"Not as Much as It Should Be": How Community-Based Outside of School Time Programs

Attend to Black Male Sociopolitical Development

Ira E. Murray, M.Ed.

University of Pittsburgh

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Dr. Amber Pabon

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Student Information:

Ira E. Murray

University of Pittsburgh School of Education, Department of Administrative & Policy Studies

Social and Comparative Analysis in Education (Ph.D.)

326 Marshall Heights Dr. Wexford, PA, 15090

Faculty Information:

Dr. Amber Pabon

University of Pittsburgh School of Education, Department of Instruction and Learning

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Across the United States, public school systems have failed to adequately attend to the educational needs of Black[1] male students for decades (Howard, 2008; Milner, Pabon, Woodson, & McGee, 2013; Noguera, 2009). As opportunity gaps linger (Milner, 2012), educational debts grow (Ladson-Billings, 2006), and Black youth incarceration rates expand (The Sentencing Project, 2014), Black male youth are under an increasingly horrific assault by the very public institution that is assumed by many to provide opportunities to positively transform their lives, but appear to be doing the exact opposite (MacLeod, 1995). In other words, a paradox exists between perceptions of public schools as beacons of hope and opportunities and negative effects of these schools on life chances of Black male students (Pabon, 2014). For instance, although there are many well-intentioned teacher candidates across the country, Pabon, Anderson, and Kharem (2011) found that a "knowledge gap" existed among Black male New York City teacher candidates that was characterized by a lack of "effective models of good teaching practices for African American students and exposure to curriculum that values the contributions of African Americans to history, language arts, science, mathematics, and the entire educational enterprise" (p. 364). Because public school systems have been ineffective in fostering positive academic and developmental outcomes for Black male students, we who are concerned with future life prospects of these children should consider the roles that other institutions within Black communities can play in supporting Black male youths' academic achievement and development.

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[1] In this paper, I use Black and African American interchangeably.

Outside of school time (OST) organizations, particularly youth development programs, are uniquely positioned to address various needs of Black male youth. These programs could potentially fill achievement and opportunity gaps (Finn-Stevenson, 2014; Milner, 2012) between Black male students and their White counterparts through not only academic support, but also by empowering Black male students to identify, critically analyze, and act to address negative sociopolitical influences on their educational opportunities. However, little is known about how OST organizations identify and conceptualize sociopolitical developmental needs and opportunities for Black male students. By sociopolitical, I am referring to social, political, and economic influences on communities (Ginwright & James, 2002). To this end, this study sought to illuminate this process by examining how community-based OST organizations within an African American community located in a northeastern state discussed their perceptions of the sociopolitical needs of the Black youth they serve as well as how they conceptualized attending to those needs. I specifically explored the following research question:

1. To what degree do community-based OST programs identify, conceptualize, and attend to sociopolitical development in Black male youth who participate in their programs?

In the proceeding sections, I first discuss educational disparities for Black male youth, followed by an overview of the potential for OST programs to help alleviate these disparities. I then discuss the potential of social justice youth development as a conceptual framework through which to analyze how OST programs identify and attend to the sociopolitical needs of Black male youth before presenting findings from a small-scale study of OST programs. I conclude with implications and recommendations for OST youth development programs that serve Black male youth.

Educational Stakes for Black Male Public School Students

There has been very little evidence that nationwide education reforms over the past 15 years have been effective, particularly for students of color and students living in poverty (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Milner, 2013; Noguera &Wells, 2011). Achievement levels for both groups of students lag behind their White counterparts across all subjects, and have grown since the 1980s. Meritocratic myths inherent in the high-stakes testing and accountability of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) have been harmful to students of color through the requirement that all students, regardless of prior educational experiences and access to resources, achieve the same level of proficiency (Heilig, Khalifa & Tillman, 2013). Discussing educational opportunities for children in low-income families, Milner (2013) notes, "there are cycles and generations of people living in poverty that the educational system may not be eliminating or at best helping to reduce" (p. 4). NCLB, in particular, has failed to live up to the original promise of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as it has strayed from the original goal of non-discrimination in favor of holding all students to the same enhanced educational standards while failing to provide equitable resources for poor students (Black, 2010). In fact, as Noguera & Wells (2011) point out, school failures were still high and standardized test scores in English and Math for low-income and minority students were still low in the decade following the implementation of NCLB.

Black males have been particularly left behind in efforts to improve educational outcomes. According to a 2012 Schott Foundation report, nationwide Black male students had a graduation rate of a mere 52%, trailing both Latino males (58%) and White males (76%). In Pennsylvania, the graduation rate for Black male students in the 2009-10 cohort was only 57%, compared to a White male graduation rate of 85% (Schott Foundation for Public Education,

2012). The 28% gap in graduation rates between Black and White male students was surpassed by only eight other states (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). These findings were not surprising, however, given the obstacles that many Black males face in public schools. Black males are more likely than White male students to attend underfunded PreK-12 public schools (Allen & White-Smith, 2014). Within these subpar environments, Black males comprise approximately 7% of the population, yet are disproportionately represented in special education, alternative schools, and remedial programs (Howard, 2008). Research has also found that Black male students are subject to disproportionate disciplinary referrals, suspensions, and school arrests, as well as more severe punishment for minor infractions than their White peers (Milner, Pabon, Woodson, & McGee, 2013; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014).

A critical manifestation of failures of public school systems in positioning Black males to positively transform their lives is the social phenomenon known as the *school-to-prison pipeline*. According to a chilling 2007 report by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), Black males born in 2001 have a one in three chance of being incarcerated at some point in their lives, compared to a one in 17 chance for White males born in the same year. In other words, 33% of black boys who are currently13 or 14 years old are expected to be prisoners at some point in their lives. To put this statistic into perspective, there are urban school districts across the country that do not graduate 33% of their black males. For instance, according to Superintendent Dr. Cedric Gray, in 2013-14 the Jackson (MS) Public School District had a 28% graduation rate for Black male students (personal communication, 2014), a sobering reality that was, unfortunately, consistent with findings from previous years (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). Clearly, many Black male public school students find themselves in distressed environments that are not conducive to positive academic and social development, oftentimes crippling their future

socioeconomic chances. Because many schools are either unwilling or unable to foster this development, it is imperative to look to other institutions that can fill these gaps, such as OST programs.

Why OST Programs?

Over the past several years, youth participation in outside-of-school time (OST) programs[2], particularly after school, has steadily increased in the United States, According to the 2014 *America After 3PM* report, which surveyed over 30,000 households across all 50 states and the District of Columbia, youth afterschool program participation has increased from 6.5 million children in 2004 to 10.2 million children in 2014, representing almost 1 in every 5 school-age children in the United States and resulting in more children attending some form of afterschool program today than ever before (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). African American and Latina/o children are twice as likely to participate in an afterschool program as their White counterparts (Afterschool Alliance, 2014; Harvard Family Research Project, 2007; Hynes and Sanders, 2011). For many of these children OST programs provide the only available adult supervision they have in the immediate hours after school. These programs typically include some combination of homework help, snacks, arts & crafts, games/activities, arts, cultural awareness activities, tutoring, and curricular-specific activities (Halpern, 1999, 2003).

Many OST programs have been shown to have myriad positive effects for children. Frequent attendance and participation in high quality OST programs have been shown to be positively associated with improved academic outcomes, self-esteem, interpersonal skills, initiative, communication, leadership, and connection to community for their participants (Strobel et al., 2008). Moreover, research has shown that high quality OST programs can help

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[2] By OST program, I am referring to programs that primarily serve youth age 5 to 18 in the hours immediately after school, on weekends, and during most schools' summer recess.

improve academic performance, school conduct, and peer relations, as well as decrease teen

pregnancy, juvenile arrests, and drug activity for low-income Black male youth (Woodland,

2008).

Although many afterschool programs in African American communities have moved

more toward an academic support model as a result of NCLB mandates (Pittman et al., 2004),

OST programs do not have to focus solely on academic enrichment to be effective (Lauer et al.,

2006). In fact, Woodland (2008), in his synthesis of various studies on characteristics of high

quality OST programs that serve African American youth, found nine core elements of effective

afterschool programs for African-American youth:

1. Adult-child relationships: committed, authoritative adults and small adult-child ratios

2. Flexibility: adaptive to the needs of the child and community

3. Staff training and education: programs hire and retain qualified, well-trained staff

4. Safe space: safety, close to participants' homes, and accessible

5. Cultural competent: culture integrated into the environment

6. Family involved: programs include children and families in planning

7. Enriching curricula: opportunities for growth and learning, utilizing arts, music, dance, and other mediums

8. One-on-one academic assistance: homework help and one-on-one tutoring

9. Rigorous and empirical evaluations: use of program evaluations for continuous improvement

The above characteristics suggest that academic support is one of many characteristics that can

make OST programs positively influential in the lives of African-American youth. Yet, African

American urban youth in low-SES communities are increasingly offered OST programs that

either primarily or exclusively offer academic support, oftentimes at the expense of other activities that could foster academic achievement and positive youth development.

Conceptual Framework

Researcher Postionality

As a social scientist, it is important to consider my own cultural and epistemological foundations as I attempt to understand other cultures. Doing so will help ensure that the narratives I share are free from researcher bias and genuinely reflect the experiences of those I studied. In considering my position as a researcher, I am reminded of the reflections of noted education scholar James A. Banks, particularly his belief that "the biographical journeys of researchers greatly influence their values, their research questions, and the knowledge they construct. The knowledge they construct mirrors their life experiences and their values" (Banks, 1998, p. 4). To this end, I will discuss my background, which informed my epistemological stance and potential biases.

I am an African American man from a low- to middle-income community in a medium size southern city. My community was demographically very similar to Greenview in that it was overwhelming African American, mixed-income, and contained several assets (e.g. schools, churches, businesses, economically secure families, and a public recreational center) and challenges (e.g. increasing crime rates and an infiltration of gangs) to youth development. My experiences in this community were formative in my decision to pursue a career in non-profit management. I spent the first 9 years of my professional career as a program/grants manager and director for a major non-profit organization in Jackson, MS. I particularly worked with OST programs that served students grades K-12 in low-SES communities in the hours immediately after school and during the summer. Most of the OST programs I encountered primarily served

African American boys and girls in elementary and middle schools. As I worked with an increasingly diverse set of programs, I began to realize that although many of the programs touted academic progress of their students, they often failed to attend to the sociopolitical needs of the youth they served. I became interested in how youth could more fully develop beyond the increasingly academic-centric world of youth development programs and into productive citizens who's values will be based more on their overall contributions to their communities rather than simply their academic and economic success.

Based on these experiences, I entered this research fully aware of my biases toward sociopolitical youth development. I also understood that, given my role as a program evaluator, I have developed a critical lens through which to view OST programs. It is through these lenses that I analyzed the extent to which this community partnership attended to youth sociopolitical development.

Social Justice Youth Development

Positive Youth Development (PYD) emerged in the 1990s as a more progressive way of addressing youth development, moving the youth development field from a deficit-orientation to a focus on developing individual assets that youth possess (Catalano et al., 2004; Gilgoff and Ginwright, 2015; Lerner et al., 2011). PYD posits that youth develop can be optimized by building upon positive individual and social "assets" that youth possess (Eccles & Gootman, 2002) in the context of their changing environments (Lerner et al., 2011). Building on earlier theorizing, research on these individual and social assets identified what came to be known as the Five C's of PYD, including: a) competence (social, academic, cognitive, vocational); b) confidence; c) connection (with people and institutions); d) character; and e) caring and compassion (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lerner et al., 2005). In reviewing PYD, Lerner et al.

(2011) utilized a variation of Hamilton's framework to discuss three different ways in which

researchers and practitioners understand PYD: PYD as a developmental process, PYD as a

philosophy or approach to youth programming, and PYD as instances of youth programs' and

organizational focus. As a developmental process, PYD considers ways in which researchers

study how youth develop individually within their ever-changing contexts. These varying ways

of studying PYD include studies of purpose, assets, motivation, stage-environment fit, active

engagement, transition periods, and resilience. PYD as a philosophy or approach referred to how

PYD is used to design youth programs. Specifically, the researchers examined how PYD

appears to be related to varying design components of youth programs, including different target

developmental domains and program characteristics/models. Finally, PYD as instances of focus

referred to the characteristics of the outcomes that youth programs espouse as desired from their

participants. Subsequently, the concept of PYD was extended by the much-analyzed 4-H Study

of PYD (Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner et al., 2014), which posited that PYD could be optimized

when the individual assets of youth are aligned with the assets of their environments, thereby

moving the field to better recognize ecological influences on youth development.

Even PYD models that take into account ecological influences on the lives of youth,

however, do not extend far enough conceptually. Baldridge (2014), for instance, argued that

there is the potential to reframe PYD by emphasizing deficits present in youth that programs are

attempting to eradicate, particularly as programs compete for funding. For Baldridge,

accentuating negative aspects of children in order to make positive development more

pronounced can potentially negatively influence the ways programs view and interact with their

participants. Moreover, many PYD models do not adequately consider the potential power of

youth and young adults to change their environments in ways that foster more complete youth

development. Indeed, a burgeoning body of research in the youth development field has more closely examined how outside-of-school time (OST) youth development programs can help empower youth to become change agents who develop the ability to critically analyze and collectively act to transform oppressive ecological factors that negatively impact their lives (Cammarota, 2011; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Ginwright & James, 2002).

To this end, emerging scholarship in the field of social justice youth development (SJYD) is used to analyze sociopolitical discourse and practices of youth development practitioners included in this study. Ginwright and Cammarota (2002) conceptualized SJYD, which combined Freire's concept of critical consciousness with social action, addressing PYD's "inability to examine the complex social, economic, and political forces that bear on the lives of urban youth" (p. 82). The authors offered a two-pronged critique of PYD, noting that PYD's focus on individual assets could potentially overlook serious negative ecological influences on youth, and that PYD formulations tended to be based on White, middle-class cultural values. For instance, the Character domain of the Five C's of PYD (Lerner et al., 2005) emphasized adherence to societal and cultural rules as an indicator of PYD. However, this domain failed to adequately consider unjust rules (laws) that govern and oppress youth in marginalized communities. Adhering to those rules, therefore, would be antithetical to positive development for those youth. In further delineating SJYD, Ginwright and James (2002) articulated five principles of SJYD, including: a. Analyzing power within social relationships; b. making identity central; c. promoting systemic change; d. encouraging collective action; and, e. embracing youth culture.

Two central components of SJYD that are salient to the conceptual framework of this paper are sociopolitical development (SPD) and the centrality of identity. Watts, Williams, and Jagers (2003) described SPD as "a process of growth in a person's knowledge, analytical skills,

emotional faculties, and capacity for action in political and social systems" (p. 185). In other words, SPD is the progression of a person's ability to identify and confront negative political, social, and economic systems (Ginwright and James, 2002). Watts, Williams, and Jagers (2003) identified five progressive stages of sociopolitical development:

1. *Acritical Stage*: Asymmetry is outside of awareness, or the existing social order is though to reflect real differences in the capabilities of group members;

2. *Adaptive Stage*: Asymmetry may be acknowledged, but the system maintaining it is seen as immutable. Predatory, antisocial, or accommodation strategies are employed to maintain a positive sense of self and to acquire social and material rewards;

3. *Precritical Stage*: Complacency gives way to awareness of and concerns about asymmetry and inequality. The value of adaptation is questioned;

4. *Critical Stage*: There is a desire to learn more about asymmetry, injustice, oppression, and liberation. Through this process, some will conclude that the asymmetry is unjust and social-change efforts are warranted, and;

5. *Liberation Stage*: The experience and awareness of oppression is salient. Liberation behavior (involvement in social action and community development) is tangible and frequent. Adaptive behaviors are eschewed. (p. 188)

Centrality of identity refers to "complex ways that young people…identify themselves, as well as how they are seen by the larger society (Ginwright & James, 2002). This concept considers how identity can be a determinant of how power and privileges are distributed, which often excludes traditionally marginalized groups of people. Centralizing identity is essential because youth bring different strengths to their learning and developmental environments based on how they conceptualize their identities (Banks et al., 2007). Therefore, by making youths'

identities central in their OST experiences, programs can capitalize on the strengths that children

bring with them and provide developmental opportunities that build on those strengths and

enable youth to identify how they can use their cultural experiences to transform their

communities.

Recent studies (e.g. Cammarota, 2011; Christens and Peterson, 2012; Duncan-Andrade,

2005; Akom, Cammarota and Ginwright, 2008) have illustrated how sociopolitical development

can have important implications for youth development and mobilizing today's youth to address

issues in their own communities. Much of the literature in this area focuses on processes of

development and outcomes that may occur as a result of youths' participating in both in-school

and outside-of-school programs that emphasize various iterations of social justice youth

development. Processes include, for example, reinforcing positive images of youths' cultural

identities (e.g. Jackson and Boutte, 2009), youth participation in marches and rallies (Ginwright

and James, 2002), and youth participatory action research (e.g. Cammarota and Romero, 2011;

Stovall and Delgado, 2009). Youth-specific outcomes of social justice youth development

include, for example, critical consciousness development (e.g. Diemer and Li, 2011; Godfrey

and Grayman, 2014), youth activism/collective action (e.g. Akom, Cammarota, and Ginwright,

2008; Christens and Dolan, 2011; Kirshner and Ginwright, 2012; Mitra, Serriere, and Kirshner,

2014; West, 2007), youth empowerment (e.g. Christens and Peterson, 2012), civic development,

psychosocial wellness, and academic engagement (Kirshner and Ginwright, 2012).

Methodology

The primary aim of this study was to examine how OST organizations identify and attend

to the sociopolitical needs of Black male youth they serve. To this end, this study employed a

three-part qualitative research design that consisted of the following elements: interviews, field

observations, and document analyses. This qualitative approach was less structured, allowing

data analysis to focus less on generalizability and comparability and more on a contextual

understanding (Maxwell, 2013) of sociopolitical development in OST programs.

Sampling

This study utilized nonprobability sampling to recruit participants. Nonprobability

sampling was an appropriate technique for this study because the study focused on a particular

geographically bound community and was not meant to make inferences about other

communities (Berg, 2007). The sampling frame for this study consisted of members of a

community-wide education and youth development advocacy group located in the community of

study. I selected this community coalition of schools, OST programs, community activists,

parents, clergy, and other stakeholders because of its longstanding stature as a multi-stakeholder

partnership focused on education issues in a well-known, historic African American community.

I attended community-wide meetings of this group for several months prior to this study and

became familiar with organizational leadership, OST program practitioners, school

administrators, advocates, and community members at large.

Because of my familiarity with this community group and its members, this study utilized

a purposive nonprobability sample. Purposive sampling helped ensure that coalition members

who were actively engaged in education and youth development work within the community as

well as organizational practices within the coalition were represented in the study (Berg, 2007).

For the purpose of this study, active membership was defined as attending at least 50% of group

meetings from October 2014 to March 2015. Including active participants was important

because the study will, in the future, examine how organizations collaborate across community

in support of youth SPD and active participants.

Interviews

I conducted two semi-structured 70 minute interviews. I used an adaptation of

Schuman's phenomenological interview series (Seidman, 2013), combining the series' three

elements of focused life history, details of experience, and reflection on meaning into one

interview. This interview method allowed participants to explore the development of their

interests and purpose with regards to youth development, share their experiences in working in

OST youth development, and consider the latent meanings of their development and present

experiences (Seidman, 2013). I recorded these interviews with a digital audio recording device.

All recordings and transcriptions were saved on a secured hard drive. Pseudonyms were used in

place of names in order to protect participants' anonymity. I analyzed these interviews using

close and repeated listening (Seidman, 2013).

Field Observations

I conducted one observation of an open community coalition meeting, which allowed me

to record and analyze themes that arose from meeting discourses in much the same way as

interview content. Observational field notes were recorded, chronicling physical environments,

oral discourses, and human behavior (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Jotted notes were taken

during the meeting, and field notes were completed within 48 hours after the meeting (Berg,

2007), so as to record a thicker description of events. In analyzing the content of field notes, I

initially coded the notes using an open coding technique, which helped me to "identify and even

extract themes, topics, or issues in a systematic manner" (Berg, 2007, p. 205). Particularly, I

examined oral discourses that spoke to youth development. Gee (1999) described oral discourse

as language plus 'other stuff' including "action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects,

tools, and places" (p. 18). In this sense, oral discourse not only included words, but also the

meanings and actions associated with them.   Therefore, analysis of oral discourse examined not only the actual words used, but also the context in which words were used in order to derive situated meanings (Gee, 1999).

Document Analysis

Finally, this study utilized content analysis in order to systematically examine and interpret (Berg, 2007) written discourses. Specifically, document analysis was used to analyze how OST programs articulated sociopolitical development among youth. OST programs included in this document analysis consisted of programs that were members of the community coalition. Seven of the nine organizations that participated in this coalition were included in the final document analysis because they had readily available organizational and programmatic information needed for the analysis. This analysis involved an examination of mission and vision statements, as well as program descriptions, for each organization. These particular documents provided background and context (Bowen, 2009) about these organizations' philosophical beliefs and programmatic approaches. An approach that entails "finding, selecting, appraising (making sense of), and [synthesizing]" (Bowen, 2009, p. 28) data (in this case, statements of sociopolitical development) was used to analyze these documents. Document analyses also enabled the "[examination of] artifacts of social communication" (Berg, 2007, p. 306) from the organizations, specifically considering both manifest content and latent content. According to Berg (2007), "manifest content is comparable to the surface structure present in the message, and latent content is the deep structural meaning conveyed by the message" (p. 308). In this particular examination, manifest content was derived from mission statements, vision statements, and program descriptions. Analyzing both latent and manifest content together allowed for an examination of congruence between what OST programs articulated as their

youth development goals and what goals they actually worked towards, particularly in the context of SPD.

Participants and Context

This study focused on the ways in which OST practitioners, programs, and partnerships identified, discussed, and attended to sociopolitical needs of the youth they served, including how youth developed critical consciousness and activist orientations. As such, data collected for this study were limited to two OST practitioners, one community education partnership, and organizational discourses of OST programs that were members of the partnership. All of the participants work in youth development in Greenview, an historic African American community located in a metropolitan city in Pennsylvania, a northeastern state in the United States. Similar to many historic African American communities across the US, Greenview was a once vibrant mecca of African American cultural, social, and economic prosperity. Over the past several decades, however, this community has suffered as a result of myriad sociopolitical issues that have negatively impacted its residents, businesses, and schools. The schools in this community were low-performing and in an urban district, much like many urban districts across the country.

Both interview participants were African American, 30-35 years old, and have worked in Greenview for at least one year. James (pseudonym), a man who has worked in the community of and on for over a year, works as a consultant and practitioner at HOPE, an OST organization serving neighborhood youth age 5-18 years old. April (pseudonym), a woman who grew up in Greenview and worked at HOPE for several years during her youth, was the director of the community OST partnership and a former director of programs for a different OST organization. Observational notes were recorded at one community partnership meeting held during the winter in the basement of an historic African American church nestled in the center of the community.

Discussion

Research in social justice youth development has examined how youth develop socio-politically, including how they become culturally aware (e.g. Jackson & Boutte, 2009), develop critical analytical skills (e.g. Diemer and Li, 2011; Godfrey and Grayman, 2014), investigate critical ecological issues negatively affecting their communities (e.g. Cammarota & Romero, 2011; Iwasaki et al., 2014; Stovall & Delgado, 2009; Yang, 2009), and creatively explore and express these critical issues (e.g. Duncum, 2011; Hanley, 2011; Morrell, 2002; Stovall, 2006). Within this study, two salient themes emerged that can be understood using SJYD: cultural awareness and community connectedness; and critical analysis.

Cultural Awareness and Community Connectedness

During the course of data collection, the most salient theme that emerged was the importance of connecting youth with their racial and community cultures. This theme was not surprising, as participation in cultural activities is a common practice in many OST programs (Halpern, 2003; Woodland, 2008). As Banks et al. (2007) noted, learning "is facilitated when learners are encouraged to use their home and community" (p. 15). This concept of learning is complementary to social justice models of youth development. Both James and April were explicit concerning the importance of developing cultural awareness and connection with community among youth in Greenview. For instance, James remarked:

> So, because of their lack of a sense of history, there is a lack of a sense of understanding about what is capable…there's one thing not to know, there's another thing to have what you think is knowledge but it's so limited and inaccurate that that becomes very damaging. So, the program does attempt to share knowledge.

These comments by James illustrated his concern about the level of cultural awareness exhibited by the youth he worked with. His remark bemoaned a perceived lack of cultural efficacy and understanding among Greenview youth that underscored why HOPE explicitly attended to

cultural awareness in its programs. In James's view, the Black youth, particularly males, that he worked with were not able to envision a broader array of life possibilities in large part because of disconnections with their cultural history. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, having a distorted view of their race and culture could potentially be damaging the way these youth perceived themselves and their possibilities. To James, it was imperative that HOPE educate these youth about their culture and history as a way to empower them to more positively view themselves and their possibilities.

Similarly, April also emphasized a lack of cultural awareness and community connection among youth in Greenview.

> A lot of the kids don't know the history of, lets say Emancipation Point, that line in the sand that was drawn, which I think is an important story to tell…They don't know about the heyday of Greenview. They don't know about great schools. They don't know about awesome graduates that come from Greenview…They don't know much about the jazz history, they don't know about businesses that boomed.

In this passage, April's identification of the lack of knowledge about the history of the community in which these youth live grounded much of the work done by the community partnership. She viewed educating youth about their community's rich and storied history as a way to raise their own self-esteem, as well as cultural and community pride. Specifically, the community partnership began working within schools and OST programs to include more cultural development among the overwhelmingly African American students that attended these schools and programs. Consider the following field note from a community partnership meeting:

> Ms. B, a teacher at the elementary school, stands up to give her updates…"Our school has recently been named a star school and we're very proud of that," to which she receives a loud ovation lasting approximately 10 seconds. She then invites the group to attend an upcoming event in celebration of that accomplishment. Next, she emphasizes a perceived need to shift the culture of the school. "Ms. S is working with us to bring back African centeredness, which has been missing for a while from our school," she says. Attendees around the room nod their heads, as if in affirmation of her observation and goal.

Although overall academic improvement of the school was celebrated, Ms. B's next comment illustrated her belief that academic achievement was an incomplete measurement of school and child success, as she immediately transitioned to a discussion of the need for more cultural development. Clearly, those in attendance agreed with Ms. B's notion that a return to cultural development is important and needed for the students in the elementary school. This feeling was also evident in the discourses of OST programs. Six of the seven programs included in this study explicitly mentioned cultural awareness or community connection in at least one of the documents reviewed. Most prominent in these discourses were program goals that aimed to connect students to community through service in community organizations and field trips that sought to help youth learn more about their racial history in the city.

Critical Analysis

Critical analysis was another salient theme that emerged across multiple domains in this study. By critical analysis, I am referring to a developmental process that involves two key components: critical reflection and critical action (Diemer and Li, 2011; Godfrey and Grayman, 2014). According to Diemer and Li (2011), critical reflection refers to consciousness and critical analysis of sociopolitical inequities, whereas critical action is the participation in social action as a result of increased self-efficacy regarding one's ability to be an agent of change. Critical analysis in sociopolitical youth development can entail both youth critiquing ecological influences on their life chances as well as their own cultures and how those cultures can be influenced by and represented in media (Morrell, 2002). Morrell (2002) noted that the "critically literate can understand the socially constructed meaning embedded in texts as well as the political and economic contexts in which texts are embedded" (p. 73). To this end, he offered a

notion of youth critical analysis of popular culture, defined as an "exchange" between dominant

(mainstream) culture and subordinate (group) cultures.

Critical analysis in the context of this study was much less salient than cultural awareness

across multiple programs, which was not surprising because critical analysis is a much more

complex process for youth development programs to explore (Diemer & Li, 2011). However,

the issue did emerge in two very different ways: 1) as a key component of youth development

programming; and 2) as an unmet need.

The most prominent instance of critical analysis as a key component of youth

programming emerged during the interview with James. After discussing the need for more

cultural awareness and community connection, our conversation transitioned to exploring ways

that youth at HOPE operationalize their cultural development into critical analytical projects.

This conversation is noted below:

> AUTHOR: So even with, though the education opportunities around the history of their community, once these kids are exposed to it, is there anything, are there opportunities that they have to, um, to create some sort of action out of what they learned? And, action defined very broadly. It could be anything from, um, creating poems to talk about what they read, or, um…
>
> JAMES: There was a poster project.
>
> AUTHOR: Okay
>
> JAMES: So, there are some projects. And I'm not going to say there's a complete gap there. It could always be better. But, a lot of our kids did poster projects that they presented in the Obama Library…They focused on the history of Greenview and African American history in general, so there were some projects. There were some learning and actionable items that took place.

According to James, youth were not only exposed to cultural developmental opportunities, but

were provided opportunities to analyze their community and create counter-narratives about

where they live, their culture, and their history. Furthermore, youth were able to use creative

expression, visual art in this instance, as a tool for critically analysis and knowledge sharing.

This process was important to HOPE, as it encouraged students to begin to explore connections

between their community's history and current ways in which their community is perceived.

     April had a very similar perspective on critical analysis. She discussed ways in which

youth were able to analyze and share conditions that affect Greenview, while also creating new

narratives that countered negative perceptions of their community.

> So we have iPads and some other equipment that we bought for them and they'll be
> taking photos and doing an analysis of Greenview and the positive light and sharing with
> other communities using social media to highlight things in Greenview. So, there will
> be…this building used to be…and finding a current image and an older image and telling
> the story in between, what happened then, what happened now and what they feel their
> role is in bringing it back.

 These comments by April underscore creative ways in which youth can critically analyze

negative sociopolitical influences on their community, while also exposing others to positive

stories about their environment. To her, it was important that students not only were able to

connect their community's history with present conditions, but also critically analyze how the

transformation occurred, which entailed a critical analysis of sociopolitical issues that negatively

impacted their community. Moreover, the students were also challenged to consider what roles

they might play in addressing those issues and revitalizing their community. This project was

also important in that it allowed youth to connect elements of their culture (i.e. social media)

with their community's history and their own sociopolitical action.

     It is important to note, however, that critical analytical processes and activities similar to

the art and Digital View projects are not very prevalent across youth development programs in

Greenview. Consider the following exchange:

> AUTHOR: So, how big of a role does, um, sociopolitical development play in youth
> development programs in Greenview?

APRIL: Not as much as it should be. I mean, we do the cultural stuff…but in terms of sociopolitical development, it could be a lot better.

When asked about the role of sociopolitical development, and by extension critical analysis, in youth programs in the community, April was very explicit that, while there is some focus on sociopolitical development in youth, that process is not prevalent across programs. Moreover, critical analysis was not a prominent theme across OST programs. In fact, only three of the programs included in this study explicitly incorporated some degree of critical analysis in their program literature. Critical analysis was also absent as a discussion point during the community meeting. Although there was a brief discussion of the need for more African centeredness in school for the youth, there was no explicit conversation regarding how students would use cultural development to critically analyze sociopolitical factors negatively influencing their community. Given the sociopolitical issues Greenview faces, it was surprising that more attention was not paid to the roles that youth could play in helping to transform the community. Given that the literature says this, and youth are capable of this,

Implications

This study explored how organizations identified, discussed, and attended to sociopolitical youth development in Black youth. Although study participants shared insights about sociopolitical development in Black youth generally, findings from this study are particularly applicable to Black male youth. By fostering sociopolitical development, particularly for Black male youth whose educational experiences have too often been shaped by oppressive educational and social policies, OST programs can empower these youth to view themselves in more historically positive, culturally affirming ways. Thus, OST programs have the potential to help Black male youth resist conforming to negative narratives about their academic abilities and life chances by teaching them how to identify and critically analyze

negative sociopolitical influences on their educational opportunities and experiences. This critical analysis is important because it encourages Black male youth to counter narratives that exist regarding their educational attainment.

OST programs must make concerted efforts to help empower Black male youth to connect with the rich history of their culture as well as critically analyze how extant sociopolitical factors influence their educational and social experiences. OST programs, because of their general focus on youth development, connections with communities, and flexibility in how they structure youth programming, are positioned to help foster sociopolitical development in Black male youth. Understanding how OST organizations that serve Black male youth identify, conceptualize, and attend to sociopolitical developmental opportunities for these youth, therefore, is critical. While I make no claims for generalizability (Maxwell, 2013) based on findings from this pilot study, the insights I gleaned are salient. Foremost, these findings provide examples of how OST programs that serve Black male youth might view the sociopolitical needs of these youth, as well as how they may conceptualize their own effectiveness in attending to youths' sociopolitical needs. However, these findings also indicate that while OST programs might identify sociopolitical development as a need for the Black male youth they serve, these programs may still not engage in sociopolitical youth development. Indeed, April's remark, "Not as much as it should be," in response to a question about Greenview's OST programs' emphasis on sociopolitical development underscores gaps that may exist in how OST program practitioners feel about youth's sociopolitical needs and whether or not these programs actually attend to those needs. Thus, more research is needed to illuminate sociopolitical developmental processes of OST programs themselves in addition to sociopolitical developmental processes of youth.

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