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Using a Translational Process to Apply Latino Youth Development Research Findings in Practice

Abstract

Translating research into practice is a cornerstone for Extension programs. We developed an intentional and collaborative translational process for converting evidence-based knowledge from Latino youth development literature into Extension practice. The process resulted in internal audience-specific fact sheets summarizing research findings as sustainable strategies for increasing Latino youth participation and engagement in Extension programming. Our systematic approach can be useful for supporting a culture of innovation and collaboration. Through use of our method, numerous organizational benefits were realized, suggesting that the process has positive implications for Extension programs across the nation.

Keywords: [Latino youth development](#), [translational research](#), [organizational development](#)

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Introduction

Latinos are the largest minority group in the United States. In California, the most populous state in the country (39,250,017 people), Latinos make up 39% of the population and are the largest single ethnic group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Despite a significant presence of Latino youths, some organizations have been unable to develop culturally relevant programming that adequately addresses their unique needs due, in part, to lack of research on Latino youth development programming (Erbstein & Fabionar, 2014). Youth-serving organizations that seek to engage and sustain the participation of Latino youths need to consider embracing a paradigm shift involving the adoption of organizational and programmatic strategies tailored to the language, culture, and

community needs of Latino populations (Hobbs, 2004). Herein, we introduce a translational process Extension professionals can use to apply Latino youth development research findings in their programs in order to address the needs of diverse Latino youths.

Summary of Literature Review

Latino youths in the United States are a diverse group representing multiple countries, regions, languages, generations, settlement patterns, ethnicities, and immigrant statuses. These young people often navigate perceived societal norms and economic and cultural challenges that are different from the challenges experienced by dominant-culture youths. Critical to supporting Latino youths' development is programming that recognizes and addresses the stress and trauma of poverty, racism, and discrimination experienced by these youths in their everyday lives (Cordova & Cervantes, 2010). In general, youth-serving organizations employ conceptual frameworks of positive youth development that reflect dominant and middle class norms (Rodriguez & Morrobel, 2004), and 4-H is no exception (Smith & Soule, 2016). Gaining an understanding of the cultural and local characteristics of Latino populations within structural contexts is imperative to better engaging Latino youths in programs that reflect their experiences. Cultivating Latino youths' ethnic identity development as an integral aspect of programming has been shown to be a protective factor (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014) even though challenges exist related to heterogeneity within the Latino population.

Given the need to better serve Latino youths, University of California (UC) Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) commissioned human ecology researchers to conduct a relevant literature review. Through the literature review, the researchers identified five practices of effective Latino youth-serving organizations: (a) adapting programmatic and organizational efforts to the needs and interests of local and regional youths; (b) contending with physiological and social effects of discrimination; (c) integrating extended understandings of positive youth development that reflect Latino and immigrant youths' and families' experiences; (d) responding to economic poverty; and (e) supporting positive ethnic identity development (Erbstein & Fabionar, 2014). These activities are manifested in the organizations' infrastructures, conceptual frameworks, and program elements (e.g., safe environment, routine/structure, positive relationships) and in ways the organizations and programs engage in community relationships.

In conjunction with 10 UC 4-H professionals from throughout the state, we developed an intentional and collaborative translational process for converting the aforementioned knowledge about practices of effective Latino youth-serving organizations into Extension practice to strengthen our capacity to engage Latino youths and families.

Life of a Fact Sheet

Our process is illustrated in Figure 1, at the end of this section. It comprises six steps.

The first two steps involved conducting an in-depth analysis of evidence-based practices and determining where UC 4-H program efforts were in relation to those practices. More specifically, in the second step we identified information from the literature review that was most essential to communicate and determined to whom that information should be communicated. From these steps, five key organizing themes emerged. We determined that we would use these themes to develop fact sheets for use by Extension personnel, with each theme being the focus of one fact sheet. The themes are as follows:

- addressing theoretical gaps in positive, diverse youth development to include ethnic identity development and

to account for discrimination and poverty;

- building partnerships with the Latino community;
- identifying promising practices for Latino youth-serving programs;
- staffing for success by hiring bilingual and bicultural staff; and
- providing professional development training on topics such as intercultural competence.

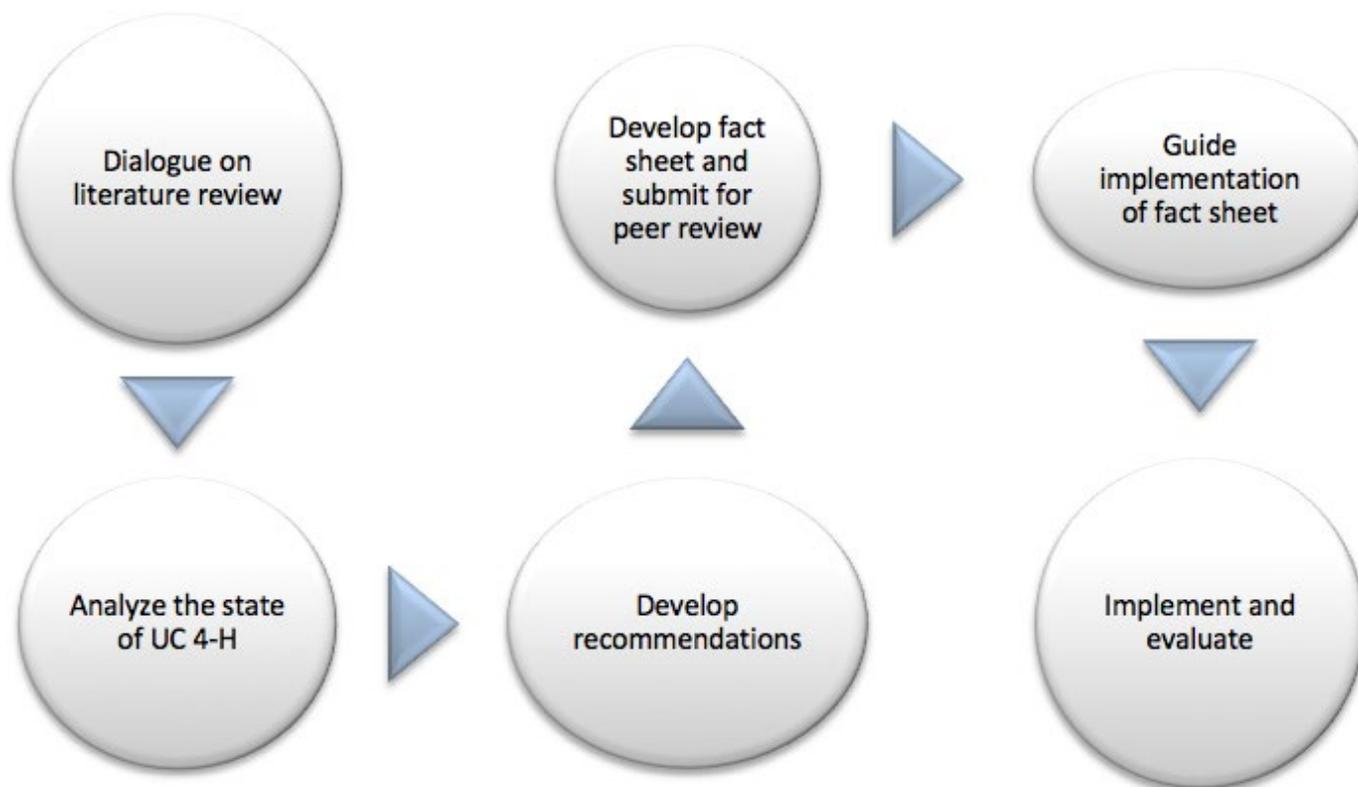
For the third step, we used information from the 4-H program analysis (our second step) to identify gaps between existing 4-H practices and the evidence-based practices we identified during our first step. We then developed recommendations to bridge those gaps.

Our fourth step involved fine-tuning the specific audience for each fact sheet and then developing the set of fact sheets accordingly. For example, for the fact sheet on staffing for success, we targeted human resources professionals to ensure that development and implementation of the recommendations would occur. Across the fact sheets, we used a consistent framework to describe the relevant issues, convey main messages, and mobilize readers to take action. To obtain credibility within UC ANR, we subjected the five fact sheets to the UC ANR peer review process (Diaz-Carrasco et al., 2017; Hill, Diaz-Carrasco, Moncloa, Villalobos, & Diversity in Youth Development Workgroup, 2017; Horrillo, Diaz-Carrasco, Hill, Moncloa, & Diversity in Youth Development Workgroup, 2017; Horrillo, Guild et al., 2017; Trzesniewski & Diversity in Youth Development Workgroup, 2017).

Authors Moncloa and Horrillo presented each fact sheet to the appropriate administrator to facilitate adoption of recommended practices. Administrators adopted some practices, but not all. An evaluation of this process is forthcoming.

Figure 1.

Life of a Fact Sheet



Discussion and Implications

UC ANR Organizational Benefits

4-H professionals coalesced under a shared goal and culture of innovation to engage in a translational process. The effort contributed to an increase in 4-H statewide programmatic support, such as the development of marketing materials, revisions to policies and procedures, implementation of new program delivery modes, and changes in enrollment processes. These programmatic changes, along with other initiatives, resulted in a 34% increase in Latino youth enrollment in UC 4-H between July 2014 and June 2017.

Our fact sheets influenced other Extension programming in California as well. Staff, academic personnel, and administrators have engaged with the literature on increasing cultural competence and inclusivity. One clear example is changes in employment announcements that enable Extension to recruit bicultural and bilingual individuals for staff and academic positions.

Implications for Extension Programs

Translating research into practice is a cornerstone for Extension programs. The systematic process described here may be useful for supporting a culture of innovation and collaboration to increase the participation of Latino youths and families across Extension programs. The process can serve as a model for other Extension programs that seek to translate research into practice by

- building a shared vision and purpose among a core group of professionals;
- using a comprehensive literature review or developing one;

- critically examining programmatic strengths and weaknesses against literature findings to identify gaps;
- leveraging Extension's strengths to develop a set of relevant recommendations; and
- capitalizing on the translational process to influence other Extension programs and administrative units.

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