

Knowledge Producing Schools: Transforming young lives and communities

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Abstract: One of the four key principles that underpin the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child declares that youth have a right to be heard in all matters affecting them and that their views are taken seriously in accordance with their age and maturity (UNICEF, 2015). This paper describes how 27 middle years students from a disadvantaged community in South East Queensland were given an opportunity to be heard and how that opportunity led to positive personal change for the young adolescents and impacted positively on their teachers' understanding of curriculum and transformational pedagogy. Underpinned by a Knowledge Producing School framework (McGrath & Rowan, 2012), the young adults were instrumental in the conceptualization, planning and building of a Youth Activity Precinct in their community that included a skate park, multicultural artwork and community-based recreational facilities. Using Most Significant Change methodology we asked the middle years students and their teachers to tell a story that represented the most significant change that they had noted because of the Youth Activity Precinct. Thematic analysis of these stories indicated that in conceptualizing and developing the Youth Activity Precinct the students developed a sense of empowerment; increased pride in themselves, their work and their community; developed a sense of connectedness to their community as well as a correspondingly positive futures perspective for their community. Because of the Youth Activity Precinct, teachers in the school noted that truancy decreased, the reputation of the school and the students who attended the school had improved, and their understanding about meaningful and relevant curriculum and transformative pedagogy had been enhanced. This project demonstrates the power of Participatory Action Research (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2012) and Knowledge Producing Schools (McGrath & Rowan, 2012) to change the lives of young people and their communities.

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