# Learning What Works: An Evaluation Overview

**Priscilla M. D. Little**

**Harvard Family Research Project**

**www.hfrp.org**

Foundations, Inc.

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# Workshop Overview

- Out-of-school time (OST) programs: What do they offer?

- Landscape of OST evaluation

- What do we know about program participation and participant outcomes?

- Special focus on evaluation strategies to increase rigor



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# OST Programs:
# What Do They Offer?

# Specific OST Program Foci

- Positive youth development (132)
- Academic/enrichment (114)
- Tutoring/extra instruction (69)
- Multi-component/ comprehensive (53)
- Prevention (55)
- Science/technology/ mathematics (42)
- Family/community involvement (34)
- Literacy (27)

- Mentoring (30)
- Sports/recreation (30)
- System-building (24)
- Arts (24)
- Youth leadership (22)
- Cultural/heritage (17)
- Service-learning/civic engagement (13)
- Vocational education (13)
- Health (7)
- Adventure (2)
- Faith-based (7)



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Note: Numbers in parenthesis are the number of programs in our Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Bibliography at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/bibliography.

# Landscape of OST Evaluation

# **Reasons for Evaluation**

Accountability

- Performance measurement

Program Improvement

- Using data to strengthen programs

# Formative Questions

- Recruitment/participation (67, 85)
- Activity implementation (60, 84)
- Staffing/training (56, 78)
- Program context/infrastructure (49, 66)
- Satisfaction (43, 55)
- Parent/community involvement (33, 43)
- Cost/revenues (27, 39)
- Program/school linkages (26, 34)
- Systemic infrastructure (24, 27)



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Note: Numbers in parenthesis are the number of programs and evaluations in our Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html.

# Summative Questions

- Academic achievement (74, 111)

- Youth development (65, 91)

- Prevention (32, 47)

- Family (24, 28)

- Community impact (11, 12)

- Workforce (8, 10)

- Systemic (5, 10)

Note: Numbers in parenthesis are the number of programs and evaluations in our Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html.

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# Evaluation Designs

- Non-experimental (61, 91)
- Quasi-experimental (46, 65)
- Experimental (18, 20)

Note: Numbers in parenthesis are the number of programs and evaluations in our Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html.

# Evaluation Methods

- Surveys/questionnaires (71, 102)
- Secondary sources/data review (55, 77)
- Interviews/focus groups (54, 71)
- Testing/assessments (47, 57)
- Observation (41, 56)
- Document review (37, 53)

Note: Numbers in parenthesis are the number of programs and evaluations in our Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html.

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# Which Data Collection Method Is Right for My Program?

- Using single versus multiple methods
- Selecting data sources
- Selecting a sample of individuals
- Collecting data before and after the program
- Cost considerations



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# Where We Are

- Programs use evaluation to answer multiple questions

- Programs conduct formative and summative evaluations—many do both

- Most evaluations are non-experimental

- Most evaluations use multiple data collect methods, primarily surveys and questionnaires



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# Program Participation and Outcomes: What We Know and What We Need to Know



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# Participation Is Important for Academic Success

- Better attitudes toward school and higher educational aspirations

- Higher school attendance (as measured by attendance and tardiness)

- Less disciplinary action (e.g., suspension)

- Better performance in school, as measured by achievement test scores and grades

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# Participation Is Important for Social/Emotional Development

- Decreased behavioral problems

- Improved social and communication skills and/or relationships with others (peers, parents, and/or teachers)

- Increased community involvement and broadened world view

- Increased self-confidence and self-esteem



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# Participation Is Important for Healthy Physical Development

- Avoidance of drug and alcohol use

- Decreases in delinquency and violent behaviors

- Increased knowledge of safe sex and avoidance of sexual activity and pregnancy

- Increased skills for coping with peer pressure



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# Participation Is Important for 21st Century Skill Development

- Expert Thinking: Identifying and solving new problems

- Complex communication: Eliciting critical information and conveying a convincing interpretation of it to others

- Proficiency in the "basics"

# Developmental Research Relating Participation to Outcomes

- Participation during the ages of 5–12 is related to value and self concept of children's abilities in math and sports (Simpkins, Fredricks, Davis-Kean & Eccles, 2003)

- Participation in after school activities during middle childhood is critical for the development of competencies and values, adolescent activity participation, and adolescent outcomes (Simpkins, Fredricks, Davis-Kean & Eccles, 2003)

- Participation in structured after school activities is associated with positive social behavior, higher satisfaction with friendships, and higher math scores (Ripke & Huston, 2003)

- Participation in structured activities (sports, lessons, and clubs) is associated with better overall achievement and social behavior than participation in unstructured activities (trips to the library, reading, etc.; Morris & Kalil, 2003)

# Factors That Influence Participant Outcomes

- Age
- Socio-economic status
- Program quality
- Participation


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# Age and Outcomes

Academic outcomes appear stronger for adolescents than for elementary school children, but elementary children do show improvements in conduct and work habits related to participation.

# SES and Outcomes

Outcomes appear stronger for children from low SES families.

# Quality Matters

- Physical and psychological safety
- Appropriate structure
- Supportive relationships
- Opportunities for meaningful youth involvement
- Positive social norms
- Learning-oriented/skill-building activities
- Autonomy/balance of autonomy and structure
- Connections with other contexts (school, home, community)

# Program Quality and Outcomes

Vandell Studies

- High quality programming linked to positive interactions with adults, less solitary behavior, less unoccupied behavior

- Higher child-staff ratio associated with negative child-staff interactions, range of activity offerings associated with positive staff-child interactions

# Program Quality and Outcomes

Smith/Smoll Studies

- Interventions in staff quality lead to better outcomes for participants, including lower anxiety and higher self-esteem

Gambone, Klem, and Connell Study

- High quality supportive relationships in early high school are twice as likely as those with average relationships to have optimal developmental outcomes at the end of high school



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# Program Staffing and Outcomes

- TASC Evaluation: Positive outcomes linked to a site coordinator who was licensed to teach

- San Francisco Beacons Initiative Evaluation: Number of supportive adults the single most significant predictor of sustained participation



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# What Is "Participation"

Participation =

Enrollment + Attendance

+ Engagement

# **Enrollment**

- Getting youth in the door
- Contextual/external predictors
- Program recruitment strategies
- Program implementation

# Attendance

- Participating vs. not participating
- Intensity (number of hours per week/month)
- Duration (history or participation)
- Breadth (number and variety of activities within and across programs)

# Intensity and Outcomes

**Academic Outcomes**

- GPA, test scores
- Homework completion
- Feelings about school, goals, and educational aspirations
- College attendance
- High school completion

**Social Outcomes**

- Lower problem behavior
- Higher community service
- Better emotional well-being (e.g., happiness)

**Participation Outcomes**

- Higher intensity in elementary school is associated with higher attendance in middle and high school


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# Duration of Participation

- Learning a specific skill, higher developmental assets scores (4-H Youth Development Program)

- Time on homework, self-reported grades, school volunteer work (Rodriguez, Hirschl, Mead & Goggin, 1999)

- Gains in math (TASC)

- Higher math grades, English grades, math test scores, reading test scores, self-esteem, locus of control, homework, academic peer group, talking with parents, talking with teachers (Broh, 2002)



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# Breadth of Participation

- Lower cigarette and marijuana use (Elder, Leaver-Dunn, Wang, Nagy & Green, 2000)

- Overall life satisfaction (Gilman, 2001)

- School drop-out rates (Mahoney, 2000)

- For boys, a higher number of activities was associated with positive academic outcomes (Pierce, Hamm & Vandell, 1999)

# Combining Indicators
# San Francisco Beacons

**Combined**

- Duration: Number of sessions—fall, winter, spring
- Breadth: Educational activities, other activities, or educational and other activities

**Results**

- **3 sessions plus educational and other activities** lead to increases in leadership, non-family support for participants, school effort, and sense of efficacy
- **3 sessions plus educational only activities** lead to increases in school effort only



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# Engagement

- More than just "being there"
- Behaviors such as persistence, effort, and attention
- Emotions such as enthusiasm, interest, and pride in success
- Motivation
- Active cognitive involvement
- Quality is key to engagement

College Guidance Counselor to parents of a high school senior:

"Unfortunately, evidence of your son's intelligence is purely anecdotal."



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# Special Focus on Evaluation Strategies to Increase Rigor

# "Shoestring Evaluations"

Bamberger, M., Rugh, J., Church, M., & Fory, L. (2004). Shoestring evaluation: Designing impact evaluations under budget, time, and data constraints. *American Journal of Evaluation, 25*, 5–38.

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# Planning and Scoping Evaluation Needs

- Define client information needs
- Define the program theory of change—inputs, implementation, outputs, and outcomes
- Identify budget, time, and data constraints

# Addressing Budget, Time, and Data Constraints

- Simplify the evaluation design
- Clarify client information needs
- Reduce sample size
- Reduce costs of data collection
- Simplify and speed up data input and analysis


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# Simplify Evaluation Design

- Pre-/post-test design

- Matched group of similar youth

- Comparison group using an existing data set

- Examine within program variations

- Comparison of participation in similar programs

- Retrospective pretest

# Clarify Client Information Needs

- Only collect the data you need

- If you are interested in implementation information you do not need a comparison group

- Each comparison statement you try to make has sampling implications (e.g., outcomes for low SES, different ages, etc.)


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# Reduce Sample Size

- Rule of Thumb: The larger the size you plan to detect, the smaller your sample can be

# Reduce Costs of Data Collection

- Only ask questions for which you really need answers
- Be clear about which indicators are the most relevant to your evaluation
- Consider each survey question carefully—a shorter survey means less data entry and analysis
- Use focus groups rather than individual interviews
- Use self-administered surveys
- Integrate qualitative and quantitative methods
- Use document review and secondary source data review, including project records
- Use "recall" to reconstruct baseline data


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# Simplify and Speed Up Data Input and Analysis

- Reorganize program monitoring records and data collection forms to be in line with evaluation questions

- Use technology to speed up data collection: hand-held devices, swipe cards, MIS, optical scanners (for surveys)

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