
Improving Out-of-School Enrichment for Minoritized Youth



Although classes occupy a substantial portion of their waking hours during the school year, children and teenagers spend only a minority of their daily lives in school. It's surprising, then, that programs serving students' needs before and after the school bell rings often get short shrift when it comes to attention, resources, and research.

An [article](#) in the May issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Educational Researcher* aims to address this gap by taking a critical look at services for minoritized youth outside of the formal school day. The work is co-authored by [Bianca Baldrige](#) of Harvard University, [Daniela DiGiacomo](#) of the University of Kentucky, NEPC Fellow [Ben Kirshner](#) of the University of Colorado Boulder, [Sam Mejias](#) of The New School and [Deepa Vasudevan](#) of the American Institutes for Research.

The research described in the article draws upon interviews with 58 stakeholders in out-of-school-time programs, including employees, scholars who study this field, members of foundations' boards, policy influencers, and affiliates of capacity-building intermediary organizations that operate in this space. The researchers also conducted focus groups and incorporated the results of a youth-led participatory action study that included peer-to-peer focus groups and a survey of 191 13- to 19-year-olds.

Although the study focused on organizations with social justice orientations, the authors found that “many youth-serving organizations are still burdened by a legacy of white saviorism, paternalism, and anti-Black racism,” with minoritized youth “positioned as at risk and

needing to be fixed or saved by programs.” Facilitating these structures are majority-white boards of directors and philanthropists who oversee the work of program employees who are often people of color earning subsistence wages.

Youth program participants described mixed experiences, expressing a sense of belonging that kept them engaged in their programs while also highlighting favoritism and racial marginalization. “[P]rograms may have missions to elevate racially just approaches to youth work while also perpetuating racist and paternalistic narratives,” the researchers write.

Exacerbating these challenges are what one Midwestern program director referred to as “scarcity-based funding models that promote competition instead of collaboration.” These models force programs to compete against one another for relatively small, time-limited grants that require considerable capacity to apply for and maintain. Because these funding opportunities come and go at the whims of philanthropists and, in some cases, politicians, it is difficult for many programs to offer the benefits and livable wages that contribute to the maintenance of a stable workforce.

Limited funding can also make it challenging for youth from low-income families to take part in out-of-school enrichment because they may be unable to afford transportation or participation fees. They may also feel pressured to choose between enrichment programs and paying jobs that can help support their families.

“It is not enough to offer a free program,” the researchers write. “[E]specially for older youth, providing them compensation to attend a program could be the deciding factor in their participation.”

At the same time, researchers identified strengths in social-justice-oriented programming. For example, out-of-school-time programs may have an edge over K-12 schools when it comes to the ability to try out innovative approaches without encountering excessive bureaucratic roadblocks. They can more nimbly serve youth participants and adapt to communities’ changing needs. And out-of-school programs can foster valuable intergenerational learning experiences—especially if the adults involved work hand-in-hand with youth rather than micromanaging them or adopting an overly laissez-faire approach that sends the message that the work is so trivial it does not matter who takes charge.

“Innovative programs organized around healing justice, youth organizing, collective care, and multigenerational collaboration deserve investment and support,” the researchers write. “Doing so offers our best chance for realizing the liberatory promise of community-based education.”

NEPC Resources on Community Organizing and Engagement

This newsletter is made possible in part by support provided by the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice: <http://www.greatlakescenter.org>

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