Passing the Mic: Toward Culturally Responsive Out of School Time Leadership

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to explore the application of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) in an out of school time organization (OST). This was accomplished by analyzing how the actions of leaders both enabled and constrained CRSL. Research was conducted with Inspire Mentoring an OST organization that provides mentoring services to approximately 90-120 high school students of color from freshman through senior year. Approximately 60% of the mentors identify as people of color. The data collected for this qualitative case study occurred over 6 months and included: 6 semi-structured interviews with executive leaders and adult mentors, 5 observations of organizational meetings and community workshops, and reviewed documents from Inspire Mentoring. The leadership practices observed were analyzed using the behaviors of CRSL. This study suggests that positional OST leaders should become more connected to their community understanding longstanding inequities, interrogate their own worldviews, and work in tandem with minoritized youth and community members to address cultural youth development needs.

Keywords: out of school time, culturally responsive school leadership, youth leadership, case study

Introduction and Research Question

During my interview with the Executive Director of Inspire Mentoring (IM) Diana Bond (Asian American Woman), she claimed that the minoritized youth in her organization “have a voice and that students are primary”. Minoritized youth are young people of color that have been historically marginalized by society and institutions in the United States (Khalifa, 2018). Diana’s assertion piqued my interest because the minoritized youth that her mentoring organization serves have been described as the farthest from educational justice. Routinely the target of disproportionate discipline and Out of School Time (OST) organizations with deficit ideologies, these youth typically have the least voice and agency (Baldrige, 2014). As my interviews with people associated with IM continued, a more nuanced picture of Diana’s statement came to light. I believe a form of Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) was occurring that engaged this community in empowering ways.
OST organizations like school clubs, summer camps, and after school programs that serve minoritized youth can be sites of youth development in the areas of cultural development, identity development, critical consciousness raising, and civic engagement that can lead to transformation of inequitable socio-political systems that effect their lives (Kwon, 2013; Ginwright and James, 2002). Youth development could be defined as a “process of growth and increasing competence” between childhood and adulthood (Larson, 2000 p. 170). However, the OST literature notes leadership practices that negatively affect youth development through leaders asserting deficit-based ideologies and trying to assimilate minoritized youth into middle class United States values (Baldridge, 2014; Halpern, 2002). Commonly, OST leadership practices have reproduced racial inequities for minoritized youth by having undertrained staff, narrowly focused programs, and a scarcity of programs located within their community (Woodland, 2008; Halpern, 2000; Weitzman, Mijanovich, Silver & Brazill, 2008). The persistent racial inequity produced by OST leaders suggest exploring culturally responsive forms of leadership to better meet the youth development of minoritized youth.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) suggests that educators should adapt their style of teaching to address the cultural learning and social needs of children (Gay, 2018). Gay (1994) found that culturally responsive development can enable ethnically/culturally diverse youth to stay connected to and build upon their values, knowledges, and ways of moving through the world. Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) derives from the concept of CRP, but instead focuses on a leader’s ability to shift all aspects of educational organizations to respond to minoritized students developmental needs (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). Research on CRSL has typically focused on leadership practices of principals, instructional leaders, and teacher leaders to influence change within the contexts of K-12 schools (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis; 2016; Marshall and Khalifa, 2018). CRSL’s ability to understand and address the cultural needs of minoritized youth may provide a framework to transform OST leadership practice. Thus, this study explores how two OST leaders Executive Director Diana Bond and Director of Programs Alex Champion (a White Male) at Inspire Mentoring (IM) in a diverse metropolitan region of the Western United States are changing their leadership practices to become more culturally responsive. The research question is:

1. RQ1: How is this OST leadership team exhibiting behaviors of Culturally Responsive-ness?

This article begins by critiquing research on leadership practice within the OST field. Assessing OST leadership practice will explicate the ways in which color-evasive values lead to dismissing the cultural needs of minoritized youth. Next, the theoretical framework will examine Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL). Subsequently, there will be a description of the organization and research methods utilized. Lastly, the article will conclude with findings and implications for practice and research. The findings from research question one suggests that positional OST leaders should become more connected to their community understanding longstanding inequities, interrogate their own worldviews, and work in tandem with minoritized youth and community members to address cultural youth development needs.