



Conducting Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Through a Healing-Informed Approach with System-Involved Latinas

Sara Haskie-Mendoza¹ · Laura Tinajero¹ · Alma Cervantes¹ · Jazzlyn Rodriguez¹ · Josephine V. Serrata¹

Published online: 30 August 2018

© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2018

Abstract

Latina girls are disproportionately represented in the US juvenile justice system (Freiburger and Burke 2011). Almost all girls involved with juvenile justice report some form of emotional, physical or sexual abuse prior to interactions with the juvenile justice system; with over 60% of girls reporting trauma before the age of 5 (Dierkhising et al. 2013). For Latina girls, juvenile detention is associated with early death as Latina girls who have been detained are nine times more likely to die by the age of 29 than the general non-detained population (Teplin et al. 2014). The stark reality faced by system-involved Latinas calls for innovative solutions.

In 2015, the National Compadres Network (NCN), with over 30 years of work embedded in the Chicano/Latino and Indigenous communities in California, developed a project to respond to the disparities in the juvenile justice system faced by Latina girls. Through this project, the NCN used a healing-informed curriculum (Xinachtli) and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) to engage Latina system-involved girls as equal partners to inform detention alternatives and reform.

This paper will describe these efforts, provide insights from the YPAR facilitators and youth researchers, and provide recommendations for other community-based facilitators who are considering utilizing YPAR through a healing-informed approach within their own work with Latina girls.

Keywords YPAR · Latinas · Latina youth · Trauma-informed approach · Juvenile justice · Healing-informed

In 2015, the National Compadres Network (NCN), a grass-roots organization with over 30 years of work embedded in the Chicano/Latino and Indigenous communities in California, developed a project to respond to the disparities in the juvenile justice system faced by Latina girls. In this project, the NCN used a healing-informed curriculum (Xinachtli) and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) to engage Latina system-involved (have had any experience with the juvenile justice system) girls as equal partners to inform detention alternatives and reform. This paper will describe these efforts, provide insights from the YPAR facilitators and youth researchers, as well as provide recommendations for other community-based facilitators who are looking at taking on YPAR through a healing-informed approach within their own work with Latina girls.

Background: National Compadres Network and Xinachtli

The National Compadres Network (NCN) as a culturally-rooted and healing-informed organization recognizes the value of cultivating the capacity of those who are most impacted by systemic inequities as they are the closest to the solution. In doing so, NCN supports interested communities and organizations to fill the significant gap in culturally competent services to families and communities of color. NCN strives to strengthen, rebalance, and redevelop the traditional “Comadre/Compadre” or extended family system of Chicana/os,¹ Latina/os,² and Indigenous Latinos.³ NCN

¹ Chicana/os refers to chosen identity of a Mexican American person that values a social-political identity and indigenous diaspora. The spiritual homeland of Chicana/os is Aztlan

² People with roots in Latin America. Even though many who identify Latina/o have direct indigenous roots, they choose to discard an indigenous identity and use a broader term to identify their Latin-American roots.

³ Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them.

✉ Sara Haskie-Mendoza
shm@compadresnetwork.org

¹ National Compadres Network and National Latina Network for Healthy Families and Communities, 1550 The Alameda, Suite 320, San Jose, CA 95126, USA

experts train service providers (locally and nationally) in several culturally centered curriculums addressing issues such as, family violence, community violence, gang violence, teen pregnancy prevention and other symptoms of oppression.

At the foundation of all NCN's work is an ideology that builds on an indigenous life view incorporating culturally-grounded physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual principles and practices referred to as La Cultura Cura (LCC) or cultural based healing. The core tenet of LCC is an understanding that within individuals, families and communities exist cultural values, traditions and indigenous practices that promote natural pathways towards healthy development, community safety, and life-long well-being (Tello and Acosta 2012). LCC employs a multigenerational process of learning and/or remembering one's true and positive cultural values, principles, customs, and traditions. This cultural healing philosophy is reflected in all of NCN's programming. This paper highlights the bridge between a curriculum that centers cultural healing and an approach that engages youth in YPAR to bring healing and action to a group of system-involved Latinas.

Xinachtli Curriculum

Xinachtli (germinating seed) is a gender responsive, culturally-based rites of passage curriculum and philosophy that promotes healing, resilience and leadership capacity of Chicana, Latina and Indigenous girls. Xinachtli is rooted in a racial justice, anti-oppression framework and reframes the narrative of oppression into transformational healing and advocacy. Xinachtli curriculum uses group circles to help facilitate the process of transformation and valor of girls in the community through the creation of extended kinship networks. Xinachtli provides support, early intervention and mental health promotion to self-identified Chicana, Latina and Indigenous girls. It builds a culturally responsive, supportive and development network for girls facing mental health issues, system involvement and other symptoms of oppression. The Xinachtli curriculum has been used in probation departments, mental health county agencies, schools, detention centers, community-based organizations (CBOs), police departments, and tribal consortiums. The following example highlights the use of this curriculum with system-involved Latina girls.

The purpose of the current project was to increase culturally-responsive and healing-informed practices with system-involved Latinas and to use this as a pathway to increase their capacity to participate as equal partners in detention reform. A major component of the project was to involve young Latinas in data-driven decision making around system reform. For NCN, working with Latina youth was particularly important given that Latina girls are disproportionately

represented in the juvenile justice system (Freiburger and Burke 2011). In addition, almost all girls in juvenile justice report some form of emotional, physical or sexual abuse prior to interactions with the juvenile justice system; with over 60% of girls reporting trauma before the age of 5 (Dierkhising et al. 2013). For Latina girls, juvenile detention is associated with early death as Latina girls who have been detained are nine times more likely to die by the age of 29 than the general population (Teplin et al. 2014). The stark reality faced by system-involved Latinas calls for innovative solutions. Thus, NCN attempted to respond by coupling YPAR with their healing-informed Xinachtli curriculum.

Xinachtli YPAR

YPAR is an innovative approach to positive youth and community development in which youth go through a process of finding their inner voice and begin a journey of self-empowerment through developing and implementing research (Rodriguez et al. 2015). YPAR is a complementary method to the Xinachtli approach because it brings about critical thinking, learning and action which can contribute to healing. Using the Xinachtli curriculum as a foundation for the YPAR process allowed this group of young ladies to not only be able to conduct systematic research to improve their lives, their communities, and the institutions intended to serve them, but to also engage in their own healing particularly as it related to their experiences with the juvenile justice system. For this project, the NCN Xinachtli YPAR team consisted of the Xinachtli curriculum developer, two facilitators, a YPAR technical assistance provider (all authors of this paper), a project manager and the Xinachtli youth researchers. Because of the healing-informed philosophy that is central to all NCN's work, the team adapted a YPAR curriculum (The Institute for Community Research 2014) to include a healing component. This consisted of allowing space at the beginning, during and in between sessions for participants to access facilitators for emotional support. As described below, the facilitators were cognizant of and could respond to trauma and trauma triggers throughout the entire YPAR process. Most YPAR scholars articulate the importance of establishing an environment of mutual learning and power sharing to successfully complete a YPAR project (Ozer 2016). However, as a culturally-grounded and healing-informed team, the current authors highlight the significant importance for YPAR facilitators to also understand trauma (and be able to respond) as a critical component to the YPAR process when working with youth who are historically marginalized and system-impacted (see Tello and Acosta 2012 and Serrata and Notaria, 2016 for

more information on trauma and healing in Latino communities).

Xinachtli Youth Researchers

The Xinachtli youth researchers' group was made of four Chicana/Latina youth that had gone through the Xinachtli curriculum within the past 12 months. All girls lived in or went to school in East Salinas, the most marginalized part of Salinas, CA. In Salinas, Latinos comprise 75% of the population, the poverty rate among Latinos is 46.5% compared to 18.9% for the city (Data USA, n.d.). The economy is primarily based upon agriculture, with a large Latino immigrant population. All youth researchers were either immigrants or first-generation daughters of farm workers and all were bilingual. The youth researchers were recruited because they had previous experience with Juvenile Justice System (either they themselves were on probation, had aged out of probation or were at risk of entering the system due to sibling involvement) and were interested in serving as "interns" for the next phase of the project. In partnership with the NCN Xinachtli YPAR staff team, the Xinachtli youth researchers developed a research project on Latinas in the Juvenile Justice System. They were involved in choosing the methodology (World Café style interviews), developing the questions, facilitating the interview questions and providing reflections on solutions for Latinas involved in Juvenile Justice.

The youth researchers were paid a \$500 stipend for their participation in the YPAR project. The team met weekly for 3–4 h on Saturdays for approximately 12 weeks. Food and transportation were provided every week. Since all of the girls were picked up by a facilitator, attendance was consistent throughout the entire 12 weeks. For the first weeks of the project, the YPAR researchers learned about Latinas in the juvenile justice system through reading academic journals, researching the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) website, learning relevant terminology (e.g., system-involved youth and school to prison pipeline) and listening to presentations from experts in the field on topics, such as the rates of Latinas in juvenile justice, risk factors for juvenile justice involvement, and the impact on mental health for youth involved in juvenile justice. Subsequent weeks included reviewing research related topics, such as introducing various methods through experiential activities, consent procedures, protection of human subjects, etc. The final few weeks included choosing their methodology, developing questions and focus group guides, and practicing conducting focus groups through World Cafe format (the group of participants are split up into small groups and do small group rounds of 20–30 min each rotating through several tables and answering a different set of questions at each round). After the project was implemented, the YPAR

researchers met to debrief about the findings and develop recommendations for policy changes regarding Latina youth.

Youth Research Process

A total of 7 young women, all with some experience with the Juvenile Justice System and currently attending school at an alternative education site served as research participants for the Xinachtli YPAR researchers. Research participants were all Latinas and ranged in age from 14 to 18. The YPAR facilitators who have many years of working in the local community were able to recruit from the local alternative school in partnership with the school principal, who allowed recruitment and provided transportation to the research event for his students. He also allowed the YPAR group to use one of his buildings to conduct the research and supported the group in obtaining informed consent from the parents. The day of the research session, the YPAR researchers and facilitators arrived early, set up food and practiced for the research project. As the event started the YPAR researchers led the event and began the process with obtaining informed assent from each participant. They decided to open the event like they had experienced for themselves every week in their own research group. They began the event by asking everyone to introduce themselves and briefly check-in on how they were feeling in the moment and if the group could do anything to support them. Then research participants were divided into three groups where they began a rotation around three stations. Each station was set up with butcher paper, markers, and different questions as described next.

Each station in the rotation focused on a specific subtopic on Latinas experiences in the juvenile justice system to guide the research participants in discussion. The first topic of discussion was on the perceived impact of race and gender on treatment within juvenile justice. Research participants in this station were asked to reflect on the how gender, stereotyping and culture may influence treatment within the juvenile justice system (e.g., Do you feel that because you are a Latina you are treated different?; Do you feel like Latinas are treated different in the juvenile justice system in comparison to Latino boys or someone of a different race?). The second topic was about youth's personal experiences with probation officers, detention or other aspects of the system. The last topic was on youth's recommendations for how the juvenile justice system could be more helpful. The adult researchers kept time. The Xinachtli YPAR researchers divided themselves up into three groups, each pair responsible for facilitating the discussion at a station. At each station, one Xinachtli YPAR researcher took notes and the other served as note taker and one Xinachtli YPAR researcher served as an interviewer (with the exception of one table that needed an adult facilitator to stand in due to the uneven number of youth researchers). Research

participants rotated stations every 20–30 min and received a \$25 gift card for their participation.

After the data collection, the Xinachtli YPAR researchers spent two of their weekly sessions debriefing and reflecting on the entire YPAR process, collecting the data, and discussing solutions for Latinas in juvenile justice. The youth researchers were also able to validate themes that were developed by adult research team members (unfortunately due to grant timeline limitations, the youth researchers were not directly involved in the analysis of the recorded session). For example, in terms of themes regarding changes to the systems, the respondents noted a need for more respect, practical recommendations included consideration of parent's work schedules and rides to probation meetings. The research participants recommended more communication between young women in the system and their probation officers. The respondents also noted that some of the practices within detention centers, such as work teams, do not help them get better or rehabilitate. Programs that helped them with anger management, on the other hand, were helpful. They noted that most counseling programs were not useful, but group discussions, such as the one they were participating in could be useful and helpful.

A unique aspect of the project that emerged from the debriefing and reflection sessions was the importance of coupling YPAR with Xinachtli. The Xinachtli YPAR researchers described the importance of not only collecting data but allowing space for healing moments in the process. One youth researcher described being able to sit at a table with someone she had previous conflict with and learn that they shared very similar experiences. She attributed this project for allowing her to gain empathy for this other young woman and heal their relationship.

Xinachtli Youth Researchers Reflection

Since conducting this research project, half of the youth researchers that were a part of this process have participated in and have played a role in the facilitation of other YPAR projects in their communities. One of the Xinachtli YPAR researchers is now a paid intern at a local non-profit. Three other youth researchers are extremely involved in local and state-wide efforts to dismantle the school to prison pipeline. Many are engaged in the community and continue to have a relationship with one another. Below is a personal reflection by one of the youth researchers showing the personal impact the project had on her.

My name is Jazzlyn Rodriguez, I am 17 years old and I am From Salinas, California. I was chosen to be in the project by Laura Tinajero [YPAR facilitator]. I met

Laura when I was 16, during a Xinachtli circle that she facilitated along with another young woman. I had got involved in Xinachtli by being invited, which later led to an internship with another non-profit that I am currently working with now.

Reflecting on the process for The Xinachtli YPAR Project it was very different, I myself had never been in a space that was only females, and in this case females with ties from other hoods. At the beginning I was very skeptical because I had no idea what I got myself into, but overtime we all grew on each other. During the beginning I think it was kinda hard for us because we were all so young and really had no idea what we were really doing and where we wanted this project to take us. We started off by sharing our stories with each other and by sharing that alone we had already realized how many similarities we had with one another, and how we wanted to make a change in our community even if it was something little. We worked hard every weekend to make our project really make an impact.

I think by being a part of this project it has given me different points of views on things that women and young women go through on a day to day basis. It's given me opportunity and a sense of direction in my life that I had no idea I would be able to have at such a young age. This project has also given me a voice I didn't know I had and by using that voice I have spoken out in my community against putting school resource officers on school campus' and it was a victory. I have also gained a lot more responsibility, identity, and a fire within myself. These things are only a little bit of things that I've done and I have so much planned for my future that I couldn't even had fathomed.

I took a lot from this project like a strong work ethic that the women around me have taught me. I've learned how to conduct myself professionally and how to get things done in a timely manner; how to stay positive even in the worst of situations. Most importantly this project has taught me how to speak up for myself, make relationships with the people, and how to be a chingona [colloquial term for someone who is smart and awesome].

As of now I am working on getting my high school diploma at Monterey County Home Charter School. Aside from that I am working as a Youth Voice intern. Youth Voice gives youth in the City of Salinas the safe space they need to voice opinions, beliefs, and concerns which we take back and find a way that we can civically engage in our community to help these youth. I am also sitting in co-ed Joven Noble circles and finding ways to better facilitate.

Xinachtli YPAR Adult Facilitator Reflections

As noted above, Xinachtli YPAR project was facilitated by two facilitators (Laura Tinajero and Alma Cervantes) who had facilitated Xinachtli with a group of Chicana/Latina girls from Salinas, CA. Laura and Alma were asked to facilitate the Xinachtli YPAR project due to their deep understanding of working with system-involved Latinas and success in facilitating the Xinachtli program. These are their reflection and suggestions for other facilitators, like themselves, who are embedded in community organizations and interested in utilizing YPAR for healing and social change.

Laura's Personal Reflection

I was born and raised in Salinas, CA and faced some of the same issues that the girls that we were working with faced. As an adolescent I did not have many opportunities to speak up about injustices that young people were facing. This is what put me on a path of becoming a youth mentor/advocate, something that I have doing for the past thirteen years of my life. About seven years into doing community work I was trained in three La Cultura Cura curriculums: Cara y Corazon, Joven Noble, and Xinachtli. This shifted my entire perspective and approach to the work that I had been doing in my community. It was the first time that I had felt empowered to utilize the values of my culture, as an asset, a tool, that could bring forth healing for myself and my community.

Although I was excited when asked if I would like to be part of the YPAR process, I was a little nervous about it because I had never been a part of anything like it before. The idea of YPAR resonated with me because I knew that it provided the girls with a platform to do their own research on a topic that mattered to them and allowed for their voices to be heard. Who better to do research and inform systems on Chicana/Latina girls in the juvenile justice system than Chicana/Latina girls that had been system impacted? This methodological approach appealed to me and appeared to do so for the girls that were a part of this project.

Throughout the YPAR process we continued to implement circulo (healing circles) during our weekly YPAR sessions, this proved to be an essential part of the process. Circulo provided the girls with the opportunity to discuss any issues that were weighing them down, things that triggered them during the research process, and provided a space to share their gifts with each other. It is my opinion that as facilitators of this process you have to be conscious of what is being asked of the young

researchers that you are working with and how this research may impact them emotionally. There were times throughout the process when it got heavy for the girls and instead of pushing them to follow the agenda Alma & I ended up holding space for them. When it got difficult we allowed for them to share how they felt and we were ok with it when they asked for a break.

My experience when working with youth is that they are honest, wise, full of energy, have solutions for the issues that are impacting them and their families. They are seeking to be heard, and often have solutions for issues that impact them and their families. YPAR is a tool that allows for youth to collect and share data with stakeholder of their communities.

Alma's Personal Reflection

I was born and raised in East Salinas and am the mother of a nine month old daughter (Annavi). I'm a daughter of nine total children and was raised by a single mother. We lived in a community where we saw disparities and injustices in demographics and income. My brother ended up in prison around the same time that my father passed away. He was the product of racial profiling. He was in gangs and ended up in prison for 8 years. For myself, I decided to leave home after high school to pursue higher education. With guidance, I have obtained a BA and Masters, although my education status has caused some separation between my family and myself. Nevertheless, I have been able to use my education to work with "at-risk" youth and have been able to work with other girls with similar experiences as my own (e.g. gender injustice, language barriers, racism, etc.). I use my story to find commonality with other girls and build relationships.

Through my Masters, I studied social influences on disparities for Latino youth in education and worked on healing through education. Though this experience I received employment after graduate school to work with Latino moms to help them navigate the education system. Through this work, I was connected with the NCN and Xinachtli. Importantly, what kept me grounded in my culture was my language (I refused to speak English until college), ballet folklorico, which helped in my healing (I've been dancing for 12 years), cultural Azteca dancing, and soccer which was really important culturally to my family and community.

There are many reasons why I believe YPAR was the best method in exploring juvenile system impacting our marginalized young Chicanas/Latinas, however, what really

inspired me to take on this project was the essence of this cyclical process; social and emotional empowerment. We were able to work with a group of young ladies that at certain instances felt they had nothing to contribute to the research or solutions to the problem. Through a healing informed pedagogy (YPAR and Xinachtli) we were able to walk together through this process that supported our emotional, mental, and spiritual health (defined below). I say we, because we as facilitators became part of this journey as well.

Emotional: Young ladies were able to build relationships, connection and respect among each other. Positive attitudes, and were able to expressed himself from the heart.

Mental: Youth were able to bring their critical thinking into practice and share their stories as a way to address root causes of problems that directly impact them, and then take action to influence recommendation to decision makers. Through the process of YPAR and Xinachtli, the youth were able to explore their intersectionality of race, gender, age, geography. The juvenile system had a huge impact on those identities and through their experiential knowledge they began to name those root causes and explore solutions.

Spiritual: Through sharing their stories, triggers came up to trauma that they have carried with them. Part of what we agreed as co-facilitators was to provide a safe space for self-reflection. We were able to ground ourselves at every meeting by using Círculos to provide opportunities for their self-care as a collective. The girls were able to face some of their traumatic experiences and find connection with other participants. This approach built unity, resiliency and most important their self-blame transitioned from “What’s wrong with you? to What happened to you.” Their critical analysis and healing informed interconnectedness were key components to understanding the root causes of problems that directly impacted them. The process helped them understand that their living situations and conditions are beyond their control and that they are part of systems that perpetuate their oppressive living condition, however, that they could also be part of the solution to change them.

Advice from Xinachtli YPAR Facilitators

As noted above, YPAR was coupled with the Xinachtli curriculum to provide a healing-informed environment where the YPAR researchers could not only engage in a process of informing system change around juvenile-justice but also

actively engage in their own collective and individual healing. As facilitators of this process, the authors see the development of a healing-informed environment as instrumental to the YPAR process when working with individuals from communities that experience oppression. Here, the authors provide advice for other facilitators who might be delving into YPAR for the first time and who are interested in our healing-informed approach to YPAR.

Do Not Underestimate the Importance of Building Relationships

There was a lot of time and consideration taken in building relationships amongst the group. The facilitators did this by using a process called “círculo” or healing circle which is an approach based on supporting the development of kinship networks among the participants. For this group it entailed the youth researchers checking in at the beginning of each session on things they were struggling with and strengths they were bringing to group. Each group wrapped up with reflecting on everything that was learned at the end of the session. The sharing out and reflecting allowed for the girls to learn more about one another and formed a deep bond amongst them. It also helped in retaining them throughout the YPAR process. It created a group dynamic that felt more like a team where they were committed to each other and to the facilitators to complete the project. They were able to feel more comfortable if they needed things to help their participation happen in the group (e.g., needing a ride) and use the group to problem solve so that they would be successful. The relationships amongst the participants and facilitators was foundational to the project.

Approach the Youth Researchers Holistically

With the relationship as a foundation, the youth researchers were more likely to talk about what they needed in and outside of the group to continue in the project. Many times, what they needed was emotional support and the group needed to offer that space. It was critical that the youth felt that this experience wasn’t just about getting a project done but that the facilitators were there to support their spiritual, emotional and physical well-being.

Reading the energy of the group, which entails being actively connected with the emotions of the group, was key in learning what the youth needed in the space in that moment. This meant that sometimes the facilitators had to put the agenda aside and even though it may have taken the project longer what was key is that the facilitators responded to the youths needs in the moment. It also indicated that the youth did not have a safe space elsewhere to share their emotional needs and worries. Allowing them to release their worries in group not only allowed them to open up, but it also helped them put

those worries aside for the moment and focus at the task at hand.

As a Facilitator, Have your Own Strong Sense of your Own Identities and Be Able to Support Cultural Development

The importance for facilitators to have a strong sense of identity from their community before walking into their work with Latina/Chicana girls is instrumental. The facilitators having a healthy ethnic identity is an important component of working with youth and underlies any program that they will partake in. Because the facilitators were very secure in their cultural identities, they could share their own learning journey with their own cultures. Their own security in their identities helped when the youth wanted to explore their own cultures more in depth, the facilitators could support them and connect them outside of the group if needed (e.g., connecting them with community traditional dance groups). In the facilitators' experiences, many youth who they have worked with in the past are now involved in exploring their own ethnic identities in more depth like doing cultural dancing and participating in sweat lodge gatherings as a way to reclaim their culture. Importantly, many of the youth are now recognizing their culture as an asset for them to draw from. It is recommended that every facilitator who is doing work with youth needs to come from a healthy personal place and do their own healing work around symptoms of oppression to be able to facilitate the YPAR process and support the youth researchers.

Center a Healing-Informed Approach

As noted, the NCN team centralizes trauma and healing informed work in all programming, no matter the program. This was foundational in the YPAR process as well. There were times throughout the process when the girls were triggered as they were conducting research on Latinas & girls in the juvenile justice system. The information that they gathered was essentially about them and/or someone they were close to. As facilitators guiding this process, it was their responsibility to create a healing informed space for the girls to share how they felt and allow for them to process their feelings. This meant that they needed to look at them as holistic individuals and not be strictly focused on the outcome of the project. The facilitators had to be attentive that young people bring their entire selves and may be living in trauma in the moment that might need attention. This work must maintain a central focus that when working with Latina youth who are system involved, the likelihood of trauma responses being expressed and present in círculo group is very high. Facilitators must center the youth and their emotional and spiritual needs, including making space for trauma responses to show up and to support them.

Step Aside. Let the Youth Researchers Take Leadership

The facilitators did their best to share and explain different methods to the YPAR process, yet it was the youth researchers that collectively made the ultimate decision on which method to use. They developed the agenda for the main event and facilitated the entire process on the day of. The facilitators had to step aside as this was the only way that their own self-empowerment would be supported and where they could connect with their internal strengths.

Develop the Identity of the Youth Researchers as Researchers

Supporting the identity development of the youth as researchers was also very important. The facilitators called them researchers from the beginning and highlighted that everyone was "in it together". The experience was called an internship and the youth were told that they were interning as researchers from the beginning. They got paid just like the facilitators and an environment of mutual learning was created. As a team, facilitators and youth researchers pushed through together on some of the challenging aspects. Developing the research questions was one of the most difficult parts but the team struggled through the process together. They were reminded that "well you are researchers and this is part of the process". By the end they were calling themselves researchers, they owned it. Their identity as researchers helped them to understand the difficult parts as part of the work and part of the process of doing research. And as researchers they were committed to getting through it.

Helping them own their identity as researchers through practice was critical. For instance, if they would defer to the facilitators to answer a question, the facilitators would hold strong and put it back on them and support them through problem solving and developing a solution. The facilitators would challenge them in a safe way and support them to grow. They made it clear that they had the solutions in them and supported a process where their own experiential knowledge could shine through. What resonated with them was the facilitators reminding them that this was their opportunity to influence the story about Latinas in juvenile justice. By the time they completed the project, they referred to one another as "fellow researchers" and the facilitators saw the influence this had on their confidence and commitment to the job.

Value both the Process and the Outcomes of the Project

Do not rush the process. It is understood that there might be certain deliverables with strict timelines and deadlines but the facilitators of this project we were able to get an extension by

the funder. Do not be scared to ask stakeholders to adjust their expectations and do not be afraid to advocate the importance of the process of obtaining trust, building relationships and creating environments of healing. In order to see growth, facilitators must respect and pay attention to the journey it takes to get there (e.g., paying attention and making space for trauma triggers). Do not let the deliverables and grant outcomes ultimately guide your work. Learn from both aspects, acknowledge and value both the outcomes and the process (including challenges) it takes to get there. For example, it could not be ignored the fact that all the girls needed transportation in order to be able to participate in the group. In addition, the facilitators had to spend time building relationships due to some community history that the girls brought with them into the group (e.g., being from competing barrios (neighborhoods)). If the facilitators would have focused solely on outcomes and grant deliverables then they would have missed these very important challenges that they needed to address early on and may have lost many of the girls along the way. For some, it might not feel like YPAR because you may feel that you are not producing something tangible but the transformation is valuable and underpins the YPAR and healing process.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper described the use of a healing-informed curriculum (Xinachtli) and YPAR to engage Latina system-involved young women as equal partners to inform detention alternatives and reform. The paper provided insights from the Xinachtli YPAR facilitators and Xinachtli YPAR researchers, as well as provided recommendations for other CBO facilitators who are considering utilizing YPAR through a healing-informed approach within their own work with Latina girls and young women.

Through this article, the authors hope that readers recognize the importance of providing a healing-informed curriculum as a step into the YPAR process and will consider such a process in their own work. It was through the Xinachtli program that the girls were able to develop their own sense of connection to community and understanding of systems of oppression. In doing their own healing work, they connected with their own self-empowerment and leadership potential. Through this initial work, they recognized the impact they could have on community and took on the YPAR process as a personal challenge and the natural next step in their own

healing journals and collective process. Through the YPAR project, they were able to continue this growth and develop tools to help them engage in systems change and action. As described by Jazzlyn, after YPAR, she was able to use her voice to advocate for change in her own community, an opportunity that she never thought possible. As the facilitators noted, carrying through the healing-informed environment into the YPAR component of the project was critical in keeping the girls, including Jazzlyn, engaged throughout the entire process of the project, including the challenging times.

Acknowledgements This article would not have been possible without the support and assistance of Dr. Heriberto Escamilla and Jerry Tello, the NoVo Foundation and the National Crittenton Foundation. The author also wishes to thank the teen girls of the Xinachtli-Ollin Project and NOXTIN: Equal Justice, for all of their effort in this project.

References

- Data USA: Salinas, CA. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/salinas-ca/#intro>.
- Dierkhising, C. B., Ko, S. J., Woods-Jaeger, B., Briggs, E. C., Lee, R., & Pynoos, R. S. (2013). Trauma histories among justice-involved youth: Findings from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 4, 20274. <https://doi.org/10.3402/ejpt.v4i0.20274>.
- Freiburger, T., & Burke, A. (2011). Status offenders in the juvenile court: The effects of gender, race, and ethnicity on the adjudication decision. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 9, 352–365. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204011399933>.
- Ozer, E. J. (2016). Youth-led participatory action research. In L. A. Jason & D. S. Glenwick (Eds.), *Handbook of methodological approaches to community-based research: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rodriguez, R., Perez-Garcia, R. A., Martinez, A. Y., & Serrata, J. V. (2015). Latina/o youth researchers respond to violence through Research & Action. *Latina/o. Psychology Today*, 2(1), 12–16.
- Serrata, J.V., & Notaria, H. (2016). Trauma Informed Principles through a Culturally-Specific Lens. http://nationallatinonetwork.org/images/Trauma-Informed-Principles-through-a-Culturally-Specific-Lens_FINAL.pdf.
- Tello & Acosta (2012). Lifting Latinos up by their “root-straps”: Moving beyond trauma through a healing-informed model to engage Latino men. Retrieved from: <http://www.nationalcompadresnetwork.org/publications/brown-paper/>.
- Teplin, L. A., Jakubowski, J. A., Abram, K. M., Olson, N. D., Stokes, M. L., & Welty, L. J. (2014). Firearm homicide and other causes of death in delinquents: A 16-year prospective study. *Pediatrics*, 134(1), 63–73.
- The Institute for Community Research (2014). Retrieved from <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/HealthyPeopleFamilies/Youth/Documents/CurriculumYPAR2014.pdf>.