P A S E PARTNERSHIP FOR AFTER SCHOOL EDUCATION

PASE Research Series
Relational Engagement Needs Among Black and Latino Boys
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Implications to Practice

Following the presentation by Dr. Fergus-Arcia, participants completed individual written reflections then engaged in small group discussion about the implications to practice. This document includes select implications to practice generated by practitioners.

The following four questions guided the reflection and discussion:
1. What are the implications of the research on how you design your afterschool program?
2. How does this impact changes you might make to your afterschool program environment?
3. What are the implications for professional development of your staff?
4. What other implications does the research have on your current practice?

STAFF HIRING PRACTICES AND SKILLS
- Hiring shifts: Take a closer look at our hiring practices. Who are we hiring? Why are we hiring them? Will they be able to make an impact? Looking more closely at the motivation – skills and talent rather than just content expertise.
- Need afterschool counselors, and Black and Latino male mentors.
- Skills needed: adequately prepared adults who are willing to talk about race, class and gender and not taking on the savior role but rather serving as conduits.
- Adults who are able to integrate context and be deliberate with the language they use in order to help develop/build resilience of young men who can navigate the world even if they are not prepared academically.
- Must ensure that each staff member is capable of the relational work.
- Instructors/administrators who understand and practice strategies to connect with and mentor the youth. Similar experiences are key.
- Need appropriate number of staff to do things effectively.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

Training Topics/Areas
- Emphasize developing part time staff: importance of relational engagement needs of the population we serve.

- I plan to do even MORE professional development with my staff around creating a "protective" environment. Staff/student sessions (small group, interest based).
- Staff development acknowledging the impact of school climate and making a concerted effort to improve that during afterschool.
- Incorporate intentional relational engagement into staff trainings and have conversations about it at staff meetings.
- It would be beneficial to have professional development on building foundational skills in positive social identity and grit.
- More staff training on how to talk about difficult topics.
- Trauma, healing, resiliency; race/class/privilege. Developing agency versus grit; Conduit versus savior – understanding staff roles.
- Strategies to build resilience in these boys (and girls). Also, training on engaging instructional (and leisure) activities to encourage collaboration and understanding of others.
- Deeper training around affirmation, importance of language. More SEL training.
- I plan to do even more professional development with my staff around creating a protective environment.
- Basic training in race and how to talk about it with students.
- Helping to understand the relationship between relationships and academic impact.
- Cultural competence and responsiveness. Even staff with same cultural background sometimes avoid explicit conversations around race/gender/sexuality/poverty – help them to have these conversations. Sometimes they don't understand the impact if they have not unpacked it themselves.
- Social work practice theories and strategies to address and discuss issues such as trauma and other mental or social issues. What happened to you? Instead of what is wrong with you?
- Teaching how to teach the "process" not just focusing on the "result".
- Staff should receive further support developing their vocabulary to include more affirmative and supportive language so that even in the most challenging situations/contexts, that is the language that rolls off the tongue.
- Improve adult's skills on working out conflict in a manner that keeps children engaged.
- Poll staff for what they see as their professional development needs.
- PD that goes beyond compliance issues for line staff.
- Create a learning community. Make PD part of the "ethos" of my organization.
- Makes sure staff, regardless of background, have the language and comfort to discuss the difficult topics, how the work impacts them and telling their story. Race, personal and social identity training is needed to help school staff set comfortable discussions about these things.
- Developing staff ability to focus on managing individual issues.
- I will be focusing on measuring a school climate shift next year and would like to create a battery of trainings to offer to school administration and faculty around creating safe space and best practices.
- More staff training on how to create a protective school environment.

Other Supports for Staff
- Need to develop staff confidence in the cognitive engagement aspects of teaching.
- Using these risk/resilience maps for self-reflection for staff: Who am I in this group or frame work? How do I fit? Where are our children? Self-evaluation tools – how does our program measure up in these crucial areas identified in this research?

- Affinity groups with our own staff to further develop research and understanding for our program and curriculum. Make sure we are sharing best practices, particularly classroom management.
- Using positive, affirming language when weary from long days of engagement particularly with staff who aren't used to the high levels of energy working with boys – particularly those boys who have not learned to "do school" well.
- Opening the dialogue up to the essential questions (during staff meetings). Bringing in guest speakers to discuss critical issues that affect our community.
- Staff need to be aware of their own story, skills, attitudes. Staff need to understand and agree with goals of fairness, resilience, talk about reality/obstacles/etc.
- Spend time with coaches/staff to empower them to make changes to adapt to kids' needs.
- Mitigation and reflection of how they [staff] perceived their systemic racism and how they could utilize their own experience and kids' experience for mentoring.
- Staff-language tool box.
- Giving staff a chance to practice not just learn it. Follow up in staff meetings – how does what you learned apply to real situation that we have here?
- The work can also be draining for staff so support and/or counseling needs to be built in for staff as well.
- Allow time for youth workers to become culturally literate, comfortable telling their stories.
- Making myself more available to staff and students on site and off.
- Modeling by senior staff for line staff. Using relationality in program leadership – senior staff using it to lead their staff.

PROGRAM DESIGN AND CURRICULUM
Content/Process
- Reinforcement of Black and Latino identity. Building resilience skills. Identity climate. Symbolic curriculum. Peer network. Mitigating and managing institutional racism. Peer network, leadership, ask for help.
- Empowering. Financial education. A road map with consistency, exposure, experiences, opportunity and expectation. Road map leading to social identity, collaboration, cultural and physical development.
- As an organization, need to devote more attention to context, not a blanket understanding of risk factors as all the same.
- Being more cognizant of "disciplining the poor". Naming race.
- Addressing the perception of the way the world sees young men of color and their own self-concept. It is important to meet students where they're AT but also expose them mentally and physically to new spaces and to address how they mitigated the experience. Value their experience, space and emotions.
- Support quality academic programming with relational engagement.
- Specificity: Tailor programs to the identity of the population served – Black and Latino-owned businesses. Monitor the way the culture of our business sites is informing the development of our students. Do corporations have the cultural language to teach professionalism? Is professional/career etiquette universal?
- Introduce new kinds of activities to kids ex: lacrosse.
- Incorporate more social studies.
- Preparing participants to perform in different environments in different and appropriate ways. Remediation and acceleration – 1) starts with basic skills (academic and cultural and social) 2) focus

on enrichment and expanding horizons 3) redefine internal environment to be positive influence on individuals.
- Activities and trips outside of the school so the students don't feel their experience is in isolation.
- Add more activities to assist students with behavioral engagement – how to be "good at school".
- Continue to focus/include/foster academic and civic engagement in our youth and within our programs. Ensure that relational engagement/connection with the youth is started and maintained throughout.
- Increase cultural responsiveness through more explicit conversations around race and social justice with kids through intentional/specific curriculum.
- Infuse – cultural affirmation. Intention – explore connection between race, class, experience, self-experience. Exposure – more mentoring, experience, opportunities.
- Change the mentoring to really address the context and skills required to have students academically engaged.
- One thing I do is create lots of hands-on-projects and group work. I never specifically researched if group work is the best method when working with all students. I have to do additional research on this.
- We can talk about race, celebrate social identity positively and encourage affirmation more.
- Do programs geared to boys' interests, beyond sports (ex – the quieter students); not relying on what is easiest in programming.
- I can begin these types of conversations now to build social grit and resiliency (with first graders).
- How do we stay in touch? Create ways to sustain our community after kids leave/transition out.
- Help students to not view their challenges as a crutch but to turn it into a strength.
- I am thinking about how to be positive, affirming and practice a strength-based approach while also acknowledging and exploring the disadvantages my students face.
- Helping youth and staff move from the abstract beliefs of education to the concrete beliefs of education.
- Be conscious of not doing just academics in OST – valuable skills are built in other activities that help with lifelong success – teambuilding, hard work.
- Facing the uncomfortable conversations in a structured and intentional way.
- Adding social/emotional programming in more intentional ways. Mentoring.

Planning
- Take a closer look at our activities and programs. Do the services we offer help students practice the skills they need to be successful? How quickly can we adapt the program to changing populations?
- Child centered – design that follows the needs of the children.
- Design an afterschool that will completely support participants and behavior that will support them cognitively, and allow participants to grow in all aspects.
- Think specifically how programming can be relatable for the boys.
- Program needs to have space/opportunity/person to listen/talk/advise those with an issue. Find ways to regularly – but honestly – appreciate/praise behavior/work/success/change.
- Instead of set curriculum, ability to adapt to environment.
- As our curriculum manager, I must focus more time collaborating with implementation staff and our members in program design.
- I believe I need to constantly research and see the bigger picture to help students/participants beyond current situation or issues.
- Track and evaluate program services and outcomes.

- The idea of looking at the whole trajectory rather than a moment in time really resonates with me. Not "getting over" (end result) but "healing" (process).

Youth Voice
- There's more we can do to elicit student feedback to design programming that interests them.
- Focus groups – what do our guys need? Want to be more engaged?
- More participant involvement to develop curriculum and collect ideas for relevant topics of interest.
- I want to survey my students. I want to create more afterschool programs around those interests. How are we letting them explore their social identity?
- Take more time to include young people in designing the program and get their insights/opinions on its strengths/weaknesses.
- Providing opportunities for engagement through student surveys/involvement in programming.
- Often schools aren't receiving feedback from students and the CBO can lead the efforts in gaining feedback.

ENVIRONMENT
- Be more intentional in supporting the school's mission to create a school climate that is protective and representative of the student's culture and identity.
- We need to be reflective of the populations we serve and check our own issues. Equipping responsible adults to create an environment of respect, engagement and support.
- "Accidental" versus "intentional" relational engagement when working with these populations.
- I would like to add more open and honest conversations during my interactions with my boys. I want them to be comfortable in their skin.
- Creating spaces to talk about identity and explore selves. Focus on affirming efforts made, especially in academic based activities – important to combat feelings of hopelessness about school.
- Using my office as a safe space.
- Ensure an environment of peer support stemming from staff modeling.
- Encouraging staff to think of the cognitive environment, behavioral environment and relational environment.
- More do's and less don'ts as part of conduct policy. Create a positive (visual) "DO" message that we post which reflects the expectations/goals for our youth.
- Being more cognizant of "disciplining the poor".
- Increase cohesion between staff and participants creating a safer and more respectful space.
- More focus on the participants themselves, letting participants express themselves, share their lives. Allow students to reflect on their behavior and why they behave in certain ways and how we can help support them.
- The language of the program must only convey protection and support.
- Review the posted and visible messages.
- Creating an effective climate for my afterschool program. Understanding that things are constantly changing, and so will the youth, which may cause resilience. Making more positive feedback, instead of constant put-down and also be more supportive and tolerant.
- Show kids that it's okay to ask for help.
- Changing the "don't" languages to "can" and "will", trying to inpire to rather than restrict behavior.
- Staff need to know how to be positive in teaching – talk about negatives and find way to positive behaviors.
- Having an open environment for discussion and dialogue about race and culture.

- Find agreement on how to best serve kids – build a collective understanding among the adults in a building. Move out of punishment paradigm.

COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS
- Rethink how we pitch our afterschool program to principals – be careful with thinking and language around persistence, grit, resilience.
- Build connections with colleges.
- Allow time for parents to "teach" after school staff about "culture", their lives and their stories.
- Moving from "our 'youth development' partner does that" to "the school and CBO does this together".
- Building connection with peers and parents.
- How can we hold "school systems" accountable for offering a low-risk, high-support environment?
- Continue to develop partnerships with other organizations to share/develop programs, resources.
- Find ways to expose kids to other kinds of people.
- Need to be able to engage parents and families

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS, THOUGHTS, CHALLENGES
- Importance of funding on the success of program. To positively enforce youth development, there needs to be a budget that allows for appropriate number of staff, staff trainings and activities.
- Buy in from leadership – will this be supported by those at the top? How can we influence leaders to make this a priority?
- In terms of developing high levels of relational engagement, I think this makes a case for higher wages and more hours for line staff – OST budgets tend to pay direct-service staff and middle managers extremely low wages.
- Building better institutional support to encourage supporting resiliency and a nurturing environment.
- Recognizing baggage kids bring, not to stifle individuality of kids while maintaining discipline for kids' success.
- Language used in reporting documents/ board related talks should include a deeper analysis and background on the specific contexts of the neighborhoods we serve. Less quantitative, more qualitative.
- Fostering these communities of engagement and support requires skilled professionals that I don't feel we are prepared for. There are lots of expectations for activity specialists/youth counselors, however not enough time/resources to properly train. At the moment I am the only educator creating curriculum and conducting training.
- The depth and multilayered approach to this work – so much more than doing lesson plans. Staff taking on all the roles that are dispersed throughout many people in a middle class situation.
- Racial self-reflection – self-searching to allow me to identify the gaps and then bridge them. Checking in with my mindset and confront biases that effect my work. Reminder – how does my own transition make me able to do this work, where have I come from, what can I share? Remember to keep opening students' worldview to a larger context. Sharing perspective, letting kids see someone who has been through what the teens are experiencing or *adults who are willing to get into their worlds*. People who are able to confront the realities that kids do.
- I will continue to be open and vocal about my personal experiences that have led me to my place in life.

- Need to suss out what makes students successful in building relationships with mentor. What micro oppressions are we perpetuating that may deter students from our program? How do we measure engagement versus attendance?
- I need to continually check my privilege and my place in society.