

USE OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME WITH URBAN YOUNG ADOLESCENTS: A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF SUCCESSFUL NATIVITYMIGUEL SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Adopting an asset-based and resilience-building framework, the present study examines the effects of out-of-school activities on advancing the academic achievement, leadership skills, and service orientation of youth of color placed at risk who attended one of over 60 independent urban middle schools that follow the NativityMiguel model of education. These out-of-school activities include late afternoon and evening academic support and other activities, such as sports and clubs, community service activities, and a holistic summer enrichment program. The present study summarizes results of individual and small group interviews with graduates and staff that address the benefits of the out-of-school programs. These benefits include being prepared for later academic success, developing effective leadership skills, belonging to a community of supportive faculty and peers, and developing a strong commitment to service and activism oriented toward addressing the needs of underserved communities. Also addressed are staffing and planning issues that contribute to successful out-of-school programs and implications for including these efforts in other schools.

THEORETICAL AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

Out-of-school programs for urban youth have been viewed as potentially important deterrents of youth crime and sources of positive social development and academic achievement (Hanlon, Simon, O'Grady, Carswell, & Callaman, 2009; Williams & Bryan, 2013). A report from the Grant Foundation (Kane, 2004) that summarized the findings of four studies showed that after-school care contributed to greater parental involvement in schools and higher levels of student academic engagement that included completing more homework assignments. Other research as well (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; National Center for Time & Learning, 2010; Roth, Malone, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010) found that overall positive changes occurred in participants' self-perceptions, connectedness to school, social behaviors, school grades, and achievement test scores.

In a study aimed at countering the typical deficit-focused research on urban youth with a strength-based approach, Williams and Bryan (2013) identified three sets of factors that were commonly found in high achieving African-American youth. These three factors were: (a) home life, which involved school-based parenting practices, personal stories of hardship, positive mother-child relationships, and extended family networks; (b) school factors, that included supportive school-based relationships, school-oriented peer culture, good teaching, and extracurricular school activities; and (c) community factors, involving social support networks and out-of-school time activities. While this research has indicated that out-of-school time activities are typically the responsibility of the community, the NativityMiguel schools incorporate out-of-school activities into their regular educational program. Whether the activities are provided by the schools or by the community, they serve as physically and psychologically safe spaces for students with opportunities to develop new skills and interests, connect in a positive way with adults and peers, and grow in their abilities to resist negative influences of high poverty neighborhoods.

The family, school, and community factors noted above represent sources of social capital that help shape high expectations and provide information, support, and resources for historically underserved urban students of color (Williams & Bryant, 2013; Fenzel & Richardson, 2017). Well-developed out-of-school time programs also have the potential to help these students gain access to community members who can contribute to their success in a racist society and awaken in youth a desire, along with the skills, to find a new way of life and contribute to breaking the intergenerational cycles of poverty. The NativityMiguel schools recognize their role in showing urban youth a different path, and out-of-school time can be a vital factor in students' transformation. Oftentimes, urban students have few good quality community health and educational resources to access and many live with family members struggling with the effects of poverty, poor mental health, and substance abuse (Harper & Associates, 2014). More than providing a safe haven, strong out-of-school time activities can provide opportunities to build social capital and hopefulness to help bring about change in the students' families and communities.

Good quality out-of-school programs, then, serve to protect urban youth from being drawn into delinquent activity while they also provide a positive trajectory for healthy social and academic development through increased resilience and a focus on asset development that enables youth to respond effectively to the stressors of urban life (Carter Andrews, 2012). These programs serve as part of an ecology of factors, which also include high quality parent relationships, relationships with caring and supportive teachers and resilient peers, and strong school bonds (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Gaenzle, Kim, Lin, & Na, 2012; Williams & Bryan, 2013), that contribute to increased resilience and academic success and persistence.

The driving force and guiding premise of the NativityMiguel schools is to provide excellent learning opportunities for traditionally underserved youth in high poverty areas. There is a theory of three systems of education in the United States in which the first system prepares some students to graduate high school and move onto college, while the second system has no expectation of some students finishing even high school. The third system, or "Third America" (Carter Andrews, 2016, p. 45), assumes that some students, particularly young men of color, are simply the collateral damage of a failed system in which they will move directly into the prison pipeline. President Barak Obama shed national light on this with his 2014 initiative, *My Brother's Keeper* (Wood & Harper, 2015) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) created a national model to support students of color (Vela, Flamez, Sparrow, & Lerma, 2016). Both programs seek ways to tap into the potential of underserved students and look to faculty and school administration to help them establish social capital in order to succeed in life and provide servant leadership that can help address problems of poverty, hopelessness, and social exclusion. The NativityMiguel schools recognize their role in "positive racial socialization" (p. 53) in order to create a "scholar identity" (p. 54) among students of color, along with an understanding of the impact that racism has had on students' social-emotional development, academic attitudes, and behaviors (Carter Andrews, 2016).

A major benefit of the extended time the students spend together in the NativityMiguel programs is a sense of brotherhood that is created among the students and staff (Fenzel, 2009; Fenzel & Richardson, 2017). In addition, Aldana's (2016) work demonstrated the impact of building a sense of brotherhood among Latino adolescents at an all-Catholic high school. By adopting this as a goal for the academic year, school personnel have found that it created a group identity among the students and staff that transcended the time in the classroom. Extracurricular activities and out-of-school time events afforded opportunities to further develop the bonds of brotherhood that provided

both a sense of belonging as well as the school-oriented peer going culture found in William and Bryan's 2013 work.

Out-of-school programming in alternative urban NativityMiguel middle schools for students placed at risk has been an essential component of the educational model that has guided the operation of more than 60 such schools for over 25 years (Fenzel, 2009). These urban schools have a reputation for accelerating the academic and social development of their students despite the fact that most of them enter the school one year or more behind grade levels in standardized test performance and experience the daily stress of high-poverty neighborhoods. The comprehensive, holistic educational approach of the schools includes out-of-school afternoon, Saturday, and summer programs that last from four to six weeks that address academic, social, spiritual, and leadership skill development. Using a resilience and asset-based framework, this study examines the nature of these programs and perceptions of students, teachers, and parents of the benefits students derive from them.

METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

This paper brings together aspects of research conducted over a 9-year period and includes multiple observations and interviews at seven alternative urban middle schools that follow the NativityMiguel model of education. These data were collected in two waves and include interviews with students, graduates, and teachers of the schools. NativityMiguel schools enroll between 60 and 100 students in grades 5-8 or 6-8 with approximately 90% of students qualifying for the FARMs program. Approximately fifty percent of students are African American and 39% are Latina/o. (See Fenzel, 2009; NativityMiguel Coalition, n.d., for more information.)

Data for the proposed paper include small group and individual interviews with 47 NativityMiguel students and graduates during Wave I and 64 students and graduates during Wave II. Parents were interviewed as well in the first wave and administrators and teachers were included in both data collections. The first wave of research (see Fenzel, 2009; Fenzel & Monteith, 2008) was designed to examine the extent to which NativityMiguel schools were successful in advancing students' academic skill development and educational attainment and to understand the aspects of the school programs that contributed to this success. During the second wave of research, researchers examined the quality of support provided NativityMiguel graduates and graduates' perceptions of the long-term benefits of their NativityMiguel education, with a particular focus on the effectiveness of the graduate support program and the value of other out-of-school activities during the middle school years.

Semi-structured interviews lasted 45-60 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed by a member of the research team; the first author also took notes on observations and interviews. The authors used NVivo11 to code interview responses and undertook several levels of examination to arrive at themes that spoke to the lived experiences of the respondents during and following their time in middle school and the benefits they received from their programs, including out-of-school aspects. These themes emerged around central issues of community and resilience.

Out-of-School Programs

The types of out-of-school programs that are addressed in the present study include afternoon or evening study halls, tutoring, and homework assistance, community service activities,

sports and other co-curricular activities, summer programs, and graduate support. Each of these programs is described below.

Academic Support

The NativityMiguel school day, which on average is 9.2 hours long (NativityMiguel Coalition, n.d.), includes time for meals, regular classroom instruction, academic support, and activities. The extended academic support time includes tutoring, homework support, and time for independent reading, working on projects, and study. Volunteers are recruited from local high schools, colleges, churches, and the community at large to work with students and a school staff member oversees the operation of this aspect of the school program. This program provides additional time for learning and skill development in a more informal setting and makes it possible for many students to complete their homework and projects in a safe and quiet setting the sort of which students may not find in their homes. Some schools provide academic support on Saturdays as well.

Service and Activism

An important aspect of the faith-based foundation of the NativityMiguel schools is the commitment to serving others, and the students engage in a number of group service activities that include visits to retirement communities, working in a soup kitchen, advocating for just corporate practices, and many others.

Sports and Other Activities

Most NativityMiguel schools have a sports program in which students can join a team that competes with other schools, take part in physical education and intramural games, or participate in a club that involve activities such as producing a school newsletter, learning chess, horseback riding, and other activities that are introduced by different members of the staff.

Summer Camps

One of the most memorable experiences recounted by graduates are the various summer programs that, along with an academic enrichment component, provide opportunities for leadership development and navigating physical and emotional challenges. A few schools provide a multi-week residential camp away from the city where students can hike, canoe, play team sports, and take on other kinds of physical challenges. Students often sleep in multi-grade cabins that provide leadership opportunities for senior students and an understanding of the ethos of the school for newer ones. Graduates recall the summer camp experience as one that contributes to strong bonding to one another and the school. Some sort of summer program is found at the vast majority of schools in the NativityMiguel Coalition, which, according to its website (n.d.), provides an average of an additional 22 days of programming beyond the number of regular school days.

Graduate Support

Designed to help students gain admission to and graduate from high performing high schools and to pursue post-secondary education, the graduate support process generally begins in seventh grade at which time students learn about the various independent, parochial, and public school options available to them and for which they would qualify. Graduate support administrators meet with the students and parents or guardians to walk them through the process of selecting and applying to high schools. They also visit the graduates in their high schools, help them succeed academically, and help prepare them for post-secondary education or careers.

RESULTS

Benefits to Students

Observations showed that out-of-school activities were well organized and well received by students. Students at all schools had opportunities for physical or other (e.g., art, music, newspaper) activity at the end of the regular academic schedule before they attended late afternoon or evening study hall or homework help sessions. With respect to community service, a graduate of a school in the Midwest noted during Wave II interviews that he learned that he could make a difference in someone's life through middle school service that he continued through high school and college and into his adult life where he mentors young Latinos and also works with elderly citizens. Another graduate remarked how the volunteer work he started when in middle school has continued and expanded in his adult life.

A number of graduates remarked how the service experiences they participated in during middle school had led them to become more involved in service and activism beyond just fulfilling what was required during high school. One college graduate recalled this influence in the following way that also included his preparation for leadership:

I think the major part was the volunteering at such a young age. Like we would go to an elderly home around the corner or special Olympics and we didn't realize it at the time because we were so young, but we can see that we made a really big difference, and I always kept that with me that I can make a big difference to somebody even though it's not really a big deal for me. That you can impact somebody's life like and put them in a straight and better path if you volunteer. I volunteer a lot with the younger Latinos 'cause I always wanted that older role model. So I see myself in them so that I can get ahead in life. I volunteered a lot in high school and now I am volunteering with the elderly. I think it was just that being here and that model of being a leader. They put us in situations and activities and classes and subconsciously you were getting all these leadership skills that you use in the real world and that I use to this day.

With respect to the extended day academic support programs, students and graduates expressed some dislike of the long day at school but they also were very appreciative of how the additional programs enabled them to acquire the skills and self-confidence to succeed in academically and socially demanding high schools and colleges. At one school for boys and girls in the Northeast, an alumna discussed how the extended day program contributed to her sense of community at the school, gave her greater confidence in her academic and leadership abilities, and helped her overcome her hesitancy to trust teachers who reached out to her and challenged her. In a focus group interview with five 6th-graders (Wave I), students expressed liking the long day because they got to know each other better, received help with subjects they were struggling with, played "real" (competitive) team sports, and went on field trips. One student indicated how a field trip on a large ship where students were given different responsibilities gave her a sense of contributing as part of a team. Students also expressed how in sports and field trips, teachers helped students learn to address interpersonal conflicts by expressing themselves verbally instead of through fighting.

The following response from a high school student who graduated from an all-male NativityMiguel school and was participating in a small focus group summarizes the statements made by a number of graduates.

Staying at school until 6 o'clock, I didn't really like it all that much but it was kind of worth it because you got all that help during study hall and with all the sports and all. [Facilitator: "And you saw the results in your standardized tests?"]. Oh, yeah. Myself at the end of it I felt it was almost normal to be at this level of education and then you meet other kids and you say, wow, I really got something special.

With respect to summer activities, most of the schools held programs at retreat centers or camps, as well as the school building. Several programs included a sleep-over component with half of the day devoted to academic enrichment, especially in literacy, and an afternoon component that included activities such as hiking, boating, sports, art, and technology. Daily prayer and reflection and leadership development were important aspects also. The original NativityMiguel school set the standard for summer activity in that the students—all boys—attend a seven-week camp in the Adirondacks. Students are assigned to a mixed-grade advisory group that sleeps in the same cabin together and meets nightly for discussions with a teacher. Three faculty of the school, some of whom were alumni, spoke strongly of the sense of "brotherhood" that the summer experience provided that stays with the boys during the regular school year. Rising 8th-grade students are expected to provide leadership for their group and the school. Several teachers commented that the summer camp experiences help the students internalize the standards for behavior that reduces misbehavior back at school. A parent from a girls' school indicated how much the summer program helped her daughter come out of her shell and engage with other children and adults with confidence.

The summer camps also enable students to strengthen their academic skills, with a great deal of time devoted to reading and the analysis and discussion of books. One student indicated that she felt the summer reading program helped her enjoy reading for the first time and another graduate of a single-sex school for girls boasted: "I love to read really complicated books now." One of us (Fenzel) also observed a group of seventh graders conduct a stream study with test tubes and charts in hand, collecting data that they would then analyze and draw conclusions about the health of the stream. This hands-on learning was then connected in the fall to a field trip aboard a research vessel on the Chesapeake Bay.

Most graduates continue their connections to their NativityMiguel school through high school, college, and beyond by serving as camp leaders, mentors for younger students and graduates, or tutoring volunteers. Others remarked how they remain connected to their classmates and other graduates of their school through the Graduate Support Program, which helps them succeed in high school, provides financial and emotional support and mentoring, visits with them to address challenges they encounter in high school, and helps them prepare for and seek college admission. A number of graduates reported how this support and follow through from the graduate support director has helped them overcome difficulties that could have led them to drop out of high school and choose a less productive life path.

Staffing

Providing a comprehensive educational program with substantial out-of-school components requires considerable staffing. NativityMiguel schools typically assign responsibilities for directing the summer program, after-school tutoring and homework help, volunteer recruitment, and organizing sports activities as part of teachers' workloads. Many schools make use of AmeriCorps members to support the out-of-school programs in the summer and regular school year. In addition,

some schools also provide opportunities for graduates to become a part of the camp staff that enables them to continue to develop their leadership skills and provide service to the current middle school students.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The out-of-school programs addressed in the present study have become a particularly valuable aspect of the NativityMiguel model of urban schooling that take place after the regular instructional school day and during the summer. These programs provide considerable benefits to the students, the vast majority of whom are students of color from high poverty contexts, in terms of academic skill development and resilience that enables them to persist in their education, consistent with other research (Williams & Bryan, 2013). They also provide opportunities for the development of a sense of belongingness and community among the students and with the staff. Students are afforded the time, support, and activities that enable them to develop physical and social competencies, strengthen their resilience and emerging identities, deepen their academic learning and connection to the school, and learn to extend themselves as leaders and social servants.

As other schools and school systems consider the kinds of programs beyond the regular school day that would support the academic and social development of their middle school and high school students, they would be wise to budget and plan carefully. NativityMiguel schools have been able to make use of motivated, energetic young college graduates through AmeriCorps and other similar service organizations to supplement to work of the professional teaching staffs, as well as volunteers from local high schools and colleges and the community. Some of the schools also make use of mentors from the community to help support and encourage graduates through high school. As schools develop their plans to building a successful out-of-school program, they should be mindful of the importance of careful planning needed to recruit, train, and support effective volunteers who are committed to the mission of the school and monitor the effectiveness of their efforts. A cost-benefit analysis of using volunteers and inexperienced AmeriCorps-type teachers should also be included as a part of the planning, along with a mechanism for assessing the benefits of the various out-of-school activities relative to the program goals. In addition, since NativityMiguel schools require little if any financial support from the families, securing funds to sustain the out-of-school programs should be a part of the planning process as well.

NativityMiguel schools have shown that these out-of-schools programs provide considerable short- and long-term benefits for the students during their middle school years and afterward (Fenzel, 2009; Fenzel & Richardson, 2017). With careful attention to detail and planning, these programs can be implemented in other educational contexts to provide similar benefits for more urban students placed at risk.

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