



The Pathways Project (Proyecto Caminos) Youth, Programs, and Parents

Participants and program staff alike can attest that out-of-school programs provide a unique opportunity for youth development. But how exactly does this development work?

We know that young people are highly engaged and often stretched in new ways. We know that they develop important life skills (responsibility, teamwork, skills for navigating the world around them) and that these often transfer beyond the program to other parts of their lives (family, school, planning for the future). But we have little systematic knowledge about how these developmental changes occur, what conditions best foster them and how culture comes into play. This study aimed to bridge the gap between research and practice with the objective being to understand the processes and pathways of youth development in ways that are directly helpful to youth programs.

Researchers selected programs for high school-aged youth in a variety of community contexts and focused on programs that are structured, meet regularly, have voluntary participation, and encourage participants to plan and work together towards a shared goal (e.g., a production, performance, community event, or service project). This study will obtain information from youth and program leaders over one full program cycle (such as a school year). This information was collected through questionnaires, interviews, and observations at four points in time. To see how families influence and are influenced by the youth’s experiences in programs, researchers also sought information from parents at the beginning and end of the program cycle.

This research was funded by the William T. Grant Foundation.



RESEARCH TEAM

In addition to the University of Illinois, the research team included researchers from the University of Minnesota, Loyola University of Chicago, Binghamton University, and Arizona State University. The FRC is highly committed to working with programs in ways that are beneficial to all. The prior research project by our team provided information that has been used by programs nationwide, as well as two dozen published articles that illuminate the experiences of youth and youth practitioners.

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