Developing Youth Capacity for Community-Based Research: Evaluation Results from the Sarasota Youth Initiative

Kelli McCormack Brown, Ph.D., CHES, Carol A. Bryant, Ph.D., Danielle Landis, Ph.D., Melinda S. Forthofer, Ph.D., Robert J. McDermott, Ph.D, & Susan Calkins, BS
Florida Prevention Research Center
University of South Florida

Community-Based Prevention Marketing Project
♦ Community organization principles and social marketing
♦ Sarasota County, Florida
♦ Tobacco initiation and alcohol use among middle school age youth

Involving Youth
♦ Important to ensure validity of qualitative data
♦ We had some questions reservations about using youth as researchers
♦ Community members experience and the literature suggested youth could be partners in collaborative research (Harper & Carver, 1999)

Training
♦ Youth training different than adult training
   - cognition and conceptualization
   - attention span
   - energy level
♦ 60-page curriculum guidebook
♦ two-day training

Training Elements
♦ 10 training elements (Landis et al., 1999)
  1. Looking through a kaleidoscope
  2. You can’t win if you don’t play
  3. Student, teach thyself
  4. Using the right side eof the brain
  5. Let’s give a around of applause
  6. There’s no “I” in team
  7. Be all that you can be
  8. Déjà vu all over again
  9. See, speak and do
 10. I think I can, I think I can
Youth Training: Lessons Learned

♦ 4 primary lessons learned (Landis et al., 1999)
  1. Be flexible
  2. Begin at the beginning
  3. Practice makes perfect
  4. Believe

Evaluation of Youth Researchers

♦ Youth perceptions of their ability to moderate focus groups and conduct in-depth interviews
♦ Staff ratings of youth effectiveness in moderating focus groups

Youth Perceptions

♦ Following the youth training, the youth completed the Interviewer Efficacy Evaluation assessed their perceived ability to conduct interviews

Interviewer Efficacy Evaluation

♦ Level of confidence before and after training
  doing in-depth interviews
  listening skills
  non-biased response skills
  probing skills
  taping and note taking skills

Youth Moderator Evaluation by Staff

♦ Two sections:
  ♦ Moderator evaluation
    Poor, Fair, Good, Very Good, Excellent
    (1-5)
    Average score
  ♦ Structure of group discussion
    Yes, No (1,0)
    Average score

Moderator Evaluation

♦ Preparation for the group
♦ Manner with FG participants
♦ Effectiveness in handling group influence
Preparation for the group

♦ 4 variables
♦ In general, the moderator's understanding of the background and subject manner was rated as very good.
♦ Average score: 4.03

Manner with FG participants

♦ 13 variables
♦ Very good to excellent on being relaxed and friendly, being nonjudgmental, probing without leading, displaying neutral body language and facial expressions
♦ Good to excellent in being in while maintaining control
♦ Average score: 3.87

Effectiveness in handling group influence

♦ 6 variables
♦ Very good to excellent on discouraging simultaneous talking & permitting individual differences of opinion
♦ Good to very good in discouraging irrelevant conversation, bringing shy group members into discussion & controlling dominant members
♦ Average score: 3.63

Structure of Group Discussion

♦ Moderator's opening
♦ Warm-up
♦ Body of the group discussion
♦ Closure
♦ Post-group evaluation issues

Moderator's Opening

♦ 8 variables
♦ In general they were able to put the respondents’ at ease, establish openness, give group “rules,” develop rapport, & provide smooth transition to next phase
♦ Average score: .9

Warm-up

♦ 9 variables
♦ Moderators were able to establish rapport with FG members, give all respondents an opportunity to speak, establish the group as a “safe place,” stay within time limits, and provide a smooth transition to next phase
♦ Average score: .84
Body of the Group Discussion

♦ 8 variables
♦ Moderators were able to move from the general to the specific, obtain members’ true feelings about topics, and exhibit approve facilitating and controlling behavior
♦ Some difficulty with obtaining a depth of responses to key issues
♦ Average score: .88

Post-group evaluation issues

♦ 2 variables
♦ Youth were successful in conducting the FGs so that substantial biases were not introduced to confound individual group findings allowing findings from each group to be combined and evaluated as a whole
♦ Average score: .50

Closure

♦ 6 variables
♦ Performed by co-moderator
♦ They were able to identify key themes and summarize key ideas
♦ Difficulty with revealing strength of attitudes and identifying individual differences of opinion
♦ Average score: .82

Conclusion

♦ Based on the *Interviewer Training Efficacy Evaluation* and the *Youth Moderator Evaluation* by staff
  Youth can be quality partners in community-based action/participatory research

References


Abstract

**Issue:** Involvement of Youth as Researchers in Community-Academic Partnerships

**Setting:** Sarasota County, Florida

**Project:** In the Florida Prevention Research Center’s (FPRC) Community-Based Prevention Marketing demonstration project, involving youth as researchers was recognized as important to ensuring the validity of qualitative data on the determinants of youth initiation of smoking and alcohol use in middle school. Community input and lessons learned from previous research (e.g., Harper & Carver, 1999) suggested that youth had the potential to contribute, but task-specific training was necessary for the development of youth capacity.

**Results:** Interested youth were provided with a two-day training in focus group moderation and in-depth interviewing techniques (Landis et al., 1999). As part of a formative evaluation of the effectiveness of these attempts to involve youth as researchers, data were collected on: (1) youth perceptions of their ability to moderate focus groups and conduct in-depth interviews; and (2) staff ratings of youth effectiveness in moderating focus groups. FPRC staff also held a debriefing meeting with youth researchers to understand their perspectives on the overall experience. After participating in the training, youth reports revealed high mean levels of perceived efficacy overall and in each of four specific skill areas assessed. Ratings by staff members observing the youth researchers suggested that they exhibited strong capacity in areas of preparation, manner, handling of group influences, and management of the various phases of the data collection process.

**Lessons Learned:** Involving youth as researchers in community-based research with peers is viable. Strategies for recruiting youth with diverse backgrounds are still needed.