



High-Quality Afterschool Programs for LatinX Youth

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Quality is an important aspect of effective programs. Although potentially effective for all youth, experiences of high-quality programs can vary, particularly for under-represented minority



Figure 1 Photograph permission provided by second author.

“Based on the experiences and perspectives of low-income LatinX middle school participants of a math enrichment afterschool program in Southern California, we identified four culturally responsive practices: (1) the promotion of an inclusive, safe, and respectful program climate, (2) engaging in personal conversations, (3) facilitating opportunities for mutual and math learning across diverse cultures and perspectives, and (4) the promotion of math and a range of social-emotional skills across contexts.”

youth from economically marginalized communities. Culturally responsive practices are necessary to achieve high-quality and equitable science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) afterschool programs.

Highlights

LatinX youth’s cultural experiences are related to the ways in which they experience afterschool program activities and interact with staff.

To better support diverse youth and their math and STEM learning, serious and thoughtful consideration should be given to the promotion of culturally responsive practices.

The overall purpose of the study was to identify and examine culturally responsive practices in the context of a high-quality university math enrichment afterschool program serving approximately 120 low-income LatinX middle school youth from underserved schools in Southern California. Approximately 98% of the students from these schools are LatinX and over 90% are free/discounted school lunch recipients. Approximately 15% (compared to the California state average of 38%) of the students at these schools meet or exceed the state math standards. In the program, approximately 80 college students are recruited as mentors for youth each year across an academic year. Mentors are expected to form positive relationships with students, encouraged to share their experiences as college students, and show an interest in students' lives. The program integrates weekly collaborative enrichment sessions for youth led by mentors with additional university outreach including STEM-focused field trips, and college information-sessions for families.

Methods

Through in-depth interviews with 28 youth participants of the program, our research sought to identify positive program and relational features and understand how they were implemented in culturally responsive ways in the program. We asked youth to reflect on their experiences in the program and their interactions with their mentors. We examined youth's perceptions of cultural representation in the program, the different culture-related supports they have experienced in the program, and their general thoughts about how the program and their mentors could change or improve to better support their culture.

Results

- Culturally responsive practices are a necessary and defining aspect of program quality.
- A safe, inclusive, and respectful climate is fundamental for culturally responsive practices.
- Engaging in personal conversations, including small talk, can make a difference.

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?

We provide research-based recommendations to support afterschool advocates in designing high-quality afterschool programs for under-represented minority youth by implementing culturally responsive practices. Our work was conducted in a math afterschool program (MATH CEO: <https://sites.ps.uci.edu/mathceo/>) established through a university-community partnership that focuses on serving low-income Latin middle school students. Through a Community Psychology perspective, our findings reveal and describe various practices that can be leveraged by afterschool staff and personnel to provide youth with culturally responsive experiences. Our goal is to make our research accessible to various communities who work with youth, further the discussion on culturally responsive practices, and promote equitable STEM learning opportunities for youth from diverse backgrounds.

- Mutual learning and the promotion of skills across contexts are important for youth voice and contribution.
- Both positive program structure and staff practices are necessary for culturally responsive programs.

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation: Our findings contribute to the growing research on high-quality afterschool programs and the importance of identifying and understanding culturally responsive practices. Our research approach builds on existing frameworks including cultural competence as well as inclusive teaching and emphasizes the importance of considering youth as active, co-producers of their learning environments. To fully understand culturally responsive practices, research on afterschool programs must go beyond examining a static set of skills or knowledge or the mere representation of culture as an aspect of inclusive teaching. Culturally responsive practices involve youth bringing their cultural backgrounds values, and everyday experiences to afterschool programs which influence how they think, act, and learn, and contribute to the shaping of the broader program culture.

Practice: Our findings provide strong evidence for why culturally responsive practices are an integral and defining aspect of high-quality afterschool programs. Moreover, we provide evidence-based recommendations for how culturally responsive practices can be implemented in afterschool programs. Particularly, our findings reveal the importance of program staff and program structure in designing culturally responsive practices and equitable STEM learning opportunities for youth. For example, our findings highlight the importance of personal conversations that youth and mentors can have and the importance of having a program structure that provides opportunities to engage in same- and cross-ethnic/race interactions.

Social Action: Although scholars have begun to pay greater attention to the importance of promoting cultural responsiveness as an inseparable and integral part of afterschool program quality, there has been limited attention given to how to achieve it and what it looks like in practice. Research on afterschool programs, including those specific to STEM enrichment, have only scratched the surface when it comes to the identification and understanding of culturally responsive practices for under-represented minority youth. There is a critical need for more research in this area, particularly LatinX youth from low-income communities, who may benefit most from these spaces. Our study provides important implications for understanding the potential impacts of enrichment spaces on youth's broader STEM engagement and learning.

Similar Settings: Our findings can support STEM afterschool programs advocates who seek to serve low-income and under-represented minority youth. We provide specific strategies on how to implement culturally responsive practices. Additionally, our findings can be used to supplement and improve STEM afterschool program staff training efforts where staff can learn more about various practices that will promote diverse students' STEM engagement and learning.

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