in critiquing public-school history curriculum by identifying it as a form of institutional racism, colonialism, and state repression (Hussain, 2014). Black Panthers also witnessed the harms schools were doing regarding nutrition and access to healthy foods and created free and reduced-priced lunch supports (Hussain, 2014). The Black Panther Party is a prime example of how community

partnerships elevated the schooling experience for minoritized youth. Freire (1970) argued that through co-creation, teachers and youth can collectively "become." Through this same ideology, community organizations and youth can collectively co-create and collaborate while becoming.

The Legacy of Youth-Led Resistance to White Supremacy Continues

In 2020, America witnessed a summer of uprising due to Black death, racism, and protests. In 2020, racism killed George Floyd, racism killed Breonna Taylor, and racism forced many institutions to reflect on how their policies and behaviors perpetuate racism (Dunn et al., 2021). Consequently, conversations sprung up in education circles, focusing on the notion that education can be reformed to rid schools of racism, white supremacy, and the inequalities created by racial oppression. As in other historical periods, today's youth are organizing for safer schools through stricter gun laws, removal of school resource officers, culturally sustaining curricula, and Dreamers advocating to keep their pathway to citizenship through DACA .

In the Metro Denver area, we are beginning to see a shift in school climate, as youth community groups reexamine their school policies. In Denver, youths co-created a resolution known as the Know Justice, Know Peace resolution—a district policy mandating that teachers teach history and other content through the lived experiences of minoritized people, and calls for continuous anti-racist professional development (Thompson, 2003). In addition, the Crown Act now protects Black youth from being punished for wearing their

natural hair. Youth are organizing in larger numbers and greater frequency to advocate for those that have been othered by the school system and society. Though these seem like small steps, I argue that we are witnessing the fall of white supremacy.

Youth Resistance

Solórzano and Bernal (2001) highlighted that resistance comes in four forms: self-defeating resistance, transformational resistance, conformist resistance, and reactionary behavior. Today's youth have access to outlets that provide facts and critical perspectives. Using these tools, youth know that schools uphold white supremacy through a whitestream curriculum and education policies. With the shift in cultural awareness and a shift in access to truth, there must be a shift in how youth display their resistance. While white progressives are learning about anti-racism through book clubs, minoritized youth have transformed into abolitionists. Education reform and school policies rooted in interest convergence have never been enough to create real humanizing change in schools. Instead, Love (2018) has brought attention to what it means to be an abolitionist educator.

Love (2019) defined abolitionist teaching as a way of life that denies the use of zero tolerance policies and seeks to destroy the school-to-prison pipeline (Meiners & Winn, 2010; Stovall, 2018). Abolitionism is not a social-justice trend; it is a way of life, defined by commitment to working toward a humanity where no one is disposable. Through this concept, minoritized youth have demonstrated

abolitionist resistance that prevents teachers from hiding behind words like, *ally* or *anti-racist*, and advocates for deep-rooted systemic change. Abolitionists work toward radical disruption, and through this idea, youth are at the forefront of disrupting the education-survival complex (Love, 2019).

Ideologies of resistance are regularly presented on college campuses, promoting a culture of organizing and protest in higher education. Similarly, younger youths have instigated walkouts, and organized protests by wearing clothes that schools would deem inappropriate, for example. However, today's youth are abolishing racist policies and behaviors that have historically oppressed and marginalized their communities. While youth have resisted in the past, today's students are taking more ambitious steps to unseat the powerful, by recording teachers and principals on their phones and uploading the videos to online platforms where thousands can bear witness. More so than in the past, after summer 2020, youth are holding teachers and school administrators accountable for their oppressive actions towards minoritized students. Social media platforms like TikTok have further enabled youth to communicate nationally about racist acts occurring in school settings, thus forcing communities to take action as well. This has created a space for mass collaboration and organizing. Giroux (1979) noted that historically, the relationship between changes in society and changes in communication have been dictated less by the nature of the developing technology of communication than by the dominant ideology and existing social formations of the given society (p. 89). As a case-in-point, when youth unified in

the summer of 2020, former-President Trump responded with attempts to foreclose youth access by shutting down Tiktok; he failed. Instead, through this action, youth became aware of their power.

Sociopolitical Youth Development

Sociopolitical development theory contends that people act when they believe their voice and behavior can have the intended sociopolitical impact for them or their community. Sociopolitical development has been described as critical awareness of social power and its impacts in local communities (Christen & Dolan, 2011; Watts & Guessous, 2006). The same can be true for youth, as they have become aware of power and oppression through daily encounters of marginalization as minoritized youths.

Youth have long been actively pursuing progress in supporting their communities, and sociopolitical youth development has supported resistance behaviors among college students. Linder et al. (2019) provided a useful example wherein youths with minoritized identities engaged in campus activism to hold institutional leaders accountable for addressing oppression. Activism has been a way to survive the education-survival complex in the higher-education space, which can be replicated in post-secondary education to support minoritized youth. Through political education, youth organizing groups support critical-thinking skills and develop values and attitudes that move youth to act against injustice (Gambone et al., 2006). Schools have been a place that teach youths to be compliant; youth organizations teach youths to be critical thinkers and leaders.

Models of sociopolitical development stem from Paulo Freire's (1973, 1970) conception of critical consciousness and liberation within perspectives and development. Moreover, we see that supporting youth in the development of their critical consciousness also supports the humanization of their development. Sociopolitical development has been labeled an "antidote" to the barriers of structural oppression (Watts et al., 1999). With understanding of this, Bluestein, McWhirter, and Perry, (2005) argued that educators should foster youth consciousness and motivation to transform sociopolitical inequity.

Through sociopolitical youth development, youth can gain stronger literacy and writing skills, while developing leadership and advocacy skills (Anyiwo et al., 2020). More importantly, Ginwright, Noguera, and Camarota (2002) argued that attainment of a positive self-awareness requires building greater awareness of community conditions that impede healthy development, thus supporting the development of critical consciousness. Understanding how oppression affects the lives of others, while contributing to social-justice practice counters oppression, while supporting youth problem solving through active participation in civic dialogue.

Through sociopolitical youth development, youth learn that their community and neighborhoods are not the problem. Instead, schooling has perpetuated the problems in their neighborhoods. For example, in Colorado, the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR) amendment has a profound impact on neighborhood schools and funding. TABOR is an effort to correct a longstanding

problem in Colorado school funding, that taxpayers in different school districts pay wildly different rates causing some schools to have more funding for resources, supplies and teachers, whereas other school districts suffer due to voting against tax increases (Meitzer, 2021).

Youth community programs support young people in their efforts to improve their communities. Similarly, the same frameworks can be used to youth in addressing problems in U.S. schooling. Camarota (2011) examined how once awareness occurs, the young person may adopt a social-justice perspective that empowers them to engage in their learning in ways that lead to systemic change. This type of awareness can support a youth-led reimagination of schooling and education policy.

Youth activists with minoritized identities who are engaged in resistance can hold institutional leaders accountable to commitments of diversity, equity, and inclusion on their campuses (Linder et al., 2019). While this is visible in higher education, youth resistance can likewise hold K–12 leaders accountable for their actions. Critical agency—which includes motivation and confidence in one's ability to make sociopolitical change—relates theoretically to youth activism and moderates the associations between analysis and activism (Anyiwo et al., 2020). Sociopolitical development supports youth in taking action, especially when they believe their voice and behavior can have the intended sociopolitical impact for them or their community.

The focus of sociopolitical youth development has been to create leaders in communities and neighborhoods. Notably, public schools are some of the largest institutions upholding structural oppression. There needs to be a paradigm shift in how we utilize sociopolitical youth development, as this can be a tool to reimagine public schools and dismantle the current education–survival complex.

It Takes a Community

Youth activist groups engage young people's zone of proximal development, which refers to the distance between what a person can do alone, and what they can do in collaboration with peers or an experienced adult (Kirshner, 2007). A key tenet of youth development is the ability to increasingly recognize one's potential to contribute in the public sphere (Gambone, 2006). Community organizations have long supported youth in recognizing their potential and ability to make changes that improve their communities. Youth development organizations frame and develop new ways for young people engage in social-justice activities specific to their community. Moreover, within youth development, community programs highlight that youth impact is not limited to neighborhoods but can also impact schools (Ginwright & James, 2002).

High schools with a high population of minoritized youth are often too large and lack opportunities for meaningful connections between teachers and students (Kirshner, 2007). By contrast, community-based youth organizations help young people build organizational intentionality around youth voice, participation in decision making, skills development, and public work.

Essentially, such programs offer a balance of structured opportunities and openness for joint creation and accountability (Gambone et al., 2006). Minoritized youth frequently work twice as hard as others to stay engaged in learning, which distracts from their educational pursuits (Linder et al., 2019). Through community co-opting, youths can collaborate with their biggest supporters—their community—to create systemic change within and beyond their communities.

Shifting Resistance from the Community to the Classroom

Youth in community programs develop their political participation and critical thinking skills by asserting their voice on key issues in their communities (Gambone et al., 2008). Youth organizing around local issues of direct concern to them is the central strategy to create systemic change (Ginwright & James, 2002). As described earlier, youth have come together to provide testimony for bills like SB-187 (school-to-prison pipeline), the Crown Act, and have held space during school board meetings to address concerns around curriculum and anti-racist teacher professional development. Youth have seen the impact they are making in their communities and are taking this learning and experience to school hallways and board meetings. Through studies of youth supporting the dismantling of the prison-industrial complex, school-to-prison pipeline, supporting unhoused youth and supporting LGBTQ youth, youth activists are learning that they can use the same strategies to abolish and reimagine school environments that have historically oppressed and culturally erased youth identity, and perpetuated white supremacy (Tuck & Yang, 2011).

Youth are seeing themselves as agents of change and are observing the shifts in how they are viewed by others, which in turn increases respect from peers and adults (Schwartz & Suyemoto, 2012). With this shift, youths are asked to co-create at local levels such as schools and community programs. Schools are youth-rich social arenas, where issues of communal importance can be easily brought before a larger number at once; where youth can be recruited to serve as agents in resolving the issues in collaboration with peers and adults; and where core values of civic engagement can be transferred in the process (Balsano, 2005). This has been impactful to make community changes; however, youths are learning that their voices should be amplified in their school communities.

In recent years, youth voice has become common in many school district board meetings and often involves consultation on internal school evaluation and planning activities, such as feedback on school policies, quality assurance, and hiring (Brown et al., 2017). Dominant ideologies are being questioned in schools and are often met with resistance by teachers, youths, and parents (Giroux, 1983). Through these processes, youths can "feel they are knowledgeable subjects that guide the educational process" (Camarota & Romero, 2006, p. 20). However, since most schools do not support resistant behaviors in earnest, youths are seeking support from community organizations.

According to O'Donoghue (2006), when marginalized by broader society, minoritized youth need to carve out spaces where they are not assumed deficient, invisible, or hyper-visible—thus revealing need for community partnerships and

organizations. Resistance redefines the causes and meaning of oppositional behavior by arguing that it has little to do with deviance and learned helplessness, but a great deal to do with moral and political indignation (Giroux, 1983). Resistance can be seen as more than just disrespect. Some educators interpret resistance to hegemonic school norms as a serious disciplinary infraction and are not cognizant of why the youth is displaying oppositional or resistant behavior (Martin & Beese, 2017).

Additional studies examining resistance and sociopolitical development within classroom spaces have identified that when youths leave the classroom to meet with friends in the hallway for purposes of resistance, the behavior is described as deviant (Aviles & Heybach, 2017). Co-creation in some studies have used examples of creating classroom norms but never to the extent of shifting district or statewide education policies. Most resistance research focuses on a self-defeating resistance, in which youth behavior implicates them even further in their own domination (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Fine, 1991; Foley, 1990; MacLeod, 1987; McLaren, 1993, 1994; Willis, 1977). These studies have not demonstrated the true power youth can have on dismantling the education-survival complex. Youth who participate in sociopolitical youth empowerment programs have learned skills that can change both their communities, and the future of schooling.

Literature in Theory

Freirean perspective posits that young people's capacity to produce knowledge to transform their world supports the notion that youth can transform

all realms in which they navigate (Freire, 1970). Freire (1970) suggested that developing critical consciousness and engaging in transformative dialogue requires teachers and youths to become "subjects," rather than "objects" (Salazar, 2013). Moreover, a humanizing pedagogy is intertwined with social change; it challenges youth to critically engage with the world, so they can act on it (Giroux, 2010; Salazar, 2013). According to Freirean ideals, all pedagogy is political and requires radical reconstruction of teaching and learning (Giroux, 1988). This has been utilized in the classroom space; however, since minoritized youth do not often see themselves in schooling, this can be applied to the relationship between youth and community partners.

Critical and resistance theorists propose that race and class backgrounds influence everyday forms of youth resistance in schools (McFarland, 2001). Moreover, active forms of everyday resistance can transform the classroom setting when they are repeatedly performed. Yosso (2005) described resistance capital as a form of cultural wealth that youths can bring into the classroom with them. Resistance capital refers to the knowledge obtained through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality and can later be utilized in other settings as means of knowing. Therefore, cultural knowledge of the structures of racism and motivation to transform such oppressive structures can support youths in identifying the nuances of oppressive systems.

Humanizing pedagogy draws on critical pedagogy, which itself draws from different traditions, including Marxism, feminism, postcolonialism, and

postmodernism. Critical pedagogy is most-closely associated with Brazilian educationalist and philosopher, Paulo Freire—especially his seminal 1970 work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. For Freire, a principal aim of critical pedagogy is to establish shared ground for critical and analytical work whereby youths can challenge traditional power relationships, both inside and outside the classroom—what Freire (1970) referred to as *praxis*. Critical pedagogy argues that youths should be active participants in their learning process and teachers should work in a more open, reciprocal, and humanizing way (Simmons, 2016). Youth who participate in organizations rooted in critical pedagogy amplify the reimaging of school policy, while increasing youth voice

Salazar (2013) brings attention to ten pillars of humanizing pedagogy that stem from critical pedagogy. The pillars are rooted in ten assumptions:

1. The reality of the learner is crucial.
2. Critical consciousness is imperative for students and educators.
3. Students' sociocultural resources are valued and extended.
4. Content is meaningful and relevant to students' lives.
5. Students' prior knowledge is linked to new learning.
6. Trusting and caring relationships advance the pursuit of humanization.
7. Mainstream knowledge and discourse styles matter.
8. Students will achieve through their academic, intellectual, social abilities.
9. Student empowerment requires the use of learning strategies.

10. Challenging inequity in the educational system can promote transformation.

Through this lens, I focus on these pillars in relationship with sociopolitical youth development and the cultivation of resistance behaviors.

Literature in Practice

Two recent mixed-methods studies of community-organizing programs serving youth of color suggest that participation in community-organizing programs is associated with higher levels of civic and political engagement; a greater sense of agency and identity development; an increased capacity for critical-social analysis; and greater educational motivation and aspirations (Gambone et al., 2006; Shah, 2011). In a study by Cabrera (2011), participants who attempted to challenge oppressive educational practices understood that their activism was always partly compromised and learned to operate within the confines of white supremacy. Through both studies, the authors demonstrated that youths could challenge the dominant ideology of the school, while recognizing the limits of their own resistance.

Linder et al. (2019) studied participants engaged in different types of activism, including organizing protests, composing demands to administrators, meeting with campus administrators, engaging in formal leadership roles in youth organizations, and resisting oppression by showing up and being present in their minoritized bodies. In doing so, Linder et al. (2019) highlighted the power behind youth activism on college campuses. In many studies related to youth activism,

resistance, critical consciousness, and sociopolitical development, youth are shown to make positive impacts in higher education and within their communities. Linder et al. (2019) found that college campuses have maintained school cultures where youth have opportunities to join organization that promote resistance capital. By contrast, in post-secondary school, such activities could be cause for suspension.

In a parallel thread, Cammarota (2008) revealed how families and community members can help youth resist the social and cultural processes within and outside school. The study looked at a small sample size of Latine youth as an ethnographic study, while presenting strategies to work within the system, not necessarily dismantle it. Cammarota (2008) highlighted that experiences of resistance in schools followed participants into their higher-education spaces. This is an example of how questioning oppressive structures and resisting a system that further marginalizes a community of color can be a skill that can be cultivated in developing strong leaders.

Many studies that speak to the need to support youth in community, youth development agencies, or through afterschool programs do not highlight how youth civic-engagement programs, youth community partnerships, and afterschool youth programs are already creating change. In addition, Schwartz and Suyemoto (2012) found that youth community-organizing programs can influence a range of youth development outcomes, including the development of skills, knowledge, civic engagement, empowerment, and positive self-perception. This

type of empowerment and knowledge continues to influence youth perspectives and decisions in positive ways, as they enter their post-secondary educational experiences.

Solórzano and Bernal (2001) examined youth resistance through a LatCrit lens by examining the L.A. walkouts and the UCLA Chicano youths strike in 1968. The belief is that the strikes have been overlooked, and the movements were focused on working-class males (Solarzano & Bernal 2001). The authors use LatCrit to discuss transformational resistance with Chicana/o youths. However, the study does not consider the lived experience of Chicanas and their attitudes towards resistance behavior in the strike, nor does it discuss how minoritized youths in the 1960s came together to unify against white supremacy, much like today. Though I have a deep connection to Xicanismo culture and history, the sociopolitical youth spaces I often navigate include spaces with minoritized youths that identify as Black, Latine, Chicano, Native American, and Asian. In the literature examined for this chapter, I did not locate any studies that speak to how minoritized youth are uniting under the need to dismantle white supremacy in K–12, or how collectively they operate as a collective to resist whiteness in schools.

Research suggest that youths often seek out spaces where they feel a sense of racial connection because of experiences with racial discrimination and injustice. On college campuses, we see this to be true with racial balkanization (Villalpando, 2003). Minoritized youth motivate other minoritized youth, and this

leads to more engagement in civic and political action to address marginalization and oppression (Cammarota, 2008). Youths become abolitionists within their communities through civic participation. Through this review of the literature, I found that schools are the driving force that continue to marginalize and oppress minoritized young people. Today's youth have evolved into disrupters and cannot wait on the world to learn to be anti-racist. Minoritized youths are well beyond waiting; they are already youth abolitionists.

In the literature reviewed in this chapter, there was a notable gap of how sociopolitical youth-development organizations are preparing youths to abolish racist and oppressive schooling. In a journey through the literature, I reviewed how schools uphold white supremacy and marginalization in schools and society. I examined how resistance is not supported in school settings because it holds school leaders and teachers accountable for their racist behaviors and ideologies. A majority of studies in this area have been in higher education, where oppositional behavior is promoted. In higher education, resistance is part of the experience, and universities offer many organizations where youths can connect with each other to resist as a collective. However, in K–12, youths can be reprimanded and punished for not assimilating to the whitestream school policies. Youth are met with suspensions or discipline from a resource officer for trying to organize around the very same causes college youths regularly organize around. By contrast, sociopolitical organizations do not have to abide by school policies, nor do they have to censor their conversations or curriculum. Therefore,

sociopolitical youth-development groups will be the driving force in supporting youth abolitionists in dismantling the education-survival complex.

Chapter Summary

Current resistance models have yet to provide a framework to accurately support resistance within community partners (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Based on the literature reviewed in this chapter, few studies explore sociopolitical youth organizations that support minoritized youth in their development of transformational resistance in community organizations. White supremacy cannot dismantle white supremacy. Therefore, youths who are subject to the whitestream school culture and education policies can advocate for the changes needed to humanize their school experience, while supporting the development of youth-abolitionist resistance behavior. Fostering youth resistance through critical pedagogy will support the development of leadership, community, critical thinking, and discourse to uproot the current education system and build a school system that honors minoritized youth. Students have reimagined their schooling experience as a place where Black, Brown, and Indigenous youths are not only empowered, but honored and respected.

Sociopolitical development has been transformative for minoritized youth in marginalized neighborhoods, as they have become active participants in their communities. As youth advocate for and bring attention to the changes needed for their communities, sociopolitical youth development is matriculating into the K–12 setting wherein youth negotiate and co-create state, district, and school

policies that better serve minoritized youth. Youth are seeking to end the conditions that sustain and support white supremacy. And youth know that they cannot seek out the support of their school, as most schools are rooted in dehumanization, performative ally-ship, interest convergence, and white supremacy (Allen, & Liou, 2018). Historically, youth have not been at the table where education policies have been created; however, through youth sociopolitical organization, the future of education policy can change, has changed, and will change again.

In the next chapter, I highlight the site of study: a sociopolitical youth program that supports youths in three districts across the Denver Metro area. I outline my methodology and next steps to reveal how sociopolitical youth development through community partnerships can dismantle K–12 whitestream school culture and policies.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Invisible people, we're tired of living in the dark

Everyone is trying to tear us apart

All we wanna do is heal now…

Invisible people, the truth is we're all the same

The concept of race was implanted inside your brain

It's time to start all over

You best believe we're taking over

—Chicano Batman

The purpose of the present study is to understand ways in which youths resist whitestream education through co-construction of education and school policies, and by engaging in critical discourse that humanizes the school experience for minoritized youth. By demanding humanizing school policies, BIPOC youth advocate for environments that do not contribute to their oppression. This chapters outlines my methodology and approach to inquiry; provides relevant context and demographic information around Youth for Social and Political Activism (YSPA); and details how and why I selected the study participants and study site. Finally, I explain my data collection and analysis processes, discuss my positionality, and highlight ethical considerations and ways in which I supported participants.

Research Question

The purpose of this research is to learn how youth resist whitestream school policies to create much-needed change in their schools through participation in community sociopolitical youth-development organizations. The questions guiding the present research ask: (a) What, if any, impacts have sociopolitical youth-development organization, YSPA had on whitestream education policies; (b) In what ways have sociopolitical youth-development organizations increased youth activism in schools? And (c), How are YSPA youth resisting racist and oppressive policies in their public schools?

In chapter two, I illustrated ways schools have historically served as spaces of cultural erasure, and highlighted education nonprofit settings where youth resistance is instead supported, cultivated, and nurtured. To learn more about this phenomenon, I sought to learn (1) whether and in what ways YSPA has led to an increase in youth activism in education policy spaces; (2) how YSPA youths define white supremacy and what steps, if any, they are taking to dismantle it; and (3) how YSPA youth are resisting whitestream education and school policy/white supremacy in their school spaces. YSPA participants attend various schools across three districts: Denver Public Schools, Cherry Creek School District, and Aurora Public Schools.

To address the first question around ways in which YSPA has impacted youth activism and the third question on resistance to whitestream school policy/white supremacy, I collected data through interviews and focus groups. To address the second research question on defining white supremacy and the steps youths are taking (or not) to dismantle it, I gathered data through interviews, focus groups, and observation of youth

coalition meetings. In addition, any youths who wished to participate but did not want to join a focus group or interview could share experiences through email submission and/or through the submission of an artifact. This reduced barriers to participation, such as stress, anxiety, or language concerns.

Research Design

The chosen methodology for this study is qualitative, as I am focused on participant perceptions and experiences, and ways they make sense of their resistance experience through participation in YSPA (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990; Merriam, 1988). By choosing a qualitative methodology, I humanized the research process for participants, and centered youth voices and lived experiences. A qualitative design allowed me to bring attention to and amplify counternarratives of the minoritized experience of BIPOC youth in K–12 public schools.

The phenomenon I observed is in conjunction with the work of YSPA; therefore, my research is conducted as a case study. The case study design is intended to illuminate experiences of youths who have organized youth townhalls, where school-board leaders, superintendents, and community leaders reevaluated memorandum-of-understanding (MOU) agreements (Creswell, 2014). To support the qualitative approach, questions asked in the research process were designed to understand the phenomenon from participant perspective, not the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I have selected a case-study approach because youth-led townhalls, reevaluation of access to ethnic studies, and an evaluation of school safety in three different school districts came to fruition through youth advocacy, resistance, and participation.

Therefore, the study site is engaging in youth dialogue through sociopolitical community partnerships and exploring new approaches to fighting racism in schools. Yin's (2014) linear-analytic structure proposes first learning about the issue or problem, then reviewing the literature, followed by methods and findings, and ending with a conclusion. This approach guided how I organized my case study, as it is explanatory, descriptive, and exploratory.

A case-study approach allowed me to explore the issue in-depth, with analysis of a bounded system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Likewise, Yin (2014) would describe a case study as empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon or "the case" in a real-life context. Creswell and Ploth (2018) have defined phenomenology as the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenologists focus on describing what participants have in common, as they experience a given phenomenon (Creswell & Ploth, 2018, p. 121).

Site and Participants

YSPA's mission is to encourage and support disengaged and underserved youth to participate in their communities—both socially and politically—in order to make change within the community. The organization's guiding vision is to cultivate youth who are civically engaged in community and career. I selected YSPA as the case study site because—as the current Director of Policy and Partnerships for the organization—I have witnessed ways the organization supports youth resistance through community townhalls and youth participatory action research (YPAR). Moreover, YSPA centers BIPOC identity and maintains a majority BIPOC staff. Such decisions align with how

other organizations have successfully supported youth and staff of color. YSPA was created in 2010 through the vision of Dr. Janelle Mack. After struggling herself to get support in high school when applying for college, Dr. Mack sought to create a space in YSPA, where youths could discuss social-science degrees in higher education with youths of the same identity.

This study focuses on dismantling whitestream education policy through the experience of minoritized youth. Because YSPA has a strongly diverse team of staff and youth interns, I observed minoritized youth interns in their coalition meetings to discern how learning and advocacy from YSPA youth coalition meetings matriculates into their school environments. At the time of this research, fifteen youth interns and six non-interns participate in YSPA. Youth interns are paid for their time, intellectual labor, and emotional labor. Those who are not paid are learning about the organization and building rapport. The organization believes that as youth gain experience, there must be reciprocity for their work. YSPA was purposeful and strategic in selecting these youth participants. Instead of oversaturating the space with as many youths as possible, YSPA chose to take a more focused approach on youths committed to social-justice work. When engaging new students, YSPA connects with youth through the social-science summer program and through teacher word-of-mouth. Interested youth can apply to be in any of the youth coalition meetings. To become an intern, youths can formally apply after attending a semester of meetings and YSPA activities.

To gain access, I met with YSPA Executive Director, Dr. Mack to discuss the purpose of the study and how it will contribute to needed changes in K–12 education

policy. To acquaint myself with the setting, build rapport with the youth liaison, and discuss the research, I observed all YSPA programs. My role was exclusively as an observer, and the focus of my observations was on ways youths are resisting whitestream education policy.

Youth invited to participate in the study were youth of color who are actively involved with YSPA, meaning that they regularly attend youth coalition meetings. Participants currently attended or were 2021 graduates of high schools in Denver Public Schools, Aurora Public Schools, or Cherry Creek School District. During interviews and focus groups, participants were invited to share experiences and insights from YSPA participation. Participants were asked how YSPA supported them in dialogue with school and district leaders to support education policy changes in their schools. Youth who participated in interviews also participated in focus groups to help me obtain a deeper understanding of their advocacy work.

I conducted semi-structured, qualitative observations in the youth council meetings to learn more about the leadership skills youths possess, and how they conceptualize resistance (Creswell, 2014). During observations, I kept field notes to support my findings. As a full observant occurred during youth meetings, which took place after school Monday through Thursday from 4:30 pm to 6:00 pm. By attending youth council meetings, I learned how youth connect across districts.

As Creswell (2014) noted, it is critical to avoid distracting participants when observing phenomenon in motion; therefore, I informed the youth council liaison of my plan and gave her time to notify youth of my intention to attend meetings. When youths

preferred that I not observe, I honored their wishes and connected with them at a time that better met their needs. Youths were often planning school board candidate workshops, town halls, and YPAR projects, so I provided at least two weeks' notice ahead of my observations.

Sample Selection

Participants selected for this study were YSPA youth who participated in YSPA programming. YSPA focuses on BIPOC youth success and maintains a staff of predominantly BIPOC educators. Because YSPA is bringing attention to how minoritized youths navigate oppressive schooling enforced through racist education policies, I limited participation to racially minoritized youth. I utilized criterion sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to capture the different lived experiences of minoritized youths participating in YSPA. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define criterion sampling as purposeful sampling based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover or understand the phenomenon occurring among selected participants. Furthermore, group exploration of a shared phenomenon may vary in size from three or four, to ten to fifteen individuals (Creswell & Ploth, 2018, p. 124). For this research project, I conducted three focus groups, each comprised of three to four youth participants. I facilitated focus groups online via Zoom videoconference. I recorded and transcribed focus groups through the Rev platform. Once I ended the meeting, Zoom generated a videorecording and transcript that was saved to my hard drive and to the Zoom cloud. This allowed me to review transcriptions as I analyzed data.

As mentioned, participant criteria included YSPA program participation, BIPOC self-identification, and YPAR engagement through YSPA (i.e., townhalls or youth-led school board candidate workshops). Youths who participated in the youth council spaces had opportunities to contribute to critical discussions with school leaders guided by their own YPAR research; therefore, youths involved in these processes engaged in critical discourse based on research.

I recruited participants via flyer distribution (see Appendix A), and through contact with the youth-coalition liaison who supports all youth-coalition meetings. Target participants were youths in grades 9–12. My sampling strategy engaged eight youth participants from the YSPA coalition groups, including Denver Youth Council program, Aurora Youth Council Program, the Concurrent Enrollment program, Healing Space, and the Cops Out Program. In addition, I interviewed the same eight youth to gain an understanding of how the organization contributed to the dismantling of the education-survival complex. In interviews, youths were asked the same set of questions. The purpose of this strategy was to ensure I brought attention to the impact of YSPA's youths—not just in their personal lives and communities—but in their school environments.

Validity

Validity involves conducting research in an ethical manner while ensuring trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To ensure the data was reliable, I triangulated interview themes with focus group themes and observations. I also member-checked responses with participants. Youth who participated in interviews were also asked to

participate in focus groups and were asked the same questions. This helped me learn if youth were able to further elaborate on answers provided during interviews, and if the examples they discussed in the interviews were again raised in the focus groups. I also observed the youth coalition spaces to triangulate their responses with the culture of the youth coalition spaces. Through interviews, focus groups, and observations, I was able to support my research questions in triangulating my findings. All youth participants were asked the same questions in interviews and focus groups to member check data, and to observe if youth provided more information on statements from interviews.

Participant Self-Identification

In total, eight participants spoke about their racial identity through their lived experiences. As part of an intentionally humanizing interview and focus group process, I did not assign participant identities, nor did I provide a set list of identities from which participants could choose. Instead, participants were invited to name and express their preferred identity categories.

All participants identified as minoritized and BIPOC. Students gravitated towards specific identities both as a reflection of their personal worldview and of how the world views them. For example, one student identified as a Chicana, while another student identified as an emerging bilingual Mexican. Another participant spoke about immigrating from Ethiopia and identified as East African, while another student identified as Black noting, “the world views me as a Black woman, so that is how I identify.” Another student discussed his identity as an Asian and Indian American person and expressed distress around the recent spike in U.S. hate crimes against Asian people.

This sentiment was echoed by another student who identified as Vietnamese, who also highlighted a lack of awareness around the many cultures and identities that encompass Asian descent. In this context, the student reflected on an experience wherein his school would not let him start a Vietnamese club—instructing him, instead, to join the Chinese club.

Student participants all preferred the term *minoritized* to the more antiquated *minority*. When asked why, one participant stated, "I am not less than white people. I was just born into a system that categorizes me as less than; therefore, it is a verb. It is something that happened to us." YSPA's approach to understanding student identity is similar to the perspective I took in the present research: students do not select their race or ethnicity from a dropdown box; rather, they have taken agency and reclaimed their identity.

Table 3.1 ***Participant Demographics***

Alias	Racial Identity	Gender	Age	Grade
Alicia	Chicana	Female	18	College Freshman
Sarah	Black	Female	16	High School Junior
River	Indian (South Asian)	Male	18	High School Senior
Sam	Vietnamese (East Asian)	Male	17	High School Senior
Esperanza	Mexican	Female	16	High School Junior

Meena	East African	Female	18	High School Senior
Annie	Black	Female	16	High School Junior
Mandy	Black	Female	18	College Freshman

Data Collection and Analysis

I conducted semi-structured one-on-one interviews and observations with youths and staff to learn how YSPA youth have shifted their school cultures.

Interviews

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), semi-structed interviews allow the researcher more flexibility—a critical point here, as some youths may need questions reworded or stated differently. Further, as I conducted interviews, there were times when I interviewed from a transformative lens, as I am bringing attention to power, privilege, and oppression (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As part of my initial protocol, I outlined the need and purpose of the study, and participant perspectives contributed to the research. In preparation for official interviews, I conducted a pilot interview to ensure my questions were concise and adjusted as needed to support thorough data collection. Prior to each interview, I provided and explained the informed consent form to all participants and answered participant questions. Youth who were under 18 assented to participation, obtained consent from guardians, and filled out an informed consent. Interviews were conducted in person, over the phone, and online through Zoom videoconferencing to accommodate youth needs, preferences, and schedules.

A semi-structured interview process guided the present research, as I am focused on the experience of minoritized youth in sociopolitical youth-development organizations, as well as how organizations like YSPA contribute to youth leadership and advocacy in the public-school setting. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), semi-structured interviews allow for flexibly worded questions and empower the researcher to respond to the situation at hand (p. 111). I hosted eight, 30-minute, online interviews. Online interviews were audio-recorded and online interviews were video-recorded. All interviews and focus groups were transcribed through Rev transcription platform. Following interviews and focus groups, all participants were provided a copy of their transcript, and I invited them to adjust, elaborate, or add to the existing data as one form of member checking. To ensure youth were comfortable, I informed them that their identity would be protected in the data collection process, analysis, and findings. Further, in an effort to amplify youth voices, there were times I had to ask youth follow-up questions or ask participant to provide more depth to their answers. In the following table, I highlight instances where I asked youth to provide more context to their answers.

Table 3.2 ***Member Checking***

Name	***Comment***	***Action Taken***
Meena	I am being silence by the oppressor	In focus group, ask participant to define the oppressor
All youth	Opportunity	Define and give examples
Sam and River	Activist and abolitionist	Define differences between terms
All youth	Listen to interviews and compare with focus group comments, look for discrepency in stories	No action: stories aligned from interview to focus group

Focus Groups

Focus-group research is interactive and allows participants to build on each other's ideas. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) highlight that data gathered in focus groups is different than interviews. For example, focus group participants can share their views while hearing the views of others, thereby refining and elaborating their perspectives. Through focus groups, I learned how youth are engaging in advocacy in different levels of governance, school districts, and schools. I learned how the knowledge they gained in the YSPA space is leading the changes necessary to dismantle the education-survival complex.

Observations

The data I collected examined how and in what ways sociopolitical youth development supports youths in advocating for other necessary changes to support minoritized youths. To support my observations youth coalition meetings, I utilized a checklist of items, including engagement, participation, organizing, and ways youths resist whitestream school policies. In table 3.3, I highlight humanizing acts such as co-creation and the number of times youth spoke, versus the number of times adults spoke in the space. Yin (2014) states that researchers should collect enough data so that they have (a) confirmatory evidence (evidence from two or more different sources) for most of their main topics, and (b) evidence that investigates rival hypotheses or explanations.

Table 3.3 ***Observation Checklist***

Humanizing Traits	***Notes***
Youth giving suggestion	Youth spaces were deciding how to plan for an event and were reviewing the agenda, youth had full agency in how to plan for event
Youth speaking	Grappling questions, critical article discussion, creating initiative for issue work in YPAR
Adult speaking	More of a guide and probed with questions and asking for youth input
Adult giving suggestion	Minimal as the youth liaison would have youth give final input on suggestions.

Finally, I kept a journal of field notes, thoughts, and reflections. Morrow (2005) recommends collecting field notes during observations and during and after interviews. This is essential to exploring and expressing the context of the study (p. 259). Field notes support the process of qualitative research by highlighting my perspective and thoughts on the phenomena within their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret the meanings people bring to them (Creswell & Ploth, 2005). The memos represent a collection of hunches, interpretations, queries, and notes made by the researcher from beginning to end of the investigation that become part of the data corpus and are reviewed frequently for incorporation into the analysis (Creswell & Ploth, 2005, p. 256). After I met with youth for interviews or observed meetings, I reflected on what was different than a typical classroom environment, how engaged youth were in the meeting, how often and how for how long youth spoke, and compared this to how I interacted with youth in public school settings previously. I also reflected on my personal experiences as a minoritized youth, recalling the opportunities I had and did not have.

Observations

I observed three different coalition spaces YSPA holds for youth. In one meeting, the youth coalitions I observed students were planning their annual MLK youth summit. As part of their planning, participants were comparing the dreams they had when they were children to the dreams they have at present. It was powerful to hear participants expressing ways their dreams have shifted because of their awareness of racism and other societal issues. As part of this conversation, one participant noted, "I want to be an OB/GYN because I know that Black women die at higher rates than any other race in childbirth." Multiple participants reflected on how their childhood dreams of becoming artists and dancers had shifted to dreams of helping their community. Pérez Huber, Velez, and Solórzano (2018) might argue that such a shift in participants' dreams is symbolic of the collective struggle and collective victory that extends beyond the individual.

My second observation was of a youth coalition focused on getting school resource officers out of schools. Participants met with house representatives from the State of Colorado to learn more why Senate Bill 182 failed (a school discipline bill that supported schools in not referring students to school resource officers), and to ensure their voice is heard in the next legislation season. Youth participants expressed concern about what they did not see in the previous bill and voiced concern for protecting students who turn eighteen while still in school, with one participant noting, "I think it is unfair for students who are labeled as an adult be handcuffed on school grounds, without informing their families. A few months ago, they were seventeen." In this same meeting, youth asked house representatives to review specific pages of the bill, asking clarifying

questions on language such as supporting youth who are eighteen on school grounds. Legally they are adults; however, as an eighteen-year-old, they still want the support of their parents and family. At the close of the coalition meeting, one representative offered the youth participants internships at the capitol. The representative noted that the students would not need to interview for the positions, as they had already demonstrated knowledge on reading legislation and could contribute significantly to equitable bills that directly impact youth.

Finally, in my observation of the healing space, youth spoke with city council members in a question-and-answer setting about how they navigate social-justice work while being Black women. The conversation centered on how youth should prioritize their mental and emotional health and protect their healing. For example, one participant asked a city council member: "How do you feel when you have to codeswitch from being your authentic self to being in policy space with white males?" The councilwoman responded that she no longer tries to fit a certain image as a Black woman. Thus, she finds she must have many conversations with colleagues about her identity. She indicated that the process is exhausting, but she has been intentional about who she has these conversations, noting, "you have to protect your time and energy. Not everyone gets to learn about you and why you do the things you do." This resonated with participants. In affirmation, one youth responded, "This is true. It is not my job to educate everyone, and everyone does not deserve my time or to hear my voice. And, as a part of my healing, I can choose not to respond."

As an observer, I noticed several things during the youth coalition meetings. One main observation is that adults in the coalition space talk less and listen more, as compared to the classroom setting where teachers speak most of the time. Youth voice is imperative in creating a world where youth can see themselves thriving in education *and* the world as a Black, Latine, Asian, and Indigenous individuals. While observing the youth coalition meetings, youth would also pose questions to one another. If one youth was participating less, other participants might invite them into the conversation. In addition, the youth council liaisons (YSPA staff) served as support in keeping to the agenda. For example, one liaison prompted: "This is great conversation. Should we continue to discuss this topic, or do you all want to move to the next agenda item?" This helped youth on stay on task, but also gave them choice for how they wanted to proceed. YSPA staff have undergone professional development in learning how to promote youth voice, sociopolitical youth development, and awareness of when they display adultism (i.e., taking the lead because they are adults).

Meeting Format

While observing, I noticed that youth decided how much time they wanted to spend checking-in, discussing critical topics from news articles, and preparing for meetings and events. Though YSPA youth liaisons, who are adult staffers supported the flow of meetings, they invited youth to lead, asking questions like, "What do you want to do next?" Youth were asked what they wanted to accomplish in current and future meetings and developed their own action items and next steps. Through all coalition meetings, adults were notetakers, giving youth time to lead, discuss, and reflect.

Study participants reported that youth voice was particularly important, as they are often silenced in school. In YSPA, however, they felt heard and empowered to lead and co-create space with each other. Through interviews, focus groups, and observations, it was clear that youth coalition spaces operated differently than classroom environments. Youth were able to agree or disagree and engage in critical discourse about their opinions; youth spoke more often and more freely in meetings; youth created meeting agendas; and youth took turns leading different portions of coalition meetings.

Interview Format

In the interviews, youth knew me as the YSPA program manager, which impacted some of the discourse. For example, in one initial interview, a participant spoke in brief about her experience with the assumption that I already knew her story and her activities at YSPA. In response to my dual identities as YSPA staff member and researcher, I requested that participants view me as a researcher completing a dissertation—not the program manager. This invited and allowed participants to explain their experiences with YSPA in more detail.

Data Analysis

To analyze my findings, I utilized platforms like Rev to support transcription of the interview's audio recordings. Once transcriptions were completed, I uploaded them to NVIVO to support coding and located themes within transcriptions. Moreover, NVIVO generated two codebooks to organize codes and themes. One codebook is inductive, wherein I derived codes from the data. The second codebook reflected a priori deductive codes from the nodes found in the literature review. Codes included white supremacy,

resistance, activism, power, advocacy, and policy. Finally, I utilized inductive data analysis of themes and codes, as this requires the ability to think about specific raw data and categorization of data within deductive coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Finally, data anaysis and data collection continued concurrently. For example, interview one informed how I conducted interview two, and interview two informed how I conducted interview three, also known as priori method. As I analyzed my finidings, I actively interviewed particpants and analyzed the data. In the interviews, many particpants spoke to me as if I knew what they were discussing. Thus, I had to remind particpants that this was for a study, and I was asking the interview questions as a student, not an employee.

Coding

Deductive codes were derived from the literature review. Once I completed the first codebook, I created a second codebook of inductive codes derived from interviews and focus groups (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Some codes were consistent across deductive and inductive codebooks; other codes were new and were not highlighted in the literature review.

Figure 3.1 ***Deductive Codes Matrix***

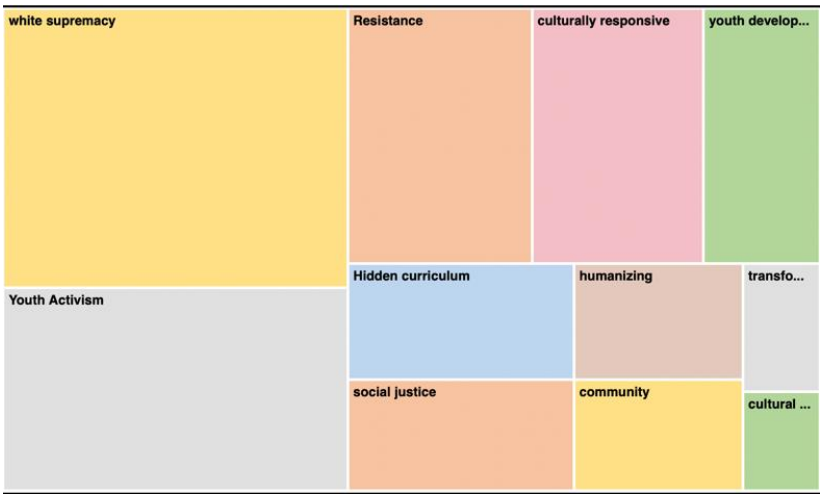


Figure 3.1 visualizes the deductive codes. The number of times certain codes were identified within the data includes: community: 17; white supremacy: 88; youth activism: 64; resistance: 43; transformational resistance: 9; humanizing: 18; culturally responsive: 40; youth development: 27; social justice: 23; cultural erasure: 7. However, once I began digging into the data and created new codes from within interviews and focus groups, I identified new codes and divided larger codes (e.g., white supremacy) into smaller codes (e.g., empowerment). When youth made note of acts of white supremacy, they immediately discussed their actions steps to address such behaviors. Figure 3.2 visualizes the inductive codes. Inductive codes, which came from interview and focus group data are follows: youth voice: 41; white supremacy: 41; activism: 29; opportunity: 25; affirming: 24; power: 24; hidden curriculum: 19; resistance: 18; community: 17; empowerment: 16; humanizing: 14; youth development: 8; abolition: 7; healing justice: 7; oppression: 6; cultural erasure: 3; organizing: 2; youth; inequity: 1.

Figure 3.2 ***Inductive Codes Matrix***

Further, I kept field notes of observations and reflections. When I asked the youth about white supremacy, youth provided examples from school curriculum, school policies, and even district hiring practices, stating the need for increased diversity among teachers. Because of the examples provided, within inductive coding, I was able to highlight new codes which often overlapped with being silenced and not having the space in their school to amplify youth voice. Moreover, youth voice was brought up as a tool to fight white supremacy and was often amplified in YSPA youth coalition meetings.

Researcher Positionality

Growing up, I remember sitting at the kitchen table with my family. Our main discussion topics included how our school day was, whether we had homework or not, and our study plans for the evening. My parents often reminded me how lucky I was to have Latine teachers because of the treatment they endured in their K–12 experience. My dad was abused by his kindergarten teacher because he did not speak English; and my mom hid the burritos my grandmother packed for her lunch under the cafeteria table to

avoid the ridicule of white children. Hearing these experiences as a child motivated me to ensure that emerging bilinguals and minoritized youth would not be subjected to this racial abuse. However, I too was subjected to a whitestream education, where I was taught a hidden curriculum. My identity was not seen, acknowledged, or supported in the classroom space. My own experience further motivated me to be a catalyst for changes in public schools.

In high school, I joined a youth program led by La Raza—a nonprofit organization in the Denver community. On weekends, I joined with youths from across metro Denver to learn Latine history and understand the need for leaders and advocacy in the community. These experiences brought to light new tensions in my small town and school community. As I learned more about the oppression of my people, I grew more motivated to speak to school leaders about injustice, education, and youth voice. These experiences of personal and familial trauma, and my awakening as a high school youth strongly informed my positionality as a researcher in this field and on this project.

As a scholar and youth leader, I identify with Xicana feminist epistemology, which is rooted in the passing and keeping of political social-justice culture (Garcia, 1997). I am a Xicana feminist, educator, and community activist. My epistemological grounding is in Xicana feminism, and I believe in practicing and implementing critical empowerment-based inquiry, with special attention to supporting the resistance of minoritized youth (Delgado-Bernal, 1998). Moreover, as a Xicana feminist, I utilize cultural intuition which supports how and why I ask the questions I do, and informs the analysis and ethical considerations I make (Garcia, 1997).

As a Xicana who is connected to my ancestors and culture, I believe it is not only necessary to reclaim our culture and our identity, but also our education system. Anzaldua (1987) describes Mestiza consciousness as rooted in Xicana identity, as it supports transformational resistance, which is often overlooked in education spaces. Furthermore, Delgado Bernal (1998) challenges whitestream approaches in understanding the lived experiences of Xicanas. I utilized this method in understanding the experiences of minoritized youths at YSPA. My lived experience and positionality have motivated me to bring attention to the oppression happening in schools through school culture and policies, and to spotlight ways minoritized youths are advocating for justice in public education.

Biases, Assumptions, and Limitations

Like all researchers, I bring various biases to this project. For example, based on my experience with equity work in education, I find that school districts take actions for myriad reasons beyond simply the "best interest" of youths—such as interest convergence and performative support—and these actions do not always reflect the actual values of administrators, teachers, or district leadership. Thus, school actions do not always represent an authentic shift in approach. In fact, in my experience, many school-equity initiatives are less about dismantling a racist system and more about showcasing that schools are doing "the work."

As a current employee of YSPA with a strong allegiance to the organizational mission and vision, I believe that youth are doing the necessary work to change school for minoritized students. Therefore, I may miss opportunities where youths can grow in

shifting their school culture. My assumptions are that youths are seeing the changes being made through the passing of education policies and are organizing to create changes in other aspects of their school environment. I assume that youths feel empowered through leading and participating in townhall meetings with district and community leaders. And I also assume that youths are motivated by co-creating this policy and are already thinking of next steps to ensuring a humanizing school experience.

YSPA runs afterschool programs for youths across three different school districts, as well as two elective high-school and one middle-school classes called "Intro to Social Justice." The elective course is offered to youths who attend the school. The school sites explored in this study require a separate approval beyond the University of Denver IRB. Applications are only accepted during a one-month window in the early fall and one-month window in the winter. Because of these barrier and limitations, I must exclude youths who participate in the daytime YSPA classes.

Finally, as mentioned previously, I am a current YSPA employee. Though I made it clear to participants that my research is separate and apart from my work within the organization, youths may yet feel inclined to answer my questions in ways they think I may want them to, which may impact the findings.

Reflections and Notes

Prior to beginning my interview protocol, I conducted four observations via Zoom videoconference. Due to COVID-19 safety procedures, youth coalition meetings did not meet in person in the 2020–2021 academic year and continued to meet virtually in 2021–2022. Across three virtual observations that were each ninety minutes long, I served as a

complete observer. I focused on learning about the structure of the meetings as well as how often youth spoke in comparison to the adult in the meeting. I focused on observing whether the space allowed for youth to co-create their agendas and action steps. I observed the Denver and Aurora Youth Coalitions: one observation was with the concurrent-enrollment youth coalition; the second observation was with the Cops Out of Aurora schools' coalition; and the last observation was in the collaborative healing space—a space where youth focus on their mental, emotional, and physical health. I chose to observe these three coalition meetings to observe how YSPA meetings were organized and run (youth centered), in comparison to how classrooms typically operate (authority centered).

From these observations, I composed fourteen pages of notes. Throughout the process, I kept fieldnotes on my thoughts, feelings, and reflections. I learned that youth have a great support system among each other, they are not scared to stand up to those in leadership, and they are reading materials that are not part of their school curriculum. In my notes, I reflected often on how youth gave examples of how they are strategic with their activism, and finally, how dismantling white supremacy isn't the main focus of their advocacy; instead, their healing and learning is central, as it contributes to the dismantling of white supremacy. Moreover, I learned that youth were more aware of what injustice looked and felt like (e.g., when I was younger, I did not have this level of awareness). As well, in concert with research best practices (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), after each interview and focus group, I reflected on youth statements across another six pages of notes. In total, I conducted eight semi-structured interviews, three focus groups,

and three observations. Interviews lasted between thirty minutes and one hour; and all focus groups were one hour in duration. The data collection and analysis process were completed in one month.

Trustworthiness

To ensure this study is trustworthy, I triangulated data between interview, focus groups, and observation data, and then analyzed the data to see how it transferred to other education settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Triangulation supported consistent findings, as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) have argued that through qualitative research, we can never capture truth and reality; however, through multiple strategies, we can lend credibility to our findings. Triangulation highlighted the same data points through different forms of data. I utilized observation, interviews, and focus groups, and again, youths who cannot express their lived experience were asked to submit artifacts with a description to answer the interview questions. Once interviews had been conducted, I compiled findings into a narrative that speaks to how youths in this sociopolitical organization responded to the interview questions. Youths were encouraged to submit artwork, poetry, or stories as artifacts, as an alternate way to render and express their K–12 experiences; however, no youth participants submitted artwork.

Validity is the notion that the research and research data are trustworthy. Beyond utilizing triangulation to support the main data points and findings of the study, I also ensured that participants agreed with their statements in previous interviews by providing transcripts. Moreover, I conducted a second round of interviews with the same participants to understand if their positionality had shifted or remained the same through

the duration of the study. Finally, I reviewed the data to see if transferability or external validity can be applied in other settings, like higher-education and non-profit settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Organizing the Data

Once interviews were coded, I conducted a secondary round of coding to insure I highlighted key points. Then, I organized codes into themes highlighted in chapter four. The data was stored on NVIVO and in a password-protected Google drive to ensure participant privacy. In addition, I kept a running spreadsheet to keep participants information organized, such as notes, age, grade, race, focus-group participation, and aliases. Any points of clarification were made using interview and focus-group recordings. All personal information was stored on a password-protected USB drive.

Ethical Considerations

I completed a full IRB approval process, as I worked with youths in high school and minors are a protected subject. Therefore, all participants were assigned an alias and a participant number if I needed more information on the subject. I removed names from any materials that others may see to ensure their identity was protected. To obtain consent, I connected with the family of youth participants as well as the youth to discuss the benefits of the study, highlighting that participation is voluntary and will not impact youth participation in YSPA programs. To maintain confidentiality, recordings were uploaded to a password-protected database, where I was the only one with access to the recordings. My data-management plan was to utilize NVIVO for coding interviews and focus groups and created a participant list.

Writing the Findings

To express the findings of the present research, I composed a collective *testimonio* also known as a *polyphonic testimonio*, which is one shared testimonio through the lived experience of many (Kiyama, 2017). *Testimonios* align with a strong *feminista* tradition of theorizing from the Brown female body, breaking silences, and bearing witness to both injustice and social change (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). In presenting the data this way, I enacted the process of decolonization, as it "is not to recover the silenced voices by using hegemonic categories of analysis, but to change the methodological tools and categories to reclaim those neglected voices" (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2011, p. 60). Huber (2009) acknowledges the testimonio as a strategy for decolonizing academia and research. In highlighting the whitestream school culture youths are subjected to, I highlight their lived experience through the *palabra*.[5] Further, Huber (2009) highlighted that with a Xicana feminist epistemology, I can bring the lived experiences to life by utilizing testimonio "to expose, understand, and further theorize the role of social and institutional structures in maintaining and perpetuating oppressive conditions" (p. 646).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the importance of the study site and why it was selected. I highlighted the importance of selecting minoritized participants and demonstrated how I ensured that the diversity of youth lived experiences were captured

[5] *Palabra* translates to word or speech and is often used in Xicano circles to express that the message was received.

in the research. I also discussed my epistemological framework in detail, which guided my inquiry. Finally, I highlighted the importance of the study and how it advances school culture and policy for minoritized youth. In the next chapter, I highlight my findings and discuss the results to inform needed changes to education policy for minoritized youth.

Chapter Four: Findings

Now I'm on my way

The sky's no longer gray, not today

Now, I'm on my way

No te olvidarás

Mi alma frutará

No, jamás te olvidarás de mí

—Ambar Lucid

According to Gillborn (2005), education policy is an act of white supremacy, and legislators and school leaders cultivate school settings that actively silence students from expressing the impact in their schools and communities. However, today, more schools are centering student identity by acknowledging minoritized populations contributions to the Unites States. In Denver and Aurora public schools, minoritized youth are resisting whitestream school policies and fostering school change through the sociopolitical youth development organization, Youth for Social and Political Activism (YSPA). In this chapter, I present findings on how YSPA is not just disrupting whitestream school policies and school culture but is actively *fostering resistance* among minoritized students. In the present research, I focused on participant perceptions, experiences, and ways they make sense of their resistance through participation in YSPA (Fraenkel &

Wallen, 1990; Merriam, 1988). As part of an intentional research design, I humanized the participant experience to center student voices and lived experiences by presenting their interviews in the form of a polyphonic testimonio.

In this chapter, I highlight the voices of youth who participated in this study and elevate ways they are dismantling whitestream education policies through advocacy skills developed in YSPA. I begin the chapter with a summary of the population and data collected. I highlight the data-analysis procedure and discuss limitations. Next, I present my results as five short *testimonios,* highlighting key thematic findings, in addition to other emergent themes and sub-themes. Primary themes include: 1) power and voice, 2) resistance, 3) healing justice, 4) white supremacy, and 5) abolition. Finally, I analyze the triangulated data from interviews, focus groups, and observations, and end the chapter with a summary conclusion.

Presentation of Results

Once the data was gathered and transcriptions were complete, I listened to each interview three times, reflecting on such things as voice intonation, storytelling approach, and crossover/repetition between interviews and focus groups. As a musician, I noticed that the audios could be likened to chord progressions. Thus, I listened for patterns and for silence. I listened for areas where one story ends, and another participant begins—akin to jazz improvisation. Consequently, I was able to engage the rhythms of participant passions for and racial traumas from public education.

The data and analysis of data are presented in the form of non-evaluative, transparent, collective response testimonios, organized by research question using quotes

from the data. I highlight five themes as foundational pillars to how youth resistance is evolving: power and voice, white supremacy, healing justice, resistance, and abolition.

While the experiences of multiple participants echoed one and other, one participant's insights were quite different. Sarah, a Black female high school junior, had many responses that did not align with other study participants. Unlike her peers, Sarah has attended a predominantly Black and Brown high school with a Black female principal. Her principal centers Black and Brown identity in the curriculum and has supported students as they developed and proposed the district wide Know Justice Know Peace resolution (KJKP). Sarah's responses highlight significant differences between student outcomes under bias leadership and youth centered leadership. Her experiences suggest that if all schools acknowledged the youth's identity and supported students as leaders, minoritized youth would feel more welcome in their schools.

For example, across all interviews and focus groups, it was apparent that youth voice was missing, except at the school led by a Black principal who shares a racialized experience of many of her students which has played an important role in how she leads (Lewis, 2020). This principal has supported students in leading a podcast that highlights the Black experience in the Unites states, and has implemented a textbook in social studies titled, "Black History." Sarah offered in her interview, "I always hear about the horrible things that happen in other schools, but I never see it at my school… I know other students…do not feel seen in their schools, and I feel sad for them."

Resistance in Data Presentation: Collective Youth Testimonios

To honor youth voice, the following data is presented in a collective testimonio that intentionally centers participant stories and lived experience. In the youth testimonios, racial identifiers were maintained to highlight shared views on white supremacy in education among first-generation college students, Asian male, Black female, and Latina students. Likewise, the diversely identified participants also shared similar views on the need to be active agents in dismantling the education-survival complex. To honor youth voice through testimonio, I listened to the audio recordings multiple times. I coded their transcriptions, and after listening to the transcriptions, I cross-referenced my observation notes to identify themes. Next, I organized the shared perspectives of the participants based on themes that were consistent in observations, interviews, and focus groups. Codes became themes, based on the number of occurrences in observation settings; then, I triangulated the data. For example, when participants spoke about healing, white supremacy, youth voice and power, and abolition, I cross-referenced when I observed this in youth-coalition meetings. Finally, I utilized my cultural intuition to piece together their shared experiences to highlight the shared stories I heard when learning from participants.

Testimonios are colloquial narratives told from the first-person perspective to represent individual or collective liberation in consciousness raising (Beverly, 2005; Kiyama, 2017). I chose to present the data as testimonios because it aligns with my epistemological framework, rooted in a passing and keeping of social-justice culture that is continuously growing and evolving as part of my own resistance. Therefore, data from

interviews and focus groups are presented in a collective, polyphonic testimonio of different participants who experienced similar events (Kiyama, 2017). Student responses are synthesized in italics, followed by my analysis. The first testimonio engages how youth defined white supremacy, as well as how they see white supremacy manifest in their education and school environment.

Collective Youth Testimonio: Defining W*hite S*upremacy

I define white supremacy as systems of oppression in our societies. It is meant to uplift white people and oppress and keep down marginalized communities. It could be subtle, too. It's a type of power that is dependent on racism and rooted in hatred, and it's not just about skin color: white supremacy is a mentality. White supremacy is how you think about yourself. And it's a way of thinking about others in your community. White supremacy is something so rooted within our systems and within ourselves that it's become normalized for people to hate themselves because of white supremacy, even if they don't realize that's why.

White supremacy is embedded in school systems through things like the SATs, and extend to higher education, too. White supremacy is how we become a number that falsely determines our value. When you look at school rankings, low-income communities get less funding. Then, you look at red-lining, and schools in those communities are predominantly students of color. White supremacy pushes opportunities to white people in white communities and white schools. It's how drug dogs get sent to some schools, and how students are arrested on campus. White supremacy criminalizes students. It's having one therapist for 1,200 students. They criminalize us and don't give us help.

White supremacy lives in everything—even in simple things like getting ready in the morning. Sometimes as people of color, we're like, "Okay, how am I going to dress in this white majority space?" White supremacy is all around us. There's this term whitewashing*; we kind of joke around about it in our organization that some of the students were whitewashed. I was the only student from Aurora. It was very excluding because while everyone was kind of whitewashed, I was the only one that held onto my culturally diverse background, and because of that exclusion that I thought, "Why can't I be whitewashed like my friends?" I was very young, and I was very callow, and I had this desire to want to fit in. I wanted to fit in by wanting to surround myself with white people.*

We are so dominated by white culture that people who are from culturally diverse backgrounds feel excluded. There's that social-identity theory in psychology where we have this need to fit in, and it's undeniable that when white supremacy and white culture is dominating society, all minoritized people are going to want to reflect and mirror those white values. Cultural assimilation creates issues because then we're reflecting the dominant white culture while losing our own identity, and that's basically how white supremacy exists in America.

In the testimonio above, the italicized material represents direct quotes from youth on the topic of white supremacy and how they have experienced it. During interviews, once a participant described white supremacy, they immediately followed it with how they hold power, and what they do, or plan to do, to resist whitestream schooling. Youth participants also described white supremacy as cultural erasure, and expressed ways it prevents them from being their authentic selves. Further, one youth participant noted:

> I used to be so ashamed to bring my home-cooked lunches to school because all the kids would say something. Then, one day I realized, my mother cooks for me, and this recipe is something my grandmother taught my mom. There is rich history in my meals, and I need to be proud of it!

As one participant mentioned in the testimonio, white supremacy makes you hate who you are, and being proud of your cultural identity is resisting white supremacy. In the following testimonio, youth define power and offer examples of how they hold power and use their voices to make changes in their school and district. In their discussions of resistance, participants connected it to oppression and white supremacy in schooling, and how they model resistance at school by taking pride in their cultural identity and healing from racial battle fatigue.

Collective Youth Testimonio: We Have Power, We Have Voice

How do I describe power? I describe it by having my voice and using it to speak against injustice. I have been taught that power comes with the status of your job or the skin color that you have, but what I know is that I have power. I think everyone has power, and I think everyone has an equal amount of power. Nobody is more powerful, nobody is less powerful, but of course it depends on if you want to act on that power or how you use that power if you choose not to use it. Power means being comfortable in your own skin, being aware of who you are, of how you carry yourself, how you present yourself, how you treat people, and how you interact with other people. Taking advantage of the voice that you've been given and to really understand, "Okay, people

might not always agree with it, but as long as you believe in it, then that's all that matters."

YSPA gives us the tools to navigate this white supremacist society—how we can use the master's tools to break the chains and break the cycle of oppression by utilizing our voices. In YSPA, there's a lot of people of color, which is really empowering. It's nice because I feel like as a Black person, I have to walk on eggshells, especially around white people. I feel like, "Okay, if I say this, if I say the wrong thing, then they're already going to have a negative perception of me." But in YSPA, it's nice to feel like, "Okay, I can say what I need to say without having to feel scared, or worried, about the outcome of it," because I'm around so many other people of color who are going through so many of the same issues as me.

YSPA has supported me in learning that my voice has a lot of meaning. It's time that people start to listen to it. As youth, we know ourselves best, and it's hard having a lot of people make decisions for us without even having any idea what we really want. YSPA has been really beneficial with that, and really just giving me the power I need in order to understand that it's time that people listen to my voice. I know my voice has meaning. Student voice is centered in YSPA. So, whatever the youth are thinking is what is said, and that's the feedback given to those in charge.

YSPA has definitely helped me get out there a little bit more. I'm still a shy person, but I used to be really shy. I would not see myself standing in front of a crowd, telling them what is wrong with the school system, and what needs to be implemented in our education and how we should be learning in school. I used to struggle with situations

where it's like, "Wait, something is weird, but I never really understood what was going on." But YSPA understands my perspective as a student of color, so they're able to tell me, "Oh, well that was actually racial abuse you were facing," or "that was this oppressive system you were facing," and then what can I do in my communities to help my community to break out of the system.

I am inspired to go and try to make a change, even if it's just in the classroom, like a simple question that's being asked can go against white supremacy. YSPA has definitely given youth a huge opportunity for their voices to be heard, especially to adults who have the power to make change. YSPA has given us a voice to talk about so many things to many people, and create events that are youth led. We're asking the questions, we're demanding the things that we want, and the fact that we have adults who listen to us and are supporting us, it just really says something, like we should get as many youth as we can involved in this and at a young age. I wish I would've known more about this stuff and would've spoken up sooner. I want to make sure that when something goes wrong in our schools, we can fix those things because we, as people of color deserve to be in higher education, and everything and everyone is against us in terms of actually getting there.

A primary takeaway of the collective testimonio on voice and power is that participants have learned that being young should not stop them from being activists. Furthermore, it spotlighted their fight for justice as abolitionists—which they define as a complete overhaul of institutions created by white people, like schooling. Through YSPA, youth participants have had the opportunity to connect with congressional

representatives, house representatives, city council members, appointed judges, and school board members, among others, where youth are leading the meetings, setting the agendas, asking the questions, and speaking to what they need in both their communities and schools. Many participants reported that they demanded meetings with school leaders and even asked them about their leadership. For example, one participant, River, noted:

> When a shooting happened in Boulder, our principal went on the intercom, and she sent condolences as she should. But I realized, oh, another shooting happened in Atlanta six days ago. Where was that acknowledgement? How come we're picking and choosing what we're acknowledging when both are tragedies? I called her out in a racial affinity forum.

River recognized that the principal was acknowledging tragedies that impacted white communities, while ignoring similar tragedies in the Asian community—a community he connects to. He went on to say that the principal responded by saying, "Oh, Boulder directly affected students at our school—not Atlanta. We need to only talk about things that directly affect our community." River persisted in response to the principal, noting, "But it did directly affect me because I am Asian, and which students are you talking about?"

River recognized that the principal defaulted to whiteness as the dominant culture of the school community and failed to recognize that minoritized youth were not only battling mass shootings, but also navigating increased Asian hate crimes. Like many of the stories I heard in the interviews and focus groups, it was apparent that youth recognized covert racist behaviors, coded language, and a hidden curriculum.

Importantly, they were also able to discuss these issues with their school leaders without fear. In the next testimonio, youth participants express how they resist oppressive systems in their day-to-day by challenging the hidden messages that have been projected on to them throughout their educational career.

Collective Youth Testimonio: Resistance to Oppression in Schooling

When there is something that is disproportionately affecting us minoritized youth, we have to actively resist it, so that we are not negatively influenced by that societal power. Not only resisting that power but also amplifying your own power at the same time. And being able to project our voice, being able to collaborate and unify with others in order to bring resistance. I can speak, I have a voice, and at the end of the day, you do not have power over me. I'm going to fight back. Resistance is not allowing the status quo to control your life. It's taking things into your own hands and understanding, "Okay, this is how I want things to work, and I'm not going to do it how everyone else expects me to. I'm going to do it how I feel I want to do it for myself."

I've learned from YSPA by just asking questions—"who told me that I'm dumb? Why am I believing them?"—it's the best feeling ever, because it's like, they have convinced us since we were kids that unless we're benefiting them somehow, we are worthless. Fighting back has been amazing.

I was present in YSPA youth coalition meetings where we were discussing the issues with the school. I made sure that they knew that they weren't providing enough resources to the students who need it the most. We did the school board candidate workshops for APS, CCSD, and DPS. We talked to school board candidates, and I think

it's really great to get to know the people who are supposed to lead the district you're in. I think YSPA has given us the space to ask them questions, and I think it's sometimes hard to talk to big authoritative figures. But I think YSPA has made it a super safe space. Don't be afraid to ask any question, your voice is valuable, and if they can't answer your question, that is an answer. We've talked to superintendents, school board members, our Congress members, city council people, and the police chief.

Asking questions of school leaders and hosting townhalls for community leaders is a powerful form of resistance, as historically youth have been silenced, not invited to the table, or told they cannot contribute meaningfully because they are young. By contrast, YSPA youth are leading community events and bringing attention to injustice. In the following testimonio, students discuss how they resist white supremacy as well as how YSPA has supported their leadership and activism, which resulted in healing justice.

Collective Youth Testimonio: **Healing Justice Is a Form of Resistance**

*One of the greatest things YSPA does is that it helps you work through your trauma—specifically generational trauma or systemic trauma. I really appreciate that YSPA provides safe healing spaces for marginalized youth. We need to heal our soul while we're developing healthy leadership, so we're not being taken advantage of by the oppressor (*those that do not understand the lived experience of minoritized youth in public schools). *It is a second home to me. It's given me space to heal from the trauma of being forced into leadership. I feel like that's just something that nobody understands. As a Black woman, as a first gen, as a woman, I don't have an option to sit down. The spaces in the world don't allow me to just exist. I have to lead. The people in my schools aren't*

leading, so I have to. YSPA allowed me to begin my decolonization journey when other times my activism was still controlled by white supremacy.

On a day-to-day basis in schools, in work, in households even, not a lot of important conversations are happening around mental health. It's an important topic that only really gets discussed once a year during suicide prevention month. In households, mental health isn't really something that many families have their focus on, mostly because they may not be educated about what even mental health is, what mental health looks like. In YSPA, we've had mental health meetings called healing sessions. In the healing sessions, we focus on physical as well mental and emotional health. Guest speakers come in to talk to talk to us about everything from nutrition to just having fun and having that ability to just be a team or a kid and just go out and do activities.

I think that's also a resource because everyone needs a break and then also resources and giving the opportunity to reach out to someone who may know someone that gives help. I want to say thank you to YSPA for creating a comfortable and very loving space that they have created for our youth, for really listening to us, and giving us and being like, "we're right behind you and your every move, we're here to support you." They have taught me so many things and have made me feel comfortable in myself once again and find my voice. I think every youth should experience this feeling. I feel like they can literally conquer anything in the world.

In the interviews and focus groups, participants reported that attention to mental health and healing was a form of protest and resistance. Youth described their mental health as foundational in continuing the fight against racism. In addition, youth explained

in focus groups that resistance comes in many forms, and one form is self-love and commitment to individual health and wellness. For example, one participant highlighted that the system is designed to foster self-hatred and exhaustion; therefore, healing justice is social justice. She noted that mental, physical, and emotional self-care can keep us in the fight longer. When interviewing youth, all described themselves as abolitionists. Therefore, I asked them to define abolition and describe how they enact it. The last testimonio emerged from interview questions about leadership and resistance where youth described themselves as abolitionists.

Collective Youth Testimonio: We Are Abolitionists

When something goes wrong in our schools, I want to make sure we can fix those things. Because we, as people of color, deserve to be in higher education. Everything and everyone is against us in terms of getting there. Joining YSPA was nice because it taught me, "Okay, these things should not be happening. People should not be saying those things, especially so willingly and without any doubts." I knew, "Okay, this is not a good thing to say." I started thinking, "Okay, if a Black teacher said this to a group of white students, then they would get fired immediately." I was like, "Okay, this needs to happen to a white teacher in a group of Black students." So, I reported it to the principal and organized other students to meet with the principal with me. Often, school leader will say "Oh, I'm doing everything. I'm in this position of power." But I think YSPA has let us question their leadership and policies.

Last school year, the Cops Out of Schools' coalition met with district leaders to review the MOU agreement they had with the local police. This year, we wanted to

continue to have the conversation and to see if they implemented any of our recommendations. They never responded to our emails, so we decided, "why are we waiting for them to get back to us? We should be going above the district leaders, and who would that be, the people that write legislation." So, we decided to reach out to those that wrote the school safety bill last year to learn why it didn't pass, what needs to happen to get it to pass, and to make sure our voices were a part of the conversation. If we want to reimagine schooling, we cannot wait for people to get back to us. We have to take action and go to the next person.

Another important distinction we would like to make is between being "anti-racism" and "abolitionism." As minoritized youth, we did not create the system that made us less-than and oppressed our bodies; it was white people who did so. As such, it is not minoritized youth's obligation to change systems created by white people to be anti-racist. Instead, as minoritized youth, we would like to completely overhaul existing institutions, so that they are designed to support and honor our beauty—that is abolitionism.

In the data, participants described a need to escalate and persist in addressing school problems. They expressed the need to be proactive and engage district leaders and community members. In conversations with the youth participants, they spoke with confidence when describing how they reached out to school and district leaders. One participant noted, "What are they going to do: suspend me because I pointed out a racist behavior?" In addition, when one member of the youth coalition scheduled a meeting with a school leader, they turned to other youth to strategize and prepare. The YSPA

community has been a key source in supporting students in having conversations with members of their school community.

Youth Development and School Culture Shifts

During youth coalition meetings, interviews, and focus groups, youth participants highlighted two ways to disrupt and abolish the system: speaking up and out against oppressive school policies and honoring their healing. Based on the data, youth participants were not sitting in silence accepting the "banking" model of education (Freire, 1970). Rather, participants were active agents in their communities and schools. Participants reported learning the tools to foster strategic and intentional conversations with school leaders, school board members, and state leaders where they can amplify youth voice, and take part in co-created learning environments that support minoritized students in thriving.

One important aspect of participant agency was supporting their fellow students and engaging classmates who may not yet be activated. For example, Sam is a high school senior and identifies as a Vietnamese American. Sam participates in the Aurora youth coalition and the Cops Out in Aurora youth coalition. Sam describes himself as an abolitionist, which he defines as "leadership to completely overhaul existing institutions, so that they are designed to have a framework that supports and honors minoritized beauty." Sam reflected on a youth participatory action research project where he was able to involve his classmates in social justice causes, noting, "we disseminated a survey to students across the Aurora Public and Denver School District. And we were able to gain insight on input regarding SROs in schools." Similarly, Mena—a high school senior who

identifies as a refugee and an Ethiopian—participated in the summer social science and policy institute program and continued participation during the school year. She highlighted ways she connected with other students in YSPA because they were also refugees and African:

> As cheesy as it sounds, I love the younger grades in my school. I love them so much, and I see myself in them. I know how hard I work, and I know how hard I've had to struggle to get to where I'm at. And even then, I'm still in this space of like, I don't even know if I could accomplish my dreams. It just really broke my heart to see students like me being drowned in this white supremacist educational system, where I've had conversations with teachers where I would tell them, "Hey, why does this school have low ratings? Why does this school have low grades and low college readiness?"

The skills youth learn in the YSPA youth coalition meetings matriculates into their school settings and likewise impacts other students. Further, the conversations that youth have in the youth coalition meetings do not end when the meetings end. Participants reported engaging in critical dialogue with peers, teachers, and even families about ways they would like to improve their school environments and curriculum,

Community and youth development programs have been utilized to develop young leaders into creating change within their communities. Here, the tools participants learned through YSPA are rooted in organizing and guided them in directly engaging in advocacy work in their schools and district settings. Through YPAR, meetings with

school leaders and state leaders, youth projected their voices and gained access to spaces youth have been denied in the past.

A first-generation Indian American who is preparing for college, River, has been a part of YSPA for more than two years. He is passionate about conversations with his school community about Anti-Asian hate. River reflected on ways his voice was amplified and how it impacted his growth as part of his work with YSPA:

> We were able to interview with someone from a news outlet: me and another youth intern were interviewed about the Aurora Public School's candidate election. With that, we've been exposed to a plethora of opportunities that have allowed me to personally grow.

Similarly, Mandy is a first-year student in college and identifies as a Black woman. She was a YSPA participant in high school and wanted to continue her participation in college. She described the value of meeting other Black leaders and growing her network through YSPA:

> We've had multiple occasions where we're given the opportunity or the resources to be able to reach out to superintendents and city council members. In the summer, we got to meet a Judge. That was life altering because...I'm pretty sure he's the first Black judge or something. He broke the glass ceiling there, and it was crazy because you don't know people who are in those positions and so now, you have something to strive for. And then I also think that we're also surrounded by people who have so much knowledge and that's also a resource as well.

Alicia describes herself as a Xicana first-generation activist. She is a first-year student in college and was a participant of YSPA while in high school. She is continuing her participation in college and reflected on ways her voice contributed to policymaking: “on Lobby Day…we were able to go and advocate for not necessarily on a specific bill, but just in general, provide insight to minoritized visions on education and why we need more education.”

Annie identifies as a Black woman and is a junior in high school. She has been a part of YSPA for two years and participates in two youth coalitions. She expressed ownership over her research and the impact it had on school leadership in her district:

> In YSPA, I was also a part of these other focus groups where I could interview different students in my school district. It was really great because we did have a new superintendent coming into Denver Public Schools. We could really just give the superintendent different information that he needed in order to really understand, "Okay, this is what the district needs to look like going forward." It was great because I could really see the different problems that the students were having. It was nice that it was being heard, especially by people that had such power in the district.

Chapter Summary

In one of the coalition spaces, youth spoke with two state representatives about a school-safety bill. Youth asked questions about the language, and how some areas of the bill gave school resource officers power. Youth brought attention to aspects that were vague or needed clarification.

Observations, focus groups, and interviews revealed YSPA as a humanizing space that develops youth socio-politically, empowering them as active agents in their communities and providing the tools to freedom dream; to reimagine what schooling should look like for minoritized students, to use their voices, and to focus on healing as an act of protest to white supremacy. Youth were keenly aware of social issues and societal problems among minoritized communities, along with racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2004). In school, school leaders often excluded youth from important conversations. The data discussed in this chapter suggests that youth have first-hand experience with racist curriculum, cultural erasure, whitestream school culture, and white supremacy more broadly. Furthermore, their experiences can speak to what issues need to be solved. Youth are seeking supports from community organizations to ensure that policymakers listen to their needs. As youth resist racist and oppressive systems, they center their own healing from racial abuse and trauma. Youth participants made the connection that to continue to fight in the battle against white supremacy and injustice, they need to prioritize their healing, as healing is a form of protest.

In chapter five, I explore the findings in relation to the research questions and bring attention to how transformative resistance—a new type of resistance, rooted in righteous anger—coupled with strategic navigation, healing justice, and youth voice are pillars to dismantling white supremacy in education policy. Furthermore, I discuss ways youth are centering their wellbeing as an intentional part of the process. I conclude with next steps for youth and those who amplify youth voice to take to continue making progress.

Chapter Five: Youth Abolitionists

Proud of the brown, that's what we should be

Above them all is what we could be

Straighten the problems of all of society

All the homies in the pen, that's what we don't try to be

More complete, believes in one own mind

This is the Lighter Shade and it's our time

Instead of our downfall, it's time to uplift

—A Lighter Shade of Brown, "Brown & Proud"

Gillborn (2005) highlighted that whiteness has developed over the past two hundred years into a taken-for-granted experience, structured upon a varying set of "supremacist assumptions—sometimes cultural, sometimes biological, sometimes moral, and sometimes all three (p. 319)". Further, white supremacy in our day-to-day is no longer enforced primarily through physical violence, such as hate crimes (though it occurs every day). Instead, it is hidden in acts and agendas like education policies created by legislators and school administrators. (Kohli et al., 2017). Gillborn (2006) highlighted further how whiteness is invisible to white politicians because of the racialized nature of politics, policing, education, and every other sphere of public life. Whiteness is so deeply ingrained that it has become normalized. This is an exercise of power that goes beyond

notions of “white privilege” and can only be adequately understood through a language of power and domination. Indeed, the issue goes beyond privilege; it is about supremacy (Gillborn, 2006, p. 319).

When educators, school leaders, and district leaders hear the word *resistance*, the immediate and impulsive response is punitive. However, the question should be, why are youth resisting this curriculum or school policy? The purpose of the present study was to examine how YSPA—a sociopolitical youth development organization—is not just disrupting whitestream school policies and school culture but *fostering resistance* among minoritized students. Youth activism and resistance is not new but has evolved over decades. Through interviews, focus groups, and observations of youth-coalition spaces, I learned how youth are resisting whitestream school policies and fostering school change through the sociopolitical youth-development organization, YSPA.

At the time of this writing (June 2022), No Left Turn—an organization that believes ethnic studies and critical race theory are divisive—initiated bills to ban books that discuss race, racism, sexual identity, and sexual orientation in Wyoming, Tennessee, Oklahoma, and Florida, arguing that teacher use these books to spread radical or racist ideologies (Harris & Alter, 2022). In Indiana, teachers are facing House Bill 1134, requiring teachers to publicly post their curriculum in advance, so parents can stop teachers from teaching curriculum on race and racism, white supremacy, the holocaust, and anything that offends their white fragility (“Controversial Education Bill Passes Indiana House,” 2022). In Florida, Senate Bill 148 bars teaching that could make people feel responsible for historic wrongs because of their race, color, sex, or national origin

("Senate Bill Targeting What Teachers Can and Cannot Say," 2022). Schools remain critical sites of persistent white supremacy and the focus of new white supremist actions. Yet, with the support of sociopolitical youth organizations, students are resisting.

Fostering Resistance

Freire (1972) encouraged educators to listen to their students and build on their knowledge and experiences to engage in contextualized, dynamic, and personalized educational approaches that enable humanization and social transformation. The conceptual framework of this study informed my research on how youth seek to perpetuate cultural diversity through negotiating education policies, while nurturing the growth of resistance capital (Paris, 2013). Through three observations of YSPA youth-coalition meetings and interviews with youth, it was clear that youth leadership development is rooted in humanizing pedagogy. YSPA centers youth voice, provides leadership opportunities in meeting co-creation, and amplifies youth voice in conversations with state, district, and school leaders to support social transformation. Through meetings and agenda co-creation, youth participants reported a sense of belonging, as staff ceded power to youth and did not dominate. Instead, staff invited youth to lead critical discussions. This shift has transformed the face of resistance and what it means to resist in youth.

Researchers have described sociopolitical development as critical awareness of social power and its impact in local communities (Christen & Dolan, 2011; Watts & Guessous, 2006). Likewise, sociopolitical youth-development theory contends that youth will act when they believe their efforts will yield the desired impact. My findings reveal

that through resistance, YSPA youth are having an impact, as they lead summits, townhalls, and youth participatory action research. Additionally, resistance theory promotes actions taken by students to oppose power hierarchies that reinforce systemic inequity related to class, gender, race, and sexuality through the imposition of curricula, school policies, and school culture (Giroux, 2001). Findings of the present research revealed that youth are actively resisting whitestream school culture by naming and rejecting the self-hate they felt as children in elementary school.

Analysis of Resistance

As youth resist whitestream curriculum and education policies that reflect larger social issues (hooks, 2003; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Matias, 2013; Tatum, 2003), policymakers fight to maintain schools as white supremacist institutions. For example, youth participants in this study discussed hosting townhalls to review memoranda of understanding between school districts and city police to bring attention to inequities that existed in this partnership. As a result of the town halls, language was changed, questions were answered, and more importantly, youth were integral to the conversation. To counter whitestream education policies, YSPA youth leveraged their knowledge and agency to demand that state leaders abolish zero-tolerance policies and work toward a humanity where no student is disposable. To learn how to make affective change, youth in the study stated that they need to be listened to by adults in leadership. Youth are mobilizing to make changes in their communities, even as resistance is often seen by school administrators and other adult as defiance (Joseph et al., 2016). Moreover, the

skills youth are learning in their community organizations is matriculating into their school day.

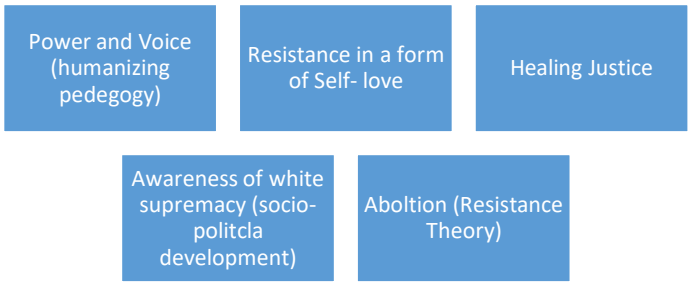
According to participants, resistance takes many forms, from reclaiming Black and Brown identity, to taking pride in lunches packed by their mothers. Resistance theories are different than social and cultural reproduction theories, as *resistance* emphasizes ways individuals negotiate and struggle with structures to create meanings of their own (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Resistance can be viewed as a contribution to progressive transformations and radical changes in social and cultural structures. Resistance theory holds true in the present research, as youth participants were not resisting by way of protest and community organizing; rather, they were strategically utilizing their voices to bring attention to injustice in their schooling. In the following sections, I summarize key learnings that emerged through observations, interviews, and focus groups. I then summarize my findings within larger research. Finally, I discuss transformational resistance and the evolution to youth resistance today as youth defined themselves as abolitionists.

Transformational Resistance to Abolition

Youth resistance is rejecting a curriculum that perpetuates white supremacy ideology. Youth resistance demands reform by speaking their truths to those in leadership, informing them why a policy is harmful. By contrast, youth *abolitionist* resistance demands a reconstruction and reimagination of a whole new education system where youth and community voice are consistently part of the creation process, and where minoritized identity is honored. Adding more nuance, I present *youth abolitionist*

resistance, which I define as self-preservation through healing justice from historical oppression by creating a new path of resistance which is loving themselves and their identity and reimagining the education system. The pillars of youth abolitionist resistance are centering youth voice in decision making to dismantle white supremacy, fostering self-love and healing, reimagining education through new systems where healing is centered, and developing an awareness of white supremacy culture in schooling.

Figure 5.1 ***Pillars of Youth Abolitionist Resistance***



Solórzano and Bernal (2001) highlighted four types of resistance: self-defeating resistance, transformational resistance, reactionary behavior, and conformist resistance; however, transformational resistance is foundational for where resistance is today. Resistance is motivated by systemic change at varying levels of social justice and social oppression. Solórzano and Bernal (2001) brought attention to how resistance should be nurtured and used as a tool to build young leaders who will change their communities. While this model still resonates with young people today, the literature did not sufficiently speak to how youth are centering their healing as a form of resistance to oppression in their day-to-day lives.

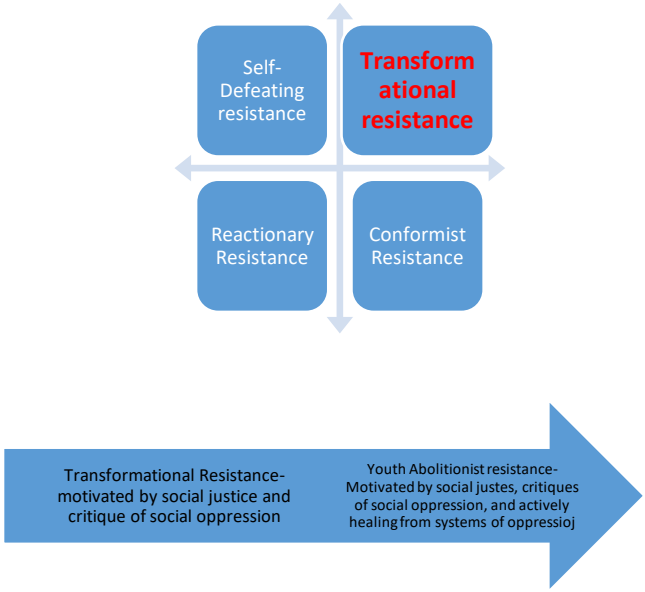
The present study findings reinforced the notion that youth resistance has and will continue to evolve from previous frameworks. Today's resistance is focused on healing from racial battle fatigue, whereas previous resistance was rooted in awareness of injustice only (Martin & Millner, 2015). For example, YSPA youth participate in sessions around healing one's inner child, where they discuss familial and societal trauma. Further, the tools youth have historically utilized to help their communities—such as advocacy and organizing—are now being deployed to reimagine schooling. In 2022, youth are deploying the tools they learned in sociopolitical youth-development organizations like YSPA to change their schools. However, for youth to stay ready for the fight against white supremacy and oppression, youth are centering their wellbeing, mental health, and self-care.

The youth in this study brought attention to how they are focused on healing from historical racial trauma by centering personal wellbeing and mental health, so they can continue the fight against injustice. Youth interviews and focus groups from the present study revealed that healing from racial injustice and racial battle fatigue is a form of empowerment needed to dismantle the education-survival complex. By healing from historical racial trauma and racial battle fatigue, youth can begin to freedom dream about their education and future. Freedom-dreaming allows students to imagine a school where their ancestors' contributions are taught and acknowledged, and their voices are heard and validated.

Youth are not waiting on school leaders to make change; instead, they are networking and building community through community organizations like YSPA to

escalate concerns above school leaders and superintendents to institute change through state policy. Youth abolitionists not only critique the systems and their oppression, they are also actively healing from historical oppression by creating a new path of resistance. This study brings attention to how youth abolitionists and their resistance to oppression can change the future of education. Thus, youth abolitionist resistance is a pillar in reimagining what education looks like in the United States. Solórzano and Bernal (2001) brought attention to how resistance appears in youth, from being from the level of motivation by social justice to the critique of oppression. Youth abolitionists not only critique their oppression but take action in fighting the oppression through healing and civic engagement.

Figure 5.2 ***Progression to Youth Abolitionist Resistance***



Implications

Historically, the narrative around resistance and youth activism has been tokenized (Gordon & Taft, 2011). Even today, tokenization continues when youth are invited to attend events or participate in conversations for photo opportunities alone. Most extant research advocates for student autonomy around classroom policies (Martin & Beese, 2017); yet, it does not engage how youth can have a greater impact on education policy at the national or state level. Traditionally, youth have been minimized as lacking the necessary education or experience to lead change in their schools (Corney et al., 2021). However, this study demonstrates that youth are capable civic engagement earlier in all levels of governance.

Through years of reform and protest, white supremacy still manifests in education policy, curriculum, and the suppression of youth voice. To address this issue, students recognize the need to create their own spaces for conversations about mandating ethnic studies and removing school resource officers from schools. The awareness that white supremacy lives in education policy is the driving force for minoritized youth as active agents in education policy. As noted in the literature review, youth recognize that much education policy is designed to condition students into perpetuating white supremacy and adjusting to the system—not changing it. Moreover, transformative resistance transforms policy, whereas abolition creates new policy.

Recommendations

Research has brought attention to schools as microcosms of larger societal issues (hooks, 2003; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Matias, 2013; Tatum, 2003). Though much

existing literature on youth activism centers on youth as active agents in their communities, participants in the present study discussed the importance of being active agents in the public-school context. Abolition must be a mindset for legislators and district leaders to move forward in creating a humanizing educational world for minoritized youth. Youth are ready to take risks; therefore, adults in leaderships positions must be ready to take risks as well. For example, leaders must cease doing things the way "they have always been done," and instead disrupt what is considered best practice or the norm.

Recommendation One: Youth Abolitionists in Policymaking

In interviews, focus groups, and observations, youth reported a desire to reimagine schooling. Indeed, they have linked their activism to changing their schools, not just their neighborhoods. As well, historical models like the Chicano and Civil Rights movements show that youth activism is fundamental to progress, as student movements have instigated curricular changes and improved voting rights. From these movements, youth learned that reform does not equate to systemic change, and sometimes adults engage in performative discussions to promote their campaigns. Even as the youth in this study met with policymakers at all levels of governance, their authenticity was in question, specifically with the school board candidate workshops. As engaged participants in YSPA and active agents in their learning, youth have the space to reflect on their encounters with adults to strategically plan their next steps.

Recommendations for Policymakers. I recommend policymakers create opportunities for co-creation with youth that center their voices in designing and revising

legislation. Furthermore, policymakers should work to build sustained relationships with youth and by inviting them to learn about and participate in the creation of policy. Drake, Fergusson, and Briggs (2014) highlighted the vital relational component between adult collaborators and youth. Centralizing these relationships entails a reconstitution of culture, institutions, relationships, and social interaction, but yields a more humane, emancipatory climate of pro-social civic engagement (Drake et al., 2014). These approaches will cultivate future legislators and more active community members. Therefore, I recommend policymakers meet quarterly with youth organizations to learn about the work community is doing to ensure that minoritized youth have equitable education.

Recommendations for District Leaders. Currently, student school boards present school board meetings from time to time. However, this should be standard practice in every meeting in all school boards across the United States, especially when issues like school closure are being discussed. Baroutsis et al. (2016) stated that community voice draws on understandings that schools are in partnership with young people. Further, the notion of the community forum is based on the concept of the democratic school meeting, where the intention is for "students and staff to sit down together as equals, reflect on their work and aspirations, raise matters of individual and communal significance, celebrate achievements, hold each other to account, and decide on what to do next" (Fielding, 2013 p. 124). Therefore, I recommend that youth and youth program participants have a voice in every school board meeting by having access, voting power, and transportation to and from meetings. Providing this platform will invite

youth to voice concerns more regularly not only as students, but as community members. In gathering the data, it was clear that youth know that through their voice has power, which results in change.

Recommendations for Community Youth Organizations. Data from youth participants reveal that students wish to be civically engaged in policy—from the school level to the national level—and active agents in their communities and schools. Youth highlighted how supportive and validating it felt not only to be heard but to create next steps for amplifying the causes they cared about with YSPA staff. I recommend that youth organizations like YSPA co-create opportunities where youth can have more authentic conversations with legislators and policymakers in creating and planning policy that directly impacts schooling and students. Youth said that they valued conversations rooted in critical analysis from their YPAR work because it helped them see the inequities in their schools to advocate for policy changes. Youth who take part in youth coalition are actively surveying peers, reviewing published research, and conducting interviews to learn about the issue work they care about, and further, present their research to legislators.

Recommendation Two: Reimagining Schooling with Youth Abolitionists

U.S schools rely on power hierarchies where teachers and administrators maintain control at the top, and students are positioned at the bottom with limited powers of self-determination (Dominguez et al., 2021). Within such a structure, it is not surprising that adults view youth as inferior. This belief is an aspect of "adultism," encompassing "behaviors and attitudes based on the assumption that adults are better than young people

and entitled to act upon young people without their agreement" (Bell, 2010, p. 115). Youths experience the impacts of poorly developed education policies and can thus speak from first-hand experience to inequitable and oppressive curricula and school policies. Youth should not need to seek an afterschool program to be heard; rather, they should have a school environment where they are already validated. Youth can speak from experience about what they are missing in their education experiences. As scholars, leaders, and policymakers, we must listen.

Recommendations for Policymakers. Youth participants in this study spoke to the ways school and the world have evolved, and students with them, noting that many politicians are out of touch. As youth pointed out, social justice is not a fad, but a broadly understood concern for many in their generation. Therefore, youth report a desire to erase everything and start from scratch in reimagining schooling. As Love (2018) stated, *reform ain't justice*. Kendi (2019) argued that shifting policy results in a shift in mindsets, so to shift our education system, we must shift policy first. However, with present-day book banning and anti-CRT movements, learning and unlearning must take place to advocate for change. As Gillborn (2005) urged, we must ask ourselves: Who or what is driving education policy? Who wins and who loses because of education policy? Finally, what are the effects of education policy? Thus, I recommend policymakers connect with youth organizations like YSPA and pay youth to conduct an equity audit on their practices of policy creation to determine if they are centering and meeting student needs.

Recommendations for District Leaders. As youth spoke about their education experience in interviews and focus groups, they felt that district leaders only connected with them to be performative. While they were often asked about their ideal vision for schooling, no action was taken by schools or districts. To address this issue, district leaders should partner with organizations that have already established trust with youth and their communities to make advancements in schooling. Organizations like YSPA have created trust, partnership, and a network where youth know they will not be silenced. District leaders should collaborate with such organizations to learn about the concerns not only happening in the community but how youth are mobilizing across school districts to bring attention to failed systems and policies. I recommend that district leaders collaborate with community partners to dismantle the current education-survival complex that Love (2019) calls *dark suffering,* where student spirit is murdered, and they are forced into complacency with oppressive schooling. Therefore, to resist dark suffering, school boards should rethink their composition and require that one community organization with a demonstrated record of successful implementation of diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development fill a seat as a school board member.

Recommendations for Youth Community Organizations. The organization in this study is centered around youth voice, encouraging youth to lead coalition meetings and dream up initiatives with no censorship. When youth raise issues in coalition spaces, they bring news articles and research, stating why the issue is of concern and why it needs to be reimagined or addressed. Youth reported that they have never experienced this type of freedom in other youth spaces or in school. Thus, this approach should be

fostered in all organizations to support youth leadership development and skill-building. Therefore, I recommend youth organizations encourage resistance and dreaming without censorship and allow youth to create their own initiatives and priorities. YSPA has supported students in leading their own initiatives through collecting data from youth in three school districts. Once students have gathered the data, they begin to create a research proposal for their YPAR work.

Recommendation Three: Decolonial Possibilities

With research question three, I sought to understand if and how students are resisting racist and oppressive policies. During interviews and observations, youth provided several examples of how they actively fight white supremacy and oppression by centering their healing. One powerful approach is by centering their mental health and wellbeing through the YSPA healing space. Youth resistance has the potential to offer other decolonial possibilities, as youth bring their identity into co-creation and healing. Moreover, participants highlighted how healing itself is another form of resistance and decolonization. Youth asserted that white supremacy does not want minoritized bodies to heal from years of racial trauma. Thus, by centering their own wellbeing and healing, they resist white supremacy. Youth participants in this study demonstrated a high level of awareness of how stress and racial trauma impact their bodies and wellbeing; hence, to continue the fight, they must care for themselves.

Recommendations for Policymakers. Policies like ESSA and NCLB ensured students had access to social workers and counselors, while maintaining a small student-to-support staff ratio. Though these bills addressed access to counselors and social

workers, they did not integrate mental health and healing into the school day. Imagine a policy that mandated youth to take care of their mental health and healing through yoga, breathing, and cooking. What would student mental health look like if schools centered wellbeing and not test scores? Therefore, I recommend policymakers start state legislation where healing justice is mandated for students, including professional development for leaders and community partners to learn why healing is necessary for minoritized youth in K–12.

Recommendations for District Leaders. At the time of this writing (June 2022), school district conversations in Colorado center on funding and school closures, while nationally students have left public school for online learning. Both issues impact students and their wellbeing. Therefore, I recommend district leaders create a plan to support student mental health and wellbeing, as neighborhood schools close and students are bussed into neighborhoods where they may not share the same cultural background. I recommend district leaders provide students and families with in-school healing spaces by partnering with community organizations to provide healing justice to minoritized families.

Recommendations for Youth Programs. In interviews, youth participants mentioned that they have the healing space to be reflective of why they say and do things. One example came from a participant. They had a habit of saying “sorry” when stuttering or would apologize for mispronouncing a word. In response, a youth liaison encouraged students to reject this and reflect on why minoritized bodies must always apologize. Finally, youth mentioned their resistance to speaking in certain ways or censoring

themselves, which are behaviors we should nurture in youth-organization spaces. Thus, I recommend youth organizations support students in reclaiming identity by deconstructing behaviors like censorship and apology.

Future Research

More research is needed to understand how youth are evolving in their resistance as well as what youth abolitionist resistance looks like across the United States. For example, future research might examine ways in which youth heal and honor themselves in continuing the fight against oppression. In addition, to develop youth-resistance theories, I recommend examining how youth resistance evolved during and after the Trump presidency. When Trump was sworn into office, I was teaching at a high school in the Denver area. Many of my undocumented students came to class scared and in tears. They knew what a Trump presidency would mean for them. In the ensuing years, we witnessed mass deportations, children in cages, the Muslim ban, and overtly racist rallies (Cineas, 2021). For many minoritized youth, these events served as a call to action to become active agents in their schooling, as schools became battlegrounds for maintaining white supremacy. Exploration of the impact of these events on youth resistance would deepen the literature and extend youth-resistance theories.

Chapter Summary

Solórzano and Bernal (2001) highlighted that resistance must be examined at an intersection that includes language rights, cultural rights, and immigration status. Youth participants in the present study discussed how they witnessed inequitable policies in their schools. In this past year, youth learned that “reform” was code for “performative

ally-ship," when what is truly needed is *abolition*. YSPA youth still aspire for abolition in education policy as schools are still the focus in how teachers create and implement curriculum. To continue in the fight against injustice, scholars, school leaders, and policymakers must continue to listen to young people, collaborate with community partners, and begin civic engagement at a younger age. In response, organizations like YSPA support youth in learning the importance of culturally affirming education, racial justice, and the power of youth voice.

YSPA presently serves high school and college-aged students. However, by the time students reach high school, they are seeking a space to be their authentic selves; therefore, YSPA should begin hosting youth coalition spaces with youth of younger ages. Youth participants often shared stories of awareness, oppression, and racism that began in elementary or middle school. Racism does not wait until students are in high school—resistance should not wait either. I began this dissertation with my own memories of being dressed as a pilgrim, as I was spoon-fed a whitestream curriculum in elementary school. At this same age, I should have also been presented opportunities for socio-political youth development. Just as young musical prodigies practice their instrument daily as children, so too must civic leaders practice their activism at younger ages.

Schools should be spaces where minoritized youth are taught truths, justice, and conviction. And because there are attempts to ban this type of learning, community programs must ensure that youth learn a curriculum that acknowledges all racial and ethnic contributions to the United States and affirms their identity. This study calls attention to how youth abolitionists and their evolving resistance to oppression is and will

continue to change the U.S. education system. Youth abolitionists not only create change but prioritize their healing to continue to create affirming educational environments for future minoritized students. Youth abolitionist resistance is a pillar in reimagining education in the United States. Some teachers already identify as abolitionist educators, and programs like the Abolitionist Teachers Network and Woke Kindergarten are gaining steam. With nurturing, this type of teaching will inspire more student abolitionists. Therefore, as educators, we must join youth abolitionists and community organizations in the fight to dismantle the education-survival complex. We must listen to our youth, and we must invite them to the conversation. These changes are necessary for the future of our education system. Throughout this dissertation, I have highlighted the need for youth voice, co-creation, and abolition in education. In line with that call, I will end this dissertation with a counternarrative that envisions a world where youth abolitionists are leading and creating education policy.

I Matter!

It has been two years since the abolishment of all oppressive education policies rooted in white supremacy. Schools are quite different now than what they looked like historically. For example, my day starts two hours later, as my growing body needs rest. My school day begins by centering my mental health and wellbeing because healing justice is a priority in U.S public schools. I have greater educational options, from learning how to cook whole foods for myself, to breathing techniques that help me reground when I feel tense and stressed.

As I walk through the halls of my school, I see Black teachers wearing their natural hair, and I hear Latine teachers greeting students in Spanglish because we value authenticity, not cultural erasure. Further, my teacher understands that the Asian lived experience is multidimensional. I am not scared to go to school anymore because policymakers have shifted their mindset from youth violence to gun violence. After all, guns were the reason we had school resource officers in the building. Now, instead of school resource officers, we have peer mediators in the building to support healthy conflict resolution.

In my classes, I read books by BIPOC authors, and I learn about the contributions my ancestors made to U.S. history. Monthly, my schools ask for feedback from students and families on school culture, environment, and school norms. My mother, a cosmetologist, was invited to be a guest speaker and talk about her journey in starting her business because my school values cultural wealth. As well, standardized tests are no longer the center of schooling. Passionate teachers who resigned under the strain have now returned. And since they are evaluated on effectuating culturally sustaining curriculum and co-creating humanizing spaces for students—instead of test scores—our teachers feel less stressed and more empowered. In school, I feel seen, I feel heard, and most importantly, I know I matter!

The youth in this study brought attention to how they are resisting whitestream education policy through healing justice. Further, the youth highlighted that schooling must change to honor and affirm the lived experience of our minoritized students in K–12, and we must make the necessary changes in building an education system that

supports minoritized students in thriving. Youth voice is powerful and must be included in the reimagining of schooling. As the youth in this study highlighted, reform is not justice and what is needed is to abolish the current education system as it was designed to spirit-murder (Love, 2019). When youth voice is included and healing is prioritized, youth abolitionists can begin to thrive!

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Appendix A

Recruitment Material Used to Obtain Family Participants

Blurb emailed to youth participants

UNIVERSITY of DENVER
MORGRIDGE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Participate in a Research Study

A graduate student from University of Denver is asking participants of Youth For Social and Political Activism in a research study about youth resistance and sociopolitical youth development

Participants will be asked to participate in a 60-minute interview and a 60-minute to 90-minute focus group. Participants will earn $10 gift card for their time.

For more information contact Tracie Trinidad at
Tracie.trinidad@du.edu
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Lolita Tabron, Assistant Professor

Recruitment email

December 2021,

Dear YSPA Youth Scholars,

My name is Tracie Trinidad, and I am a graduate youth in the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about youth resistance and activism and learn more about how YSPA has supported you in engaging school, district, and state leaders when it comes to school policy. If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 60 minute 1-on-1 interview and a focus group which will last about 60 minutes to 90 minutes. You will also be offered a $10.00 Grub Hub Gift Card for your participation. The information gathered in this interview will be used for the completion of a dissertation study towards the award of a graduate degree. All information will be completely confidential and no identifiable information will be revealed in reports. This is completely voluntary. You may choose to be in this study or not. If you would like to participate, need additional information about the study, and or have further questions, please contact me at 720-364-6400 or email me at tracie.trinidad@du.edu.

In Solidarity,

Tracie Trinidad
PhD Candidate
Morgridge College of Education
University of Denver

Appendix B

Consent Forms

Assent Form for Participation in Research

Minors Over the Age 13

Title of Research Study: *Dismantling the Education Survival Complex: A Qualitative Case Study of How High School Youth Resist Whitestream School Policies and Foster School Change through a Youth Development Organization*

IRBNet #: 1840759-1

Researcher: *Tracie Trinidad, MNM*

Faculty Sponsor: *Dr. Lolita Tabron*

Study Site: *Young Aspiring Americans for Social and Political Activism*

What is a research study?

A research study is a way to find out new information about something. The researcher would like to learn more about how YSPA is supporting the development of your leadership and advocacy and how what you are learning through YSPA is supporting the necessary changes in your schools, school districts, and even school policy at the state level.

Do you have to be in the study?

You do not have to be in this study. It is up to you. You can say okay now to be in the study and change your mind later. All you must do is tell me when you want to stop. No one will be upset if you don't want to be in the study or if you change your mind later. You can take time to think about being in the study before you decide.

Why are you being asked to be part of this research study?

You are being asked to join the research study because you are or have been an active participant of YSPA. About 8 other youth will be in this study participating 1-on-1 interview as well as the focus groups.

If you join the research study, what will you be asked to do?

If you agree to join this study, you will be asked to *answer a few questions about your school as well as learn how YSPA has supported the development of your leadership.*

- You will be in the study for 60 minutes to 90 minutes when participating in a focus group and 1 hour when participating in a 1-on-1 interview.
- The researcher will ask you to answer 8 questions
- The researcher will want to audio and video record you during the study as you answer questions. If you do not want to be recorded, that is okay too. Just tell the researcher if it makes you uncomfortable.
- Finally you will be asked to review your transcript with the researcher to ensure your answers in the interview were transcribed correctly.

Your parent or guardian will not be expected to pay for *your participation in this study.*

There are other ways to help if you don't want to be in this study, examples include submitting an email in responding to the questions, or through the submission of art and/or poetry.

Will any part of the study hurt or be uncomfortable?

The researcher thinks that *discussions on race and white supremacy* may be difficult to discuss, so at any time we can take a pause. Participation is completely voluntary, and you may stop at any time without penalty if you feel uncomfortable or embarrassed.

Will the study help you or others?

The researcher does not know if being in this study may help you.

The researcher may learn something that will help other youth with navigating oppressive school policies someday.

Do your parents or guardians know about the study?

This study has been explained to your parent or guardian, and they said that the researcher could ask you if you want to be in the study. You can talk this over with your

parent or guardian before deciding if you want. You do not have to be in this study even if your parent or guardian thinks it is a good idea. It is up to you.

Will anyone else know that you are in this study?

The researcher will not tell anyone else that you are in this study. You do not have to tell anyone about the study or your answers to the questions.

The information that you provide in the study will be handled confidentially. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released or shared as required by law. Representatives from the University of Denver may also review the research records for monitoring purposes.

Who will see the information collected about you?

The researcher will keep all information on a protected folder on a drive protected with a password to keep your information safe throughout this study.

The information collected about you during this study will be kept safely locked up. Nobody will know it except the person conducting the research and their faculty sponsor.

The study information about you will not be given to your parents/guardians, youth council liaison, school, or district. The researchers will not tell your friends about the study or your answers to the questions, etc.

Your individual identity will be kept private when writing the final report.

What do you get for being in the study?

You will receive a $10 gift card to Grub Hub for your participation in a 45 min to 1 hour focus group or 1-on-1 interview.

What if you have questions?

You can ask any questions that you have about the study at any time. Just tell the researcher or your parent/guardian that you have a question. You or your parent/guardian can contact the researcher, Tracie Trinidad, any time during the study by calling 720-364-6400 or emailing tracie.trinidad@du.edu

Options for Participation

Consent to video / audio recording for purposes of this research

This study involves video/audio recording. If you do not agree to be recorded, you CAN STILL take part in the study.

Please initial your choice for the options below:

___ **YES**, I agree to be video/audio recorded/photographed.

___ **NO**, I do not agree to be video/audio recorded/photographed.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form.

_____ _____

Participant Signature **Date**

Parent or Guardian Permission Form for Child's Participation in Research

Title of Research Study: *Dismantling the Education Survival Complex: A Qualitative Case Study of How High School Youth Resist Whitestream School Policies and Foster School Change through a Youth Development Organization*

Principal Investigator: Tracie Trinidad, MNM

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Lolita Tabron

Study Site: YSPA- Virtually via Zoom

IRBNet#: **1840759-1**

Your child is being asked to participate in a research study. Participation in this research is voluntary and they do not have to participate. Participants will be asked to participate in a 1-on-1 interview, one focus group, and will be asked to review their transcript from their interview. The purpose of this study is to learn more about how YSPA is supporting the development of youth leadership and advocacy and what youth are learning through YSPA is supporting the necessary changes in education policies from the school, district, and even state level. Your child may decline to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect their relationship with the University of Denver or YSPA in anyway. You can agree to allow your child to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if your child participates.

The purpose of this form is to provide you (as the parent or guardian of a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision as to whether to let your child participate in this research study. The person performing the research will describe the study to you and answer all your questions. Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether to give your permission for your child to take part. If you decide to let your child, be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission.

What if my child does not want to participate?

In addition to your permission, your child must agree to participate in the study. If your child does not want to participate, they will not be included in the study and there will be no penalty. If your child initially agrees to be in the study, they can change their mind later without any penalty.

What is my child going to be asked to do?

If you allow your child to participate in this study, they will be asked to patriciate in a 1-on-1 interview that will last 60 minutes and a 1 hour to 90 minutes focus group, with a follow up meeting to review transcripts with the participant via zoom. There will be 8 other people in this study.

If you choose to participate in this study, your child will be audio and video recorded. Any audio and video recordings will be stored securely, and my faculty

sponsor and I will be the only one to have access to the recordings. Recordings will be kept for 4 months and then erased.

What you will you be asked to do in the study?

If you agree to let your child(ren) participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign consent for your child.

What are the risks involved in this study?

Discussions on race and white supremacy may be difficult to discuss, so at any time we can take a pause. Participation is completely voluntary, and your child may stop at any time without penalty if they feel uncomfortable or embarrassed.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

The possible benefits of participation are students can bring attention to how organizations like YSPA could partner with schools and school districts in making the necessary shifts in education policy

Incentives to participate

Your child will receive a $10 Grub Hub Gift card for participating in this research project.

Incentives include gift cards provided for participation. Your child is entitled to payment for time invested in the project, even if they withdraw early.

Alternatives (if applicable)

If your child wishes to participate in the study and does not want to participate in a focus group or interview, they may submit art or poetry that can speak to the questions that were asked in the interviews and focus groups.

How will your child's privacy and confidentiality be protected if s/he participates in this research study?

Your child's privacy and the confidentiality will be protected by being removed of his/her data in transcripts, as well as password protected on a computer hard drive where my faculty sponsor and I will be the only people to have access to this information.

Your child's name will not be used in any report. Identifiable research data will be encrypted, and password protected. Your child's responses will be assigned a code number. The list connecting their name to this code will be kept in an encrypted and password protected file. Only the research team will have access to the file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed. The information that you give in the study will be anonymous.

Because of the nature of the data, it may be possible to deduce your child's identity; however, there will be no attempt to do so, and your child's data will be reported in a way that will not identify them. Information collected about your child will not be used or

shared for future research studies. The information that you provide in the study will be handled confidentially. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released or shared as required by law. Representatives from the University of Denver may also review the research records for monitoring purposes.

Use of your child's information for future research

All identifiable information (e.g., your child's name, date of birth) will be removed from the information or samples collected in this project. After we remove all identifiers, the information or samples may be used for future research or shared with other researchers without your additional informed consent.

Data Sharing

De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community at large to advance education. We will remove or code any personal information (e.g., your child's name, date of birth) that could identify your child before files are shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify your child from the information or samples we share. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your child's personal data.

Whom to contact with questions about the study?

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher Tracie Trinidad at 720-364-6400 or send an email to **tracie.trinidad@du.edu** for any questions or if you

feel that you have been harmed. This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Denver's Institutional Review Board and the study number is 1840759-1

The Faculty Sponsor overseeing this project is Dr. Lolita Tabron and may be reached at Lolita.tabron@du.edu

Whom to contact with questions concerning your rights as a research participant?

For questions about your rights or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the University of Denver (DU) Institutional Review Board by phone at (303) 871-2121 or email at IRBAdmin@du.edu.

Consent to video / audio recording / photography solely for purposes of this research

This study involves video/audio recording, and/or photography. If you do not agree to be recorded, you CAN STILL take part in the study.

_____ YES, I agree to allow my child to be video/audio recorded/photographed.

_____ NO, I do not agree to allow my child to be video/audio recorded/photographed.

You are making a decision about allowing your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow them to participate in the study. If you later decide that you wish to withdraw your permission for your child to participate in the study, you may discontinue his or her participation at any time. You will be given a copy of this document.

_____

Printed Name of Child

_____ _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian **Date**

Appendix C

Parent or Guardian Permission Form for Child's Participation in Research

Title of Research Study: *Dismantling the Education Survival Complex: A Qualitative Case Study of How High School Youth Resist Whitestream School Policies and Foster School Change through a Youth Development Organization*

Principal Investigator: Tracie Trinidad, MNM

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Lolita Tabron

Study Site: YSPA- Virtually via Zoom

Your child is being asked to participate in a research study. Participation in this research is voluntary and they do not have to participate. Participants will be asked to participate in a 1-on-1 interview, one focus group, and will be asked to review their transcript from their interview. The purpose of this study is to learn more about how YSPA is supporting the development of youth leadership and advocacy and what youth are learning through YSPA is supporting the necessary changes in education policies from the school, district, and even state level. Your child may decline to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect their relationship with the University of Denver or YSPA in anyway. You can agree to allow your child to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if your child participates.

The purpose of this form is to provide you (as the parent or guardian of a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision as to whether to let your child participate in this research study. The person performing the research will describe the study to you and answer all your questions. Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether to give your permission for your child to take part. If you decide to let your child, be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission.

What if my child does not want to participate?

In addition to your permission, your child must agree to participate in the study. If your child does not want to participate, they will not be included in the study and there will be no penalty. If your child initially agrees to be in the study, they can change their mind later without any penalty.

What is my child going to be asked to do?

If you allow your child to participate in this study, they will be asked to patriciate in a 1-on-1 interview that will last 60 minutes and a 1 hour to 90 minutes focus group, with a follow up meeting to review transcripts with the participant via zoom. There will be 8 other people in this study.

If you choose to participate in this study, your child will be audio and video recorded. Any audio and video recordings will be stored securely, and my faculty

sponsor and I will be the only one to have access to the recordings. Recordings will be kept for 4 months and then erased.

What you will you be asked to do in the study?

If you agree to let your child(ren) participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign consent for your child.

What are the risks involved in this study?

Discussions on race and white supremacy may be difficult to discuss, so at any time we can take a pause. Participation is completely voluntary, and your child may stop at any time without penalty if they feel uncomfortable or embarrassed.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

The possible benefits of participation are students can bring attention to how organizations like YSPA could partner with schools and school districts in making the necessary shifts in education policy

Incentives to participate

Your child will receive a $10 Grub Hub Gift card for participating in this research project.

Incentives include gift cards provided for participation. Your child is entitled to payment for time invested in the project, even if they withdraw early.

Alternatives (if applicable)

If your child wishes to participate in the study and does not want to participate in a focus group or interview, they may submit art or poetry that can speak to the questions that were asked in the interviews and focus groups.

How will your child's privacy and confidentiality be protected if s/he participates in this research study?

Your child's privacy and the confidentiality of his/her data will be protected by being removed in transcripts, as well as password protected on a computer hard drive where my faculty sponsor and I will be the only people to have access to this information.

Your child's name will not be used in any report. Identifiable research data will be encrypted, and password protected. Your child's responses will be assigned a code number. The list connecting their name to this code will be kept in an encrypted and password protected file. Only the research team will have access to the file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed. The information that you give in the study will be anonymous.

Because of the nature of the data, it may be possible to deduce your child's identity; however, there will be no attempt to do so, and your child's data will be reported in a way that will not identify them. Information collected about your child will not be used or

shared for future research studies. The information that you provide in the study will be handled confidentially. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released or shared as required by law. Representatives from the University of Denver may also review the research records for monitoring purposes.

Use of your child's information for future research

All identifiable information (e.g., your child's name, date of birth) will be removed from the information or samples collected in this project. After we remove all identifiers, the information or samples may be used for future research or shared with other researchers without your additional informed consent.

Data Sharing

De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community at large to advance education. We will remove or code any personal information (e.g., your child's name, date of birth) that could identify your child before files are shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify your child from the information or samples we share. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your child's personal data.

Whom to contact with questions about the study?

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher Tracie Trinidad at 720-364-6400 or send an email to **tracie.trinidad@du.edu** for any questions or if you

feel that you have been harmed. This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Denver's Institutional Review Board and the study number is 1840759-1

The Faculty Sponsor overseeing this project is Dr. Lolita Tabron and may be reached at Lolita.tabron@du.edu

Whom to contact with questions concerning your rights as a research participant?

For questions about your rights or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the University of Denver (DU) Institutional Review Board by phone at (303) 871-2121 or email at IRBAdmin@du.edu.

Consent to video / audio recording / photography solely for purposes of this research

This study involves video/audio recording, and/or photography. If you do not agree to be recorded, you CAN STILL take part in the study.

_____ YES, I agree to allow my child to be video/audio recorded/photographed.

_____ NO, I do not agree to allow my child to be video/audio recorded/photographed.

You are making a decision about allowing your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow them to participate in the study. If you later decide that you wish to

withdraw your permission for your child to participate in the study, you may discontinue his or her participation at any time. You will be given a copy of this document.

_____

Printed Name of Child

_____ _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian **Date**

Appendix D

Interview Protocols

Interview Guide and Protocol – YSPA Participant

Opening Protocol:

1. Provide the Informed Consent Form to the participant and ask that the form be read.
2. After the participant has read the form, ask the participant if he/she has any questions about his/her consent, the research, or the process.
3. Answer any questions the participant may have and ask the participant if he/she is willing to participate in the study and to sign the copy of the Informed Consent Form through Docusign.
4. If willing to participate, give the participant a copy of the informed consent form and retain a signed copy for yourself through Docusign.

Preamble:

Good [morning, afternoon, evening]. My name is Tracie Trinidad. Today is_____ and I am with YSPA youth talking with [fill in name]. Thanks so much for agreeing to this focus group/ interview! The purpose of this research is to learn how students are resisting whitestream education and are making the necessary changes in schools through co constructing school policies. Additionally, I aim to ***understand the experiences of the students who participate in YSPA*** The reason why you were asked to participate in this interview is because you are a current YSPA participant.

Your opinions, experiences, ideas, and participation are very important in this study and may lead to supporting other schools in adapting partnerships with organizations like YSPA. Please know that I am not here to promote a particular way of thinking about YSPA, I want you to feel comfortable about good things as well as critical things. There are no right or wrong answers.

I received consent to audio/ video record our discussion today so that I can ensure the best accuracy in note taking for this study. For your information, please know that only my faculty sponsor and I will hear the tape or read the transcript of this interview. Additionally, I will destroy the audio recording after the notes have been transcribed and the research project is completed. Because of these efforts to provide protections, the informed consent form signed by you today meets the requirements for human subject research for those 18 and older, and I have received consent from guardians of those under 18.

The form explains that: 1) All information shared during our conversation will be kept confidential; 2) Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may stop at any time without penalty if you feel uncomfortable or embarrassed; and 3) there is no harm intended through this study. I will not put your name or any other identifiable information that can be traced back to you on the final report.

During this time, I have several questions that I would like to ask you. To respect our time together, I may need to interrupt our conversation if I am running short on time. As a follow-up to this interview, I may request additional comments and feedback during

the writing of the report to ensure that your opinion, experiences, ideas are accurately reflected.

Now I will ask some questions regarding the study. You may ask me questions at any time during this process. If you would like to follow along, I will add the questions I plan to ask in the chat.

Before I continue, do you have any questions? Great! Let's begin.

Interview Questions:

- What school districts are you located in and what grade are you in?
- Can you describe YSPA and why are you involved with the organization?
- How has YSPA supported the development of your leadership and activism?
- How has YSPA provided space for youth to converse with school, district, and state leaders?
- In what ways has student voice been included with the creation of district or school policies through YSPA?
- How has your racial identity been celebrated and acknowledged in the classroom?
- How has your racial identity been celebrated and acknowledged through YSPA?
- Can you tell me about a time you didn't agree with something happening in your district, school, or classroom and what did you do?
- How do you define power?
- What is resistance and how would you define it?

- Tell me about a time you resisted a policy in school
- How would you define white supremacy?
- Can you give examples of how white supremacy exists in schools?
- Can you give me an example of how oppression manifests/ exists in schools?
- Is there anything else that you would like to bring attention to in our time together?

Closing script

Thank you again for your time and your participation in this study. Your work and your interview are important to our study as well as minoritized students nationally. A follow up meeting will be requested to review the transcripts of your interview with you at your convenience via zoom. Should you have any questions or concerns please feel free to email me at tracie.trinidad@du.edu. Have a great rest of your day.