

Research Brief:
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Dr. Andrea Ettekal was born and raised on the border of Ohio and West Virginia (an “Ohio River rat”) where she was heavily active in sports growing up. Among her favorite sports were volleyball and softball (she was a pitcher!). She received her baccalaureate degree from Kent State University in Ohio and then went on to pursue both a Master’s and PhD in Family and Human Development at Arizona State University, while also specializing in Measurement and Statistical Analysis.

Dr. Ettekal is an assistant professor at Texas A&M University in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences. She is married to Dr. Idean Ettekal, a professor in Educational Psychology at Texas A&M, and together, they have a one year-old boy. She currently teaches: RPTS 370: Youth Development Organizations and Services; RPTS 670: Youth Development Programs and Services; RPTS 602: Social Science Foundations of Recreation, Parks and Tourism. She considers herself an applied developmental scientist by training. Her primary goals are to impact the scholarly body of knowledge about youth development by conducting applied research on positive youth development (PYD) through out-of-school time (OST) programs and to bridge research and practice through evaluation of OST programs.

During her time in graduate school, Dr. Ettekal helped her advisor develop a conceptual framework about culturally responsive out-of-school time (OST) programs. Her mixed-methods dissertation was the first empirical test of the framework. She was particularly interested in the involvement of Latino youth in mainstream American OST programs. She suspected that a cultural disconnect might explain why many Latino youth do not participate in OST programs. In her first study, she developed a quantitative scale to measure Latino youth’s perceptions of the extent to which their ethnic culture was integrated into their OST programs. Unexpectedly, she found that integrating ethnic culture into OST programs was associated with some negative experiences for Latino youth. She followed up that research in a second, qualitative “within-group” study. Findings from her qualitative study helped explain the unexpected findings – *the assumption that all Latino youth would want to participate in OST programs that reflect their ethnic culture was invalid*. She learned that what content was covered in the programs (what the space looked like, what holidays they celebrated, what the activities consisted of), mattered more than whether the leader was Latino (they wanted skilled leaders regardless of ethnicity) or whether the leader spoke Spanish (youth were sufficient to broker parent-leader communication). Her primary conclusions from the studies were as follows:

- Some Latino youth wanted their programs to be “Latino-centered” - language, games, etc.; others used the programs to learn about and integrate into American culture and did not care for Latino-centered activities;

- Negative emotions about stereotypical Latino activities were evident - for example, Cinco de Mayo—the Latino (Mexican) youth she studied did not celebrate Cinco de Mayo and viewed it as a superficial way to represent their culture.
- Although efforts to integrate ethnic culture were well-intentioned, the programs did not reflect the voices of the Latino youth and families involved.

Dr. Ettekal’s dissertation was an important springboard for her overarching research agenda. Currently, she focuses her studies on understanding youth programs as a way to promote PYD, with a focus on understanding the “specificity principle” – *which programs* (e.g., sports, arts); promote *which outcomes* (e.g., character attributes); for *which youth* (e.g., social class, ethnic background); at *which points in time* (e.g., middle versus high school)?

Dr. Ettekal completed a research project that was a 3-year evaluation of Positive Coaching Alliance, a non-profit intervention program to promote character development through sport. Her research was funded by the John Templeton Foundation. The purposes of the study were to find out if the program did, in fact, build character. She also wanted to better understand performance character (e.g., work ethic) and moral character (e.g., honesty), and how they vary for different sports. Results suggested that sport *may* be a vehicle to promote character, but in order to optimize the potential of sport, character must be:

- Authentically prioritized by athletics administrators and coaches;
- Fostered through high quality relationships among youth athletes and between youth athletes and coaches;
- Intrinsically motivated, where youth and coaches are genuinely interested in being moral humans and act on their own volition;
- Modeled by key adults, including athletics administrators, coaches, and parents;
- Empowered by youth and coaches, rather than imposed on them;
- Intentionally taught through developmentally appropriate activities.

Dr. Ettekal is currently working on multiple projects related to youth programs, including:

- Character development in the context of 4-H contest-based programs
- Evaluative thinking for 4-H leaders of programs centered on culture/social class
- Engagement measures for youth programs
- The role of spirituality in faith-based character development programs
- Teaching future youth workers about youth development principles and programs

When asked to share “words of wisdom.” Dr. Ettekal responded as follows:

Youth development involves exchanges between individuals and their multiple, nested environments. In short, youth development is a multifaceted system involving many “parts” where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. When we study development, we must understand that we are taking a snapshot of a phenomenon that cannot be understood without placing that snapshot back into the bigger picture of the system.