Unveiling the Community Cultural Wealth of Black Out-of-School Time Staff

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Black staff in out-of-school time (OST) programs are frequently positioned as disciplinarians, behavior managers, or "chaperones," while curriculum and instruction responsibilities are assigned to formally trained (and often White) educators. Imbalances in power and funding mean White leaders usually hold decision-making authority, while Black frontline staff, typically working part-time, bear most on-the-ground responsibilities (Baldridge et al., 2024). These staff may be positioned as cultural brokers and natural mentors to youth who share their racial identity, but their capacity otherwise remains underutilized (Cherfas et al., 2021).

In addition to the endemic issues in OST staffing such as low pay and lack of career advancement, Black OST staff face distinct challenges, including limited training, precarious employment, racial bias, exclusion from leadership roles, and stereotypes that question their instructional capabilities (Baldridge et al., 2024). Additionally, many OST programs lack policies and training that recognize staff members' cultural knowledge and lived experiences and can develop these assets as instructional resources.

Rather than being constrained by these barriers,

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some Black OST staff leverage their community cultural wealth (CCW, Yosso, 2005) to bridge skill gaps, adapt to resource limitations, and implement effective strategies that support youth development. Larson and Ngo (2017, p. 4) state, “Culture matters because each day youth and staff bring their cultural experiences to the program, and these experiences influence how they think, act, and learn.” Black staff who come from the same minoritized background as the youth they serve have significant capacity to bridge educational opportunity gaps. Because they share cultural referents and experiences with youth, they can facilitate strong rapport and culturally responsive practices (Jones & Deutsch, 2011; Matloff-Nieves, 2007), leading to enhanced support and positive student outcomes (Gay, 2000).

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Black OST staff often embody the very representation youth need to see to counteract negative stereotypes and develop academic confidence (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Observing role models who share their cultural experiences enhances young people’s self-efficacy and helps them envision success in fields they might otherwise view as inaccessible. Consequently, Black OST staff serve as mentors and catalysts for equity, bridging resource and knowledge gaps that disproportionately impact minoritized communities (Lauer et al., 2006). Beyond fostering a sense of belonging, strong relationships with staff also play a pivotal role in youth engagement, influencing young people’s attendance in OST programs (Akiva & Horner, 2016; Boat et al., 2024).

Moving from the chaperone stereotype to fully integrating Black OST staff as legitimate educators is a key step in addressing longstanding educational disparities (Gay, 2000; Woodland, 2008). When Black OST staff bring their cultural knowledge and community-based expertise to their work, they can foster self-discovery, empowerment, and critical thinking skills among racially minoritized youth (Ginwright, 2010; Larson & Ngo, 2017). Failing to recognize and sustain the culturally relevant contributions of Black OST staff marginalizes their insights and diminishes their potential to transform informal learning (Cherfas et al., 2021; Winfield et al. 2023).

This study unveils how Black staff in one OST program in a racially minoritized community used CCW to position themselves as key educators rather than peripheral staff. Using Yosso’s (2005) typology of six kinds of CCW, we examine how Black staff members described their use of CCW in their work with young people. Findings emphasize the need for OST programs to integrate CCW into staff training, mentorship, and leadership pathways, giving Black professionals the support, recognition, and resources they need to thrive. Their CCW makes Black staff integral to educational equity. Transforming how the field thinks about the professional development and integration of racially minoritized OST staff is necessary to broaden access, learning, and cultural responsiveness. This transformation can result in improved outcomes for racially minoritized part-time OST staff and the young people they serve.

Our central research question was, “How are the forms of community cultural wealth salient for Black OST staff working in a racially minoritized community?” By centering the experiences of Black OST professionals, we highlight the cultural, relational, and pedagogical assets they employ—assets that are largely neglected in discussions of informal education. Through this lens, we also reiterate why recognizing and sustaining Black OST staff is an equity imperative, especially for the communities that most need effective education outside of school.

Theoretical Framework: Community Cultural Wealth

Community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) provides a strengths-based framework for understanding how racially minoritized individuals accumulate and leverage various forms of capital to navigate social and educational inequities. Departing from Bourdieu’s (1986) notion of cultural capital, which often uses a deficit lens when focusing on marginalized groups, Yosso (2005) underscores the rich assets that minoritized communities already possess. She outlines six interconnected forms of capital:

1. **Familial capital:** Cultural knowledge and lessons derived from extended family and community ties, fostering a sense of collective responsibility

2. **Linguistic capital:** Adeptness in multiple languages or communication styles, including vernacular forms
3. **Aspirational capital:** The capacity to maintain hopes and dreams despite systemic barriers
4. **Social capital:** The networks and relationships offering practical and emotional support
5. **Resistant capital:** The knowledge and motivation gained from challenging inequality and overcoming discriminatory practices
6. **Navigational capital:** The skills needed to maneuver through institutions and spaces not designed with marginalized communities in mind

Existing research on CCW has primarily focused on minoritized students in formal academic contexts (Martinez et al., 2020; McGowan & Pérez, 2020). In education research, multiple studies (e.g., McGowan & Pérez, 2020; Ortiz et al., 2019) underscore how racially minoritized learners leverage CCW to develop strong academic identities and persist despite systemic inequities.

However, the role and application of CCW in OST remain comparatively understudied (Habig et al., 2021; Rubinson, 2016). Our study addresses this gap by examining how Black OST staff draw on all six types of CCW to facilitate youth learning while navigating the constraints of limited resources and lack of formal training.

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Familial Capital

Yosso (2005) refers to familial capital as the knowledge gained from family and close friends related to the history and culture of the community. Black OST staff in our study described having learned from parents and elders life skills, such as social etiquette, resilience, and personal conduct, that they now modeled for youth. These ideas align with the findings of DeNicolo et al. (2015) and Luna and Martinez (2013), who documented how advice passed down through families can shape the ways minoritized individuals engage in educational spaces. In line with Tolbert Smith (2022), we found that parents' emphasis on resilience, persistence, and drive helped staff see themselves as potential leaders and mentors.

Staff also drew on memories of growing up in low-income, single-parent homes to empathize with youth facing similar circumstances and to offer them extra help. Similarly, Samuelson and Litzler (2016) observed that African-American and Latinx undergraduates felt compelled to "give back" to younger students as an extension of their familial capital. Rubinson (2016) noted that OST mentors can foster relationships akin to familial ties, reinforcing young people's social-emotional well-being.

Linguistic Capital

Yosso (2005) defines linguistic capital as the experiences of communication using more than one language, with the attendant knowledge and skills, along with varied linguistic forms and resources. Our data revealed how Black OST staff employed African American Vernacular English and colloquial phrases to build rapport and demonstrate genuine care. Some staff noted that they demonstrate differences between vernacular and formal or "standard" communication styles. DeNicolo et al. (2015) found a similar phenomenon among Mexican-American students who sought to learn English to expand educational and career opportunities.

Staff also used storytelling, poetry, and drama based in Black traditions in OST activities. Denton et al. (2020) highlight the need for more research on how "storytelling or artistic mediums" function as forms of linguistic capital in informal learning contexts. Culturally relevant storytelling can bolster young people's enthusiasm and sense of belonging (Denton et al., 2020).

Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital includes "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Black OST staff in our study expressed ambitions for their future careers and life goals. These aspirations were often rooted in experiences of growing up in challenging circumstances. Similarly, Luna and Martinez (2013) found that racially minoritized college students who experienced poverty maintained high goals and a commitment to self-improvement.

Study respondents also took on mentorship roles. By modeling success and reinforcing young people's dreams, staff exemplified the potential of aspirational capital to instigate positive changes (Luna & Martinez, 2013; Ortiz et al., 2019; Tolbert Smith, 2022).

Social Capital

Social capital is the collection of people and resources in a community, including peers and social contacts (Yosso, 2005). Social contacts support individuals both instrumentally and emotionally. In our findings, Black OST staff often invoked relationships with coaches, mentors, or fellow staff as crucial sources of knowledge and encouragement. These experiences reflect existing research on social capital in underrepresented communities (Chavez, 2018; Coronella, 2018), where empowering figures share essential knowledge and open doors for younger generations (Zamudio, 2015).

Resistant Capital

Resistant capital is the ability to hold on to one's community culture and persevere when faced with adversity and inequality (Yosso, 2005). It includes instructing children in the cultural structures of racism and how to oppose injustice. Black OST staff in our study cited experiences in which they were "living lives that intentionally countered society's negative deficit views" (Tolbert Smith, 2022, p. 758). Samuelson and Litzler (2016) found that Black male engineering students used resistant capital to challenge negative stereotypes, drawing on personal experiences as both a source of motivation and a tool for overcoming societal barriers. These authors also describe how Black women in academic settings pushed back against stereotypes by striving for high performance (Samuelson & Litzler, 2016).

Navigational Capital

Navigational capital refers to "the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Tolbert Smith (2022) describes how navigational skills can be imparted in educational contexts. By giving youth their "very best," in the words of one respondent, Black staff in our study modeled an ethic of excellence and determination to overcome societal barriers.

Methods

Research Context

Data collection occurred in an afterschool and summer STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) program at an out-of-school time learning facility in East Saint Louis, Illinois. Of the approximately 20,000 residents in this community, 95 percent are Black, and nearly 30 percent live below the poverty line. Each year, the OST facility serves over 1,500 predominantly Black youth, ages 6–18, providing safe recreational spaces and supportive adults to assist participants in achieving their goals. The Donald Danforth Plant Science Center, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and the OST facility joined efforts to changing lives by collaboratively providing quality youth and community programs in STEM, agriculture, food production, nutrition, and physical activity.

At the time of our study (2022–2023), the OST facility had 18 staff members, ages 18–60. Most were Black women, many of whom came from the local community or from a similar background. Staff roles were typically part-time; high school diplomas were the most common educational attainment level.

Participants

We recruited five Black OST staff members (average age 41) to explore how racially minoritized and underresourced communities utilize CCW to support young people. The selection was based on informal and formal STEM education experience or recommendations from leaders at the OST facility. Table 1 (next page) summarizes respondents' demographic information. These participants were part of a more extensive study of mentoring and professional development in OST settings (Kaggwa et al., 2024). All participants gave informed consent through either online or paper forms.

Study Design

Following Yin's (2018) case study methodology, we investigated how these five staff members applied CCW in their work. This single-case longitudinal study was conducted over one year (May 2022–April 2023),

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information

Position	Sex	Age	Highest Educational Attainment
YDP*	Male	37	High school diploma
YDP*	Male	34	Some college
YDP*	Male	43	Unknown
STEAM educator	Female	48	Bachelor's degree
Curriculum program director	Female	42	Doctorate

* Youth development professional working directly with youth

capturing multiple time points. Data were gathered through monthly focus group sessions and semi-structured interviews conducted at the conclusion of the professional development program (see Kaggwa et al., 2024). During the monthly sessions, participants shared examples of how they utilized CCW in their work with youth, described common barriers, and discussed strategies for overcoming those challenges. To guide these sessions, we employed a focus group protocol featuring questions such as:

1. "Please share an example of how you use your social capital at the OST facility. What was the situation?" (social capital)
2. "What knowledge and skills do you have that fostered your ability to challenge inequalities and negative stereotypes?" (resistant capital)
3. "Please share an example of how you maneuver social institutions that were not created for communities of color." (navigational capital)

In addition, all respondents completed monthly written reflections. Two staff members participated in interviews at the end of the year to offer in-depth insights into their use of CCW in their OST work.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, researchers independently coded focus group and interview transcripts, identifying themes that corresponded with Yosso's (2005) six CCW components. Coding was performed deductively (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The coders convened in multiple sessions, striving to achieve consensus before, during, and after the coding process. Two additional coders examined all data sets, offering diverse viewpoints to bolster the project's validity. Three researchers analyzed data in the Dedoose qualitative analysis platform.

Highlighting the Community Cultural Wealth of Black OST Staff

Our findings unveil how the Black OST staff in our study applied their CCW in their work with racially minoritized K–12 youth from an underresourced community. The examples we cite for the six kinds of CCW highlight the resources staff members applied from lived experiences but do not represent an exhaustive list.

Familial Capital

Black OST staff shared lessons on public appearance and personal conduct that they learned from family members and applied in interactions with program participants. One respondent cited a simple example about keeping one's shoes tied: "I can't let a kid walk past me, no matter how old they are. 'Hey, let's just stop for a second. Let's get those shoes tied.'"

Another area in which the example of family members influenced staff members' work with youth was leadership and resilience. One male staff member recalled that his mother repeatedly told him that he was "the man in the house" and therefore he had to "lead by example." A female staff member recounted how her mother continued to inspire her:

> My mom … she doesn't give up. [She taught me,] you can't give up, you can't quit. So [that motivation] absolutely comes from her upbringing…. Now, as an adult, it's, like, "Oh, man, she is so resilient. She's so powerful. She's so encouraging because she never gave up."

Respondents said they empathized with youth from households that faced challenges similar to those their own families faced, such as inadequate income and lack of male role models. As one male staff member put it, "Sometimes in a single-parent household, some kids don't have … that male figure that take the extra mile, spend his money, or do extra…." This respondent described how staff "chipped in" to help program participants pay for a field trip as an example of how OST staff can fill a quasi-parental role.

Linguistic Capital

Black OST staff discussed using phrases from local community vocabulary to engage youth. One respondent said, "Like, one of the things I'll ask … when I see kids … is, 'You good?'" He went on to describe how, "depending on their inflection, it can totally mean different things"—from warning to acknowledgement to offer of help. Using the local vernacular enabled this staffer to connect with young participants on their level while offering adult support for positive behaviors. Staffers also described ways in which they encouraged young people to use polite formal language to show respect for adults.

Respondents also used their cultural congruence with OST participants to facilitate communication and STEM learning. One staff member explained, "We used skits to discuss food safety. The kids were excited to tell me what I was doing wrong." We also observed staff leveraging poetry and drama during instruction, engaging youth in STEM learning by tapping into a storytelling tradition that fosters active participation and creativity (Figure 1).

Aspirational Capital

The staff members we interviewed expressed how they tried to instill hope for greater possibilities in program participants, despite barriers and setbacks. As one respondent put it, "We tried to just reach them to get to their minds for them to just reach out…. [We don't want to] let them go to jail or experience the streets, because the streets, that's not what they want."

Another staffer's comments on young people's use of language highlights an overlap between linguistic and aspirational capital: "They use vulgar language, curse words a lot…. And I was, like, 'Have you ever heard [me] curse? ... You know why? Because you have to expand your vocabulary so that you're able to speak in every environment.'"

At least one respondent found that his OST position developed his own aspirations:

> [Working in this program] helps me set goals, helps me want more of the mentorship, made me want more out of life…. I have an overnight job that I got last week. And I'm just trying to save some money and just have better money management skills.

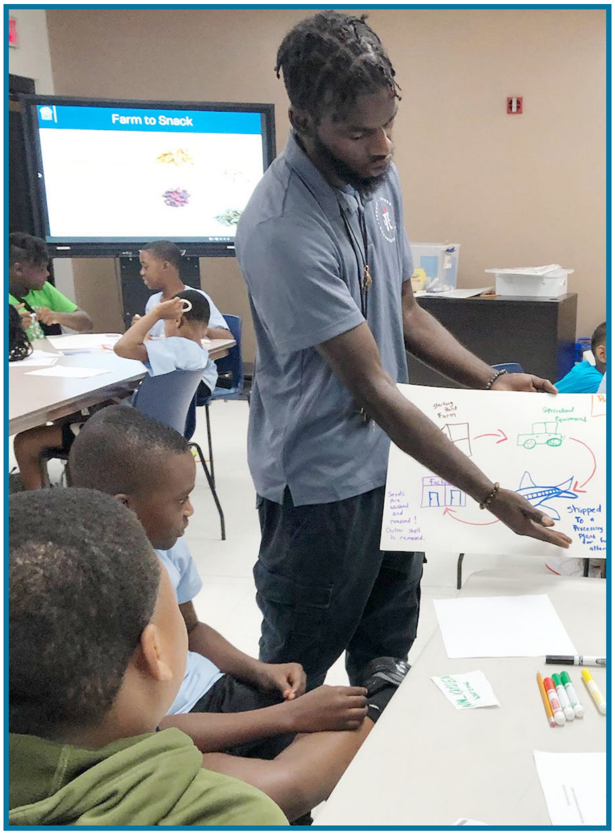

Figure 1. Staff member using poetry and culturally relevant teaching

Social Capital

The Black staff in our study described the importance of social connections in various ways. Staff who had been participants in the OST program where they now worked described how ongoing mentorship and social ties influenced their decision to stay involved. A mentor shared that a youth development professional who participated in sports programs at the OST facility when he was younger was deeply influenced by "Coach M," who was "not only just like a regular coach, but also kind of like a father figure." This respondent added that the relationship with Coach M influenced the staff member's "ability to relate to students today."

Staff also built social capital among themselves. A respondent who had recently been promoted to a managerial position, for example, named one staff member as the person to go to for event planning and a different staffer as the resource for "scientific projects." Knowing one another's strengths can help staffers serve young people more efficiently and effectively.

Social capital was also important in working with OST participants. Staff cultivated social capital among participants through regular gatherings, collaborative lesson planning, and group outings. One OST staff member described how he built his players' social capital by creating connections off the field: "How I reached my kids for my football team is just go out and hang with them,… like sometimes we take my team out to bowling. Just … spending time with them one-on-one."

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Resistant Capital

A reflection of one male staff member perfectly illustrates the need for and the exercise of resistant capital.

> People immediately write me off…. They think, "Oh, there is a black man. Okay. This black man, how's things about to be? Is he going to be aggressive?" Because they might … automatically think, "He might be aggressive or … territorial." No, as I begin to talk with people, I begin to create friendships, bonds, … to where it becomes beneficial for me and that individual.

One participant, who had been recently promoted from part-time staff to a leadership role, reflected on an interaction with a police officer in the parking lot of the OST facility:

> I was stereotyped. And I handled it very well. And it was amazing to kill his stereotype. No, I'm not a thug. I'm not trying to get away from you. I'm not running. I'm just going to work to serve my community.

This respondent reflected on how he assumes the role of a mentor and guide for the youth, warning them away from paths that could lead to incarceration:

> You want to lead them down the right path. Like … what kid is going down the wrong path, and you just … want to tell them, like, "Dead and in jail is what they expect you to be. So let's beat this stereotype." [We] want to just try to motivate [participants] to be better than what they expect you to be. Because risk-taking can either be good or bad. So you want to take good risks.

Black OST staff reflected on how their personal growth, responsibility, and accountability combined to influence their responses to racism. They actively taught youth to do the same, demonstrating that resistance can serve as a form of mentorship that empowers future generations to question systemic injustices.

Navigational Capital

One Black staff member described the barriers through which program participants had to navigate: "Many people think [the children] can't, and so they won't. [People] don't see [the children]. They are already defeated when they come. Most of the time they already have that crappiest education." Her response to the stereotyping and inadequate investment imposed on Black children was to affirm that it was "[my] job to give them the best of [me]." The reward for that effort, for this staffer, was when program alumni came back to tell her how much her teaching and example meant to them.

One respondent expressed gratitude for the fact that the OST program itself was a safe space that did not require navigational capital:

> The benefits of working at [the OST facility] is that it is a place that has communities of color in mind because it is a community of color, specifically Black. And so we have the privilege of not having to navigate this.

In addition to personal safety strategies, staff also described providing practical guidance to youth on how to handle encounters with authority. A respondent described how he modeled use of navigational capital in an encounter with an irate parent.

> She was just cursing me out. I was just, like, "Yes, ma'am. I'm sorry about the confusion. Have a great day." And at the time, one of the kids that was there watching this…. He's a difficult kid, he's a very difficult kid. When the lady left and I [noticed he] saw how I handled it, I was, like, "You see how I did that?" He was, like, "Oh, that would have never been me." I'm, like, "Right. That's my point. You have to learn how to do exactly what I just did. That lady was cursing me out. And I told

> her, 'Yes, ma'am. Thank you. Have a great day.' Every action doesn't need a reaction."

Overlaps Among the Types of Community Cultural Wealth

Respondents' reflections on CCW revealed overlap and connections among the six types of capital, some of which have been noted above. Yosso (2005) recognizes the connection between social and navigational capital: "Navigational capital thus acknowledges individual agency within institutional constraints, but it also connects to social networks that facilitate community navigation through places and spaces" (p. 80). One OST staff member in our study made a similar connection in their role as mentor for program participants: "I just try to give them examples of things that they probably already know. You don't want to get shot. You don't want to end up dead. You don't want to go to jail."

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Another staff member illustrated how he draws on familial and social capital to handle disciplinary challenges at the OST facility.

> I just tried to be like mentors that I had in the past. Not too cool, but not too mean. It's cool to be, … like, kids want to be around me.... I use trials from my past life to help me, motivate me.

Familial capital overlapped with linguistic capital as another respondent reflected on how he uses lessons instilled by his mother to teach participants how to talk to adults. This staffer says to participants:

> As you're interacting with an adult, make sure you use some verbiage that says, "Yes, sir. No, sir. Yes, ma'am. No, ma'am." [I'm] helping them, teach[ing] them to become responsible for themselves. Motivating them in ways as much as my mother did as well.

Conclusions and Implications

Our findings offer a nuanced look at how Black OST staff, who are often precariously employed and underrecognized, leverage their CCW to enrich OST experiences for students while countering longstanding narratives that marginalize Black staff as mere chaperones. CCW is a valuable source of expertise Black OST staff can use to support young people. The lived experiences, community ties, and cultural competencies of these staff members equip them with skills to foster meaningful relationships, mentor youth, and create engaging learning environments. Rather than viewing Black OST staff through a deficit lens that assumes a need for extensive formal training, OST programs should recognize and amplify these professionals' strengths.

For example, our study respondents used familial capital in their work, translating childhood lessons about resilience and leadership into strong mentoring practices. They used their linguistic capital to create inclusive, relevant learning environments by using culturally familiar language while encouraging use of more formal language when appropriate. They actively challenged stereotypes through resistant capital and bridged resource gaps via navigational capital, thereby demonstrating their capacity for transformative leadership that remains undervalued under current precarious staffing structures. Social capital was fostered by supporting youth and building relationships with them through social activities. Participating Black OST staff were also motivated to mentor youth and serve as role models, in part because of their own childhood experiences where they themselves lacked mentors.

The unique contribution of our research is its direct examination of how OST staff employ CCW, as CCW has been examined predominantly among students in formal education (e.g., McGowan & Pérez, 2020; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016). OST programs serve as critical sanctuaries, providing safe spaces for underserved youth. However, if staff are marginalized, program effectiveness can be impaired. By illuminating how Black staff in one program mobilized their CCW, our study illustrates the central role of Black OST professionals in creating robust, culturally attuned experiences for youth.

Our study is limited by reliance on self-reported data from Black OST staff, who may have leaned toward socially desirable responses. Observational data could have helped to overcome this bias. Furthermore, the sample is small, and all respondents come from a single OST facility serving predominantly Black youth in a low-income community. The findings therefore may not be generalizable. However, they do incorporate the authentic voices of practitioners, whose experiences and opinions suggest implications for practice and policy.

Implications for OST Professionals and Programs

Our findings suggest the need for a transformation in how the field thinks about racially minoritized part-time OST staff. Rather than being mere caretakers, these staffers are central to efforts to broaden access, learning, and cultural responsiveness. Adopting this view could improve outcomes for racially minoritized OST staff, broadening their opportunities in informal education, while simultaneously enabling them to better serve program participants.

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Our study findings suggest that OST programs could combat the underutilization of Black staff by fostering Yosso's (2005) six dimensions of CCW. One way to harness familial capital is by encouraging intergenerational involvement, in which families share cultural stories that can be integrated into programming. Culturally sustaining pedagogy that promotes the inclusion of home languages and dialects in programming would build on staff members' and participants' linguistic capital. Offering clear promotion pathways for staff would recognize and build on aspirational capital by facilitating opportunities for meaningful leadership and professional growth. Structured peer mentorship opportunities, in which more experienced staff guide less experienced practitioners, can build on existing social capital while creating new bonds. Such structures could support staff in their daily work while showing youth how to build strong, sustainable networks. Use of navigational and resistant capital can be fostered in professional communities of practice in which staff share strategies for handling challenges.

In order to tap into and foster all six types of CCW, OST programs must give staff time and opportunity to cultivate meaningful relationships with young people rather than prioritizing rigid content delivery. Strong staff-youth relationships enhance participants' outcomes and increase their engagement in OST programs (Akiva & Horner, 2016; Boat et al., 2024). For example, programs can set aside dedicated time for informal check-ins, establish mentorship pairings that foster long-term connections, and create unstructured spaces where staff and young people can engage in meaningful conversation. When staff have the space to engage authentically with youth, they become trusted mentors, role models, and key figures in students' social-emotional development.

Implications for OST Leaders and Policymakers

OST leaders and policymakers could consider embedding CCW as a formal, sustained, and integrated component of OST policies, training, and professional development. This strategy would recognize that Black OST staff are not peripheral helpers but integral contributors to youth success. It would value these staff members' inherent strengths, cultural knowledge, and lived experiences and leverage these strengths as essential assets in youth development. Training efforts should be intentionally designed to build on these existing strengths.

State or city OST networks, or state legislation, could amplify these efforts by encouraging tailored approaches for serving racially minoritized youth. For example, professional development that trains OST leaders and staff to identify and build on their cultural assets can lead to more culturally sustaining programming. Approaches might include community-centered curricula, specialized workshops that equip staff to handle sensitive race-based conflicts, and targeted mentorship networks connecting Black OST staff with external professionals. Such larger-scale efforts can help programs better serve the unique needs of racially minoritized youth while enabling staff to feel valued for their cultural contributions.

Stable funding and career pathways enforced through policy changes would acknowledge the fundamental role of Black staff in bridging opportunity gaps. Policies that foster and promote public-private partnerships with local organizations and families can further amplify familial and social capital, ensuring that programming remains culturally relevant and empowering for Black staff and youth.

Ways Forward

By examining the CCW of Black OST staff, this study adds to the growing literature on strengths-based epistemologies in informal learning contexts. As the staff in our study navigated precarious employment conditions, racial biases, and limited recognition, they simultaneously drew on familial ties, linguistic capabilities, aspirational visions, social connections, resistance strategies, and navigational skills to uplift and mentor students.

Future research could examine the long-term outcomes of staff-led initiatives or investigate how various community contexts influence the application of CCW. Comparative studies might explore the forms of cultural wealth mobilized across multiple OST facilities and different types of programs. Such studies would add depth to our understanding of how best to empower OST participants and staff. Ultimately, stakeholders can strengthen the broader equity mission of OST programming by recognizing, rewarding, and integrating the multifaceted cultural capital of Black OST staff.

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