

**Youth Cinema Project  
Stakeholders Report 2019**

***Youth Cinema Project:  
Working to Change the Trajectory of Students' Lives***

Prepared by the  
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CONCLUSION:

YCP holds great potential for impacting students' lives as learners by effectively implementing the research based practices that support both academic learning and social emotional learning... Research studies argue that schools create the best conditions for student learning by building caring relationships within the classroom, providing opportunities for students to interact and communicate with their peers, and helping students gain social competency by working in teams and being active learners... These research-based best practices are echoed in the findings of our study.

Teachers and students both reported that attitudes and dispositions of students were impacted - students felt excited about their work in YCP, were more focused, and engaged because of the style of active learning offered in the program. Participants shared the importance of relationships, trust and the support of their peers in getting work done, learning to manage their emotions, and figure out problems as a team. Teachers reported that students, some who had struggled academically or who were identified as resource students, used oral and written language successfully, gained confidence in sharing their thinking, and completing academic tasks in ways that had not been observed before.

These findings and the YCP practices, supported by key research studies and reports, **demonstrate the power and potential of YCP to change schools, classrooms, and the future of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**, who too often are forgotten, or are made to feel that school is not a place where they are welcome or can succeed. **Given the strong connections this study has found between the practices of YCP, and the recommendations for how schools need to shift their practices** to meet the expectations of the new standards and alleviate the current performance gaps, **we at SCALE see YCP as a curricular and instruction program that has great potential in making progress toward closing those gaps, building socially and emotionally competent students, and possibly changing the trajectory of diverse students' lives in ways we are only beginning to imagine.**



# YOUTH CINEMA PROJECT



## YCP

## RESEARCH CONNECTION

Creates

**POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTS**

and learning communities



Creating positive and caring environments to ensure all students learn.

Promotes active and social learning



Inviting active participation of students to use skills & knowledge to create meaningful products.

Provides in-depth instruction of **VOCABULARY** across multiple modalities.



Providing focused and varied opportunities to develop academic and general vocabulary.

Cultivates **SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING** competencies.



Teaching directly to develop students' social, emotional learning skills in connection to content.



# SCALE

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## Students and teachers believe that YCP...

- **Impacts their confidence** when speaking outside of YCP class --in other classes, social situations, and at home.
- Requires students to pay attention to details in writing and the impact words have on a reader's interpretation of their writing. Notably, students report that they believed experiences with writing in **YCP helped them in other academic areas** such as language arts, social studies, and school testing - and improved their ability to write in a second language.
- **Grows leaders;** students who have not usually lead before are suddenly taking charge, directing others, and helping their team be successful.
- **Students are not giving up;** they are figuring things out and working outside their comfort zone.
- **Helps students become more resilient** by trying, putting in a committed effort and learning to lead or working together to face and solve problems.



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## Youth Cinema Project: Working to Change the Trajectory of Students' Lives

*It has helped me by thinking "hey I can be more than just a girl, I can be a director."*  
[student survey]

INTRODUCTION: Research reports continue to show that public education continues to struggle with gaps in achievement and graduation rates for diverse populations. There is also evidence that some students believe that schools do not care or help them develop the social and emotional competencies needed for them to be successful in school and life (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). These challenges exist while educators and district leaders are expected to meet the shifting demands of new standards (e.g., Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards). These new standards move well beyond a focus on recall of content to an emphasis on academic language development and the importance of student discourse. Educators are now expected to support students' communication about their thinking and reasoning through multiple modalities (reading, writing, speaking, listening) and media.

The Youth Cinema Project – or YCP – was created to address these challenges. YCP brings professional filmmakers into Title 1 public schools and works with teachers to implement a challenging and standards-based curriculum to support students in some of the poorest and most linguistically diverse California communities. The overall goal is to positively impact achievement and close opportunity gaps within schools and the entertainment industry promoting greater equity and access for culturally and linguistically diverse youth. YCP's three-part focus is to:

- Help students become socially and emotionally empowered learners
- Develop students' English language competencies
- Promote students' engagement in school

The Stanford Center for Assessment, Equity and Learning (SCALE), conducted an evaluative study to investigate how YCP was meeting their goals and what teachers and students' perceived to be YCP's impact on students' language development and social emotional learning. Data collection took place during spring 2019 across three northern California school districts using quantitative and qualitative evidence, including sources from district data on student attendance and test scores, classroom observations, surveys and interviews. This report focuses most prominently on the findings from the qualitative portion of the study.

This stakeholder report is designed for superintendents and district leaders, summarizes the findings of the study in relation to four impactful and research-based practices that synthesize the work, impact and benefits of YCP. These practices include:

1. YCP creates positive environments and learning communities
2. YCP promotes active and social learning
3. YCP provides in-depth instruction of vocabulary practices
4. YCP cultivates social and emotional learning competencies

In the upcoming sections, each YCP practice is described, along with how it relates to recommendations from educational research. Examples from the study are presented to further explain each practice. The report ends with a conclusion section to summarize the potential benefits of YCP, given the study findings and research underpinnings.

### **YCP PRACTICE 1: YCP creates positive environments and learning communities**

*It has helped me work better in teams because we could stick together and help each other. [student survey]*

Our study found on-going evidence that YCP mentors and teachers worked to create positive environments and learning communities in the classrooms that centered on:

- Encouraging interactions
- Building relationships and supporting each other
- Working in collaborative and structured teams across time

**RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION:** According to educational research, creating a positive classroom environment is one of the key factors to ensuring that students are able to learn, achieve and develop holistically. A report reviewing school climate across over 70 studies found that having a positive school environment not only improved academic achievement, but also decreased the impact of poverty on the achievement gap (Berkowitz et al., 2016). The literature lists the following as key elements to include when schools are working to build positive environments:

- Respectful and trusting relationships with peers and other adults that are responsive to students' needs and interests
- Intentional community structures that provide a sense of belonging, safety, a "culture of participation" and promote student agency and leadership

**YCP FINDINGS:** Across our study we found that YCP provided continual and numerous opportunities for students to interact with their mentors, teachers and peers, and build supportive relationships. Students reported developing a sense of trust in YCP and their peers – so much so that they reported it felt like a "family." An example from a student interview illustrates the importance of interactions, relationships and trust:

*Student 1: Communication is key. So, when we're really too busy or overwhelmed, and we can't do something. We always have to tell the other person, "I'm sorry. I can't do this. Get someone else to do it." Student 2 responds: And I know (another team member) will do it because she's awesome. And so... No matter what, we always have our backs. And in reality, we (the team) are actually all pretty close friends. ...So, that's how we maintain our trust. [student interview]*

Related to the practice of creating positive school environments, we found YCP also maintains collaborative teams that serve as learning communities across all participating classrooms. These teams are structured in a way that allow students to select the job-oriented roles

involved (e.g., producer, editor, camera person) and require students to consider other team members and the larger goal of their production company as they make decisions to complete the film. Students reported feelings of pride and success during YCP due to the opportunity to make their own decisions and create a student-led product. Teachers noticed how students supported and were impacted by the support of others during YCP, noting how students often took the lead to refocus or direct others to help teams reach their goals. Examples from the data demonstrate the power of the YCP learning communities for creating a sense of belonging, support, participation, and leadership:

*I've seen kids say, "You know what, you're not really listening. You're goofing around. Can you stay on board or could you go outside for a minute." It's kind of like refocusing - These kids that are doing what usually myself or the mentors will be doing. [teacher interview]*

*...what I like about YCP is that a bunch of people come together in this group and work on this single project altogether for a while. And even though sometimes, it may get stressful, ...in the end you have to be honest. It's really fun, and really exciting to see your creation out there. And you're going to be like, "Oh, wow I did that." [student interview]*

## **YCP PRACTICE 2: YCP promotes active and social learning**

YCP you interact more. Yeah, like be more like free kind of. When you're in language arts you have to be sitting down the whole time, just like writing and copying.  
[student interview]

Through our research we found YCP consistently grounded and enacted their curricular and instructional practices from the position that learning is a social phenomenon and requires students to be active participants. The following represent the ways in which YCP promoted active and social learning:

- Engaging in collaborative conversations about content<sup>1</sup>
- Providing opportunities to make choices
- Creating real products and solving real problems

**RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION 1:** Research (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018) supports the need to establish student-centered classrooms where students actively construct knowledge and educators understand that learning is a social and emotional endeavor.

Instructional practices that promote active and social learning focus on:

- Supporting students to:
  - actively construct knowledge and connect it to experiences and interests
  - create exciting or useful products

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<sup>1</sup> Content refers here to the English Language Arts standards and the academic content knowledge related to the production of filmmaking.



- make choices and decisions
- Teacher/mentor as facilitator

YCP FINDING: Evidence from our study showed consistent evidence that students were active and social learners. We observed and gathered classroom artifacts that demonstrated students: communicating with their team members to prepare materials, filming, practicing a scene, editing footage, or reviewing and critiquing segments from their own or other teams' films to provide feedback. YCP mentors acted as facilitators asking questions of the teams to help them make decisions and solve problems such as: "What shot do we need next? Where are you going to put the camera and why?"

Examples from the study illustrate how YCP promoted active learning, and how the participants reported this impacted students' dispositions and engagement in school:

*YCP has helped me become way more social and into group work than I used to be. Because, as all these people (his peers) know, I used to be very antisocial and like closed doors, and all that. But thanks to YCP I'm more open to new things and stuff. [student interview]*

*You know, they're able to do all the skills, so I think that brings a lot for the students who generally struggle academically -- where this is accessible, it's a project-based. They are able to (do it)-- its project-based where it's not just sit and read or... sitting and doing math problems. --so, I think it definitely gives confidence. [teacher interview]*

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION 2: Research further supports fostering interactive conversation to support content learning and recommends that students engage in daily learning opportunities that integrate oral and written language (Baker et al., 2014). In small groups, students should be able to collaboratively discuss content (e.g., vocabulary) and exchange ideas, especially, for example, before more high stakes presentations (e.g., in front of the whole class).

YCP FINDING: Our study revealed that YCP requires students to actively exchange ideas in small groups or pairs multiple times a day. We observed students building and clarifying ideas with each other throughout the filmmaking process. Students reported that communicating with their peers about their script and filming ideas helped them learn the content and feel more comfortable sharing ideas in other academic situations.

*I think I learned to express different ideas to other people. So before I took this class, I wasn't able to like - communicate my different ideas like - what I'm thinking of. But now, I can like tell people, like, this could be good and like this can be done in a different way to create one scene. [student interview]*

**YCP Practice 3: YCP provides in-depth instruction of vocabulary practices across multiple modalities**

*I'm a person who speaks Spanish and English, but like when I started writing the script, it makes me think that I can write in both languages. [student interview]*

Throughout our investigation we found a range of literacy practices and behaviors that demonstrate in-depth instruction of literacy - specifically the development and use of vocabulary across the four modes of communication (listening, speaking, reading, writing).

Literacy practices revealed in YCP classrooms include:

- Listening for and using words, phrases related to academic content in relevant and appropriate ways when discussing/presenting - this includes using precise vocabulary and terminology while speaking.
- Engaging in a range of collaborative conversations about text or topics - this includes soliciting and providing verbal feedback related to text or a topic, negotiating with peers, offering ideas, participating in conversations about text or a topic.
- Reading and understanding the meaning of words and phrases from different types of text, including media- this includes reading various types of text and media, and reading for different purposes to learn new vocabulary and terminology.
- Producing clear and coherent writing, with precise language/domain-specific vocabulary - this includes editing and improving writing abilities, including media and the use of precise language, such as technical language.

**RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION 1:** According to research, many students from underrepresented populations (e.g., ELLs and students from low SES) need frequent quality experiences that will help them develop the complex and necessary academic vocabulary essential for literacy learning (Baker et al., 2016; August & Shanahan, 2006). One key recommendation to support literacy learning is to ensure that students have in-depth and varied opportunities to develop both academic and general vocabulary. Specifically, to support literacy learning, English Language Learners should receive in-depth focused instruction on vocabulary, with opportunities to engage with the vocabulary in a variety of ways, through multiple modalities. Academic vocabulary should be scaffolded and include words: 1) used in other content areas; 2) with multiple meanings; 3) with affixes (Baker et al., 2016).

**YCP FINDING:** Through our study, we found that YCP provided daily routines and activities that engage students with varied opportunities to learn and practice academic and general vocabulary related to the many aspects of filmmaking. In addition, our research revealed that all of the activities observed in YCP required all students to engage with academic vocabulary and communicate with their peers using this vocabulary. Academic vocabulary in YCP met the three recommended types of academic vocabulary words. For example, YCP students regularly used words with multiple meanings (e.g., cut, grip, take, reflect) and affixes (e.g., record, edit, produce).

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION 2: Research further suggests that when teaching vocabulary, students should engage with language through additional modes of communication (i.e., speaking, listening, reading and writing). Providing instruction through multiple modes supports a deeper learning of vocabulary moving beyond rote memorization and superficial use (Carlo et al., 2008). Students should engage in discussions that include vocabulary from text – and allow them to provide their opinion or explanation, grounding those ideas in text or other media (Baker et al., 2016; Lesaux et al., 2010).

YCP FINDING: Again, consistent with research, YCP provided varied opportunities related to all four modes of communication (reading, writing, speaking and listening). Students were observed leading and initiating conversations that required the use of academic and general vocabulary. Students believed that being in YCP helps them ask questions of others in order to participate in a conversation or follow directions. Data revealed that students believe YCP improves their capacity to be better listeners, meaning they are able to listen for details (e.g., specific words) when information is spoken to them. Teacher and students reported that YCP helps improve their writing. The ways in which YCP supports the writing mode of communication are further explored below.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATION: When engaged in writing, research suggests that students should be able to use the vocabulary in a range of writing structures and purposes (e.g., short answer, labels, paragraphs...) and other writing activities (e.g., “charades, sketching, and drawing to represent word meanings can help increase exposure to and experience with target academic words,” Baker et al, 2016, p. 21).

YCP FINDING: Our analysis revealed that students in YCP have multiple opportunities to engage in a range of writing and editing activities. Such opportunities included, writing pitches, full scripts, storyboards, shot list and “the slate”, daily reflections, feedback to peers, including feedback about their films and letters and forms that are constructed to request locations for filming and additional actors. Students must edit their writing and the writing of others and attend to details in their writing, including the use of precise academic language (e.g., types of shots/angles, colors of clothing, details with hair/make-up/set design). Overall, students believed that YCP helped them learn to pay attention to details in writing, specifically the impact words have on a reader’s interpretation of their writing. Notably, students reported their experiences with writing in YCP helped them in other academic areas such as language arts, social studies, and school testing – and improved their ability to write in a second language.

*Also like, it helps you like write in detail. Like something you just write she or he, but who is she or he? Like you don’t know who that is? [student interview]*

#### **YCP PRACTICE 4: YCP cultivates social, emotional learning competencies**

*The students... A lot of them are learning how to be resilient. They're learning that I can't just give up. [teacher interview]*

Findings from our study made it clear that YCP directly and continuously provided students with opportunities to practice and develop their social and emotional competence. The fostering of social emotional learning occurred across the following areas:

- Self advocacy
- Leadership
- Resilience
- Self management/Agency

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION 1: Educational research explains that social and emotional skills are “malleable;” they can be influenced throughout a student’s life, given the right opportunities for growth and development (Farrington et al., 2012). Given this, the key recommendation for educators is to intentionally foster the development of social and emotional learning skills and attributes. The literature claims the best approach is to “recognize that academic, social and emotional learning are interconnected,” (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018, p.22) and should be developed in relation to each other. Studies demonstrate the formal teaching of SEL has resulted in multiple improvements for students across grade levels and urban, suburban and rural settings including: improved SEL skills, improvement in behavior, increased test scores and grades, and improved self-image (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). It is further recommended that programs focus on one or more of the following when building SEL into their programs:

- Provide explicit, focused and active SEL instruction
- Integrate SEL instruction into the teaching of subject matter
- Infuse SEL opportunities into all parts of the school day

YCP FINDING: Across our study we observed how YCP provided on-going and explicit opportunities for students to develop and reflect on the development of their social and emotional competencies in relation to their academic learning. Creating their films and working in teams to problem solve and create products provided students opportunities to advocate for themselves, manage their emotions, lead others, and practice resiliency. Students reported that YCP helped them learn to step up and speak out, helped their team members work together to complete their film, and learned to better manage their emotions. It is clear that YCP integrated the development of social and emotional learning into the everyday work of creating a film, so it became part of the fabric of students’ daily learning. This integration impacts SEL competence and confidence. Examples from the study demonstrate the impact and potential such an approach had from teachers and students’ points of view:

*I don't think that a lot of students do that very often --it's hard to communicate your emotions. So it's (YCP) really focusing on a lot of like what's going on, why are you mad, why are you frustrated --let's pull it back a little bit, like how are you affecting this*

*person. So there is a lot of conversation much more than I thought --when it comes to social, emotional learning and well-being of the students... I see some of their attitudes change for the better. ...So I do think it has an impact. [teacher interview]*

*With communication, YCP has helped me in a way because, I guess I used to always be so quiet, and like never really talk about my opinion. But now, when I see something wrong, - or when I'm going against something, YCP has helped me state my opinion out instead of just staying back and being quiet. [student interview]*

*It has helped me because when I am in YCP I have to work with my team to get things done like our films, and in class if I have to work in my group I have the confidence to speak up when they aren't working or when I need help. [student survey]*

**RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION 2:** Current research (Ferguson et al., 2015) advocates the need to correct the imbalance between schools' emphasis on testing and focus on students' development of agency – as demonstrated, for example, through agency-related behaviors (i.e., punctuality, good conduct, effort, help seeking and conscientiousness). According to a 2015 report from Harvard University, “young people with high levels of agency do not respond passively to their circumstances; they tend to seek meaning and act with purpose to achieve the conditions they desire in their own and others' lives” (p. 1). To promote students' development of agency, research recommends supporting students' learning through seven qualities of effective teaching (care, confer, captivate, clarify, consolidate, challenge, and classroom management)

**YCP FINDINGS:** Through our research we found that YCP teaching practices' and observed daily support of students' learning experiences align with the recommended teaching qualities to support students' development of agency. For example, our data revealed that students in YCP were *captivated* and *challenged* through the curriculum and learning activities. In our observations, students were observed on-task and demonstrating respect for one another (*classroom management*). When needing support from mentors, students were shown *care*, without being over scaffolded. Teachers and students reported that students were encouraged to make informed independent decisions aligned to learning goals (*confer*). In addition, students and teachers reported that students were encouraged to provide each other constructive feedback and to persist during challenges, including encouragement to seek help from others if needed (*clarify*).

**CONCLUSION:** YCP holds great potential for impacting students' lives as learners by effectively implementing the research based practices that support both academic learning and social emotional learning by creating positive climates in schools and classrooms, and engaging them in active learning communities that foster their social and emotional development. Research studies argue that schools create the best conditions for student learning by building caring relationships within the classroom, providing opportunities for students to interact and communicate with their peers, and helping students gain social competency by working in teams and being active learners. As noted in the research literature, providing these teaching

and learning structures and practices, that attends to the development of the “whole child,” can improve achievement outcomes, student engagement and behavior.

These research-based best practices are echoed in the findings of our study. Teachers and students both reported that attitudes and dispositions of students were impacted - students felt excited about their work in YCP, were more focused, and engaged because of the style of active learning offered in the program. Participants shared the importance of relationships, trust and the support of their peers in getting work done, learning to manage their emotions, and figure out problems as a team. Teachers reported that students, some who had struggled academically or who were identified as resource students, used oral and written language successfully, gained confidence in sharing their thinking, and completing academic tasks in ways that had not observed before.

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