



the

# evaluation exchange

A PERIODICAL ON EMERGING STRATEGIES IN EVALUATING CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

HARVARD FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT ■ HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION ■ VOLUME X NUMBER I ■ SPRING 2004

## from the director's desk



Heather Weiss

**D**emand for out-of-school time (OST) programs is at an all time high. Coupled with this demand is a growing research base which suggests that to succeed in the 21st century, youth need what Dick Murnane at the Harvard Graduate School of Education terms the “new basic skills.” These include problem solving, inter-

personal, and communication skills, and basic proficiency in reading and math—skills that recent polling indicates the public feels are partly the responsibility of OST programs to foster. With heightened attention on the need for youth to have safe, productive places to be in the nonschool hours—places that can promote the “new basic skills”—comes increasing pressure for programs to improve the quality of young people’s experiences by providing OST options from which program participants can reap maximum benefits.

Therefore, when we were consulting with key people in the field, including our funders, to determine the focus of our fourth issue devoted to out-of-school time, we were excited by W. T. Grant Foundation’s suggestion that we concentrate on OST program quality, specifically examining how to measure, assess, and create quality programs to improve a range of outcomes for young people.

Several authors provide insights into how they, and others, are tackling measurement issues, from using technology and data systems to collect information and track progress, to applying lessons learned from developing early childhood quality measures.

Authors also provide grounded examples of how they and the programs they work with use research and evaluation data for improvement and learning. As al-

ways, throughout the issue and especially in our Evaluations to Watch section, we have alerted you to a range of research and evaluation efforts underway to assess and improve quality and understand its links to outcomes.

Recognizing the pivotal role that participation plays in determining effective youth outcomes, our two Theory & Practice articles examine two key participation issues: measuring participation, and attracting and sustaining participation. Our Questions & Answers section examines how group randomized trials can be used to assess program impacts, while Tom Kane, UCLA economist, provides us with some lessons learned from looking at how others have assessed OST program impact.

We asked leaders in the field to identify the single most important ingredient for creating, sustaining, and improving program quality. Overwhelmingly, our experts responded that program staff are key—that they need to be well trained, well compensated, and able to foster youth leadership. Some of our authors speak directly to this issue, helping us to understand how professional development efforts are and can be evaluated.

There is so much important work being done in this arena—as evidenced by the unprecedented length of this issue. In our tenth anniversary year, let me say again how much all of us here at HFRP value your support, your ideas, and your contributions to making OST programs better places for young people to learn and grow. As always, if you have ideas for future issues on out-of-school time or other topics, please let us know.

Heather B. Weiss, Ed.D.  
Founder & Director  
Harvard Family Research Project

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## Characterizing and Measuring Participation in Out-of-School Time Programs

*Honing in on the relationship between breadth of youth activities and outcomes, Sandra Simpkins Chaput from HFRP summarizes recent developmental research examining dimensions of participation in out-of-school activities.*

One of the key questions in the out-of-school time (OST) field is, How much program participation is enough to produce beneficial outcomes for participants? However, before this question can be answered, we need to have a deeper understanding of what it means to participate in OST activities. This article synthesizes developmental research and OST evaluations to provide an overview of the dimensions of participation and then hones in on *breadth* as an important dimension for achieving youth outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

### Characterizing Participation

Participation, or the time youth spend in OST activities, has several dimensions. To date, most researchers who have examined participation have grouped youth into one of two categories: those who participate in OST activities and those who do not. Although this grouping has been and will continue to be useful in our understanding of OST programs, it overlooks several other indicators of participation. These include:

1. *Intensity* – the amount of time youth participate in a program during a given period. Intensity has been measured in terms of hours per day, days per week, and weeks per year.
2. *Duration* – the history of participation. Duration is distinct from intensity. Intensity addresses current participation, whereas duration addresses the number of years youth have participated. For example, two youth may participate with the same intensity (e.g., 3 days per week), but for different durations (e.g., 1 year versus 5 years).
3. *Breadth* – the variety of participation (Eccles & Barber, 1999). Variety refers to whether participation is focused on one or more types of activities within and/or across programs. For example, many OST programs incorporate breadth by offering children a variety of activities (e.g., reading time, sports, dance). Other programs specialize in one type of activity, such as baseball. In this case, youth can achieve higher breadth by participating in multiple activities across a variety of programs.

### Research on Breadth and Outcomes

Breadth is particularly interesting to examine in relation to outcomes because a small but growing research base is indicating that breadth has implications for program quality. However, of the three dimensions of participation, breadth has received the least attention from the research and evaluation community.

Baker and Witt (1996) studied breadth within a multi-component program by examining differences in outcomes depending on the number of activities in which youth participated within the same program. Findings suggest that elementary school children who participated in three or more different activities had higher grades and aca-

<sup>1</sup> Eighty methodologically rigorous studies examining the links between participation in general out-of-school activities and outcomes were identified through several searches. These studies are discussed in a forthcoming HFRP *Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation* brief on understanding OST participation. (To be notified when this brief becomes available, sign up for our out-of-school time updates email at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/subscribe.html](mailto:www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/subscribe.html).) From this group, seven studies included findings relevant to the issues discussed in this article. These seven studies, which cover a range of youth development indicators, OST program and participation indicators, and evaluation and academic research, are marked with an asterisk in the reference list at the end of this article.

demographic test scores than nonparticipants or youth who participated in only one or two activities. In fact, the outcomes of youth who participated in one or two activities were not significantly different than nonparticipants' outcomes.

Breadth in activities can also be attained through participation in different programs or activities. Participation in a variety of distinct activities after school is associated with more beneficial outcomes, such as academic achievement and lower drug use (Elder, Leaver-Dunn, Wang, Nagy, & Green, 2000; Gerber, 1996; Swanson, 2002).

Other researchers have studied the number of activities in which youth participate during their high school years, essentially merging breadth and duration. For example, two youth could have each participated in four after school activities during high school. *Youth A* could have participated in four different activities for just 1 year, thus showing high breadth but low duration. *Youth B*, on the other hand, could have participated in the same sport for 4 years, thus showing low breadth, but high duration.

Although this characterization makes it impossible to untangle breadth and duration, it has led to some interesting results. The number of activities in which youth participate during their high school years was positively associated with numerous indicators, including satisfaction with life (Gilman, 2001), academic achievement, homework completion, beliefs about their abilities, educational and occupational plans, and university enrollment (Marsh, 1992; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). While an indicator combining duration and breadth more accurately reflects the complex nature of participation, it would be helpful if researchers completed additional analyses to understand if the effect is attributed to duration, intensity, breadth, or a combination.

### How Is Participation Breadth Associated With Outcomes?

How much participation breadth is necessary to impact child outcomes? Three general models address this question. Several researchers have found a linear relationship between participation breadth and various outcomes (Baker & Witt, 1996; Gerber, 1996; Gilman, 2001; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). As Figure 1 depicts, the linear model suggests that as participation

### Related Resource

This article is based on an upcoming HFRP brief entitled *Measuring Activity Participation and Its Link With Outcomes*. Part of our *Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation* series, this brief reviews multiple indicators of youth participation in OST activities and examines the various ways in which they are associated with youth outcomes. To be notified when this brief is available on our website, sign up for our out-of-school time updates email at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/subscribe.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/subscribe.html).

breadth increases, youth outcomes will increase. According to this model, the more variety in OST activities, the better the outcomes.

However, some of the linear relationships may, in fact, be thresholds. A threshold model, as drawn in Figure 2, suggests that people will benefit if their participation exceeds a certain level or threshold. The findings from Baker and Witt (1996) suggest that there may be a threshold, or a bump in outcomes, when youth participate in three to four activities, and an additional threshold at five or more activities.

While this pattern may hold true for studies that involve middle school students, studies on breadth during adolescence suggest that the relations may be curvilinear (Elder, Leaver-Dunn, Wang, Nagy, & Green, 2000; Marsh, 1992; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002; Swanson, 2002). As shown in Figure 3, moderate amounts of breadth are associated with the best outcomes. High breadth is still associated with better outcomes than no breadth or low breadth.

### Conclusion

Overall, the studies reviewed here suggest that participation in a variety of OST activities, either within a single program, or over the course of the week, is associated with beneficial youth out-

*continued on page 29*

FIGURE 1: LINEAR MODEL

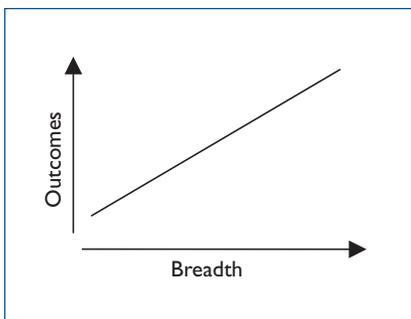


FIGURE 2: THRESHOLD MODEL

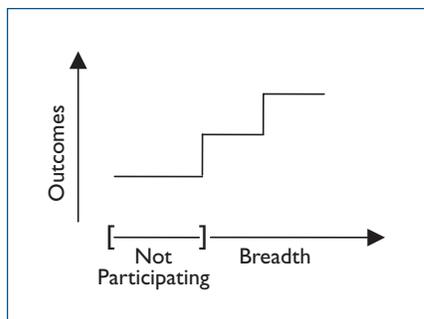
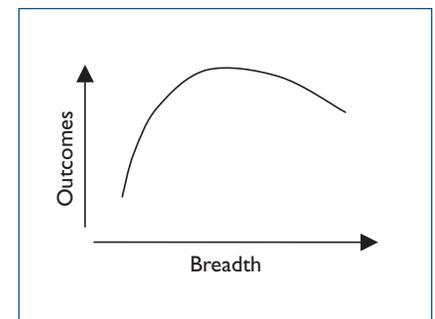


FIGURE 3: CURVILINEAR MODEL



## Attracting and Sustaining Youth Participation in After School Programs

*Sherri Lauver from HFRP reviews implementation data from a range of evaluations to propose a set of strategies for recruiting and retaining youth participation in out-of-school time programs.<sup>1</sup>*

When youth participate in high quality school- or community-based after school programs, they are likely to benefit in a myriad of ways. Students cannot benefit from after school programs, however, if they do not attend them. Unfortunately, due to busy schedules, claims of boredom, or desire for freedom on the part of youth, low attendance is the norm in many programs for middle and high school students. Participation in these programs dwindles during the critical transition from elementary to middle school, though students continue to need caring adult role models and interesting out-of-school activities.

This article culls insights from a synthesis of evaluation research available in HFRP's Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database<sup>2</sup> to offer guidance on student recruitment and participation in after school programs. As Hollister (2003) asserts, "A major contribution that can be made through evaluation studies *not* aimed at measuring the impact on long-term outcomes is to isolate better strategies for boosting and sustaining participation during this transition [from elementary to middle school] and continuing into the middle school years." Therefore, all evaluations in the database that contained detailed findings on youth recruitment and participation were examined, as well as related literature in the after school field. The following promising strategies are proposed for recruiting and retaining youth participation in after school programs.

### Reach out Directly to Youth and Their Parents

Rather than relying on posters, flyers, or referrals to generate interest, programs can benefit from reaching out directly to youth and their families. Phone calls and visits are an effective means of increasing local interest in these programs. Youth participants are often a program's most effective recruiters or ambassadors (McLaughlin, 2000). If poor participation is due to youth's misperceptions about the quality of a program, then current participants may offer an honest account of program activities and of what potential participants can expect. Street outreach has also been touted as particularly effective for recruiting teens, and some programs hire outreach workers specifically for this task (Herrera & Arbretton, 2003).

<sup>1</sup> This article summarizes the findings detailed in a forthcoming HFRP *Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation* brief, entitled *Attracting and Sustaining Youth Participation in After School Programs*. To be notified when this brief becomes available, sign up for our out-of-school time updates email at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/subscribe.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/subscribe.html).

<sup>2</sup> The database is available at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html).

### Match Program Schedules to Youth's Needs

While many elementary students and their parents may be able to commit five days a week to out-of-school time activities, this option often does not work for older youth, who have other responsibilities and choices. Five-day-a-week registrations may work if the expectations are clear and attendance is enforced; however, they appear to work best for elementary students. Also, while these programs may increase the overall number of days a student attends, they may simultaneously restrict the number of participants interested in attending (Grossman et al., 2002).

These problems are particularly acute for older youth in underserved communities, who may participate only when they are offered a flexible schedule where they can drop in for some activities. A choice of activities, organized into 8-week blocks, may also increase participation because it offers students the flexibility of participating in the program while continuing to participate in other activities.

Drop-in programs, where there is no expected commitment, are often blamed for low participation levels. But these programs may also offer the flexible programming sought by participants, particularly those most at risk and unwilling to make commitments. This structure may also prevent a program from unwittingly "creaming off the top" more motivated or advantaged participants. While drop-in programs have certain disadvantages in terms of reaching program goals (e.g., offering participants a high intensity learning environment), they may appeal to students who have busy schedules, or who would otherwise not participate at all.

### Allocate Program Slots for At-Risk Youth

At-risk students are those with a higher likelihood of school failure. They live in socially disorganized communities and they may have troubled family lives, use drugs, and have higher levels of school absences (Weisman, Soulé, & Womer, 2001; Lauver, 2002). These students may need these programs most, but are often disengaged with school.

School-based after school programs have successfully involved at-risk students by (1) working closely with teachers to identify and encourage them to participate, (2) earmarking a certain number of program slots for hard-to-reach children, and (3) hiring staff members who demonstrate an ability to relate well to these youth (Grossman et al., 2002; Forum for Youth Investment, 2003). Community-based programs are also important because they complement school and family resources in providing at-risk youth the additional support services they need.

### Recruit Pairs or Groups to Join Together

Research indicates that youth with friends who participate in after school programs are more likely than others to participate

themselves (Anderson-Butcher, Newsome, & Ferrari, 2003). We often overlook this finding as a potential strategy for recruitment and retention. There is little information in the program evaluation literature about ways to increase participation rates by recruiting groups of friends, yet doing so may be an effective way to increase attendance.

### Attract Youth With Energetic, Trustworthy Program Staff

When youth are happy with their after school program, they describe it as a *family*. They develop trusting, caring relationships with the after school staff members (McLaughlin, 2000; Warren, 2002, Wright, 2004). Successful staff members enjoy participating in rather than simply supervising activities, and they are representative of participants in both gender and ethnicity (Herrera & Arbreton, 2003).

### Mix Interesting, Fun Activities With Relaxation Time

A variety of activities, such as sports, homework help, the arts, or community service, may attract a diverse group of participants. In neighborhoods with few alternatives, a mixture of activities is even more important, because students consistently state that activity choices matter to them.

Variety reduces boredom and encourages regular attendance (Grossman et al., 2002; Lauer, 2002; McLaughlin, 2000; Walker & Arbreton, 2001; Reisner, Russell, Welsh, Birmingham, & White, 2002). Diverse activities may promote academic achievement, physical and mental health, and overall positive development while offering students a break from traditional classroom instruction. Some youth will be more easily drawn to less structured activities, such as pick-up basketball, while other students prefer an organized group activity (e.g., theater production or baseball) with clear goals. Another strategy for engagement is to offer activities that tend to be missing from the school day, such as arts activities that have been eliminated from the traditional school curriculum.

### Link an “Academic Agenda” to an Engaging Project

The evaluation literature suggests that youth will not tolerate two or three more hours of “school” in the after school setting.

#### Related Resource

This article is based on an upcoming HFRP brief entitled *Attracting and Sustaining Youth Participation in After School Programs*. Part of our *Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation* series, this brief analyzes the research evidence on recruitment and retention in after school programs and offers promising strategies for sustaining youth participation. To be notified when this brief is available on our website, sign up for our out-of-school time updates email at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/subscribe.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/subscribe.html).

Yet many urban schools feel enormous pressure to provide students with additional academic instruction in preparation for high-stakes exams, often at the expense of artistic or recreational activities. We found, however, that several after school programs (e.g., arts programs) offer a “hidden” dose of academic enrichment, while successfully retaining youth through engaging activities.

### Offer Opportunities for Leadership, Community Service, and Paid Employment

After school programs struggle to keep teens interested and involved. Participation in teen programs typically plummets when teens reach 15 or 16 and start having opportunities for paid employment. Some programs have found that leadership opportunities help teens to know that their contributions are important to the organization. Rewards for strong leadership, such as opportunities to travel to teen conferences, are especially effective (Wright, 2004). Teen programs that sustain student interest and have positive effects for teens often include community service or employment (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Hollister, 2003; Kirby, 2001; Sawhill & Kane, 2003).

Participation depends on whether youth are sufficiently engaged to stay involved in a program long enough to reap its potential benefits. Practitioners, parents, and communities should seek to understand promising strategies for recruiting and retaining youth participation in after school programs so that youth can reap the benefits from these programs.

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*continued on page 31*

## Getting Inside the “Black Box” to Measure Program Quality

Nicole Yohalem, Karen Pittman, and Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom from the Forum for Youth Investment provide an overview of program quality assessment tools.

As the landscape of out-of-school time programs for children and youth has expanded and matured, the issue of program quality has moved to the front burner across research, practice, and policy contexts. While the quality of individual programs hinges on the capabilities of local practitioners and the resources available to them, the research community plays several important roles in defining, measuring, and improving quality.

First, research helps demonstrate that *quality matters* by surfacing connections between levels of program quality and program outcomes. Second, researchers play a critical role, along with evaluators and practitioners, in demonstrating that *quality is measurable* and in developing tools for measurement. Finally, research helps demonstrate that *quality is malleable*, by showing that, once named and assessed, specific program features related to quality can be improved over time.<sup>1</sup> This article demonstrates how quality can be measured and offers an overview of the quality assessment tools that are, or will soon be, available to programs that serve young people.

An array of tools is surfacing within different areas of practice across the youth fields that will allow practitioners and researchers in any setting where youth are engaged, from a public park to an after school journalism club, to measure the quality of that setting and the activities available there. The Forum for Youth Investment has collected and reviewed several existing and forthcoming program quality assessment tools, including standards lists and observation and survey instruments used in large-scale evaluations (see Table 1, facing page). While these tools alone do not reflect a comprehensive scan of the field, they do represent a range of purposes, methodologies, and institutional perspectives.

Table 1 shows a high degree of consensus regarding specific elements of program quality. Significantly, this consensus exists despite the fact that the developers of these instruments represent a range of perspectives, including youth employment, after school, camping, and alternative education.

When we looked beneath the scaffolding of each tool listed, we found that quality is gener-

ally being defined and measured in terms of three broad areas: youth opportunities, staff practices and supports, and administrative and management policies. Within those areas, we also found significant consistency in the specific quality features included in each instrument.

Table 2 summarizes common constructs across tools reviewed. The specific elements of quality listed align closely with the features of positive developmental settings described by the National Research Council in 2002.<sup>2</sup> These parallels support the consensus that is building across research and practice communities about what it takes to engage young people and what high quality, supportive settings look and feel like. This consensus signals an important developmental milestone for the youth development field, as discussions about the need to do *something* for youth shift to analyses of *what to do* and *how to do it*.

Being able to define, measure, and improve youth program quality is critical, and progress made in both research and practice over the past several years is indeed promising. However, while mounting evidence shows that quality indeed matters, is measurable, and is malleable, the bottom line is that *quality costs*.

The effective development and use of quality assessment tools like those summarized in this article require significant time and resources on the part of the research community and programs themselves. Researchers are making tremendous efforts to refine, adapt, and make assessment tools more widely available; programs are implementing and fine-tuning continuous improvement systems. But, for further progress to be made, the policy and funding communities must recognize the importance of these efforts. Ensuring quality is costly; the costs of not doing so, in a relatively new and rapidly expanding field, are far greater.

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<sup>2</sup> Eccles, J., & Gootman, J. A. (Eds.). (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

**TABLE 2:  
FEATURES THAT  
DEFINE QUALITY  
OST PROGRAMS**

**Youth opportunities for...**

- Positive relationships
- Safety and belonging
- Exploration and skill building
- Meaningful involvement
- Expression/reflection
- Service and work

**Staff practices and supports that promote...**

- Youth as partners
- Safe, fair environments
- Supportive relationships
- Personalized participation
- Learning opportunities/intentional skill building
- Continuity within program and across settings

**Organizational policies and structures that promote...**

- Consistent, safe, inviting environments
- High quality staffing
- Effective leadership and management
- Range of diverse, interesting, skill-building activities
- Meaningful linkages with community
- Youth involvement

<sup>1</sup> Forum for Youth Investment. (2003, July/August). Quality counts. *Forum Focus*, 1(1).

**TABLE 1: YOUTH PROGRAM QUALITY ASSESSMENT TOOLS**

Tools Reviewed	Primary Purpose					Data Collection Strategy			Target User			
	Accreditation	Accountability	Evaluation	Self-Assessment	Improvement	Observation	Interview	Questionnaire	Program Leader	Program Staff	Youth	External Reviewer
<b>American Camping Association Accreditation Standards</b> <a href="http://www.acacamps.org/parents/accreditation/stdsglance.htm">www.acacamps.org/parents/accreditation/stdsglance.htm</a>	■	■				■			■			■
<b>Assessment Indicators for Organizational Practices</b> <a href="mailto:info@ydsi.org">info@ydsi.org</a>		■		■	■	■			■	■		
<b>Beacons Activity Observation Tools (Public/Private Ventures)</b> <a href="mailto:kwalker@ppv.org">kwalker@ppv.org</a>			■			■						■
<b>Cause &amp; Outcome, Skill &amp; Action, Membership &amp; Modeling (CO-SAMM)</b> <a href="mailto:lcamino@facstaff.wisc.edu">lcamino@facstaff.wisc.edu</a>		■	■	■	■			■	■	■	■	■
<b>Foundations Quality Assurance System</b> <a href="http://www.foundationsinc.org/ExtendedDayFolder/QAS/QualityAssure.asp">www.foundationsinc.org/ExtendedDayFolder/QAS/QualityAssure.asp</a>		■	■	■	■	■		■	■	■		
<b>High/Scope Youth Program Quality Assessment</b> <a href="mailto:charlesh@highscope.org">charlesh@highscope.org</a>			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		■
<b>Networks for Youth Development Assessment Manual</b> <a href="mailto:jmates@fcny.org">jmates@fcny.org</a>				■	■	■	■		■	■	■	
<b>New York State Afterschool Network Program Quality Assessment Tool</b> <a href="mailto:kolsen@tascorp.org">kolsen@tascorp.org</a>				■	■	■		■	■	■		
<b>NSACA Standards for Quality School-Age Care</b> <a href="http://www.nsaca.org/standards_glance.htm">www.nsaca.org/standards_glance.htm</a>	■			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
<b>NYEC Education Development Network Criteria and Self-Assessment Tool</b> <a href="http://www.nyec.org/EdStrategies.html">www.nyec.org/EdStrategies.html</a>				■	■	■		■	■	■		
<b>NYEC Promising &amp; Effective Practices Network Self-Assessment</b> <a href="http://www.nyec.org/pepnet/assess.html">www.nyec.org/pepnet/assess.html</a>	■	■	■	■	■			■	■	■		■
<b>Program and Activity Assessment Tool</b> <a href="http://www.uwex.edu/ces/4h/paat">www.uwex.edu/ces/4h/paat</a>				■	■	■			■	■	■	
<b>School-Age Environment Rating Scale</b> <a href="http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ecers/sacers_frame.html">www.fpg.unc.edu/~ecers/sacers_frame.html</a>		■	■	■		■			■			■
<b>Standards for Baltimore After-School Opportunities</b> <a href="http://www.safeandsound.org/link.php?id=57">www.safeandsound.org/link.php?id=57</a>		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		■
<b>YouthNet Standards of Quality Performance</b> <a href="http://www.kcyouthnet.org/standards_l.asp">www.kcyouthnet.org/standards_l.asp</a> (school-age) <a href="http://www.kcyouthnet.org/standards_teen.asp">www.kcyouthnet.org/standards_teen.asp</a> (teen)		■		■	■	■	■		■	■	■	■

## Life on the Ground: Balancing Youth Ownership With Adult Input

*Kathrin Walker and Reed Larson from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign describe their research on the dilemmas adult leaders in youth programs face and how they address these dilemmas to improve program quality.<sup>1</sup>*

The practice of youth work is replete with real-life dilemmas. A group of youth who have been planning a citywide youth summit want to make major changes at the last minute, when there is not time to think through these changes. Two adult advisors of a high school service club turn over the planning of a day camp to the club's members, but as the date of the camp approaches, the youth haven't yet come up with a plan for the camp. Wanting to avoid this type of situation, the advisors of an arts program create in advance a structure for the work youth will do, but then have difficulty getting the youth motivated.

The daily life of practitioners is not formulaic. It brings complex situations that require deliberating the merits of different paths of action. Practice is carried out on the "rough ground of paradox and contingency, ambiguity and fragmentation."<sup>2</sup> Effective youth practitioners are effective, in part, because they are good at anticipating and responding to these types of dilemmas. We suspect that their skill comes, also, from a regular process of self-evaluation.

We are examining the critical role adult leaders play in supporting youth's process of development and self-change. We are exploring the dilemmas these leaders face in their work and their

<sup>1</sup> The research described herein was supported by grants from the William T. Grant Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> Schwandt, T. A. (2003). "Back to the rough ground!" Beyond theory to practice in evaluation. *Evaluation*, 9(3), 353–364.

### Related Resources

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Larson, R., Jarrett, R., Hansen, D., Pearce, N., Sullivan, P., Walker, K., et al. (in press). **Youth programs as contexts of positive development.** In A. Linley & S. Joseph (Eds.), *International handbook of positive psychology in practice: From research to application*. New York: Wiley.

University of Illinois Youth Development Research Project website. [web.aces.uiuc.edu/youthdev](http://web.aces.uiuc.edu/youthdev)

strategies for addressing these challenges. Of course, every situation is unique—we do not believe research can identify a prescriptive set of responses for the diversity of programs, youth, and real-life contingencies. Rather, our goal is to learn about the salient features of these situations and to identify the repertoire of responses on which adult leaders draw.

One dilemma involves balancing youth agency and ownership with adult direction. When adult leaders stand back completely, youth can get off track, as happened with the planning of the day camp we mentioned above. But when adults assume control, youth will not experience the ownership that drives important developmental changes. Ownership is crucial to the growth of multicultural competencies, the development of initiative, and the formation of social capital, among other processes.

The adult leaders we have studied are highly skilled at avoiding the horns of this dilemma. Our data suggest that the techniques they use promote youth ownership *at the same time* that they provide guidance to help keep things on track. These techniques include:

- *Following youth's lead* – supporting goals set by youth
- *Cultivating a culture of youth input* – instilling norms and expectations that emphasize youth leadership
- *Monitoring* – attending to how the work is proceeding, with careful intervention to encourage rather than undercut youth
- *Providing intermediate structures* – helping youth structure or break down tasks to make them more manageable
- *Stretching and pushing youth* – encouraging youth to try out new roles and ideas; nudging them to go beyond their comfort zones

Allowing youth to have ownership and keeping work on track are not inevitably at odds. In the programs we studied, when adults intervened, they did so in ways that shored up rather than undermined youth ownership.

What adult leaders do is often more art than science. Much of their expertise consists not in applying a standardized routine, but in reflecting on and responding to different situations, developmental goals, and groups of youth. It should be recognized that finding and maintaining this balance between youth ownership and adult intervention is only one of the many dilemmas adult leaders face. By attending to this dialectic of dilemmas and responses to these dilemmas, we can better understand, evaluate, and elevate youth development practice.

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## Building Quality in Out-of-School Time in the United Kingdom

*Ian Fordham, Pam Boyd, and Tony Apicella of ContinYou, a leading youth development organization in the United Kingdom, describe their efforts to improve quality in out-of-school time programming nationwide.*

Since 1992, ContinYou (formerly Education Extra) has been the leading not-for-profit organization in the United Kingdom for promoting out-of-school hours learning (OSHL). Recently, ContinYou has played a prominent role in efforts to improve and monitor the quality of OSHL programs. Our approach has been guided by the view that any quality assessment system must be simple, cost effective, responsive to the needs of a range of stakeholders, and, most important, supportive of innovative OSHL programs for young people. The development and success of our efforts, which include the creation of a national OSHL framework, after school quality models, and a quality assurance inspection system, may prove illuminating for after school professionals from both sides of the Atlantic.

### Increasing Interest and Support for Quality in OSHL

While the child care field has a set of nationally prescribed standards and a number of quality frameworks, our national system of quality assurance for OSHL has not been as tightly defined. However, as a result of significant lobbying in the mid-nineties, the Department for Education and Skills (DFES) issued a report establishing a coherent framework for OSHL activities in schools that included a unifying vocabulary and a set of key planning principles.

ContinYou built on this basic quality guidance by partnering with the Office for Standards in Education, the government agency that inspects the quality of school teaching and learning. Together the two organizations established a system for integrating after school activities into the existing school inspection process. As a result, inspectors now assess the quality of “opportunities for enrichment” provided outside the school day in all English schools. Although the assessment process is currently limited in terms of allowing schools to use the data for their own program improvement, it is a promising step toward ensuring quality. For example, we have observed that many schools have begun to consider the OSHL assessments integral to their programs and achievement goals rather than as add-on components.

### New Resources for Assessing and Rewarding Quality

In the past five years, these efforts have been aided by the development of three significant resources for monitoring after school quality in all four countries in the U.K.—England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland:

1. A *quality assurance tool* that includes both in-school and out-of-school components (and varies slightly across countries). It

includes separate sections on implementation, sustainability, and quality assurance, each consisting of multiple questions that are tied to a series of standards. This tool allows schools themselves to assess the quality of their OSHL programs.

2. A standards-based *recognition scheme* that uses a portfolio assessment to identify high quality OSHL programs and reward them with a special quality credential.
3. The Extra Quality *self-assessment tool* developed by ContinYou in partnership with Lloyds TSB (a leading bank in the U.K.). This tool assesses nine essential after school program categories (including leadership, people, processes, and results), which are derived from the widely used *quality in education* model in England. This self-assessment tool differs significantly from the quality assurance tool in that it is based on the principles of *total quality management* and on the *business excellence model*, and in that it assesses the quality of an after school program within a broader framework of whole school improvement.

### Addressing Challenges to Ensure Quality

In working to improve quality through these new resources ContinYou has faced challenges, not least in convincing principals and policymakers to prioritize quality OSHL programs, which are a central resource for raising young peoples’ self-esteem and achievement. Several developments look promising, however. For example, national frameworks for OSHL now exist in England and Wales. Another development is an infrastructure throughout counties, districts, and schools made up of OSHL coordinators responsible for monitoring quality. Support from the departments of education in all four countries has also been valuable. The DFES recently invested over \$1 million in the three-year Quality Development Programme, aimed at helping schools to integrate OSHL into mainstream school priorities.

*continued on page 19*

### Related Resources

Andrews, K. (2001). *Extra learning: New opportunities for the out of school hours*. London: Kogan Page.

Fordham, I. (2003, October). *Bridging learning across the pond*. Paper presented at the Harvard Learning With Excitement conference, Cambridge, MA.

For more information about national standards for **out-of-school hours child care clubs** see [www.surestart.gov.uk/\\_doc/index.cfm?document=154](http://www.surestart.gov.uk/_doc/index.cfm?document=154).

## Promoting Quality Out-of-School Time Programs Through Professional Development

*Suzanne Bouffard from HFRP explores the contribution that staff development initiatives and evaluations make to improving the quality of youth programming.*

Staffing is a key component of quality in out-of-school time (OST) programs. Many programs attribute their success to skillful providers, and research shows the importance of positive staff-child relationships for youth outcomes (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Professional development can enhance the skills of both new personnel and longtime staffers. While the concept of professional development is not new, its significance for those working in OST is still emerging. As the professional development field begins to have a larger impact in youth programming, evaluation will continue to play an important role in measuring success and bringing effective initiatives to scale.

### What Is Professional Development?

Professional development programs have the common goal of increasing the knowledge and skills of staff to improve youth outcomes. Many programs have the secondary goal of improving the quality and sustainability of the youth workforce. Professional development activities may be conducted before the job application process or later in the career cycle. Examples include higher education, new-staff orientation, in-service training, external seminars and conferences, apprenticeship programs that combine college courses with job experience, and informal resources such as newsletters and online discussion boards.

Research from education and early child care demonstrates that professional development is related to positive social and cognitive outcomes for youth (National Institute of Child

Health and Human Development, 2001; Westat & Policy Studies Associates, 2001). In the OST field, professional development activities are also related to providers' confidence and satisfaction (Center for School and Community Services, 2002) and form the backbone of the "career development ladder," a new system that ties increases in staff salaries and responsibilities to ongoing education and experience.

### A Multilevel Framework for Evaluation

Evaluation is a critical part of the professional development process because it identifies successful program elements that can be replicated and ineffective elements that call for improvement. However, evaluations of professional development have been sparse. Multiple barriers could be responsible for this scarcity, including limited time and resources; for example, educators and other youth workers often report feeling that evaluation of professional development wastes valuable staff time (Guskey, 2000). However, one of the most significant barriers may be the need for an evaluation framework that is tailored for professional development.

An evaluation framework for professional development must demonstrate the effect of an initiative at multiple levels of outcomes. Staff development experts agree that evaluations can and should assess the following four levels: (1) feedback from providers about satisfaction, (2) providers' knowledge of youth development and best program practices, (3) the practices employed by program providers, and (4) positive developmental outcomes for youth and other stakeholders, such as families and communities (Guskey, 2000; Killion, 1998; Mizell, 2003). Each level can provide valuable information; however, only the fourth level can establish whether the ultimate goal was achieved, that is, whether the initiative had a positive impact on youth.

Most current evaluations of professional development in OST focus on the first level, in the form of post-training satisfaction surveys. These surveys cannot demonstrate impact on providers' practices or youth outcomes, but they can illuminate providers' opinions. Awareness of such opinions can help professional development planners to revise their programs, thereby increasing participation and engagement in the future.

A few initiatives, such as Building Exemplary Systems for Training Youth Workers (Center for School and Community Services, 2002), Making the Most of Out-of-School Time (Halpern, Spielberger, & Robb, 2001), and the North Carolina Quality Enhancement Initiative (Hall & Cassidy, 2002), have reported outcomes on the second and third levels. This encouraging trend has helped to establish the positive role that professional development plays in the way providers interact with youth and lead programs.

To date, no studies have examined the fourth level of how professional development impacts youth. Positive youth out-

*continued on page 19*

### Related Resources

This article is based on an upcoming HFRP brief entitled *Promoting Quality Out-of-School Time Programs Through Professional Development*. Part of our *Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation* series, this brief examines professional development in OST and related fields and provides a framework for evaluation tailored to OST professional development initiatives.

The **Out-of-School Time Resource Center** is housed in the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Research on Youth and Social Policy. The Center aims to help connect OST programs with resources, and features professional development tools and research. [www.ssw.upenn.edu/ostrc](http://www.ssw.upenn.edu/ostrc)

## Youth Civic Engagement: Emerging Theory and Practice

*Margaret Post from HFRP examines the emerging practice of youth civic engagement and describes current research efforts to promote quality in this area.*

Youth civic engagement (YCE) is an emerging area of practice and knowledge development that seeks to engage young people in democracy through in-school and out-of-school time (OST) learning opportunities. As the field has developed, there has been debate as to what constitutes effective youth civic engagement programming. With the overarching goal of building a more engaged citizenry, Gibson (2001) argues that a hybrid approach to YCE theory and practice is needed, one that “transcends institutional and ideological silos.” Gibson further calls for a “thoughtful dialogue about how to enrich youth civic engagement.”

For the out-of-school-time field, this is a critical challenge, as more and more emphasis is placed on building youth participation for an active citizenry. Effective quality programming in youth engagement is essential, as is rigorous research about effective strategies that cut across disciplines.

Through youth civic engagement initiatives, young people can make valuable contributions to social change efforts in schools and communities across the nation. Activities and programs vary depending on the setting: some are school-based civics education and service learning programs; others exist at the community level, taking place in the out-of-school-time hours. Across these settings, young people work on community action projects, participate in leadership development, and contribute to legislative advocacy efforts and electoral politics. It is evident from this range of activities, as well as from the extent of current foundation support for them, that youth participation in strengthening democracy has become a critical component of new efforts to renew the civic fabric of our communities for the 21st century.

Recognizing that activities range from community service to formal political activism, the challenge before us is not only to determine what programs are the most suitable and effective mechanisms by which young people can be involved in civic work, but also to develop a shared understanding of what is necessary for quality YCE. There are now several efforts by researchers and foundations to begin filling this void in empirical research through an investment in longitudinal evaluation research of specific programs and through an investigation of youth development outcomes related to civic involvement (Gibson, 2001; Michelsen, Zaff, & Hair, 2002; Winter, 2003; Pearson & Voke 2003).

Particularly relative to youth development and OST, this research begins to explore the relationship between nonacademic competencies for youth and the community-based (OST) activities in which they participate. In addition, it points practitioners

toward a greater understanding of the range of effective strategies for engaging young people in democratic participation.

YCE can be an integral component of any positive youth development experience. When done well, YCE activities build on the best of what we know about youth development outcomes, especially in the OST hours. Research can serve as a mechanism by which the practice of YCE can be strengthened. Currently, evaluation and longitudinal research efforts investigate the following:

1. Individual youth outcomes (Michelsen, Zaff, & Hair 2002; Winter, 2003)
2. The best in youth civic engagement practice (Michelsen, Zaff, & Hair, 2002; Pearson & Voke, 2003)
3. The impact of youth involvement in local community change initiatives (especially the recent work of the Innovation Center, which in part examines community-level impact of youth involvement)

Moving forward, continued work in each of these three areas will lead us to a more sustainable and integrative approach to building a stronger YCE movement in out-of-school-time learning.

### References and Related Resources

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- Skelton, N., Boyte, H. C., & Leonard, L. S. (2002). *Youth civic engagement: Reflections on an emerging public idea*. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Democracy and Citizenship.
- Winter, N. (2003). *Social capital, civic engagement and positive youth development outcomes*. Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates, Inc.

*A more extensive listing of youth civic engagement resources is available on our website. See our list of non-HFRP out-of-school time publications and resources at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/other.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/other.html).*

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## Out-of-School Time Opportunities for Immigrant Youth

Erin Harris from HFRP discusses the importance of out-of-school time programs for immigrant youth.

Immigrant youth in the United States face a unique set of social and academic challenges, to which several stress factors contribute:<sup>1</sup>

1. *Exclusion.* Discrimination can ostracize and exclude immigrants from mainstream institutions. This exclusion often results in inadequate access to quality resources and needed services.
2. *Poverty.* Settling in poor areas, as many immigrants initially do, leaves them vulnerable to problems associated with poverty.
3. *Separation and cultural dislocations.* The immigration process frequently involves separating youth from other family members for extended periods. Separation can lead to unsettling transitions without the benefit of parental support. Even when families are not separated, immigrant parents often are unable to provide the level of support their children need to adjust to the new culture: parents are limited by their own unfamiliarity with American culture, and, often, language.
4. *Identity formation.* Immigrant youth face the dual task of understanding their ethnic identity and reconciling it with their new American identity.

These factors can leave immigrant youth vulnerable to such risks as academic failure, delinquency, and low self-esteem.

The out-of-school time (OST) field is faced with the responsibility of providing special programs for immigrant youth and of creating sensitivity to immigrant issues in “mainstream” OST programs. A national survey of after school programs found that more than half served youth whose home language or first language was not English.<sup>2</sup> In addition, a growing number of OST programs specifically target various immigrant populations and include a variety of activities and goals such as academic achievement, social development, and substance abuse/delinquency prevention. A frequently articulated program goal is helping youth, and often their parents, to transition into their new communities.

Some researchers have identified successful strategies for working with minorities. The following strategies are based on interviews with staff at after school programs serving predominantly ethnic and cultural minority populations in the California Bay Area:<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Roffman, J. G., Suárez-Orozco, C., & Rhodes, J. E. (2003). Facilitating positive development in immigrant youth: The role of mentors and community organizations. In F. A. Villarruel, D. F. Perkins, L. M. Borden, & J. G. Keith (Eds.), *Community youth development: Programs, policies, and practices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. [www.sagepub.com/book.aspx?pid=9103](http://www.sagepub.com/book.aspx?pid=9103)

<sup>2</sup> California Tomorrow. (2003). *Pursuing the promise: Addressing equity, access, and diversity in after school and youth programs*. Oakland, CA: Author. [www.californiatomorrow.org/publications/cts.pl?pub\\_id=31](http://www.californiatomorrow.org/publications/cts.pl?pub_id=31)

<sup>3</sup> Wong, R., Go, C. G., & Murdoch, S. (2002). *Best practices for outreach and retention of middle school youth in after-school programs*. Davis: University of California Cooperative Extension. [ucce.ucdavis.edu/files/filelibrary/5180/5824.pdf](http://ucce.ucdavis.edu/files/filelibrary/5180/5824.pdf) (Acrobat file)

1. Flexibility and responsiveness to the community’s specific cultural needs
2. Hiring staff who share the same culture and language as participating youth
3. Fostering awareness and appreciation of other cultures
4. Providing special activities and supports for minority groups to help them feel included and welcome

Evaluations of OST programs serving immigrant youth can also help identify promising practices, as illustrated in the following two examples:

- *The Somali Community Services of Seattle Child Development Program* provides after school and weekend tutoring and support to Somali children and their parents. An implementation evaluation of this program found that one of its main strengths, cited in interviews with staff, volunteers, parents, and children, was its cultural relevance and responsiveness to the Somali families it served.<sup>4</sup>
- The Minnesota-based *Hmong Youth Pride* after school program provides tutoring and structured group activities (including Hmong language and cultural lessons) for Hmong youth, as well as support services for their parents. In addition to finding improvements in youth academic achievement and parent involvement, a five-year outcome evaluation also found that youth participants frequently expressed appreciation for the exposure to Hmong language and culture.<sup>5</sup> Further, results showed a 23% increase in the percentage of participants who said they were very proud of their culture, compared to 10% of the comparison group, which consisted of their peers who did not participate.

With increasing policy emphasis on access and equity in OST activities, recognizing the needs of immigrants as separate from the needs of U.S.-born ethnic and racial minority youth has become critical. The experiences of immigrant youth are unique and must be treated as such, both by programs targeting immigrant youth specifically and by those targeting the general youth population. Research has suggested that programs that serve immigrant youth effectively are those that respond to the cultural needs of the populations served.

To learn more about evaluations of OST programs that serve immigrant youth, visit the HFRP Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html).

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<sup>4</sup> Casey, B., Sullivan, M., & Roble, M. A. (2000). *Evaluation report: Somali Community Services of Seattle Child Development Program*. Seattle, WA: Seattle Partners for Healthy Communities. [depts.washington.edu/hprc/CRC/products.htm](http://depts.washington.edu/hprc/CRC/products.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Chase, R., & Clement, D. (2000). *Hmong Youth Pride: Outcomes evaluation summary*. St. Paul, MN: Wilder Research Center. [www.wilder.org/research/reports.html?summary=80](http://www.wilder.org/research/reports.html?summary=80)



## Designing Quality Assessment Tools in Early Childhood Education and Youth Development

*Ted Jurkiewicz and Charles Hohmann of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation discuss the lessons from developing High/Scope's Preschool Quality Assessment Instrument that brought to bear on the design of the new Youth Program Quality Assessment tool.*

Our design for the new Youth Program Quality Assessment tool draws on what we learned from our experience developing High/Scope's Preschool Quality Assessment Instrument. The new tool assesses the extent to which practices used in out-of-school time (OST) services achieve high standards of developmental appropriateness. Practices in the domains of *youth opportunities* and *youth supports* are assessed through observations of workshops, classes, meetings, and other forms of OST service as they are delivered by youth-serving agencies, school districts, and other organizations.

Organizational practices focusing on *structure, policy, activity, and setting* are assessed both by observing activities and by interviewing program staff. Each domain of developmentally appropriate practice—youth opportunities, youth supports, structure, policy, activity, and setting—is built up from indicators and items that collectively represent consensus about best practices in the youth development field.

Because they have a longer history, efforts to create acceptable program quality measures in the early childhood field offer valuable lessons for similar attempts in the youth development arena. Our experiences developing tools for assessing practices in both fields suggest that the following steps are key to success:

1. *Start by formally gauging consensus around what constitutes developmentally appropriate practices.* The early childhood and youth development fields house different schools of thought about what practices are essential to growth and development. However, variation may be greater in the early childhood field because its thought is more entrenched, with a longer history and more evidence to draw on than concepts in the youth development field. However, striving to consensus is still productive in either field if that consensus is widely vetted among leaders.
2. *Employ a conceptual framework that is meaningful to practitioners, researchers, and policymakers.* A well conceived framework helps developers and potential users organize and parcel out the wide array of behaviors, events, decisions, and other phenomena that comprise practices or directly support them. Such a framework clarifies whether an indicator is focused on

a specific aspect of practice in an activity or classroom, such as a human relationship, or on a specific aspect of organizational practice, such as a policy. Interestingly, frameworks have been a little easier to develop in early childhood than in youth development, because preschool programs take place in more standardized settings than is typical of youth programs.

3. *Create an iterative process of testing and revising the instrument that includes data analyses and feedback from practitioners.* Practitioners, who know what language will best resonate in a particular field, can use their knowledge of program practices to tell whether measures make sense and are usable. Data analyses will help determine if measurement goals are being met. Instrument developers need to take practitioner knowledge and use it to mold indicators that generate meaningful assessments. Multiple attempts should be made to get feedback from practitioners about findings to make instrument revisions efficient and meaningful.

4. *Instrument developers must meet the needs of practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to develop acceptable assessment tools.* Policymakers are more likely to listen, understand, and respond appropriately to demands from youth development profession-

als if tools are valid, useful, usable, and supportive of discussion about what is being measured using a common language. To meet all of these goals, the development process must address the concerns of practitioners and researchers by integrating their perspectives, experiences, and expertise effectively.

Carrying out an instrument development process that integrates the perspectives, experiences, and expertise of researchers and practitioners does not come easily, or cheaply, if it is done well. However, the first step is to design such a process by building on lessons like those we have described.

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*Carrying out an instrument development process that integrates the perspectives, experiences, and expertise of researchers and practitioners does not come easily, or cheaply, if it is done well.*

## Learning From Organizations That Learn



*The After-School Corporation of New York (TASC) and Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) are large out-of-school time organizations with a demonstrated track record for using evaluation for both accountability and learning. We asked four experts affiliated with these organizations to reflect on what they have learned about using evaluation for program improvement. The panel includes TASC president Lucy Friedman and TASC evaluator Elizabeth Reisner, who is a principal at Policy Studies Associates, Inc., as well as Rebecca Fain, director of agency development for BBBS of America, and BBBS evaluator Jean Grossman, senior vice president for research at Public/Private Ventures.*

### Lesson 1: Develop a Mindset in Favor of Evaluation for Program Improvement

*Rebecca Fain:* A true learning organization is driven by a desire for quality and continuous improvement. An “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” attitude needs to be converted to one of “How can we do what we do better?” Big Brothers Big Sisters of America’s (BBBSA) structure as a federation is a key component of our identity as a learning organization. We have a piloting process for new ideas, directions, and program improvements that enables us to build agency support for change. New ideas are rigorously tested to determine the *what* and *how* of achieving success and the degree to which success can be replicated. This approach allows us to prove the worth of an idea prior to rolling it out to all agencies. Agencies hear directly from those in the field why and how a measure must be taken to achieve outcomes before they have to implement it.

*Jean Grossman:* A promising strategy for developing an evaluation mindset is to be sure that staff members understand the value of evaluation. Don’t go from zero to 60. Start small and start with things that are useful to staff. For example, collect basic participant satisfaction information that staff can discuss in meetings. Use evaluation results as internal benchmarks, comparing results from one quarter to the next and reflecting on the differences for program improvement. Then, gradually expand your questions to address how participation is impacting outcomes.

The organizations with which Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) has had successful evaluation partnerships have been more mature organizations like BBBS. They have extra staff to do non-direct service, such as helping to write proposals, thinking through programs, attending conferences, participating in evaluation meetings, and getting other people to collect and con-

sider data. The extra staff enables organizations to thoughtfully absorb evaluation data. Another factor critical to developing an evaluation mindset is organization members’ belief that evaluation is useful. An organization’s members should think, “I can do a better job if I know what’s going on.”

*Elizabeth Reisner:* TASC’s commitment to evaluation stemmed from its understanding of evaluation as a source of feedback for program partners and public agencies, and for program improvement. TASC and its board made it clear to Policy Studies Associates (PSA) from the beginning that they were interested in a lot of feedback, and the more reporting we at PSA did, the more the demand grew. TASC made sure the community-based organizations that applied for grants understood what they were getting into in terms of evaluation requirements and how the evaluation would benefit them. And then it made sure that grantees and project-level staff received regular feedback from the evaluation.

*Lucy Friedman:* Lead organizations need to play a cheerleading role in order to promote an evaluation mindset. When we at TASC started evaluating our programs in 1998—when no one was evaluating after school—we told organization administrators that running the programs wasn’t just about serving the 300 kids in their program, but that they were pioneers in a larger national effort. It was a mobilizing message that was critical to ensuring participation and cooperation with PSA’s evaluation. And it worked!

### Lesson 2: Build Evaluation Into Program Design

*Lucy Friedman:* Building evaluation into TASC from the outset served to strengthen the TASC model. We understood that if we wanted to learn something across all the sites, we needed a program model that had characteristics common across sites, but also was sufficiently flexible to respond to the needs of individual schools and communities. So we developed the set of core elements that have become the basis for the entire TASC model. If we hadn’t been thinking about evaluation at the very beginning, we might not have developed such a strong program model. We made it clear to grantees from day one that evaluation was an integral part of receiving TASC funds, so grantees were never taken by surprise when PSA asked them for cooperation with the evaluation.

*Rebecca Fain:* Out-of-school time organizations should build evaluation into all aspects of their programs, including getting

*An “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” attitude needs to be converted to one of “How can we do what we do better?”*

*Rebecca Fain,  
Big Brothers Big Sisters  
of America*

funding to cover costs. Program designers and leaders need to understand the importance of demonstrating results for ongoing support and funding, for staff reinforcement, and for engaging other clients, families, and stakeholders.

*Jean Grossman:* Keep in mind that there are opportunity costs in conducting evaluation, especially for small programs that could be trading off service delivery for evaluation. These programs need some staffing breathing room before they can really tackle evaluation questions. I recommend a phased approach where evaluation starts small and grows with the program. But even little programs can and should collect some basic implementation data that may feed into a larger evaluation and can be used to strengthen the program. My advice is to collect a few things. It's much better to get three high quality measures than 10 to 15 measures that mean nothing. A measurement of participant attendance, for instance, is an important piece of data all programs should collect.

### Lesson 3: Manage Data Burden With Staffing, Expectations, and Relationships

*Elizabeth Reisner:* For large-scale evaluations, to the extent possible, place the burden of data collection on the external evaluators. Also, in some cases, other agencies have already collected data that can inform a program's evaluation, so it is important to develop good relationships with agencies that control the data you need.

*Rebecca Fain:* Performance metrics, which BBBSA created, led to a culture of performance management that has become critical for managing data for program improvement. BBBSA employees have a clear idea of what they need to do, and at what level, to achieve outcomes. Agencies know what data points to look at regularly to determine if they are on track or if adjustments are needed.

### Lesson 4: Be Intentional About the Logic of Your Program

*Jean Grossman:* All program operators should think through, step-by-step, how they expect participants to be changed by their programs. Then they can figure out a few things to measure that will help them assess if these changes occur. I like to collect data to capture three phases of a program: early, middle, and late. Early data tell something about participant characteristics. Middle phase data capture something about dosage and about whether the program is reaching its intended participants. Late phase data offer information about in-program changes or outcomes.

*Lucy Friedman:* Having a core set of elements across all TASC programs helped PSA build consistency into the evaluation across sites. Even with flexibility within programs, TASC's basic

theory of change<sup>1</sup> does not vary from site to site and therefore we can use it as a framework for evaluation.

### Lesson 5: Disseminate Evaluation Results Strategically

*Elizabeth Reisner:* Incorporate strategic communications into evaluation and disseminate evaluation results both within an organization and to the public.

*Jean Grossman:* Sharing results broadly within the organization is a key to promoting high quality implementation.

*Rebecca Fain:* I make a distinction between internal and external dissemination. BBBSA's appreciation for the importance of program evaluation began, in part, with the release of the first P/PV evaluation report both inside and outside of the organization.<sup>2</sup> Our funders, who supplied an external perspective, rewarded our evaluation efforts; their response reinforced an internal attitude of appreciation for evaluation. Internally, the taste of impact data made us understand its tremendous value and the need for more. Sharing the results within BBBSA created a compelling case for using data for continuous improvement.

*Lucy Friedman:* To ensure the success of after school programs nationwide, we must get key evaluation messages to policymakers. From its inception, the mission of TASC has been to shape public policy. We knew in the

beginning that if we wanted to get the attention of policymakers, we would need data. So from the very beginning we partnered with PSA to ensure that we got the data we needed. We had a vision that the TASC effort would grow beyond providing after school programs in specific communities—that it would become part of a new thrust to develop and expand high quality after school programs nationwide.

*For more information about the BBBS and TASC evaluations, visit the HFRP Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html). For both summaries and full text of the most recent interim reports of the TASC evaluation, visit [www.policystudies.com](http://www.policystudies.com).*

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<sup>1</sup> A program's theory of change explicitly articulates how the activities provided lead to the desired results by linking service receipt to intermediate changes (such as changes in attitudes or in-program behaviors) to short- and longer-term outcomes in participants.

<sup>2</sup> Grossman, J. B., & Tierney, J. P. (1998). Does mentoring work? An impact study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. *Evaluation Review*, 22(3), 402–425.

*Lead organizations need to play a cheerleading role in order to promote an evaluation mindset.*

*Lucy Friedman,  
The After-School  
Corporation*

## A conversation with

### Howard Bloom & Stephen Raudenbush

Howard Bloom, chief social scientist for the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), leads the development of experimental and quasi-experimental methods for estimating program impacts at MDRC. He has conducted or helped to design evaluation studies that have randomized public housing projects, firms, schools, classrooms, and day care centers.

Stephen Raudenbush, professor at the University of Michigan School of Education and Survey Research Center, has spent the last 10 years focusing on building into statistical models the fact that children are clustered into social settings rather than left as solitary individuals.

In this installment of Questions & Answers, Howard Bloom and Steve Raudenbush discuss the possible use of group randomized trials to assess quality youth programming.<sup>1</sup>

**Q** Why do you feel there is a need to develop new experimental approaches to assessing program quality and how might group randomized trials be appropriate for evaluating youth programs?

**A** Steve Raudenbush: Using group randomized trials to assess program quality is actually not a new idea. One of the classic texts of the early '50s by Lindquist<sup>2</sup> on experimental design in psychology and education identified this design as useful, and there is a history of using this design in public health. The design has been a component in many studies that have been funded by the Centers for Disease Control. What is new is the emphasis on this approach in other areas, such as youth development.

**Howard Bloom:** I agree. When the theory of the intervention acknowledges the collectivity—the force of the group—as part of the mechanism by which an intervention is supposed to create its effect, then you clearly want to randomize groups. You don't want to be randomizing individuals in and out of groups. Acknowledging the group nature of the intervention is very important for assessing youth and education programs. This approach may not be the most appropriate for evaluating *all* youth interventions, but it is becoming appropriate for many group-oriented interventions.

The growing emphasis on randomizing groups to assess the effectiveness of youth interventions reflects the increasing acceptance of randomized experiments in general. Historically, research in education and related fields has used non-experimental alternatives that produce less reliable results than experimental designs would yield. And even though the past 20 years have seen some very important methodological advances in non-experimental design using sophisticated modeling and

matching procedures, these advances fall short of providing the solid causal evidence available from randomized experiments. When empirical research has been conducted to ask whether you can get the same kind of reliable and internally valid results from non-experimental comparison group methods, the answer has been no.

**Steve Raudenbush:** That point helps explain the recent emphasis on randomization, but the other part of the question is, why *group randomization*? As Howard pointed out, the group level is really, for many of the interventions we're interested in, the natural unit of intervention and randomization. In a comprehensive school reform program aimed at restructuring instruction throughout the school, for example, the entire school would naturally be the unit of treatment, and therefore of randomization.

One appealing aspect of group randomization is that it eliminates some of the difficulties in individual-level randomization. For example, when teachers are randomly assigned to implement different treatments, they might share information across groups, contaminating data. Or, there might be some kind of tension between the experimental and control groups within the school. When the whole school is randomized,

you avoid these problems.

**Q** What are the statistical implications and advantages of this approach?

**A** Steve Raudenbush: In terms of sheer statistical power, by which I mean having the maximum probability of finding a treatment effect, we might actually prefer a design in which we randomly assign individuals. If we could pull it off, we'd have more degrees of freedom with individual assignment than with groups.<sup>3</sup> Howard and I have both shown that the number of groups that have to be randomized to demonstrate a particular effect of the intervention is sometimes daunt-

<sup>3</sup> The number of degrees of freedom in an experiment refers to the number of parameters that can be independently varied.



Howard Bloom

<sup>1</sup> Group randomized trials are experiments in which some groups are randomly assigned to receive an intervention while others are assigned to a non-intervention control condition.

<sup>2</sup> Lindquist, E. F. (1953). *Design and analysis of experiments in psychology and education*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

ing. In many cases we see that 25 or 30 schools would need to be assigned at random to each treatment condition, and this prospect scares some people. Even though group randomization has no real power benefit, it *does* have another statistical kind of benefit.

Generally, in a randomized experiment, we assume that the effect of the treatment does not depend on certain extraneous factors. For example, if I participate in a health study and am randomly assigned to use *Drug A*, presumably it doesn't matter which doctor gives me the drug—what's important is that I take the drug in the manner prescribed. But now consider an analogous example from education. The assumption that the effects of an instructional method (the “drug”) doesn't depend on who is teaching (the “doctor”) is really quite implausible, because teaching style is regarded as critical to kids' outcomes.

This same idea could carry over to youth development programs. Adults who provide leadership in youth development, in general, are going to be very important when it comes to assessing outcomes; therefore, randomized grouping at the participant level alone would lead to false outcomes.

**Howard Bloom:** Building off of that, there are two points I would add. First, it is *very* important to do the impact analysis in accordance with how randomization was conducted. Some folks haven't quite figured that out. There have been studies that have randomized *groups*, but analyzed their data as if they had randomized *individuals*. So when these studies calculated the statistical significance of their findings, they grossly overstated that significance. People conducting this kind of research should make sure that the analytic model they use to estimate impacts is consistent with the randomization approach they implement.<sup>4</sup>

A second and related point is that in most cases, the number of *groups* that are randomized is far more important than the number of individuals per group in determining how much precision, or power, you have. That's why Steve was saying that you often need 25 or 30 groups per treatment condition, regardless of how many individuals there are per group.

**Q** What are the implications of this approach for future evaluation and research, specifically in after school and youth development?

**A** **Steve Raudenbush:** After school programs are clearly a group-oriented treatment, so they come very much into this domain. But, one of the things that must change for this movement to be successful is that people who run schools and after school programs have to get used to the idea of participating in a randomized experiment. That notion may seem implausible, but we have to get more clever and thoughtful about how to do this type of experiment.

<sup>4</sup> For a clear discussion of this issue see Cornfield, J. (1978). Randomization by group: A formal analysis. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 108(2), 100–102.

In a recent randomized trial of school-based interventions, the original design involved some schools getting an exciting new instructional approach, and other schools getting basically nothing. That was not a successful approach—people didn't want to participate in the study. So in a further refinement of that design, everyone got a treatment, but some groups were randomized to get it in one grade and others would be randomized to get it starting in another grade. The schools' principals knew that whatever the result of the coin flip, in this modification, they would benefit from some new, potentially interesting attempt to solve a problem. That strategy was much more successful in recruiting people.

**Howard Bloom:** Building a culture that accepts randomized experiments is critical. You need to build a constituency for “effectiveness information,” understanding that there are multiple ways of measuring effectiveness of interventions, but randomization is ultimately the best. However, it will take a lot of time to build this constituency. For example, in the fields of employment and social welfare research, it took several decades for MDRC and other organizations, and folks in the federal government, to demonstrate that these kinds of studies could be done and *should* be done, and that their *findings* can play an important role in policymaking. In education, there is a strong push to bring more of this methodology in, but it will take a while to build a culture and a constituency for it.

Finally, it is important to understand that in any field of social science research you have to “pick your shots” when trying to use randomized experiments. You have to be careful and strategic—you simply cannot use a randomized experiment every time you want to answer an impact question. The question has to be important enough, with a large enough constituency behind it, to make the effort required to successfully conduct a randomized experiment worthwhile.

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Stephen Raudenbush

### Related Resources

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## A Recipe for Quality Out-of-School Time Programs



*In keeping with the theme of this issue, assessing and improving quality in after school programs, Priscilla Little from HFRP asked leading experts in the after school field to identify the single most important ingredient necessary to create, sustain, and improve systems to ensure quality out-of-school time programs for all youth.*

### Bob Granger, President, William T. Grant Foundation

Program quality is driven by what line and supervisory staff do—the choices they make about materials, activities, and schedules; the role they create for youth; and their behavior with youth and with each other. Little formal preservice preparation for line staff, and their rather high turnover, are inevitable. Therefore, my suggestion for improving quality is to *rely on differential staffing*. Hire line staff who have personal characteristics and social skills that will help them to be viewed as significant by the youth. Then help line staff “deliver” by hiring and retaining a small cadre of staff who can model quality programming and effectively coach line staff on-site.

### An-Me Chung, Program Officer, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

Assuming sufficient funding is available, ongoing and regular *professional development* of after school educators is a critical ingredient in developing effective and sustainable after school programs. Professional development should include strategies and content for integrating learning opportunities that support cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development. Intentional linkages to school-day curriculum and educators should be made, and practitioners should become adept at working with participants of different ages, ethnicities, and cultures, as well as with those that have special needs. Professional development should also involve continuous improvement and assessment of participant progress, hiring and retaining qualified staff, using community resources effectively, engaging families and participants in program planning, and exercising effective program management skills.

### Deborah Craig, President, YouthNet of Greater Kansas City

*Staffing* is the key ingredient. Program quality boils down to effective interactions between staff and youth and the environment the staff creates. If those interactions are lacking (e.g., adults are not interacting with youth) or are of poor quality (e.g., the adults belittle or yell at youth), no program, research-based or not, can be effective. In fact, the program could be detrimental. To better understand poor staff-youth interactions, use a self-reflection process that begins by asking, Is pay sufficient to secure staff that can develop good skills? Is staff oriented regarding performance expectations, then regularly trained? Do supervision and employee evaluations ensure that

what staff has learned is implemented into practice?

### Beth M. Miller, Miller Midzik Research Associates

*Investment* is the foundation for an array of related efforts: bringing everyone to the table, making programs accessible to all children, creating data-driven program improvement efforts, developing part-time staff into after school leaders, creating real jobs with adequate pay and benefits, doing the research that will guide effective practices, and mobilizing advocates to build an even stronger system over time. With energy, commitment, and know-how, people in our field can, and do, create incredible programs out of almost nothing. However, it takes substantial investment to construct a system that will sustain such programs and nurture more opportunities for youth across the community.

### Carla Sanger, President and CEO, LA's BEST

Creating an *environment of staff support and development* must be central, and more organic than the traditional staffing model. Too often, it is assumed that we can produce high quality programs if we have staff who demonstrate a particular credential or core set of competencies. Emphasis is placed on knowledge of ages and stages, classroom management, use of equipment, etc. In fact, whether these things result in high quality programs is largely dependent on the *social context* of a program. The single most important aspect of building a context that nurtures and energizes staff is that they listen to, and be guided by, their own voices. The main goal in staff training should be to draw out what staff already know and think, in order to engage them in a process of developing new goals and initiatives that *they* will identify with and support.

### Dale Blyth, Director, Center for 4-H Youth Development

The most critical ingredient for creating, sustaining, and improving systems to ensure quality is *intentionality*. Far too often we assume people know what is meant by quality. This will only change if we become intentional about the meaning of quality, its importance, and the critical factors that underlie it. Systems that become intentional about quality use it as a driving concept in their work. They train around it, they monitor it, and they help their clients recognize it. When successful, this intentionality creates an ethos of youth development that permeates the work of the system and makes quality “job one,” as one corporate advertising slogan goes.

### Karen Pittman, Executive Director, Forum for Youth Investment

Creating, sustaining, and improving systems to ensure program quality requires many things, but the catalytic ingredient, espe-

cially in times of scarcity, is a *systemic sense of efficacy*. Quality improvement is not a zero-sum proposition. The result is better programs and better outcomes, but the process is stressful, even when resources are available. The careful work done by intermediaries (such as Community Networks for Youth Development in San Francisco, and Kansas City YouthNet), to create climates where staff can debate standards, agree to assessments, converse with funders, and find low- and no-cost improvement strategies, is the essential work that must be done to ensure that everyone owns the quality improvement goal.

### Heather Weiss, Director, Harvard Family Research Project

Building an effort to improve the quality of existing programs means investing in developing standards and benchmarks that emphasize *capacity building* at the systems level. From the systems-building work now happening in early childhood, we know that this capacity building must include evaluation, professional development, and strategies for compensation. Additionally, it must include building capacity to do data-driven continuous improvement at the program and the community level. A key component of building capacity is being selective and strategic about the way one uses the complex research and evaluation knowledge base, not only to inform policy decisions, but also to feed into programs for continuous improvement. This approach to building capacity for quality improvement involves moving beyond the traditional research and development model to recognition of the proliferation of out-of-school time programs that need quality enhancement.

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### Professional Development

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comes, while most conclusive, are also the most difficult to attain. A multitude of complex factors, both within and outside of OST programs, operate to influence youth, which makes it difficult to demonstrate that outcomes observed in level four are due specifically to staff training.

When embarking on an evaluation of a program's professional development efforts, it is critical to begin with level one evaluation and build toward level four. Combining multiple levels and working toward the highest level will help programs meet accountability requirements as well as generate valuable feedback for improvement. Such a system of continuous improvement can contribute to high quality programs that benefit providers, youth participants, and communities alike.

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### OST in the U.K.

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In combination with the quality assessment tools described above, these initiatives may be adopted or adapted to bring quality to scale in individual settings at local, state, or national levels and on both sides of the Atlantic. As we move forward toward this goal, we will welcome opportunities to take the debate forward with models developed from both sides of the pond.

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### Extracting Evaluation Lessons From Four Recent Out-of-School Time Program Evaluations

*Thomas J. Kane, professor of policy studies and economics at the University of California, Los Angeles, distills lessons for future research from his review of four recent after school program evaluations.<sup>1</sup>*

Over the past decade, after school programs have moved from the periphery to the center of national education policy debate. Understandably, policymakers are eager to see evidence that investments in these programs are paying off. To draw the lessons learned so far, I recently reviewed the results of four recent evaluations of after school programs: the first-year results of the national evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program, the After-School Corporation's After-School Program (TASC) evaluation, and evaluations of the Extended-Service Schools Initiative and the San Francisco Beacons Initiative. This article highlights four lessons for future evaluation designs to consider.

#### Focus on Participation

When programs operate on a drop-in basis, attendance is often sporadic, with the average participant attending only one to two days per week. (The major exception was the TASC program in New York, where participants attended three to four days per week.) With such irregular attendance, programs are unlikely to yield lasting benefits. As a result, programs should rethink their strategies for increasing enrollment. One approach would be to require parents to commit to regular attendance as a prerequisite for participation. This was one of the strategies used by the TASC program to raise enrollment. But such requirements risk excluding the most disadvantaged youth, whose parents may be unable to make such a commitment.

Another strategy would be to devote additional resources to actively recruiting participants and following up with parents whose children are not attending regularly. As programs experiment with alternative ways to increase attendance, future evaluators should collect evidence on the impact of different strategies for increasing attendance.

#### Experimental Versus Non-Experimental Designs

Many of the existing non-experimental evaluations have relied on comparisons of participants and nonparticipants attending

the same schools. Given the strong presumption that participants—who have chosen to attend the after school programs—likely differ from nonparticipants in their access to alternative after school care arrangements, in their feelings of safety after school, or other outcomes, it is unlikely that such studies will ever be persuasive.

At the least, evaluators need to be able to demonstrate that, at the baseline before the program existed, the statistical method being used—either regression adjustment or matching—is able to eliminate any prior difference between participants and nonparticipants on critical outcomes such as after school care arrangements and academic achievement. Unfortunately, few of the studies collected baseline data on such outcomes or, when such outcomes were available, differences often remained between participants and nonparticipants.

Given the selection bias problem in after school participation, to evaluate program impacts, future evaluation studies should consider random assignment in oversubscribed programs (as was done in the 21st Century elementary school evaluation) or other non-experimental strategies (such as comparing students at schools with and without after school programs).

#### Think Harder About Magnitudes of Academic Impacts

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers evaluation was designed to detect a .2 standard deviation impact on Stanford 9 reading scores. This has become common practice in the field of education evaluation for a wide range of different types of interventions. Rather than continue to use such arbitrary benchmarks, we need to be more realistic about what it takes to create discernible effects on achievement test scores. For example, in the national samples used to norm the Stanford 9 achievement test, fifth grade students scored only one-third of a standard deviation higher than fourth graders on reading and one-half of a standard deviation higher on math.

In other words, everything that happens to a student between the end of fourth grade and the end of fifth grade—a whole school year of full-day classroom instruction, interactions with family, conversations with friends, and homework—is associated with an important but not huge gain on an achievement test.

With this as a backdrop, consider the typical after school program with youth attending one to two days per week for two to three hours per day. While it is reasonable to expect that after school activities can affect performance as measured by achievement tests, it is likely that such effects will be small. This

<sup>1</sup> Some information in this article was drawn from two previously published articles: Kane, T. J. (2004). *The impact of after-school programs: Interpreting the results of four recent evaluations* ([www.wtgrantfoundation.org/usr\\_doc/After-school\\_paper.pdf](http://www.wtgrantfoundation.org/usr_doc/After-school_paper.pdf) [Acrobat file]), and Granger, R. C., & Kane, T. J. (2004, February 18). Improving the quality of after-school programs. *Education Week*, p. 76, 52.

*Despite the prominence of so-called latchkey children in the rationale for after school programs, it is surprising that only one of the four recent evaluations kept track of students' after school care arrangements.*

is particularly true for reading scores, since they are traditionally less responsive than mathematics scores.

Therefore, even if the programs are helping, effects on achievement tests are likely to be hard to detect statistically. We should balance a focus on test scores with an examination of the intermediate effects, for instance, of more parental involvement in school-related activities, more diligent homework completion, more school attendance, and better grades—efforts that may pay off in improved test performance over time. Although the studied programs often did not have statistically significant effects on achievement test scores, some programs did have promising effects in these other areas.

### Collect Better After School Care Data

After school programs are often justified to policymakers and the public as a way to reduce the number of children caring for themselves after school. Despite the prominence of so-called latchkey children in the rationale for after school programs, it is

#### Related Resources

Granger, R. C., & Kane, T. J. (2004, February 18). **Improving the quality of after-school programs.** *Education Week*, p. 76, 52.

Grossman, J. B., Price, M. L., Fellerath, V., Jucovy, L. Z., Kotloff, L. J., Raley, R., et al. (2002). *Multiple choices after school: Findings from the Extended-Service Schools Initiative.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

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surprising that only one of the four recent evaluations kept track of students' after school care arrangements. Even more surprisingly, the researchers in that one evaluation found that many of the program participants would not have been on their own, but with a parent or sibling if the programs were not available. Reducing sibling care is perhaps a good thing, but it is less obvious that time spent in an after school program would be more worthwhile than time spent with a parent after school.

As noted above, it will be difficult to discern the impact of after school programs on academic achievement. It may be even more difficult to identify impacts on hard-to-measure outcomes such as the risk of committing or being the victim of a crime, or leadership skills. But if programs truly are reaching a large number of youth who would otherwise be on their own after school, policymakers and the public will be more willing to give the programs the benefit of the doubt.

Accordingly, evaluators must document the nature of the impacts on after school care arrangements. Future studies should collect detailed time diary data on students' whereabouts after school, and keep track of any net impacts on the proportion of children under adult supervision after school.

### Conclusion

After school programs may be unaccustomed to holding center stage in the national education policy debate, but that is unlikely to change anytime soon. Some of the evidence so far is forcing a reconsideration of the magnitude of impacts we might reasonably expect. Other evidence, such as the failure to find much impact on adult supervision after school, is even more surprising. Such surprises, and the reassessments they provoke, are to be expected early on. It is still too soon to determine whether the impacts of after school programs are sufficient to justify the costs. But it is probably not too early to know that greater effort should be devoted to raising attendance and reaching the children who would have been on their own after school.

Moreover, it is not too early to know that evaluators need to do a better job of measuring the impacts the programs are having on after school care arrangements. Policymakers and the public may be willing to be patient until more of a consensus develops. But the evaluation community and after school programs will need to demonstrate that they are willing to learn from the evidence that is forthcoming.

*To read evaluation profiles of the four programs discussed in this article, visit the HFRP Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html).*

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## Promising Approaches to Evaluating Out-of-School Time Program Quality

*Christopher Wimer from HFRP describes three promising methodological approaches to studying out-of-school time program quality.*

Increased attention to program quality in the out-of-school time (OST) field requires researchers and evaluators to use evaluation methods that generate reliable and valid information about what constitutes program quality. This article highlights three methods for generating such information—mixed-methods approaches, cross-site participant-adjusted approaches, and intraprogram randomized trials—and provides examples of how these methods have been used to study OST program quality.

### Mixed-Methods Approaches

As accountability and science-based research movements take hold in the evaluation community, researchers and policy-makers often call for rigorous quantitative indicators of program benefits through quasi-experimental or experimental research designs. While these methods allow more confidence in inferring whether programs are working, relying on such methods alone can leave sizable gaps in our knowledge about *why* a program may or may not have worked. One way to keep sight of program quality is to use mixed-methods approaches, whereby quantitative results are enriched and expanded through qualitative inquiry (Rossman & Wilson, 1994).

In recent evaluations of the After-School Corporation's (TASC) programs (Reisner, Russell, Welsh, Birmingham, & White, 2002; Welsh, Russell, Williams, Reisner, & White, 2002), evaluators combined quasi-experimental impact estimates with interviews, focus groups, reviews of program documents, and in-depth site observations. This approach enabled evaluators to identify both likely program impacts (e.g., increased math performance and school attendance) and strong program components that seemed likely to have contributed to these impacts (e.g., intensity of activities and integration with host schools). Mixed-methods approaches provided a more holistic picture of the program and of how features of program quality might lead to youth outcomes.

### Cross-Site Participant-Adjusted Approaches

Another issue arises when evaluators compare outcomes across multiple program sites. It is tempting in such situations to assume that the “best” sites are those that appear to achieve the greatest gains in youth outcomes (e.g., sites where 50% of participants graduate high school versus sites where only 30% graduate). Some sites, however, may serve substantially different populations than others. Adjusting the magnitude of outcomes across sites by statistically accounting for features of the populations served is a useful methodological approach for addressing this issue.

For example, one can estimate what expected outcomes for different participants *should* look like (e.g., by looking at gains

across all sites for disadvantaged students from high poverty schools), then calculate what a particular site's outcomes *should be* given observed characteristics of its participants. The highest quality sites would then be those that achieved the best outcomes compared to estimates of what their outcomes should look like.

Ferguson and Clay (1996) take this approach in their evaluation of YouthBuild, a national youth and community development program for older youth. Evaluators found that the strongest sites were not those with the largest *apparent* gains in selected outcomes, but rather those with strong outcomes *relative* to the populations they served. The evaluators were thus able to identify program features of these sites likely to have resulted in such gains, such as strong recruitment, screening, and selection criteria for youth.

### Intraprogram Randomized Trials

Experimental OST evaluations typically assign youth randomly to either a treatment or control group. While this research design can be powerful for identifying program impacts overall, it is less helpful in identifying program elements leading to such impacts. One alternative is to randomly assign participants to *different aspects* of a program rather than to the program as a whole or to no program at all.

Evaluators have used this method in two ways. One way involves randomly assigning youth to multiple treatment conditions (in addition to a control condition) to identify the value-added of a particular constellation of program components. For example, in the multi-component program Across Ages, LoSciuto, Rajala, Townsend, & Taylor (1996) randomly assigned youth either to a control group, a treatment group receiving a standard set of services, or a treatment group receiving standard services plus an older mentor.

A second method entails taking a new program component (e.g., Friday arts classes) and randomly assigning participants from a preexisting program to either receive or not receive this new component, thus identifying whether the new component is a worthwhile addition to the program. A Youth Opportunities Unlimited summer program in Arkansas used an intraprogram randomized trial to examine a new problem-solving training component (Glascocock, 1999) and found that this new component led to increases in youth's math performance.

Measuring program quality involves significant methodological complexity. Though none of the methods described here are foolproof, and though some may entail more costs for programs, each presents unique opportunities for uncovering what works in OST programs for youth.

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*continued on page 27*

## Meaningful Assessment and Continuous Improvement: Using the Foundations Quality Assurance System

*Claudia Weisburd and Rhe McLaughlin of Foundations, Inc., describe their Quality Assurance System for program improvement.*

Since 1992, Foundations, Inc., has operated extended-day enrichment programs and provided technical assistance to schools, school districts, and other education and community organizations. Working primarily with children from low-income communities and those who serve them, Foundations seeks to improve program performance and enhance student achievement in school and during non-school hours.

In 1999, after a rapid expansion in our after school operations, we at Foundations found ourselves confronted with what is now a widespread challenge: maintaining program quality across states, sites, and highly varied on-the-ground conditions. Snapshot evaluations or one-time ratings were clearly insufficient. We needed a system that would establish the highest standards and at the same time help staff attain and maintain those standards through a process of tailored, targeted, and continuous improvement. After three years of piloting and revising, Foundations developed the Quality Assurance System (QAS) evaluation tool.

The QAS is an assessment tool that can be tailored to individual programs to build a comprehensive picture for planning program improvement. It is designed to show change over time, instead of merely showing where a program happens to be on assessment day. Using the QAS, programs begin with an initial assessment. Based on the results, assessors and program staff identify areas in need of improvement and develop specific improvement strategies. The program then conducts a follow-up assessment, paying particular attention to those elements targeted for improvement. The QAS is designed to be used as either a self-assessment tool or a tool that outside evaluators can use. (Outside assessment offers the opportunity for program-specific expert help. By comparing programs across sites, the reports generated through outside assessment create a picture of how well programs measure up against each other; these reports may also be particularly useful for formal reporting requirements.)

### Offering Flexibility While Ensuring High Standards

The design of the QAS is based on our belief that if staff are to embrace assessment-based improvement plans, they must see the process as relevant, contextual, and potentially helpful. A hallmark of the QAS therefore is its flexibility. The tool starts “from where programs are,” by assessing their missions, content, and resources. At the same time, it emphasizes best practices for after school. This combination leads to high quality, realistic, and site-specific improvement planning.

The two-part *program profile* assesses the context of the program. Part I addresses items essential to all after school programs, including staffing, facilities, and health and safety. These “program-basics building blocks” are examined for all programs regardless of particular program content.

Part II narrows the lens to analyze “program-focus building blocks,” such as program mission, target population, and activities, with specific sections applicable to academic programs, recreation programs, and youth development. The assessor using the QAS completes only those sections corresponding to specific program goals. This program-focus section allows providers to tailor the assessment to the actual goals and activities of their programs. This specificity frees programs from being penalized for failing to provide content that was not part of their mission. For example, a recreation program will not receive a lower rating because it scores poorly in academic content, if academics were not part of the program goals.

While the QAS deliberately accommodates a range of program types, it establishes clear, high standards through the close assessment of building blocks. Each building block is divided into composite elements that are evaluated on a scale of 1 to 4. Element scores are summed to provide a total score for each building block. Within the staffing building block, for example, the assessor looks at elements such as qualifications, attendance, and staff-child ratios. The level of detail provided by these elements and building blocks allows staff to easily identify both program strengths and weaknesses. This information can then guide targeted improvement planning.

### Current and Future Progress

Since the debut of QAS in April 2003, over 150 programs have participated in its processes, which have involved approximately 1,000 staff members in evaluation, reflection, and program improvement. With the launch of a web-based version of the tool (slated for spring 2004), sites will have the ability to collect data, analyze findings, plan change, and produce reports online. By blending meaningful assessment with continuous improvement, the QAS has encouraged and will continue to support the development and maintenance of high quality after school programs across diverse sites.

*For more information about evaluation of the Foundations, Inc., after school programs, visit the HFRP Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html).*

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### Using Technology to Link Evaluation and Funding: San Francisco's Contract Management System

*Tajel Shah and Nani Coloretti of the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and Their Families reflect on the value and limitations of a web-based contract management system for youth programs.*

Two trends are currently colliding within city agencies, foundations, and other public and nonprofit arenas: the push to strengthen data-driven evaluative processes, and the desire to fund programs based on proven, positive results. San Francisco's Department of Children, Youth and Their Families (DCYF) is one place where this intersection is showing promising results. DCYF funds, strengthens, and coordinates over 200 child and youth services in the City and County of San Francisco through distribution of the Children's Fund, a property tax set-aside of over \$28 million per year. The DCYF approach is one of results-based accountability, and a key component of the process is an innovative web-based data management system known as the Contract Management System (CMS).

#### An Accountability Tool for DCYF

DCYF originally developed the CMS as a paperless grant management system of online reports, forms, and invoicing. DCYF then enhanced the system to capitalize on its potential for collecting outcomes-based evaluation data, a critical component of DCYF's results-based approach. Today the CMS is a sophisticated tool required of all DCYF-funded agencies.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) must use the CMS to record their projected annual work plans, which are tied to citywide goals for youth and to standardized performance measures. CBOs must then record data such as participant enrollment and demographics, and use the CMS to submit monthly reports and invoices online. The monthly timeframe and detailed data allow DCYF program officers to monitor grantees' progress toward department goals, to analyze citywide trends, and to gauge the impact of Children's Fund dollars.

#### A Self-Assessment and Self-Promotion Tool for Grantees

Using preset report templates, CBOs can generate critical information for managing their programs more effectively, for communicating with their staff and board of directors, and for presenting detailed and accurate data to potential funders.

The CMS has also helped grantees think more critically about their organizational goals. Analyzing outcomes helps agencies define their work and articulate it to others. Some CBOs, for example, have integrated CMS data into grant proposals, supporting DCYF's hope that the CMS can help leverage additional resources for San Francisco children and youth.

#### A Tool Enhanced by Other Methods

While the CMS has thus far proven to be a powerful tool for linking on-the-ground programs to results, some limitations should be noted. Although the CMS can help to document whether a program achieved a certain outcome, it cannot ana-

lyze *why* a program did or did not work. Another limitation is that the CMS does not document whether some children use more than one program. As a result, when all local program data are aggregated, the number of children served across the community may be overstated. While enhancements to the CMS may mitigate some of the system's limitations, the technology cannot supplant the role of DCYF staff and evaluators, who regularly visit funded agencies to assess organizational health and program impact.

#### Scaling Up: The Full Impact of the CMS

The CMS has already proven its value to DCYF and the children's services community of San Francisco. However, its full capability will not be realized until DCYF fully implements its results-based approach this year. This change will be completed with the next request for proposals (RFP), due in March 2004, which will make an estimated \$25 million available per year for 3 years to child- and youth-serving agencies that have been selected through a competitive process. DCYF staff is currently using CMS data to help design the RFP. The data will also be used to determine, in part, which programs and agencies will receive new grants. Once funding has been awarded, use of the CMS will continue to play a central role in the cycle of program planning and tracking, and in DCYF's use of the Children's Fund as an instrument of social change for the city's young people.

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#### Related Resources

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CitySpan Technologies, Inc., in Berkeley, California, is an e-services consultancy providing web-based information systems to public agencies and nonprofit corporations. [www.cityspan.com](http://www.cityspan.com)

## Program Evaluation Across the Nation Using Technology

*Sarah Levin Martin, currently with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, describes an innovative and cost-effective way to collect and report evaluation data for program quality improvement.*

In the fall of 2002, the Nike company funded a new after school physical activity program in 31 Boys and Girls Clubs across the country. The program, called NikeGO, had two primary goals: (1) to get more kids moving and (2) to get kids already moving to move even more. Each club received Nike equipment and training in the use of the SPARK® curriculum. SPARK, or Sports, Play, and Active Recreation for Kids, is a nationwide program devoted to promoting physical activity for both students and teachers. With input from its 9- to 15-year-old clients, each club designed its own program. Although programs shared the same goals, they took very different approaches to implementation: Across clubs, activities ranged from street hockey to hip hop dance to yoga.

### The Evaluation

Nike's evaluation challenge was how to equitably and efficiently evaluate the programs with limited funding. The company asked an independent evaluation team (husband and wife faculty members at Morehead State University) to conduct a systematic assessment that could be used for continuous improvement. Limited to approximately 1% of each program's total operating budget, Nike needed to determine both process measures and impact measures. Hence, Program Evaluation Across the Nation Using Technology (PEANUT) was conceived. PEANUT was used to measure the effectiveness of NikeGO against its two main goals, described above.

### The Process

The PEANUT evaluation team recruited, screened, and hired research assistants (RAs) from universities and colleges across the United States as data collectors. These RAs were then trained to use technology such as conference calling and email to carry out scientific inquiry. Once trained, the RAs visited clubs to collect data through observation and structured interviews both with adult activity leaders and with participating youth. The RAs then submitted their findings electronically to the team for synthesis and evaluation.

The evaluation team graded clubs on three areas: activity level, participation rate, and implementation process. Activity level was graded on several factors, including the intensity of the activity (light, moderate, vigorous), the degree to which the skill and/or activity lent itself to continued participation beyond the program (lifelong activity), the number of times the activity took place each week (frequency), the length of the activity sessions (duration), and the continuity of the programming (timetable). Participation rate was graded on the reach of the program (attendance rates) and the number of sedentary kids attracted (i.e.,

youth that had not participated in the past). Implementation process was graded on the club's ability to run the program (organizational capacity), and the degree to which the youth dictated the activities (kid input). Clubs were not compared to one another, but to a set standards; each received its own score, derived from the "call for proposals" put forth by Nike in their initial announcement of the grants available.

For scoring purposes, the reports adapted terminology from the game of horseshoes, which was operationalized to match the expectations of NikeGO:

- *Ringer* – a program showing evidence of a greater-than-passing grade for activity level *and* participation rate (including all or nearly all subcategories) and at least a passing grade for implementation process
- *Leaner* – a program showing evidence of a greater-than-passing grade for activity level *or* participation rate (including most subcategories) and at least a passing grade for implementation process
- *Shoe-in-Count* – a program showing evidence of a passing grade for at least one subcategory from each of the three areas
- *Almost* – a program showing weak evidence of passing in at least one of the three areas
- *Shoe-out-of-Count* – a program showing no evidence of passing in any of the three areas

### The Lesson

Evaluation results were shared with stakeholders at an annual meeting in Florida last spring. While the summaries were expressed in simple "horseshoe" terminology that was fun and easy to understand, Nike was given a more detailed report to help improve the quality of their program nationally. NikeGO is now entering an expanded second phase based largely on the first round of evaluation findings.

As for PEANUT, evaluators have furthered the use of technology. Web-based surveys have largely replaced interviews with club administrators, and the process of synthesizing the collected data has become partially automated.

*For more information about the NikeGO evaluation, visit the HFRP Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html).*

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## The New 3Rs — Reading, Resilience, and Relationships in Afterschool Programs

*Gil Noam from Harvard Medical School/McLean Hospital and Harvard Graduate School of Education describes an evaluation to discover how well the New 3Rs, a proven school-based reading and risk prevention intervention, works in after school contexts.*

The New 3Rs — Reading, Resilience, and Relationships in Afterschool Programs study evaluates the efficacy of a proven, school-based reading intervention in a new, after school context, both alone and with an innovative risk prevention program. The New 3Rs is a two-year research intervention directed by Gil Noam with Maryanne Wolf of Tufts University and Tami Katzir of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and managed by Sally Wilson. The intervention is funded through the Interagency Education Research Initiative (a collaborative effort sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences in the U.S. Department of Education, the National Science Foundation, and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development) and the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust, with additional support from the Haan Foundation. The study poses the following three broad questions:

1. Can early elementary school children with reading difficulties make significant gains in reading skills, particularly fluency and comprehension, in an after school intervention that is exciting and fun?
2. Do combined emphases on structured and supportive relationships, resiliency, and high quality reading remediation result in both academic and social outcomes? (This question addresses concerns about the perceived schism between academic foci in schools and the more social development orientation of many after school programs.)
3. What academic and social characteristics best predict which students will respond well—or poorly—to intensive instructional interventions in after school settings?

Teachers at participating schools will recommend struggling readers in the second and third grades. In the first year of the two-year study the participating schools will be the Beebe and Forestdale Schools in Malden, Massachusetts; Moon Mountain School in Phoenix, Arizona; and Galveston Elementary School in Chandler, Arizona. In the second year, Boston elementary schools will be added.

Two hundred seventy children will take part in the study. Based on an initial screening, children are selected and then randomly assigned to one of three groups: a group receiving a reading fluency and comprehension program, Retrieval, Automaticity, Vocabulary Enrichment, and Orthography (RAVE-O); a group receiving RAVE-O and a social and academic support program, Rally for Kids; and a control group. Children in the RAVE-O group will receive 1 hour of reading instruction 3 times per week and participate in their regular after school program outside of these 3 hours. Children in the RAVE-O and

Rally for Kids group will receive 1 hour of RAVE-O 3 times per week and approximately 1 hour of Rally for Kids 3 times per week. Children in the control group will participate in their regular after school program only.

All three groups will be subjected to the same testing and evaluation procedures. This random assignment design was chosen to explore whether the after school hours can produce significant results while maintaining the goals of positive relationships and enjoyment in learning.

In collaboration with school staff, the investigators will select, train, and supervise teachers (to provide the RAVE-O intervention) and social workers (to serve as Rally for Kids prevention practitioners). The study will also evaluate whether after school programs can serve as an experimental space for teachers to bring their learning back into their classrooms. Preliminary results from this study will be available in fall 2005 and will be posted on the Program in Afterschool Education and Research website at [www.paerweb.org](http://www.paerweb.org).

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### New Resources From HFRP

The third and fourth publications in our series, *Out-of-School Time Evaluation Snapshots*, are now available:

- *Snapshot 3*, entitled *Detangling Data Collection: Methods for Gathering Data on Out-of-School Time Programs*, describes the common data collection methods out-of-school time programs use to evaluate their implementations and outcomes.
- *Snapshot 4*, entitled *Engaging With Families in Out-of-School Time Learning*, examines what strategies programs are using to collect data on engaging with families.

The *Snapshot* series draws on the program evaluations featured in our Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database ([www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html)). *Snapshots* can be read or downloaded online and some are also available in hard copy. [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/index.html#snapshot](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/index.html#snapshot)

## Quality Youth Interventions Through Community Assessment: Evaluation of the School Success Profile Intervention Package

*Gary L. Bowen, Kenan Distinguished Professor in the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, describes the evaluation of an intervention system that uses assessment to design and implement high quality, individualized youth services.*

The School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has received funding from the William T. Grant Foundation for a three-year project to evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of a research-based intervention: the School Success Profile Intervention Package (SSP-IP).<sup>1</sup> The SSP-IP is designed for use by local youth service providers, including schools, out-of-school time programs, and community groups. The package allows youth workers to assess the needs of their target populations and to design and implement appropriate interventions.

The School Success Profile (SSP) component of the package is an assessment tool that collects data from middle and high school students about their social environments (neighborhoods, schools, peers, and families), physical and psychological well-being, and school performance. Data from the SSP highlight community needs and inform the design of both in-school and out-of-school interventions. Implementation of these interventions is aided by a training component for youth workers, which includes information on how to administer the SSP and how to use SSP data to design interventions. The SSP-IP also includes an ongoing technical assistance component, which is provided both at intervention sites and online.

The new study will evaluate the success of the SSP-IP on academic performance and adjustment. It will employ a longitudinal experimental design and will use school performance data from North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction (DPI). The study sample will include middle schools in North Carolina that have received "no recognition" ratings from the DPI. (A school receiving the no recognition label under North Carolina's ABC Accountability Program has at least 60% of its students performing at or above grade level, but less-than-expected growth in math and reading achievement for the previous academic year.) Included in the study will be 11 schools receiving the SSP-IP and 33 schools not receiving it.

The evaluation will address the following three outcome-related questions:

1. Can the intervention package improve the academic trajectories of individual students?
2. Can the intervention package improve the academic standing of schools, as measured by state standards?

<sup>1</sup> The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation has provided supplemental funding for this evaluation.

<sup>2</sup> *Learning organization* is a technical term which describes an organization that encourages teamwork, innovation, and open, inclusive channels of communication. In a learning organization team members learn from both their successes and failures in order to meet challenges and solve problems.

3. Does the intervention package encourage schools to become *learning organizations*?<sup>2</sup>

I will be leading this three-year evaluation together with Professor Natasha K. Bowen, and we will be assisted by Dr. Elizabeth Glennie, director of the North Carolina Education Research Data Center at Duke University. The evaluation will include administration of the SSP, consultations with schools to develop interventions, and collection of implementation and outcome data as well as briefings of the results for school personnel. Results will be made available in technical reports on the SSP website, through presentations at national research conferences, and via publication in professional journals.

For further information about the School Success Profile, visit [www.schoolsuccessprofile.org](http://www.schoolsuccessprofile.org).

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## Investigating Quality: The Study of Promising After-School Programs

*Deborah Lowe Vandell and Elizabeth R. Reisner describe their three-year study into whether and how participation in high quality after school programs matters for youth outcomes.*

More and more, stakeholders in out-of-school time (OST) are asking, What is quality and does it matter? To address the question, the Study of Promising After-School Programs<sup>1</sup> (the Study) is investigating the short-term and long-term impacts of high quality after school programs on the development of youth from high-poverty communities. By first identifying high quality programs and then examining their associated youth outcomes, the Study goes beyond the question of whether *any participation* matters for youth outcomes, to address the question of whether, and how, *participation in high quality programs* matters.

The Study operates from a research-driven theory of change<sup>2</sup> that links family background characteristics, program features, program participation, and youth outcomes. The theory of change acknowledges that these components are interdependent. For example, child and family characteristics may be associated with access to and outcomes of high quality programs.

Testing the relationships among these components requires a comprehensive, multifaceted study that employs a nationwide sample of programs. The Study includes 18 elementary schools and 18 middle schools that serve predominantly low-income

<sup>1</sup> This nationwide study, which spans the years 2002–2005, is being conducted by the Wisconsin Center for Education Research, in collaboration with Policy Studies Associates, and with support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> A program's theory of change explicitly articulates how the activities provided lead to the desired results by linking service receipt to intermediate changes (such as changes in attitudes or in-program behaviors) to short- and longer-term outcomes in participants.

children at risk for school failure. At the outset, OST experts identified potential school-based or school-linked programs whose quality they deemed high. This sample was then narrowed to those programs meeting criteria both for high quality practices as defined by previous research and for research feasibility (i.e., enrollment of at least 30 students in each of the targeted grades and availability of similar students not served by the program).

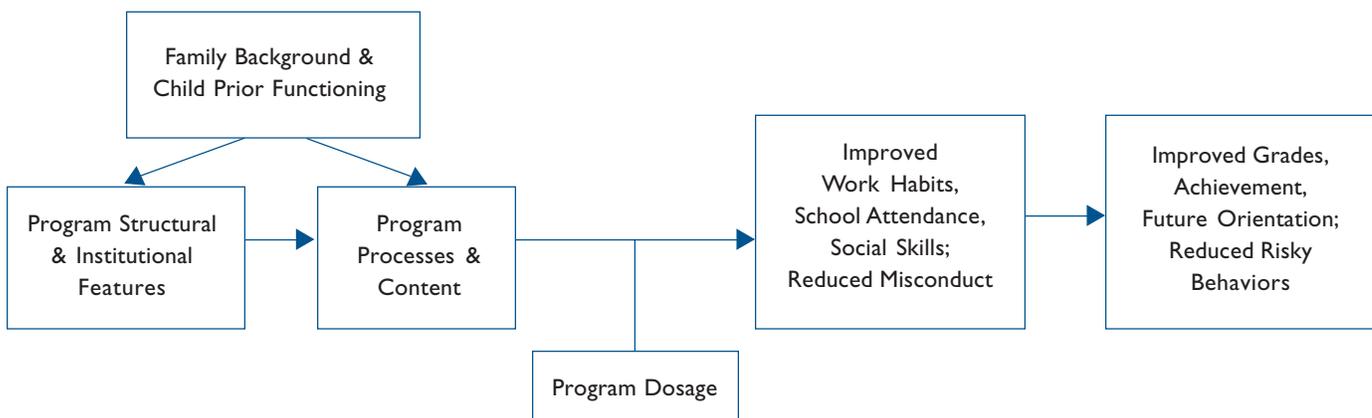
Programs included in the study met the following criteria for quality:

- They have been in operation at least three years and are likely to remain in operation for the near future.
- They offer opportunities for sustained involvement in substantive activities intended to promote cognitive and social growth.
- They use staffing methods conducive to supportive relationships with youth (e.g., low child-adult ratios, low staff turnover, staff training).

Children who participate regularly in high quality programs are compared with classmates who are similar in terms of family background but who do not participate. Children with varying levels of participation are also compared. Assessment of participation is based not only on a yes-or-no scale, but also on the frequency of participation.

Program quality is assessed in terms of two related but distinct sets of features: structural and institutional features, such as staff education, child-staff ratio, and financial resources; and process and content features, such as positive relationships, variety in program offerings, availability of activities that promote sustained cognitive engagement, and opportunities for autonomy and choice.

### THEORY OF CHANGE FOR THE STUDY OF PROMISING AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS



The Study is also examining four categories of developmental outcomes: academic, social, psychological, and behavioral. Each category is being assessed by multiple sources, including youth, parents, teachers, and staff. Developmental outcomes are being assessed both in the intermediate term (in spring 2004) and in the longer term (in spring 2005).

Preliminary analyses of baseline data collected from programs in spring 2002 and fall 2003 reveal some of the programs' characteristics. In terms of structural/institutional features, analysis has so far shown that programs have strong ties with community organizations, offer a wide variety of activities ranging from tutoring to sports, and demonstrate the likelihood of sustainability over several years. The majority of staff members are college educated, a large proportion with at least three years of OST experience, and most reporting high levels of job satisfaction. In terms of process and content features, preliminary analysis shows that most programs get high ratings for having supportive relationships, opportunities for cognitive growth, and student engagement. These results are consistent across both elementary and middle school programs in the sample.

In 2004 and 2005, further analysis will be conducted to address questions of participation and outcomes. The specific questions will include the following:

1. How do child and family characteristics relate to participation?
2. Is frequency of participation related to youth outcomes?
3. Does participation have intermediate effects on school attendance and work habits, on social skills and peer relationships, on self-efficacy and persistence, and on misconduct?
4. Does participation have long-term effects on grades and test scores, on positive attitudes and behaviors at home, and on delinquent and risk-taking behaviors?

The final results of this research, in combination with the preliminary results discussed above, will help to document the components that constitute high quality OST programs and their effects on participating youth.

For more information about the Study of Promising After-School Programs, visit [www.wcer.wisc.edu/childcare/des3.html](http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/childcare/des3.html).

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## Characterizing and Measuring Participation

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comes. Measuring breadth provides unique information that cannot be obtained from indicators that simply distinguish between youth who do and do not participate. For instance, breadth and an indicator of participating/not participating demonstrated beneficial effects of program participation (Baker & Witt, 1996). However, the results on breadth suggest that youth needed to participate in multiple activities within a program to maximize the benefits of participation. This information has important implications for program design and would not have been obtained from only knowing whether children participated or not.

Solely examining the differences between participants versus nonparticipants glosses over many important aspects of participation. While it is true that in many cases simply having a child at the program site may make a difference in terms of safety and supervision, it is time to develop a knowledge base that helps program leaders understand how to promote quality programs that yield maximum impact on their participants. One key ingredient of this effort is to develop more nuanced approaches to measuring and assessing intensity, duration, and, especially, breadth of participation on youth outcomes.

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## Bringing Yourself to Work: Assessing the Impact of Social-Emotional Learning for After School Staff

*Michelle Seligson is director of Bringing Yourself to Work, a professional development program for after school practitioners. She describes the project's approach to professional development and the strategy for assessing its impact on program quality.*

Recent research has shown that one important indicator of excellence in the workplace is an employee's self-awareness and capacity for connection, empathy, and mutuality. While concepts such as emotional intelligence and group relations are now informing interventions in the corporate world, little attention has been given to their application in child care or after school settings. Bringing Yourself to Work: Successful Staff Development in After-School Programs (BYTW) is a research and training project that aims to translate

theory into practice in order to enhance the job performance of after school practitioners and the quality of their programs.

When children form positive relationships with adults and peers, they have more successful outcomes. In keeping with developmental research, we believe the quality of relationships between care providers and youth participants is the most significant characteristic of a good after school program, and that professional development of staff members can facilitate this process.

However, while research on the correlation between teacher training in social-emotional skills and children's in-school success is available, to date there is no parallel research investigating the impact of such training for after school practitioners and participants. BYTW addresses this gap by offering didactic and interactive trainings that include theoretical and experiential learning on emotional intelligence, relational theory, and group relations. These concepts are demonstrated through case examples and participants' reflections on their own experiences.

At BYTW, we evaluate all of our trainings to ensure continuous improvement. As our project shifts from research and development to application, evaluation data is critical in order to guarantee that the content and delivery are relevant to providers' lives. To facilitate the evaluation process, we have developed several instruments to assess participant satisfaction. These include a pre-training questionnaire that assesses individual program environments and concerns, a self-assessment tool for individual providers, a participant goal-setting tool, and a post-training satisfaction questionnaire administered to participants by telephone at 3, 6, and 12 months after the training.

An example of one of our evaluation questions is, How has this experience affected your thinking about yourself and your relationships with others, and how has what you're doing changed as a result? While we are unable at this time to evaluate directly the impact on children of improved social-emotional skills among staff, information from the follow-up surveys will help to capture data about overall program quality.

As part of our continuous improvement efforts, four diverse communities have been selected to participate in an upcoming pilot study of an expanded BYTW training. This training model will include on-site observation and consultation. We plan to use the evaluation instruments described above to assess the degree to which training participants have improved their social-emotional skills relative to the children and other adults in their programs.

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### Related Resources

Seligson, M., & Jahoda, P. (2003). *Bringing yourself to work: A guide to successful staff development in after-school programs*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Seligson, M., & MacPhee, M. (2002). *The relevance of self at work: Emotional intelligence and staff training in after-school environments*. Wellesley, MA: The Wellesley Centers for Women.

Although focused primarily on education, many of the National Staff Development Council's (NSDC) resources are also helpful for the OST field. See also the fall 2003 issue of NSDC's *Journal of Staff Development*, which focuses on evaluation of professional development. [www.nsdcc.org](http://www.nsdcc.org)

The National Youth Development Learning Network (NYDLN) is an initiative of the National Collaboration for Youth designed to strengthen the capacities of youth workers. NYDLN resources include a professional development e-newsletter, available at [www.nassembly.org/nydic/newsletter/Prof\\_Series12\\_3.pdf](http://www.nassembly.org/nydic/newsletter/Prof_Series12_3.pdf) (Acrobat file).

The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) has created the National Awards Program for Model Professional Development to recognize schools with highly effective staff development programs. From the pool of winners, NCREL has identified promising professional development practices and synthesized them into a hands-on guide for conducting evaluations. Although geared toward education, many of the guide's how-to suggestions can be applied to OST. [www.ncrel.org/pd/toolkit.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/pd/toolkit.htm)

## Assessing the *How* of Outcomes in Out-of-School Time: Learning From MARS

*John Zuman and Beth Miller present an overview of the Massachusetts Afterschool Research Study, a statewide investigation into how after school programs affect children's outcomes and constitute quality contexts for youth.*

While the importance of large-scale evaluations of out-of-school time (OST) programs is now widely acknowledged, key questions remain before the field can build consensus about best practices and policies. The statewide Massachusetts Afterschool Research Study (MARS) aims to address some of these issues. The initiative is being conducted by the Intercultural Center for Research in Education and the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, and is sponsored by the United Way of Massachusetts Bay, in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Education, the Massachusetts Office of Child Care Services, and the Nellie Mae Education Foundation.

Beyond gathering high quality research data from diverse OST settings across the state, MARS makes several unique contributions to OST research. Unlike other studies that have asked the question of whether OST programs affect children's outcomes, MARS also assesses *how* such effects occur, in an effort to identify best practices and to promote effective, high quality programs. Another of the project's goals is to drive a community-wide consensus and agenda about which outcome indicators should be assessed and how the research results should be used. To meet this goal, the MARS team is engaging OST professionals, funding organizations, and community stakeholders at all levels throughout the research process.

MARS researchers are addressing the following questions:

1. What program features and characteristics (e.g., program size, goals, activity offerings, and staff training) are associated with youth outcomes, both academic and nonacademic?
2. Are some children more likely than others to have positive outcomes associated with participation, depending on their family background?
3. What variations exist in programs and program features?

To answer these questions, the research team is collecting data from 78 OST programs in diverse locations, from Boston to Holyoke, from urban to rural, from elementary and middle schools to community centers, and from multiple levels of the socioeconomic spectrum. Data collection is occurring in two waves: The first wave took place in the fall of 2003 and focused on baseline measures; the second wave will take place in the spring of 2004. Data include reports from after school staff, school personnel, and youth participants. In addition, trained researchers are conducting observations of the participating after school programs. Analysis on these data will begin in the summer of 2004 with a final report expected in spring 2005.

For information about MARS, contact Don Buchholtz or Lisa Pickard of the United Way of Massachusetts Bay at 617-624-8000, or via email at [dbuchholtz@uwmb.org](mailto:dbuchholtz@uwmb.org) or [lpickard@uwmb.org](mailto:lpickard@uwmb.org).

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### Sustaining Participation

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*In this section HFRP offers a selected list of new tools for evaluating out-of-school time programs.*

Chinman, M., Imm, P., & Wandersman, A. (2004). *Getting to outcomes 2004: Promoting accountability through methods and tools for planning, implementation, and evaluation*. Researchers at RAND designed this manual to aid practitioners in improving the quality of youth prevention programs. Its 10-step approach includes strategies for assessing needs, implementing programs, conducting evaluation, and promoting continuous improvement. The primary focus of the report is on substance abuse prevention, with implications for other types of prevention programs as well. [www.rand.org/publications/TR/TR101](http://www.rand.org/publications/TR/TR101)

Geiger, E., & Britsch, B. (2003). *Out-of-school time program evaluation: Tools for action*. Portland, OR: Education, Career, and Community Program, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. NWREL evaluators have produced this how-to guide for designing and implementing program evaluations. The guide provides useable surveys, focus group questions, and strategies for data analysis. [www.nwrel.org/ecc/21century/publications/ost\\_tools.pdf](http://www.nwrel.org/ecc/21century/publications/ost_tools.pdf) (Acrobat file)

Hipps, J., Ormsby, C., Diaz, M., & Heredia, A. (n.d.). *Evaluating after-school programs: The program evaluator's multiple challenges*. Oakland, CA: WestEd. WestEd evaluators use their experiences evaluating 21st Century Community Learning Centers sites to describe the important role of, and challenges faced by, after school evaluators. The report highlights several key issues for evaluators, including potential organizational hazards to program implementation, tensions between schools and community-based agencies, and disconnections between those responsible for securing funding and those responsible for program implementation. [education.ucdavis.edu/cess/ccsp/research/pdfs/hipps.pdf](http://education.ucdavis.edu/cess/ccsp/research/pdfs/hipps.pdf) (Acrobat file).

London, J. K., Zimmerman, K., & Erbstein, N. (2003). *Youth-led research and evaluation: Tools for youth, community, and organiza-*

*tional development*. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 98, 33–45. This article describes the Youth-Led Research, Evaluation, and Planning (Youth REP) model developed by Youth in Focus. The model includes a method for training youth in leadership and evaluation, and for training adults in sharing decision making and evaluation responsibilities with youth.

Child Trends has produced a series of resources for understanding and improving positive development among adolescents. The **Research Tools to Improve Youth Development** resource includes the Youth Outcomes Compendium and the series What Works: Programs for Teens. Together these resources employ a youth development framework to summarize current knowledge about the types of outcomes that matter for youth, the types of programs and practices that affect these outcomes, and strategies for measuring practices and outcomes. [www.childtrends.org/what\\_works/clarkwww/clark\\_overall\\_intro.asp](http://www.childtrends.org/what_works/clarkwww/clark_overall_intro.asp)

The After-School Corporation is sponsoring the **Promising Practices Initiatives** to document and disseminate effective practices of after school programs. The initiatives include a series of resource briefs and tool kits that focus on staffing and professional development. Also included is the Citigroup Success Fund for Promising Practices in After-School Programs, which provides awards for programs to write about their promising practices for a wide audience of after school practitioners. [www.tascorp.org](http://www.tascorp.org)

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*Although we compiled an extensive list of new and noteworthy resources for this issue, we were unable to include them all because of limitations on space. However, an expanded version of New & Noteworthy is available on our website, at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue25/newfull.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue25/newfull.html).*



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