

Culturally Responsive Programming as a Violence Prevention Strategy

A Case Study of El Joven Noble in Lompoc, CA

THE POWER OF CULTURE

Young people need extra support and guidance during their adolescent years. School programs that provide culturally competent mentorship are helping students and school communities thrive.

School districts have the dual challenge of maintaining safe behavior on campus while simultaneously producing positive student learning outcomes. Violence and disruptive behaviors usually emerge in youth during middle school years but can start as early as elementary school. These occurrences can compromise long-term academic performance and learning outcomes for all students.

The city of Lompoc, CA is no exception, facing an increase in fighting and disruptive behavior among elementary and middle school students that has compromised students' sense of safety and contributed to rising rates of violent juvenile offenses in Santa Barbara County. Lompoc Unified School District (LUSD) identified the 2019 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Comprehensive School-Based Approach to Youth Violence and Victimization program as an opportunity to implement the Lompoc Youth Violence Prevention Project. LUSD's goal was to develop a long-term community partnership model focused on reducing youth violence and related challenges.

JOVEN NOBLE

LUSD partnered with the Compadres Program at CommUnify, a nonprofit organization in Santa Barbara, to bring the "Joven Noble" training curriculum to Lompoc High School and Vandenberg Middle School. Joven Noble is a ten-week, evidence-based, healing-centered leadership enhancement opportunity for at-risk youth. Created by Jerry Tello in 1988, the curriculum seeks to build leadership skills and guide young men and women through a "rites of passage" experience during their adolescent

years. Joven Noble was designed with the notion that young adults need positive male and female role models, as well as their family and community, to guide them through intentional introspection and healing in preparation for adulthood.

Joven Noble has been implemented across the U.S. and has reached more than 5,000 individuals. It is offered in school settings, probation, and alternatives to justice programs. The curriculum focuses on youth who may be challenged by personal and/or generational traumas that impact their academic success. Young people often struggle to express their identities due partly to conflicting self-image or perception (Jacobson, 2018), and LUSD instructors observed this tendency in their program participants. This instability can greatly impact a student's interest or involvement in school. Negative self-image can be perpetuated by peers, the media, or their family. The Joven Noble Program seeks to dismantle individuals' acceptance of these negative external views to allow students to heal and better understand their personal and cultural identities (Tello, 2021). The curriculum builds health knowledge with the goal of decreasing incidents of unwanted or unplanned teen pregnancies, substance abuse, community violence, and relationship violence.

An “extended kinship” circle helps young people heal and thrive



HOW IT WORKS

The Joven Noble Program is centered on four pillars:

- Identity development
- Understanding one's “sacred purpose”
- Integrating bilingual/bicultural values
- Overcoming fear through safety, security, and interconnected trust



How it works, continued

Joven Noble instruction is facilitated by trained “Circle Keepers,” who incorporate fundamental indigenous-based restorative practices as a foundation for creating a culture and climate that focuses on relationship-based connections.

The term reflects the Indigenous tradition of gathering in circles to learn from each other, teach, heal, and continue strengthening bonds within a community (Tello, 2021). By incorporating the Círculo tradition, the Joven Noble curriculum seeks to create an extended kinship model of compadres/godfathers for youth and their families. This approach allows older generations of men to teach and nurture younger generations through guidance, trust building, and teaching. Fundamentally, the program underscores the importance of healthy relationships for youth and the significance of having positive, adult role models in their lives.

Youth participation in the Joven Noble program is free. However, there is a cost for organizations, such as school districts, seeking to contract a Circle Keeper to lead the 10-week curriculum at a local school. The curriculum is administered by the National Compadres Network (NCN), a 501c3 organization also founded by Jerry Tello that brings together culturally competent, nationally recognized leaders in the fields of health, trauma, education, juvenile justice, and evidence-based research and evaluation. When partnering with NCN, school districts can identify staff that may be interested in becoming trained Circle Keepers to support the delivery of the teachings district- or school-wide. NCN has a nationwide network of anchor organizations to expand the reach of its healing-informed trainings. Those organizations, including local service providers, often lead their own Compadres or Joven Noble programs. School districts can either contract with the National Compadres Network or a local agency to directly implement the Joven Noble training curriculum at school sites.

Under the continued guidance of Jerry Tello, Joven Noble follows a model it calls “La Cultura Cura: Transformational Health and Healing.” The model emphasizes community healing from within, led by members of one’s own culture. Furthermore, while outside resources such as funding or partnerships may initiate a change, real motivation must come from within the circle of those who need or desire the transformation to inspire long-term and sustained action in participants (Tello, 2021).



1. Mediation, conflict resolution, deescalation strategies, crowd control, bleeding control and CPR at a minimum. <https://cbpscollective.org/building-capacity-for-cbps-organizations-working-to-reduce-violence-cbps-collective-report/>

What results has Lompoc Unified School District observed?

By adopting the Joven Noble curriculum, Lompoc Unified School District sought to foster student character development and mitigate disruptive behaviors in their middle and high-school students. The program initially ran from 2018-2019 and began with training of staff throughout the County of Santa Barbara through a state funded Racial and Ethnic Disparities Grant. That year, LUSD offered Joven Noble at Lompoc High School and Vandenberg Middle School with co-ed cohorts. Following the training, LUSD noted improvements in communication between participants and their peers, teachers, and school personnel. Staff from the school district observed that after the program, participants exhibited more positive views of their future, including academic aspirations (Jacobson, 2018). These outcomes are consistent with an evaluation of the Joven Noble program, which established that the curriculum enhances leadership, builds cultural knowledge and self-identity, uplifts cultural esteem, and decreases the incidence of relationship violence among participants (Tello & Cervantes, 2012).

In addition to El Joven Noble, LUSD has implemented its counterpart program for female students, Girasol and Xinachtli, at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. To implement those programs, the school district used funds from the CYVP Youth Violence grant, other federal and state grants as well as general fund dollars to train staff, provide materials, and contract agencies to expand implementation of the Girasol program at elementaries and middle schools. The Girasol program was specifically implemented in elementary and middle schools to align with female reproductive health education workshops. In total, 75 students have participated in Joven Noble and Girasol groups. Programming for both cohorts has been implemented through direct contracts with community organizations.

LUSD is one of the many school districts that has partnered with the National Compadres Network or a community organization like CommUnify to use this evidence-based and culturally relevant curriculum to improve school safety and boost academic outcomes for at-risk students. The Joven Noble program is an excellent model of culturally based school programming that can improve campus safety and promote positive student engagement. School districts seeking to implement the curriculum can contact the National Compadres Network or engage a local community-based organization that may have a Joven Noble program already underway.

What is the CYVP Program?

The Comprehensive School-Based Approach to Youth Violence and Victimization (CYVP) grant program supports a comprehensive effort to address youth violence and victimization through the implementation of evidence-based prevention, intervention, and accountability efforts in a school-based setting. This includes opportunities for schools to partner with community-based organizations to create or build upon strategies that increase safety in schools and throughout the community.

Resources and Contacts

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LISC

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