Developing Afterschool Programs for Teens: 4-H Bloco Drum and Dance

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4-H Bloco Drum and Dance is an afterschool program that teaches adolescents drumming, dancing, and theater arts in the traditions of Brazilian Carnaval. Teens learn to express themselves in a variety of modalities and perform at community events. The program was developed by a community coalition that included 4-H, other youth programs, and the school district. Most program participants are Latino, high-risk youth. Program evaluation revealed that 4-H Bloco had positive impacts with regard to cultural appreciation, gang-related attitudes and awareness, health awareness, exercise, and nutrition. 4-H Bloco demonstrates the value of culturally relevant arts education in Extension youth programming.

Afterschool hours, 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm, are the peak time for juvenile crime and risky practices, such as gang activities or alcohol and drug abuse, according to the US Department of Education. This time, while critical, can also represent an opportunity for learning and providing youth with a healthy and safe environment.

Studies indicate that few elementary or middle school youth attend afterschool programs (Brimhall, Reaney, & West, 1999). Although federal government and private foundation funding has increased, research indicates that there are not enough programs available to meet the demand. Further, as youth age, there is much less involvement by middle and high school youth in organized afterschool day care and programs (Alexander, 2003).

When surveyed, nine out of ten Americans believe that teen youth should be involved in positive afterschool programs, and two-thirds acknowledge it is difficult to locate these programs. Due to the results of these studies, there is significant need for expanding the availability of afterschool programs for middle and high school youth. One option worthy of further investigation, and hence, the development and implementation thereof, was the incorporation of music, dance, and drumming programs into middle and high school afterschool programs.

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In 2003, a Gallup Poll found that Americans are playing musical instruments at the highest levels since 1978. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents agreed that playing a musical instrument provides a sense of accomplishment and encourages expression. Eighty-five percent believe that playing music makes individuals smarter and research indicates there is a direct correlation between higher math scores among youth who participate in an organized music program.

Other survey results indicated that 97% believed that playing an instrument helped them to appreciate arts and culture, 88% said playing an instrument teaches youth discipline, and 71% believe that teenagers who play an instrument or who are involved in music or dance are less likely to have discipline problems (Cushman, 2005). The study further stated that people who participate in music and the performing arts show more creativity, have a better understanding of themselves and other cultures, and a stronger connection to their communities, regardless of age, income levels or ethnic groups.

4-H Bloco Drum and Dance Program

4-H Bloco Drum and Dance is a program in the Brazilian Carnaval tradition that is dedicated to enlivening the life of the community through music, dance, and nutrition education by providing youth the opportunity to raise academic standards, make better food choices, reduce high school drop out rates, discourage gang participation and build a sense of cultural pride. This is accomplished through building

positive self-esteem, embracing personal discipline, developing a commitment to the community and building musical skills.

The 4-H Bloco Drum and Dance afterschool program in Sonoma County targets middle and high school students, between the ages of 12 and 19. This program has been modeled after San Francisco's Loco Bloco (see www.locobloco.org). The Loco Bloco program encourages boys and girls of diverse nationalities and ethnic backgrounds to come together and share their love of music and dance in a safe afterschool environment.

The Loco Bloco program provides two hours of instruction and practice, three times a week in both drumming and dancing. The music embraces both cultural expression and exercise. Additionally, healthy snacks are served to encourage teens to adopt healthy eating habits. The lessons are led by older high school students, along with paid adult staff who serve as mentors by sharing their drum and dance skills with younger teens.

Through the instructional activities, youth are introduced to Afro/Brazilian, Cuban, Hip-Hop and Reggaeton music and dance. Students participating in the instruction of drumming, learn basic concepts and a wide variety of techniques while playing: conga, surdo, repeniquè, Tambo rim, shekere, bells, and djembès. Dance students learn the basic steps of Brazilian music and how the movements relate to the beat of the drums. Following the mastery of these basic steps, they in turn, develop their own dance routines, which tell a story. Both drum and dance students learn about themes, how to develop appropriate choreography, costume design and construction, and mask making.

Once the Drum and Dance skills are mastered, the youth share their skills and knowledge through performances. The performances, due to the theme development, choreography, and costumes, enforce the newly learned music skills, routines, and how to work effectively with other team members to produce the final product, that bring smiles and greater appreciation for percussion, dance and fast paced rhythms to their audiences. By integrating basic music skills and learning to work together as a unit, youth are involved in team building experiences and cultural appreciation. Students create ownership and awareness of their abilities as they contribute to the process of creating a successful performance by committing themselves to disciplined rehearsals.

Our goal was to build a comprehensive long-term program using the 4 H Youth Development model of experiential education and the San Francisco Loco Bloco model of drum and dance to provide an Afterschool Drum and Dance Program. Program objectives included the following: 1) Through the use of nutritional education and culturally appropriate foods and snacks, participants will be able to identify healthy nutritional snacks; 2) Physical fitness as an activity choice beyond that of sports will reinforce an awareness of the connection between physical fitness and obesity prevention; 3) Through the development, implementation, and extensive collaboration between youth serving agencies, schools and community groups, there will be the successful creation of combined use of facilities and in-kind contributions, services and donations; 4) The creation and promotion of intergenerational programming opportunities to include families will result in long term relationships with caring adults, parents, and grandparents; 5) By focusing on the whole middle school child, and by providing early intervention models of instruction, in the form of dance and music, youth, families and communities will engage in positive lifestyle alternatives.

This paper shares findings from an evaluation conducted between 2005 and 2009 to see whether and how the 4-H Bloco Drum and Dance Program was successful in meeting its goals.

METHOD

The evaluation used a pre-test post-test design for three consecutive years between program year 2005 through 2008.

Sample

Across the three years, 229 youth completed the pre-test and 218 completed the post-test. The ethnicity of program participants was 72% Latino, 14% Caucasian, 7% mixed ethnicity, 3% African-American, 2% Native American, and 2% Asian

or Pacific Islander. Fifty-nine percent came from single-parent homes, and 32% came from immigrant families. Thirty-five percent of the teens reported having a good friend in a gang.

Data

Participants completed questionnaires at the beginning and the end of the year. Questionnaires included items in the interest areas such as importance of learning about cultures, gang-related attitudes and involvement, health awareness, exercise, and nutrition. Questions were designed in a multiple choice format with rating from 0 to number times per week to allow for quantitative comparisons.

Analysis

Change in pre-test and post-test responses were assessed through testing for statistical significance in paired *t*-test scores.

RESULTS

Evaluation results for 4-H Bloco are presented for three program years, (see Figure 1) from 2005-06, 2006-07 through 2008-09 (also see Conklin-Ginop, Braverman, Caruso & Bone, 2011). Percentage gains have been reported here, all of which were statistically significant at $p < .001$ level.

Cultural Appreciation

At pre-test, 50% of teens felt it was important for kids their age to learn what life is like in different cultures, compared with 82% on the post-test. At pre-test, 76% felt it was important to spend time with peers of different races, compared with 94% at post-test.

> *"In Bloco everyone is family. It don't matter where you come from or what kind of car you drive or if you are cool at school. We are brothers here."* Roberto, teen participant (15 years old).

Gang-Related Attitudes and Involvement

When asked whether being in a gang is a good idea for young people, 54% at pre-test reported "definitely not" or "probably not," compared with 95% at post-test. Eighty percent at pre-test believed that the Bloco project would definitely help them stay out of a gang, compared with 96% at post-test. At pre-test, 72% percent believed that Bloco would definitely help "most kids" stay out of a gang, compared with 92% at post-test.

> *"We don't talk about gangs in Bloco, we don't need them and we don't want to be part of them either. We have each other!"* Lilliana, teen participant (18 years old).

Health Awareness

At pre-test, 28% felt it was definitely important for kids their age to think about their health when deciding what to eat, compared with 54% at post-test.

> *"I love the dancing. It helps me lose weight and it also helps me feel okay about being a larger girl."* Juanita, teen participant (15 years old).

Exercise and Nutrition

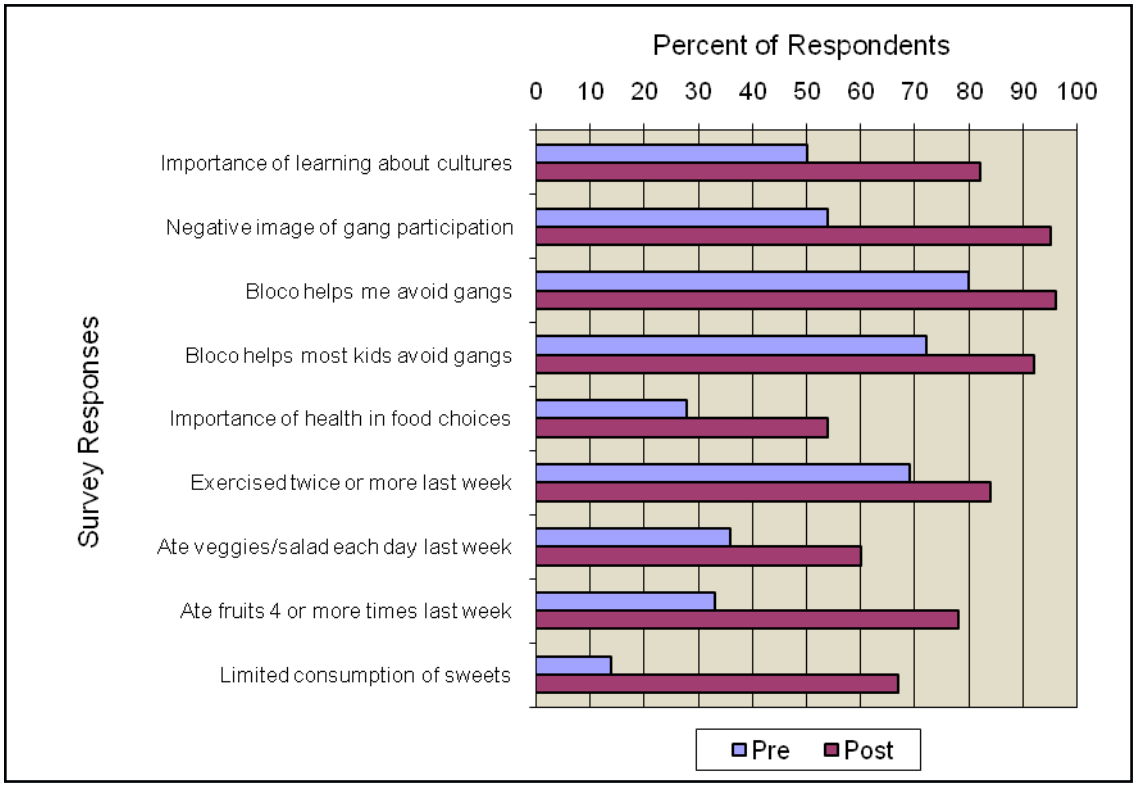
At pre-test, 69% reported exercising outside of school at least two days a week for 20 minutes during the past week (not counting Bloco itself), compared with 84% at post-test. At pre-test, 36% reported eating vegetables or green salad daily during the past week, which increased to 60% at post-test. Also, 33% at pre-test reported eating fruit 4-6 times in the past week, compared with 78% at post-test. Finally, 14% at pre-test reported eating sweets not more than three times in the past week, compared with 67% at post-test.

> *"We eat snacks before we play cause it takes a lot of energy to drum. We eat granola bars and fruit. We only are allowed to drink water while we practice. I hated it at first cause I used to eat more candy, but now I do better without all that junk!"* Juan, teen particpant (14 years old).

DISCUSSION

A comparison of the pre-test and post-test surveys revealed that the Bloco program did have a positive

FIGURE 1
Showing Percentage of Respondents



Note: Returning participants are included in the sample for each year.

impact on the participants in regard to exercise, food choices, appreciation of other cultures, feelings about gangs, and awareness of their health. The 4-H Bloco data revealed that the program is a success and that it has had positive impacts on the lives of the participating young people.

The teens' health awareness was certainly affected by the program. After participating in the 4-H Bloco program, more of the teens believed that it was "definitely important" or "probably important" that other youth should consider their health when deciding about what to eat or whether to drink alcohol or smoke. The teens are not only more aware of their health, but they are taking better care of themselves as evidenced by their eating choices and physical activity rates.

At the conclusion of the program, significantly more teens exercised outside of school classes and played team sports. Simply put, the teens were generally more physically active than when they had started the program. In addition to being more physically active, the teens were also implementing better nutrition practices.

One intended outcome of this program is greater cultural awareness and diversity appreciation. Teens participating in the Bloco program gained a better appreciation of other cultures as more reported that it was "definitely important" or "probably important" for youth their age to learn what life is like in different cultures and to spend time with youth from other cultures within California (Conklin-Ginop, Braverman, Caruso & Bone, 2011).

Another intended outcome of the program is gang prevention. This is a critical issue right now for the young people in Sonoma County. This is validated by the fact that over half of the participating teens reported having a good friend in a gang. When comparing the pre-test and post-test, nearly the same amount of youth (87.5% pre-test and 86.7% post-test) believed that the program would "definitely" or "probably" help them and others stay out of a gang. The fact that so many teens saw Bloco as a gang

alternative in the beginning (before even participating) is powerful. The message is clear: young people see this afterschool program as something that will help them resist gangs, and 93% reported that they did not think they would be involved in a gang in the coming year. Overall, the 4-H Bloco Program is helping teens become more physically active, practice better nutrition, appreciate other cultures, be more aware of their health, and resist gangs.

We believe the 4-H Bloco Drum and Dance was successful because of the following program practices: 1) adult direction with teen input, 2) emphasis on life skills, 3) cooperative learning, 4) engaging atmosphere, and 5) experiential learning methods.

Adult Direction with Teen Input

It is important that teens are a part of the program development implementation, and included in decision making processes. For older teens the Bloco program provides enriching opportunities to develop leadership and decision making skills.

Emphasis on Life Skills

The elements to be learned are key to the success of the instructional component. Youth should not only have the opportunity to learn music, dance, drumming, but also the elements of life skills and performance skills. Life skills are defined as non-academic skills. These skills are knowledge, attitudes and behaviors which people use to master life situations. In the 4-H Bloco Drum and Dance Program, the youth focused on developing life skills. One outcome from learning life skills is high school teens often are a wonderful resource as mentors to younger teens (Todd, 1995).

Cooperative Learning

All participants, whether it is youth, instructors, teen mentors, or other volunteer adults, need to maximize their cooperative efforts, roles and relationships with participants. With cooperative learning, the groups work as teams, and each youth brings different strengths to share with others. This type of team approach enhances teen learning in the program, and their personal life skills. (Baker, 2008).

Engaging Atmosphere

The atmosphere of the program is fun, educational, as well as inclusive of the established goals and objectives.

Instructional Strategies, Methods, Tools and Techniques are Experiential in Nature

The 4-H Bloco afterschool program includes a series of true life participation learning experiences. To be an "experiential" or "hands-on" learning activity, it involves discussing activities, developing lessons from the activity, and applying the lessons to the real world. It must involve a person or persons doing something and then looking back at it critically.

CONCLUSION

The core of 4-H Bloco's purpose and programming is the use of the arts as a tool for the empowerment of youth to adopt healthy, active lifestyles; to contribute positively to and serve as leaders in their communities; and to embrace ethnic and cultural diversity. Our program incorporated social, artistic and physical goals, encouraging youth to perceive themselves as direct contributors to their neighborhood's cultural wellness and social vitality.

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