

Youth Development Practices and The Latino Community:
Best Practices for Latino Youth Development

Nydia De Alba-Johnson
University of Minnesota

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A copy of this manuscript may be obtained at the following website:
<http://measurement.class.umn.edu/aera/papers.html>. This manuscript is adapted from an expanded report that includes detailed information about Latino youth serving organizations reviewed in this study. To obtain a copy of this report, contact La Escuelita 4137 Bloomington Avenue South Minneapolis, MN 55407, www.laescuelita.net.

Youth Development Practices and The Latino Community: Best Practices for Latino Youth Development

It is clear that Latinos are the fastest growing youth population in the United States. Youth population projections for the United States indicate that by the year 2020 Latinos will comprise nearly one out of four youth (Chapa & Valencia, 1993; Duany & Pittman, 1990). Despite these projections that Latino youth¹ will soon make up 25% of the U.S. youth population, developmental investigators have focused little attention on the research of Latino youth development as demonstrated by an extensive review of the youth development literature (Rodriguez & Morrobel, 2002). In this review, the authors found that only 67 of 1,010 empirical articles published in six mainstream journals reported results for Latino youth. Furthermore, the little research conducted on Latino youth development has been deficit oriented rather than asset oriented.

This lack of attention to Latino youth development could lead to economic and social problems such as declines in worker skill levels, below average incomes, and increases in health and social service costs in this country, all problems that could seriously hurt the economy and structure of this society (Mehan, Hubbard & Villanueva, 1994). To change these projections, it is necessary that states, schools, colleges, and communities pay more attention to issues that pertain to Latino youth, especially if American society wants to provide equal opportunities for everyone.

¹ In this manuscript Latino youth is used as a term to describe adolescents who identify their ethnic heritage in Mexico, the Caribbean, Central and South America.

It is important, therefore, that youth development practices foster not only developmentally appropriate environments, but also culturally sensitive contexts that target specific needs of Latino youth, promoting more adequate strategies that help them achieve positive development. This does not mean that youth service programs need to be “exclusive” regarding the population they serve; but it is important to consider that Latino youth have particular characteristics and obstacles to overcome such as: language barriers, poverty, immigration, acculturation, low educational attainment, low self-esteem, and mobility; obstacles that place them in very disadvantaged situations (Chahin, 1993; Chapa & Valencia, 1993; Hurtado & Gauvain, 1997; Narro-Garcia, 2001; Orum, 1986; Valdivieso, 1990). These obstacles need to be understood and attended to help Latino youth meet their specific needs and overcome these barriers to become successful and active participants in their society.

Purpose

The main purpose of this study is to identify elements and practices that are specific to Latino youth development organizations, practices that have been successful in helping Latino youth overcome the barriers they face and develop their strengths as participants of society.

Much attention has been focused on youth development as a response to solve many of the problems youth are having; problems that are also affecting families, schools, and communities. As a result, youth development programs are becoming relevant sources to help adolescents gain the necessary competencies to meet the challenges they face as they mature (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray & Foster, 1998). Yet, there is a growing concern about the effectiveness of national youth organizations in serving different cultural groups,

as well as a lack of research in youth development practices that have considered demographic trends (Pittman, 1991; Rodriguez & Morrobel, 2002; Waxman, Huang & Padron, 1997).

Recent statistics show that youth minority groups are growing and that these groups generally face different barriers that put them at risk and often impede them from succeeding in society. The growth of these numbers is contributing to the recognition that there are a number of very real cultural differences among youth in this society, differences that need to be considered by youth development organizations and policy makers.

It is the objective of this report to clarify the need to exercise culturally appropriate youth development practices in organizations serving Latino youth by (a) describing the relevance of contextual background including demographic and educational characteristics of Latino youth, and (b) presenting the important role played by culture in the development of youth practices.

Contextual Background

Based on a Bureau of the Census report (Therrien & Ramirez, 2000) in 2000, 32.8 million Latinos resided in the United States from which 35.7 % were less than 18 years of age, this percentage compared to 23.5 % of non-Latino Whites shows that Latinos have much younger age distributions than white population. In addition, long-term projections of youth population indicate that Latino youth will triple in size, increasing from 6 million in 1982 to nearly 19 million in 2020, a time in which they will comprise 25% of the national youth population. A remarkable increase considering that African Americans will comprise 16% while other minority groups will comprise 4% of the total national youth population (Chapa & Valencia, 1993).

These numbers clearly illustrate that Latino youth have become the fastest growing youth population in the United States. Latinos make up a significant percentage of the population in many cities and will continue to comprise larger portions of school age and college-age populations. This rapid growth of Latino youth population stresses the need to pay more attention to issues and policies related to Latino youth and implies that Latinos will become important to the economic and social well being of the United States (Chapa & Valencia, 1993; Mehan, Hubbard & Villanueva, 1994; Valdivieso, 1990).

However, a number of obstacles impede Latino youth from developing competencies to succeed in this country and society. For instance different sociodemographic reports show that Latinos are the most undereducated group in the United States. The educational condition of Latinos has been characterized by:

- below-grade level enrollment
- high drop out rates
- high rates of illiteracy
- a low number of school years completed (Orum, 1986)

All these characteristics have led to low graduation rates for youth and young adults. Recent data (Therrien & Ramirez, 2000) indicate that among Latinos only 46% had completed high school or had some college and only 10% had a bachelor's degree. This low educational attainment generally contributes to lower-status occupations that in turn translate into lower-income and higher poverty rates among Latinos.

In the United States, successful youth are expected to graduate from high school, gain the education and occupational skills needed for economic independence, and contribute to society. Many of these expectations are not being met by Latino youth either

because they do not have access to basic opportunities and resources or because they have to face a number of barriers that interfere in their development, or both. Consequently, it is necessary and practical to take into account cultural awareness and appropriateness in the development of youth program practices whose purpose is to prepare youth to lead productive and healthy lives.

Research on Youth Development and Culture

Youth development is an ongoing process in which “all youth are engaged and invested”, a process where young people need to meet their basic needs and develop competencies they consider necessary for success (Pittman, 1991).

To promote youth development among Latino adolescents, youth organizations must understand what are the needs of Latino youth and what competencies they consider necessary for success. One way to know this information is by learning the specific cultural values of youth and their families; specifically, in the case of immigrant groups, youth programs need to be aware of how culture and acculturation influences developmental processes. To achieve successful Latino youth development, researchers in this area suggest, “*youth service providers should continue to learn about developmental issues facing Latino youth and structure culturally sensitive environments that allow youth to identify and take advantage of their strengths*”(Rodriguez & Morrobel, 2002, p.21). It has also been proposed that an understanding of culturally specific value systems, which includes knowledge about culture, family, and individual values, is needed to implement an effective developmental program (Garcia Coll, Akerman & Cicchetti , 2000).

Recent research on human development has pointed out the role that culture has in understanding developmental processes and outcomes. It is the assumption of this research

that the studies of culture not only affirms and broaden theories of development, but also challenges these theories by providing evidence of which factors are most important to biological, social, emotional, and cognitive growth according to a specific cultural group. In addition social and demographic changes in the United States have contributed to an increasing awareness and need to reformulate how human development has been studied. Nevertheless, the majority of theory and research in the field of human development has been conducted in Western cultures, which implies that it is necessary to develop and conduct more research that includes other cultural groups as well (Garcia Coll, et al., 2000).

Unfortunately, cultural differences and social problems have led researchers to emphasize the use of deficit-oriented models and comparative studies where studies have primarily focused on the deficits instead of the assets of Latino youth and in comparing Latino youth with other youth populations. Current tendencies urge for single-culture studies where research and practice can be linked and public policies can be derived (García Coll et al., 2000; Rodriguez & Morrobel, 2002).

Examples of single-culture research can be found in the areas of mental health and resiliency. In each field researchers, have conducted studies that demonstrate how culture may influence positively or negatively development processes with Latino adolescents.

Mental Health

Research in this area (Garcia Coll, et al., 2000) has demonstrated that contact with a different culture may be a possible source of stress. Generally, the process by which immigrants adopt and exhibit the behaviors of another culture rather than maintain the

customs and values of their own culture has proved to have a negative influence on the healthy development of the individual (Garcia Coll et al.; Ebin, et al., 2001).

Latino youth as immigrants need to face their status as a minority group in the United States where they need to adapt to a new language, experience discrimination, and overcome social problems that characterize the Latino population, situations that could be perceived as potentially disruptive, leaving Latino adolescents more susceptible to the exhibition of problem behaviors (Mehan, Hubbard & Villanueva, 1994; Garcia Coll et al., 2000). Nevertheless, Elbin and colleagues (2001) found in a study whose purpose was to examine how acculturation affects the behavior of Latino adolescents, that more acculturated Latino adolescents are more likely to engage in problem behaviors and less likely to engage in health promoting behaviors than less acculturated Latino adolescents. Therefore, the results of this study show that although Latinos confront barriers that could be associated with problem behaviors, there are aspects of the Latino culture that serve as protective factors and contribute to a healthy life-style. However, some of these aspects tend to be jeopardized in the process of internalizing the values and behaviors of the U.S. society.

An important implication of these studies is that the promotion of cultural awareness may have a positive impact in the life styles of Latino youth. Consequently, youth workers in programs that work and serve Latino youth should identify factors of Latino culture that are protective against the barriers Latino youth experience as immigrants. Furthermore, youth workers need to promote cultural pride and awareness of these factors and their advantages among Latino youth.

Resiliency

Emerging researchers of Latino youth have directed their interest to identifying the factors that contribute to resilience in middle and high school students. An advantage of this approach is that it shifts away from deficit models and focuses on the successes of young students that come from disadvantaged situations (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Waxman, Huang, & Padron, 1997).

Resilience has been generally referred to “*a class of phenomena characterized by patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity or risk*” (Masten & Reed, in press). Resilient youth manage to meet developmental expectations in spite of adverse circumstances. Studies that attempt to show why some Latino youth succeed while others do not are important and relevant in designing more effective programs and interventions because they enable youth organizations to identify factors that are not fixed but alterable and modifiable to all young people.

In a study conducted with Latino high school students, some of these modifiable factors were identified (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997). The researchers of this study, found out that supportive environments, a sense of belonging to school, family and peer support account for academic success. They also suggest that this success is also influenced by cultural factors such as cultural pride and awareness. Research on resiliency suggests that it is important to identify assets and protective systems that can later be translated into information that could be used in program and policy development that supports the positive growth of Latino youth.

Several youth-serving organizations have realized that they can make a difference in the lives of Latino youth by providing and fostering factors that have demonstrated success

in promoting healthy development and competence in Latino middle and high school students. These programs are aware not only of the stressful situations Latino youth experience in their daily lives, but also recognize that if young Latinos and their families receive adequate and culturally appropriate services their experiences could change dramatically and their future can turn to the better. Some of these programs were designed and created specifically to serve Latino youth while others serving broader populations have demonstrated positive results and benefits for Latino youth.

This study presents a synthesis of elements and practices specific of Latino youth-serving organizations. The objective of the study is to inform youth development practice by presenting a summary of practices that have demonstrated success in working with Latino youth. Considering the lack of empirical research involving Latino youth, these practices have been gathered from anecdotal information provided by youth service workers from several youth organizations nationwide.

Method

This study reports on a review of national youth organizations serving Latino middle and high school students. The process of searching for organizations included: a review of Latino youth developmental literature, internet searches, and contacting major Latino organizations that in turn provided information regarding other organizations. Major organizations included: White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), and the National Latino Children's Institute. These organizations are nationally recognized and have published directories and reports that include programs serving Latino youth. The programs referred by the National Latino Children's Institute were recipients of La Promesa award, an award that recognizes

organizations that have dedicated themselves to working with the Latino Community by delivering culturally appropriate services.

From this search, 47 organizations were contacted, of which 12 organizations did not have documentation about their programs, 15 organizations were not interested in participating, and 20 organizations sent information describing their programs. Information received from organizations included brochures, reports, information packets, and videos. These programs represent a broad variety of emphases and services: after school, enrichment, arts, academic, leadership, employment, and mentoring, and can be classified in two major groups: school-based and community-based programs.

All information received was analyzed. In some cases organizations received additional contacts by phone and e-mail interviews. Follow up interviews involved specific questions that arose during the reviewing process of the information sent by organizations. To determine effectiveness of organizations, the review process included a careful analysis of evaluations methods and outcomes of each youth-serving organization. Effectiveness was determined by school-level outcomes such as school performance, retention rates, graduation rates, and college enrollment rates, as well as individual outcomes such as self-esteem, attitudes, aspirations, and interests. The analysis resulted in a list of specific practices; practices that have demonstrated to work with Latino youth according to evaluations and the positive impact these organizations have had in the life of many Latino youth. Specific practices were synthesized into common elements. Youth development experts with experience working with Latino youth reviewed this synthesized list of practices and made several modifications to the labels used to describe the practices.

Findings

Fourteen “best practices” were identified as demonstrating success in working with Latino youth. These practices resulted from a careful analysis of evaluations and outcomes published in documentation sent by youth serving organizations and published literature that describes how successful Latino youth development may be realized. Evaluations conducted by Latino youth-serving organizations included a wide variety of methods, qualitative and quantitative. In many cases participants were being tracked by follow-up interviews and surveys. Outcomes reported by Latino youth organizations included: reduction of dropout rate levels, higher measures of school performance, higher college enrollment rates, higher academic aspirations, and a positive impact on youth’s self-esteem, self-image, and cultural awareness. The fourteen practices identified as a result of the analysis of Latino youth-serving organizations were the following:

- I. Culturally Sensitive and Appropriate
- II. Resources to Improve Academic Achievement
- III. Responsiveness to the Integral part of the Individual
- IV. Focus on the Potential of the Individual, not on the Failures
- V. Positive Role Models
- VI. Empowerment of Youth and Promotion of Social Responsibility
- VII. Provision of Economic Assistance and Opportunities for Career Awareness
- VII. Well Defined Program with High Standards and High Expectations
- IX. Introduction of Participants to College Culture
- X. Safety and Positive Alternatives
- XI. Support and Advocacy

- XII. Sense of Belonging
- XIII. Encouragement of Parental Involvement
- XIV. Establishment of Partnerships

Although these are common practices found throughout all of the youth organizations analyzed, not all of the practices were found in a single organization due to each organization's individual goals and mission.

Each practice includes a description with examples that represent what these successful organizations are doing and how they are accomplishing success in serving Latino youth. The order in which practices are presented does not represent order of importance.

I. Culturally Sensitive and Appropriate Programming

Developing ethnic and cultural pride is an important element in programs serving Latino youth (U.S. Department of Education, White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics Americans, 2000). Latino youth serving programs integrate Latino culture and cultural awareness into their services, helping Latino youth navigate between different cultures and deal with challenges posed by racism and peer pressure. At the same time these youth programs impart a positive view of their own culture and respect for others. Specific strategies used by programs range from activities that teach and affirm youth about their cultural heritage to role modeling provided by staff members that identify with the Latino cultural background.

Promote accommodation without assimilation

Latino youth programs have promoted *accommodation without assimilation* (Mehan, Hubbard, & Villanueva, 1994) helping Latino adolescents fit in a new culture

without losing their cultural identity. Youth organizations have helped Latino youth affirm their cultural identities while at the same time recognize the need to develop certain cultural practices acceptable to the mainstream. Latino students have learned how to navigate in the system they are involved where they use “border crossing” strategies that have helped them to move between two cultures without feeling uncomfortable in either the Latino or the Anglo culture. Students recognize that they can be proud of both their ethnicity and academic identity as high achievement students, especially when Latinos tend to equate academic achievement with assimilation into the Anglo culture (Mehan et al., 1994; Gándara, Mejorado, Gutierrez, & Molina, 1998).

Provide bilingual bicultural services

One common element of programs serving Latino young people is that they incorporate and provide services in English and Spanish. The bilingual and bicultural components in most of these programs help youth communicate and become familiar with their language, culture, and heritage. The presence of bilingual and bicultural staff is a common characteristic and a key element in understanding and relating with Latino youth and their families. Understanding culture is essential if Latino youth service providers want to identify and connect with youth and families, parents are more willing to open up if they know youth service providers understand their culture and can communicate with them.

Employ staff with relevant backgrounds

Staff, mentors, and guest speakers in Latino youth programs generally come from backgrounds and personal situations similar to the ones experienced by Latino youth. In several of the school-based and after school programs, tutors and staff were former participants or graduates of the program. These similar experiences facilitate staff, mentors,

and tutors' understanding of the dynamics of home, school, and community for Latino youth, as well as the pressures and processes they are going through. Staff can empathize with youth and help them develop productive behaviors with regard to the situations they face.

Promote cultural values & cultural pride

Another important aspect of Latino youth serving programs is that they promote cultural values and incorporate cultural practices. Some organizations have used painting and music to help youth preserve their culture and transmit their cultural values to others in their community. Latino youth plan, design, and complete murals or other public artwork, art projects where youth are required to investigate their own culture and life experiences. In some other situations youth participate in traditional folk dances and songs as ways to express themselves in positive ways.

Utilize culturally driven curriculum

Latino youth programs recognize that a meaningful way to impact the lives of young Latinos is by using culturally driven curriculum where Latino culture is embedded in the instruction. Instruction includes Latino literature and community-based folklore assignments which incorporate parents and family members as sources for research activity. Youth are excited to know that people like themselves write stories and books that speak to their own life circumstances. Other instructional methods used by these youth programs include Latino History research and journalism classes where youth are trained to collect community history through interviews and research. Instructional projects embedded in the culture provide Latino youth with opportunities to identify with their culture, have voice, and learn academic skills.

II. Resources to Improve Academic Achievement

Latino youth remain at the highest risk for school failure of any ethnic group. Therefore, many programs serving Latino youth have realized how important it is to explicitly instruct Latino youth in the academic skills necessary to succeed in school and have demonstrated that Latino youth can succeed if they are helped and provided with adequate resources.

Provide formal instruction of academic skills necessary to succeed in school

Latino youth learn skills such as writing, problem solving, research and study skills, and acquire organizational skills and strategies that help them evaluate if they are accomplishing their personal goals. Youth also participate in hands-on activities where they become active participants in the learning process and discover how different subject areas can be applied to real life situations. As a result, Latino youth have opportunities to learn skills essential for success in higher education.

Develop well planned and organized academic curriculum

Effective programs have also shown a well planned and organized curriculum with specific objectives that give their staff and participants a clear idea of what they need to accomplish. Curriculum requires Latino students to learn strategies that directly target the needs of Latino youth and address weaknesses common to immigrant students who are learning a second language. Latino youth learn strategies such as: time management, textbook reading, library research, test preparation, note taking, and question asking. They also prepare for the PSAT and SAT examinations by reviewing math, reading, vocabulary skills, and test-taking strategies.

Provide tutoring and help with homework

Tutoring has been another essential aspect exercised by Latino youth serving programs. Latino youth can attend homework labs where tutors help them with their work at hand and also tackle the reluctance to seek and use help. In the homework labs, youth are matched with tutors who are bilingual college students from local Universities. Tutors help Latino youth not only with homework and school, they also take them to visit their universities, and advise them with college enrollment. Tutors become role models for Latino high school students by making a positive connection with the youth and showing them that higher education is within their reach.

Work toward impacting school practices

Latino youth serving programs have realized that it is also necessary to have an impact on school practices to ensure that Latino students will have a real opportunity at high achievement. Effective programs have tried to effect some changes in schools where there is a high percentage of Latino students. Some of the strategies used to influence practice in the schools include pedagogical and counseling strategies through modeling and workshops; greater presence of Latino community members by bringing community representatives to schools; and increased parent involvement at schools, bringing parents to schools through presentations, workshops, college recruitment nights, socials, and helping to form parent advisory boards. These strategies have helped to increased parent and community involvement, have affected the attitudes of students toward school, and have changed the practices of individual teachers inside their classrooms as well as counselors in their relationship to their counselees (Gándara, Mejorado, Gutierrez & Molina, 1998).

III. Responsiveness to the Integral part of the Individual

A young person is not viewed as an isolated entity. Effective programs take a more holistic approach that targets each individual's characteristics, as well as the characteristics of the environments in which young people live and function (Dungan-Seaver, 1999).

Employ a holistic approach

Many programs serving Latino youth have learned that an effective way to retain students is to provide a variety of programs and services that consider all areas of youth development. Programs provide activities to enrich youth's academic, social, emotional and physical development. These activities may include art classes, cooking classes, theater, technology, leadership development, field trips, academic tutoring and mentoring programs, career and college exploration, and sports.

Approach services comprehensively

Latino youth-serving programs address individual characteristics as well as the characteristics of the environments in which they live by recognizing that contexts such as family, school, and community are important to consider if they want to have long-lasting positive effects. It can be difficult to make a positive difference in the life of Latino youth without considering the needs of their families and the communities where they live. As a result, Latino youth programs have taken a more comprehensive approach that includes a variety of family and community systems that affect young people. These programs provide services that benefit youth, their families, schools, and communities.

Provide multiple services

A common characteristic of some Latino youth serving programs is that they are a division of community-based organizations where other services are also offered.

Consequently youth and their families can have access to social, educational, employment, training, and healthcare services among others, facilitating youth programs to offer a package of services that help Latino youth and their families overcome obstacles and needs in a comprehensive way. In the case of independent youth programs it is also common to observe a referral component where youth and parents receive information about community services and get help to get these services.

IV. Focus on the Potential of the Individual, not on the Failures

It is not rare to observe that Latino youth are usually categorized and labeled as youth “at risk”, especially if one takes into consideration the population characteristics and the barriers faced by Latino young people. Latino youth are frequently viewed as “problems and failures” by school staff and community members, in turn causing Latino youth to have low-self esteem and negative views about themselves.

Value and Support Youth

A practice that youth organizations have used to counteract a negative focus on Latino youth has been to value youth by seeing and emphasizing their potential and assets. Latino youth take positions of responsibility such as tutors and mentors of younger Latino students and receive the support they need to succeed. This “valued youth” philosophy stipulates that all students can learn, are valuable, and can contribute to their own education and to the education of others (Cárdenas, Robledo, Supik, and Harris, 1992).

Recognize and provide youth with positive feedback, consistently

Latino youth programs support participants with instruction and positive recognition. Youth working as tutors receive recognition for their efforts and contributions. Throughout the year youth receive incentives and personal expressions of

appreciation. They receive media attention and are honored at the end-of-year event.

Student recognition events include information about post-secondary options and college career choices to help Latino youth find ways to make their success continue. Additional recognition practices exercised by Latino youth programs include public recognition of youth's accomplishments published in newsletters, local newspapers, graduation, and award ceremonies program guides.

V. Positive Role Models

A major and common component observed among Latino youth serving programs is to provide young people with positive roles models and the support and nurturing of caring adults or older peers. Latino youth learn to develop positive relationships with adults and are exposed to real and meaningful examples of success especially when these adults are successful professionals or students and share the same ethnic background. Youth organizations provide positive roles through mentors, tutors, staff, guest speakers, and parents. A main characteristic of these role models is that they show young people that Latinos can go to college, have a profession, and be successful.

Help youth develop positive relationships with adults

Some programs make an effort to find Latino mentors that act as *Padrinos* (godparents) for young people, a role that is common to find among Latino families. Mentors are encouraged to meet students' parents and establish a close relationship with them so that parents can be involved in the mentoring relationship, which creates a situation where mentors are cooperating and not competing with parents in achieving the well being of their children. Mentors meet with Latino youth to work on personal exploration, aspirations, and career counseling.

Use real examples of success by having older peers and former participants work as mentors and tutors

Older peers have also acted as positive role models in some programs. For instance older students who have been successful in navigating through high school act as “peer partners” for younger students, helping new students to make a successful transition into high school. Other programs have former participants become tutors and mentors of current students, providing young people with role models that have gone through similar paths and have experienced the same barriers. Tutors and mentors can then communicate and by their example demonstrate that Latino youth can achieve their goals and support others like themselves.

Engage staff, guest speakers, and parents as role models

Youth programs count on staff and presenters as positive models for their young participants. Programs provide Latino youth with opportunities to hear guest speakers who are members of their community and model a variety of professions and experiences. Staff and guest speakers’ personal and professional stories motivate Latino youth to become better students, stay in school, and become proud of who they are. In other programs, parents of participants are invited as role models to recognize the contributions parents make to the community and to emphasize the dignity of families. This is a meaningful model that recognizes the fact that parents can be the best examples youth can have.

VI. Empowerment of Youth and Promotion of Social Responsibility

Empowering Latino adolescents to take control of their lives, to be able to resist negative influences, and to make a difference in their society is a common goal of many effective youth organizations (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray & Foster, 1998). Yet, empowerment can be promoted in different ways among programs. For one program, it

might involve placing young people in responsible roles or having youth actively participate in their community. For another, it might be developing leadership skills by encouraging young people to plan and organize projects in their own program.

Place students in responsible roles

Youth programs that offered Latino youth positions of responsibility allow them to start looking at their competencies and capabilities to fulfill the role they have been assigned. As a result, Latino youth feel confidence about themselves, knowing they are capable to accomplish a task and to do a good job in any area of their lives. Youth organizations offered Latino youth opportunities to become tutors, teachers, and role models for Latino children where youth are expected to perform as workers in real work situations and hence are responsible for fulfilling their tasks.

Provide opportunities for youth to participate actively in their communities

Other programs empower youth by having them actively participate in their community. Latino youth with the help of facilitators are responsible for planning a community service project where youth create action plans to take back to their communities; these plans are designed to help Latino youth interact and impact the broader community. Latino youth meet with community leaders to investigate funding options or have discussed plans with professions to carry out their projects. Projects organized by youth have included sport tournaments, celebrations of Mexican culture in schools, awareness and prevention of teenage pregnancy, adult ESL classes, articles in local newspapers, cultural clubs in schools, and volunteering.

Include youth in the process

These and other organizations provide youth with opportunities to make a contribution and participate in the design of civic and community activities, in other words these programs make youth feel central to the program and give them opportunities to have a stake in the creation, development, and implementation of the rules; viewing young people not only as recipient of services, but also as contributors. These Latino youth serving organizations are characterized by their view of youth as resources to be developed. Youth developmental researchers posit that one of the characteristics of this view is seen in the choice and responsibility given to adolescents where successful programs empower young people to develop their competencies (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray & Foster, 1998).

VII. Provision of Economic Assistance and Opportunities for Career Awareness

Programs serving Latino youth are aware of the needs and struggles that youth and their families are going through where the majority of families are coming from low-income income status and low educational attainment. Many of these programs provide Latino youth with economic assistance through stipends and scholarships that enable them to help out with household expenses and provide the means to go to college. These organizations also include strategies where youth can explore economic opportunities and have access to real work and professional environments allowing them to develop career awareness and job skills, an important goal for programs serving urban youth (Schwartz, 1996).

Develop job skills

Some Latino youth serving programs supply Latino youth with employment, training, advisor support, and scholarships. Programs offer job skills development through

valuable work experience and specialized training. This early employment experience has a strong impact on youth's perceptions about work. In addition to earning money, youth receive other benefits from this experience. For instance, they gain hands on experience and knowledge of business in a professional environment, form positive attitudes toward work, gain appreciation for the value of education, take responsibility, and develop skills to increase future employability. By providing jobs, ongoing support and guidance, programs help young people obtain tools that will help them prepare for a future career.

Provide stipends and scholarships

A successful element of Latino youth programs has been to provide Latino youth with financial support to attend workshops and opportunities to compete for scholarships. Programs provide financial assistance to their participants and also design workshops where youth are able to examine possible career paths by participating in hands on activities. These practices in addition to interactions with peer and role models have contributed to encouraging students to stay in school and pursue higher education and help them realize they are able to overcome the challenges they face. These contributions are shown in school-level outcomes of programs where a high percentage of scholarship recipients have gone on to college and school drop out rates among Latinos have decreased considerably.

Develop work and community based projects

Financial assistance and career exploration have also been offered by Latino youth serving organizations through projects where young people learn and develop real world competencies. Researchers investigating about out-of-school programs (Dungan-Seaver, 1999) have stated that work and community-based projects and applied learning activities

help adolescents from low income areas fulfill their needs for earned income and initial paid work experience. Latino youth programs offer Latino youth employment training, work, and community-based projects where young Latinos acquire and use skills in real life situations and receive a stipend. Youth receive training and later have the opportunity to practice their training skills by presenting a final project that usually helps them connect to their community and cultural roots. Final projects have included public exhibitions, magazines, and community research.

VIII. Well Defined Programs with High Standards and High Expectations

To have effective youth serving organizations, it is necessary to have clear goals, well-developed procedures and resources for attaining these goals, and on-going training for staff (ERIC, 1998). A characteristic that has defined successful programs for Latino youth, according to the White House Initiative on Education Excellence for Hispanic Americans (U.S. Department of Education, 2000) is to have clearly defined programs and service outcomes where the youth service providers are aware of the goals and take steps in the development, design, and management of their programs to measure progress. Evaluation and staff development are key components that allow youth organizations to identify and confront obstacles and look for new ways to better serve their participants.

Conduct rigorous evaluation

Evaluation has been crucial for many Latino youth serving organizations in the implementation and improvement of their programs. Evaluation of programs consists of quantitative and qualitative measures such as school life scores, grades in academic areas, achievement test scores, absenteeism rates, college enrollment rates, perceived self-concept, aspirations, and expectations. To evaluate their programs, Latino youth

organizations have used different designs that include experimental comparison studies, longitudinal studies, pre-post-test designs, case studies, and ethnographic studies. Data is collected through surveys, questionnaires, observations, focus groups, and in-depth interviews that involve program participants, staff and parents.

Promote staff development

Staff development has also been an important factor for Latino youth organization. Staff members are trained on regular basis through workshops and training sessions spread throughout the year. In addition to training, staff members receive support from the program through materials and advice during the year. Staff working with youth receive training within their disciplines and in cross-disciplinary sessions.

Expect Participants to Fulfill High Standards

Programs that have worked successfully with Latino adolescents have been characterized for setting high standards that convey high expectations for both staff and young participants, expectations that reflect a real belief that young people can “do it”. These programs have helped many Latino among other minority youth groups to succeed by recognizing that the only way students can get into or through higher education is with perseverance, hard work, and commitment. Although it is generally thought that minority students would not succeed in structured and disciplined environments, participants in these programs have demonstrated the contrary. These programs provides what Latino students usually lack: high expectations, encouragement, day-to-day help, a vision of college as attainable, and guidance.

IX. Introduction of Participants to College Culture

Latino youth have one of the lowest rates of college attendance of all cultural groups in the United States (Hurtado & Gauvain, 1997; Therrien & Ramirez, 2000). Some elements cited as critical barriers for Latino students to go to college have been the lack of access to an appropriate curriculum that prepares students for college and lack of information about post-secondary educational opportunities (Gándara, Mejorado, Gutierrez, & Molina, 1998; Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996). Many Latino high school students are not sufficiently informed about college options and college admissions. Generally, existing enrollment support systems used in schools assume that all students come from a middle-class family with at least one adult with post-secondary educational experience; however, many Latino families do not fit this profile (Cortez, 2001). Thus, organizations serving young Latinos have provided specialized support systems needed by Latino families and their children where families and youth are guided through the complex process of college enrollment. These organizations have taken the time to advise and help Latino youth on issues related to college such as admissions, financial aid applications, course requirements, and preparation courses; introducing Latino families and young people to the “college culture”.

Advise and help students on issues related to College entrance

The purpose of many Latino youth serving organizations has been to help Latino youth move successfully from high school directly into four-year colleges. Programs ensure that Latino students will be placed in college preparatory classes and that the students will be supplied with the information necessary to prepare them for postsecondary education. Organizations accomplish this purpose by providing counselors to participate in

sessions on university admission requirements, arranging for college visits, organizing college admissions workshops for parents, and preparing students for college entrance examinations like ACT and SAT.

Provide field trips to Colleges

For Latino youth the idea of going to college becomes more real when they have the opportunity to visit a college and walk around the actual campus. Visiting colleges motivates Latino youth to apply to college where field trips served as a catalyst for that. Guidance and support around college enrollment has proved to be successful. Evaluation results of some of these programs show that more Latino youth participants compared to non-participants attend and apply for four-year colleges and are more confident that they know what is needed to prepare for college (Gándara, Larson, Rumberger, & Mehan, 1998; Gándara, Mejorado, et al., 1998).

Externalize hidden curriculum

Programs serving Latino youth have made explicit the instruction that is usually demanded by schools in the United States, but rarely discussed openly by their staff. Generally students from linguistic, ethnic-minority and low-income background do not have access to this implicit or hidden instruction because the parents of these students have not had any information or personal experience about higher education and how schools in this *new culture* work (Mehan, Hubbard, & Villanueva, 1996; Swanson, Mehan, & Hubbard, 1995). Youth programs whose purpose has been to increase college attendance among minority and low-income students, have explicitly taught Latino, techniques that are key to academic success: test taking, note-taking, study skills, and how to complete applications for college and financial aid; instruction that other students implicitly learn at

home (Mehan, et al, 1996; Swanson, et al., 1995). Moreover these programs have helped parents understand what their children need to be able to enroll in a good college.

Promote “Social and Cultural Capital”

Programs serving Latino youth provide young people and their families with *cultural capital*, that is knowledge of how the system works, and *social capital* that is access to supportive social networks that foster opportunity (Gándara, Mejorado, et al, 1998; Kahne & Bailey, 1999; Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994). Students, who will be the first generation in their family to attend college receive some of the cultural capital that middle-class parents generally give to their children at home by explicitly teaching them the special ways of talking, writing, thinking and acting that are demanded by the educational system. Students learned about the college application process where students get information about procedures for filing applications, meeting deadlines for SAT tests, and requesting financial aid and scholarships.

X. Safety and Positive Alternatives

Youth development researchers have posit that youth spend a lot of time alone each day after school (Pittman, 1991). This fact along with lack of supervision and positive alternatives for youth have contributed to many of the social problems affecting youth, especially in the case of low-income and inner-city youth, characteristics that are common to find among Latino youth. In response to this situation, many community based programs serving young Latinos have created after school opportunities for youth to participate in the arts, explore careers, provide service to others, improve their academic achievement, or simply have a place to be after school.

Create a safe environment

For Latino youth, youth serving programs have literally become a second home and youth service providers have been considered a second family. Programs work hard to provide a safe physical place and psychological space for youth to be. A strength of these youth programs has been their ability to attract and retain youth whose only option has been to be on the street at risk of getting into trouble. Latino youth serving programs provide an environment that is safe, welcoming and open and provides an alternative place to be in two different ways: first it provides an important place for youth to “hang out” and to be supervised outside of school, the home, and the street; second it provides an alternative space for youth to be themselves, to define themselves in positive ways (Halpern, Barker, & Mollard, 2000).

Provide positive alternatives and allow for self-expression

In addition to providing a safe and supportive environment, youth programs teach Latino youth positive ways to cope with frustrations and express their feelings. Art programs have used theater, painting, and music as positive alternatives for youth to express themselves. Youth learn to express their concerns using the tools of the arts. In this context, youth create a public work of art that accomplishes the goal for youth to be heard and gives youth the satisfaction to educate their community about their culture and what is important to them.

XI. Support and Advocacy

Research on resiliency and Latino youth has identified care and support as protective factors that have help Latino immigrant youth develop resiliency (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 2000). When Latino youth experience a caring relationship and feel supported

and accepted they are more likely to develop an ability to cope with adversity. One attribute of effective youth programs is the emphasis on consistent, positive relationships and interactions between youth and supportive adults through low youth to staff ratios and one-on-one relationships (Dungan-Seaver, 1999). Care, support, and advocacy are common themes found in youth programs serving young Latinos where youth service providers show a genuine interest in the youth and pay close attention to every aspect affecting the young person's life.

Provide close attention and true interest

One aspect found at Latino youth serving organizations is the attention and support youth receive from youth workers. Youth workers accept youth, believe in them, and genuinely like youth (Halpern, Baker, & Mollard, 2000). Youth workers combine discipline and directness with sensitivity and respect for youth's feelings. Youth are not judged or told they are wrong, but are presented with tools that guide them to make a decision for themselves.

Advocate on behalf of participants

Youth workers also take the role of advocates at an academic and personal level. Effective Latino youth serving programs make sure their participants are doing well at school and at homes. Low student to staff ratios allow workers to know how their participants are doing. They monitor school assistance of participants and communicate with teachers to check on the academic progress of their participants. They also act as interpreters for the family in school issues when necessary. Advocacy has not been limited to the academic life of Latino youth; it also extends to their personal life where workers

visit sick participants and call parents when youth are having problems at home or are working too many hours.

Provide a continuum of care

To have dramatic effects on Latino youth it is necessary to provide ongoing programming (Gándara, Larson, Rumberger, & Mehan, 1998). Another characteristic found in Latino youth serving organizations is the continuum of care youth receive. This care is not just on a one-time basis, but it is provided with continual programming throughout their development. Through this continuum of care staff members have been able to watch and serve their participants as they grow, maintaining the same system of support for families and youth.

Create family-like environments

Successful youth organizations are described as family-like environments, in which young people feel safe and have access to caring relationships (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998). For Latinos, the individual is an extension of the families where family relationships are a key aspect of the culture. Latino youth serving organizations recognize this emphasis and attempt to become an extension of Latino families where youth service providers become “la familia” the second family who will be there to support youth whenever they are needed. In some programs youth workers are called *tios* and *tias* (uncles and aunts), mentors act as *padrinos* (godparents) and peers are considered and treated as *hermanos* (siblings).

Build bridges between cultures

An important role of these programs has been to help build bridges between cultures by acting as mediators between Latino youth, their families and their schools,

helping to remove the impediments to these adolescent's social and academic achievement. Latino families are faced with the challenge of fitting into a culture they do not know, where they may not be aware of their rights, responsibilities, and their roles. For instance, parents do not know how to contact teachers and administrators, when to visit schools, how to look for the best school, and how to help their children succeed in their classes. In addition, youth are also struggling to understand their responsibilities; at the same time they are learning a language and helping their parents navigate in this new culture. As a consequence, Latino youth serving programs have filled the gaps that school and community have left empty. Staff members make sure that parents know how and when to participate in school activities, how to understand report cards, and when and how to contact school staff.

XII. Sense of Belonging

Latino immigrant youth often struggle with their sense of belonging (Mehan, Hubbard, & Villanueva, 1994). Organizations serving Latino youth offer a sense of belonging to youth by providing a space where they can identify with a peer group and be recognized by others through public markers. These organizations also promote voluntary associations where young people voluntarily decide to participate in a program.

Sustain and promote cultural identity

Activities in Latino youth serving organizations are planned in ways that encourage their young assistants to develop a stronger sense of belonging, esteem for their heritage, and a willingness to assert themselves in their every day lives. Youth have the opportunity to listen to music, hear stories, and enjoy folk art from their root cultures. These activities

help Latino youth affirm their identity, understand their roots, and embrace aspects of themselves.

Create external identity markers

Latino youth serving programs develop and mark group identity in a public manner. Youth receive markers such as notebooks, distinctive badges, and t-shirts that distinguish youth as participants of a group. All these visible markers define a space for youth to develop an academic and cultural identity; within this space participants meet other peers and are recognized by other youth as members of a specific group.

Enroll participants on a voluntary basis

Programs working with Latino youth promote voluntary participation, giving prospective members the choice to decide if they want to commit and be in the program. By committing to a program youth decide for themselves to form part of a group, developing a sense of belonging. These youth programs require students to sign a contract of agreement to participate in the program or to write an essay stating why they want to participate in the program, requiring youth their commitment and effort to be in the program.

XIII. Encouragement of Parent Involvement

Programs working with Latino youth are designed based on the belief that parents need to be taken into account to be effective in their work with Latino youth. Substantial links with families are essential in programs that have demonstrated success with Latino youth. Research has demonstrated that parents play an important role in the academic achievement, educational aspirations, and college planning behaviors of Latino adolescents (Hurtado & Guavain, 1997; Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994). Therefore Latino youth

serving organizations recognize that if they want to make a difference in the lives of their participants, they have to actively involve parents in the academic experience of their children (U. S. Department of Education, 2000).

Actively involve parents in the education of their children

Effective Latino youth programs require parents to support their children in a variety of ways, including attending workshops, meetings, and events. As a result, parents of participants increase parenting skills and parent confidence in providing a nurturing environment that supports learning. Latino youth serving organizations help parents become more involved in the education of their children by conducting home visits, providing forums, providing regular tips on supporting academic skill building at home, and referring parents when appropriate to other programs that support their children's academic skill building.

Maintain close communication with parents

Ongoing communication with parents is another key component of programs serving Latino youth. These programs communicate with youth and their parents through newsletters that include: calendar of upcoming events, referral information, news about participants, birthdays, and important information about the program. Latino youth programs also promote ongoing communication with families through phone calls, regular meetings, regular written and verbal notices, and home visits.

Encourage involvement in all program activities

Successful Latino youth serving programs offer flexible ways for parents to be involved in their programs, including volunteering, planning, and evaluation. Examples of parent involvement include asking parents to attend field trips to have a common learning

experience with their children and inviting parents to participate in the program as guest speakers. Parents are also a key factor in the evaluation of youth programs. Most program evaluators, recognizing the central role of parents, consider parents' feedback and opinions and include data collection from parents through surveys, focus groups, questionnaires, and interviews.

XIV. Establishment of Partnerships

According to the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans (U. S. Department of Education, 2000), a common attribute of programs that work for Latino youth is that they maintain solid connections and interactions with schools and communities where these collaborations foster the kind of support Latino youth and their families need to achieve their goals and improve their lives. Effective programs communicate and collaborate with a range of partners in addition to the youth themselves (Dungan-Seaver, 1999). Organizations serving Latino adolescents have established partnerships with schools, colleges, and community to accomplish their goals.

Build partnerships with colleges

Latino youth serving organizations maintain close connections with universities to fulfill their objectives. These partnerships have included not only college tutors, but also culturally appropriate college recruitment facilitating Latino participants' entrance to college. Colleges have sponsored campus tours, special lectures, orientations, guest speakers, and college fairs. With these partnerships, colleges begin to recognize the valuable resources these programs offer in their quest to recruit capable students and strengthen their diverse student bodies.

Build partnerships with schools

Latino youth serving programs have partnered with schools to provide more adequate services to Latino students and their families. Many of the programs are housed at high and middle schools, which facilitates communication with school staff. Partnerships can allow Latino youth programs to have a positive impact on the way Latino youth relate to their school and the way the school relates to Latino youth and their families.

Build partnerships with communities

Latino youth serving organizations have been able to create a network of partners that include community-based organizations. These partnerships have allowed youth programs to work together to provide leadership and guidance regarding programming and implementation of a diverse number of quality after school activities for Latino participants.

Conclusions

The review of Latino youth development practices presented in this report highlight youth organizations that provide culturally appropriate services to Latino youth and their families. The examples and outcomes described show the effectiveness of these services and practices in serving Latino youth. However, successful programs serving Latino youth take many forms and cannot be described by one particular focus, practice, or strategy; rather several practices emerged as important characteristics of programs that have successfully improved the lives of Latino youth.

Although effective youth programs serving Latino youth may take many forms, all of them consider the needs, demographic and cultural characteristics, and values of the Latino youth they serve. They provide a focused, supportive, and culturally sensitive

environment that fosters the development of Latino youth to their fullest potential. In addition, they take an active role in assuring that the needs of all youth are met through positive youth development. Youth development experts recommend youth serving organizations to make an effort to reach minority youth because these youth have the greatest needs; therefore it is important for youth agencies to meet these needs (Pittman, 1998)

In the Latino community, now is the time to take advantage of these effective practices and to put them to work. In this time of explosive Latino population growth, now is the time to take advantage of the chance to make an impact in the lives of Latino youth. These practices have demonstrated effectiveness and success with Latino youth. Imagine the impact that can be made in shaping a bright future for Latino youth if we just engage in these practices, allowing what we have learned through experience to further guide our work.

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