“My culture... is just another number for the school to put on their website.”

Asian and Asian-American Students’ Sense of Belonging at a Boarding School

Lydia DiIulio ‘18 and Olivia Grommers ‘18
Miss Porter’s School

- All-girls independent 9-12 boarding school in Farmington, CT
- 320 students: two-thirds boarding, one-third day
- 2017-2018 tuition: $62,315 boarding, $50,165 day
- 42% of students receive financial aid

“Miss Porter’s School educates young women to become informed, bold, ethical, resourceful global citizens. We expect our graduates to shape a changing world.”
Center for the Study of Boys’ and Girls’ Lives

CSBGL is a consortium of independent schools and scholars from the University of Pennsylvania, dedicated to Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR).

“CSBGL is a call to schools and others to embark on a search. A search for a better understanding, better school curricula, better family practices, better community policies - to offer boys and girls a better world.”
History of YPAR

1946 Action-Research (Lewin)

1988 and 1991 Participatory Action Research (Tandon and McTaggart)
1990’s-2000’s Youth Participatory Action Research
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1990’s-2000’s Youth Participatory Action Research
Challenges for YPAR

- Power dynamic
- Anecdotal bias
- Student confidentiality
- Continuity
Turn and Talk

How do you think YPAR would work in your school? Would you come across some of the same issues? What excites you about this work? What concerns you?

In a few minutes we will share with the group.
YPAR Resources

- Center for the Study of Boys’ and Girls’ Lives - csbgl.org
- Texts: Anderson & Herr, Falk & Blumenreich, Maxwell
- Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning (YELL) - gardnercenter.stanford.edu
YPAR at Porter’s

- Learn about qualitative research, YPAR, and ethnography
- Engage in identity work
- Conduct a literature review
- Carry out a research project at Porter's
- Meet 4-5 hours a week
- 11th and 12th graders + “research coordinator”
A Typical Research Methods Class

- Strengths Inventory / Kiersey’s Temperaments
- Writing a Researcher Identity Memo or journaling
- Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning (YELL) Activities
- Discussing literature review
- Skyping with our Research Director and Assistant at CSBGL
- Analyzing survey results
- Drafting and piloting interview and focus group scripts
- Coding data
- Preparing presentations
Why it works at Porter’s

● Support of Administration
  ○ Legitimacy
  ○ Trust
  ○ Agency
  ○ Time and Resources

● Application Process
  ○ Continuity
  ○ Diversity
Comprehensive Assessment of Student Life

- CASL
- Given every two years
- Measures the student experience
- Six key areas:
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- Six key areas:
  1. Citizenship and Student Voice
  2. School Social Environment
  3. Faculty Support of Students
  4. Peer Culture and Student Self-Confidence
  5. Student Emotional Well-Being
  6. Student Academic Self-Perception
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“I feel like my teachers try to get to know me as a person.”
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“I feel that I have to act in certain ways to avoid being teased.”
Comprehensive Assessment of Student Life

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Does your school survey the student body? How are the results used? Do students ever see the results?

In a few minutes we will share with the group.
Bridge between research projects

- 2015-16: Study of students’ experiences with teacher feedback → discovery of race-based differences in experience (though not in the feedback itself)
- 2016-17: Study of black and white students’ experiences with teacher feedback, teacher support, and the classroom environment
- 2017-18: Year of planning and taking action
- Balance follow-through on previous projects with desire to explore new topics
- “Race isn’t just black and white”
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Why did we study Asian and Asian-American students?

Sample Items:
- I feel like an important person at school.
- My peers look to me for guidance and leadership.
- I wish I had closer relationships with other students.
- I have been able to make genuine friends at this school.
Why did we study Asian and Asian-American students?

- CASL results
- Concerns raised by Asian friends
- Three years of “black and white” work
- 20-25% of students identify as Asian
Literature Review

● Riekie, et al. (2017)
● What’s Happening In This School? (WHITS)
  ○ I am part of a community.
  ○ I feel included at school.
● School Connectedness → Resilience → Well-Being
WHITS-like Survey - December 2017

- Questions taken directly from the WHITS:
  - I am part of a community.
  - I feel included at school.
- Administered in day student rooms and evening dorm meetings.
- Results were very uniform across race groups, nothing like the CASL data.
- Team members heard from friends that students did not take this seriously.
Literature Review

- Bihn (2014)
- Social identities of international students at an all-girls’ school in U.S.
- Identity maps
Focus Groups

1. Returning International Chinese students
2. New International Chinese students
3. International Korean and East Asian students
4. Domestic Asian students
“Students from various social groups get along well together here.”
“At school, I feel like I am an important person.”
Preliminary Findings - and Validity Checking

- Invisibility
- Split Identity
- Assimilation
- Forced Complacency/Acceptance
- False idea of a “Monolithic” Asian Culture
- Race isn’t “Black and White”
- Expectations
- Culture of Anxiety
Preliminary Findings

- Invisibility

“I [feel] like people didn't really want to know where I was from and my whole background, like they didn't really want to get know me and I didn't really know how to introduce conversations about that... I still don't feel that enough here. I don’t feel that people genuinely really want to know all of you and I don't know if that’s the people I surround myself with or just the general culture here that doesn't facilitate the conversations.”
Preliminary Findings

● Split Identity

“I think that international people who live in the U.S.... I feel like I'm just lost, in a sense that I don't know what country I belong to anymore.”

“We switch between Western culture and Asian culture; sometimes it’s frustrating.”
Preliminary Findings

- Assimilation

“I decided to come to America. I told myself that I have to blend in... I told myself in my freshman year that no matter what, I have to blend in.”

“One thing I felt very frustrated by was that I did feel like I had to change my accent and adjust myself and everything because I wanted to fit in and, like, make this place home. Then people would come up to me and say ‘Hey, like, have you noticed that you've become so Westernized?’”
We’ve identified themes, what now?

- More data analysis
- Work with Chief Equity & Inclusion Officer and Asian Student Alliance to develop action plan
- Build on models of previous projects: identify and enlist allies, be persistent yet patient
- Propose action


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