Examining the influence and developmental impact of after-school/out-of-school programs on youths from high risk environments

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EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE AND DEVELOPMENTAL IMPACT OF
AFTER-SCHOOL/OUT-OF-SCHOOL PROGRAMS ON YOUTHS
FROM HIGH RISK ENVIRONMENTS

by

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Bachelor of Science
Washington State University
2004

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University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the

Master of Science Degree in Sport & Leisure Studies
William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration

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The Thesis prepared by

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Entitled

Examining the Influence and Developmental Impact of After-School/Out-of-School Programs on Youths From High Risk Environments

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science in Hotel Administration Sports & Leisure Studies

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ABSTRACT

Examining the Influence and Developmental Impact of After-School/Out-of-School Programs on Youths from High Risk Environments

by

Ranna Jane Daúd

Dr. Cynthia Carruthers, Examination Committee Chair
Associate Professor of Leisure Studies
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Currently, thousands of youth-based programs exist to promote education, enhance development and instill a sense of belonging and competence in inner-city/urban youth. After-school programs have been found to develop resilience in adolescents (Morrison, Storino, Robertson, Weissgass, & Dondero, 2000) by providing opportunities for growth, increasing academic achievement (Mahoney, Lord, & Carryl, 2005), providing a safe environment (Kahne, Nagoaka, Brown, O’Brien, Quinn, & Thiede, 2001), creating supportive and significant relationships (Hall, Yohalem, Tolman, & Wilson, 2003), and keeping youth out of harms way. Furthermore, after-school programs have been found to increase academic potential, increase attendance rates in school, and promote academic progress in at-risk youth (Dungan-Seaver, 1999; Miller, 2001). After-school youth programs continue to grow in inner-cities, however, the uncertainty of funding and necessary resources pose a threat to the future vitality and structure of youth programs. This paper will examine the importance of after-school/out-of-school programs in ameliorating the risk behaviors and enhancing the protective factors of
youths that are immersed in high-risk environments. Furthermore, the paper will review
the new focus on positive youth development and the best practices found in successful
after-school programs.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the developmental impacts of an
after-school program for youth that reside in high-risk environments. This study was
conducted using qualitative methodology. Youth participants from two program sites
were interviewed about their experiences in their after-school program. Two program
coordinators from each site were also interviewed, and observations were conducted at
each site. Although there were some differences found between the two program sites,
the results indicated that, overall, youth participants gained valuable developmental
assets. Five outcomes were strongly expressed by the youth participants and after-school
coordinators in this study, which included:

1. Nurturing and enjoyable environment,
2. Positive values and behavior,
3. Improved relationships and social skills.
4. Opportunities to learn and try new things, thus developing the perception of
   competence, and
5. Positive view of future.

Respondents also offered several suggestions and recommendations for future changes
and improvements.
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People ask me why I chose to do this thesis and I tell them because I wanted to do it for myself. If you don’t challenge yourself, you don’t grow as an individual. This was just a phase in the growing process for me...and I am proud.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Historically, youth-based programs were created in an attempt to remedy the unhealthy social conditions arising in big cities at the end of the Industrial Revolution. As time went on, the after-school hours emerged as discretionary time and the need arose for the creation of protected spaces for youth (Halpern, 2002). Additionally, budget pressures and cuts forced public and non-profit agencies to try to compensate for the programs that were eliminated during school hours, such as art, music, physical education and health services, by introducing after-school programs (Halpern).

Today, urban youth are increasingly finding themselves in a changed landscape where impoverished social and economic circumstances are working against their success in school endeavors and, more generally, in life's pursuits (Riggs & Greenberg, 2004). Yet despite all of the adversity, many urban youth are succeeding and achieving. Opportunities presented to them by after-school youth programs may help to withstand these circumstances (Rew & Horner, 2003).

The importance of after-school and out-of-school programs for adolescent development is being recognized by school-based educators, community youth workers, policy makers, and funders (Kahne et al., 2001). Nationally, concerns have been raised regarding the number of children left unsupervised and without constructive activities after school (Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez, & Brown, 2004). In the 1970's and 1980's
there was a renewed interest in after-school programs and a growing recognition that children in low-income communities were the most susceptible or “at-risk” to problem behaviors (Halpern, 2002). Unfortunately, as a society, the tendency to label youth as “at risk” is based on the underlying assumption that youth are at fault for their own educational and social failure (Winfield, 1994). In actuality, the unhealthy circumstances in which youth find themselves are typically associated with poverty, lack of parental support, and negative peer pressure (Kemper, Spitler, Williams, & Rainey, 1999). However, it is becoming clear that the after-school program provides opportunities to develop positive assets and are an important milieu for inner-city, at-risk youth.

Purpose of Study

Evaluators, researchers, program providers, and policy makers are conducting much research in an attempt to gain a better understanding of how the different types of after-school activities and programs affect youth development. Although the benefits of after-school programs are being recognized, Riggs and Greenberg (2004) explain, “the evidence that after-school programs are related to positive youth outcomes is inconsistent” (p. 178). Riggs and Greenberg reported in a review of literature that some program evaluations have found that children who participated in after-school programs were more likely to show signs of competency, pride, ability to handle feelings of anger and attentiveness during class time. Some studies have suggested that participation in after-school programs is associated with positive social-emotional and academic outcomes (Dungan-Seaver, 1999; Mahoney et al., 2005; Miller, 2001). However, other studies have revealed a very different perspective of after-school programs and their effectiveness in youth development. This may be due to reporting mixed and null effects.
on the same outcomes. After conducting a thorough literature review of after-school program outcomes, Riggs and Greenberg advised refraining from deriving conclusions from the research to date due to several weaknesses which include: lack of randomization (presenting difficulty in controlling selection bias) and failure to utilize comparison groups, which "makes it difficult to determine whether effects are due to the program itself or the typical and expected development of children" (p. 178). Other limitations of research on after-school programs can be attributed to a lack of control for baseline differences between comparison children and treatment group children, funding differences in after-school programs, the dearth of studies that focus on the more mature and stable after-school programs (i.e. premature evaluations), and the lack of methodological rigor in after-school research (Riggs & Greenberg). Furthermore, Roffman, Pagno, and Hirsch (2001) suggest that although there is a great deal of literature on risk and protective factors, there is little research that examines the relationship between program components and outcomes.

This particular study will seek to understand the outcomes and developmental impact of an after-school/out-of-school program for youths at two different after-school sites located in high-risk neighborhoods in Las Vegas, Nevada. This will contribute to the noted gap in the knowledge base of after-school programs. As most of the studies referenced in this literature review were based upon responses from youth leaders and parents, it is evident that further studies are needed that seek information from the after-school participants themselves in an attempt to truly understand the implications for involvement, interactions and relationships (Halpern, Barker, & Mollard, 2000). Several qualitative studies have been conducted to explain the importance of the after-school
program, however, fewer studies rely on the perceptions and experiences of youth participants.

As explained by Bogdan and Biklen (2003), “Learning to do qualitative research means unlearning this social construction of ‘research,’ and opening oneself to the possibility of employing a different vocabulary and way of structuring the research process” (p. 4). A qualitative study that investigates the importance of after-school programs would present a more involved and inductive approach that focuses on interpretive input from the lived experiences of others (in the case of this investigation, the after-school participants and coordinators and observations) of those experiences. Furthermore, a qualitative study would be optimal for identifying program strengths and weaknesses as they relate to the promotion of positive development in the youth served.

Research Questions

The research questions that will guide this study and provide additional insights are “what is the experience of youths involved in an after-school program in a high risk environment?” and “what is the developmental impact on youths involved in an after-school program in a high risk environments?”

Significance of Study

This study will seek to understand the “experience,” opinions and beliefs of the youth participants in an after-school program. This study will take an in-depth look at the youths’ experiences in the after-school program at two middle schools located in high-risk environments in Las Vegas. This will be achieved through open-ended interviews, focus groups and observations at each after-school program site. Many studies have been conducted on after-school programs; however, very few have asked youths (particularly
middle school aged youths) their opinions, attitudes and beliefs about their experience in after-school programs (Halpern, et al., 2000). Typically, studies have relied on coordinators, leaders, teachers and parent interviews to obtain their data. This is a limitation because researchers are failing to validate the importance of the youths’ opinions and experiences. Empowering the participants in research is important, and understanding the perspective of the person living the experience is a different, yet equally important, issue. This is a gap in the literature that has not been given adequate attention.

**Definition of Terms**

For this investigation, it is appropriate to identify the definitions upon which this paper will focus. According to Lerner and Galambos (1998), adolescence can be defined as “the period within the life span when most of a person’s biological, cognitive, psychological, and social characteristics are changing from what is typically considered childlike to what is considered adult-like” (p. 414). This period usually requires many adjustments to changes and serves as a time of discovery. The term ‘adolescence’ is pertinent to this discussion because many of the factors associated with “growing up” are directly correlated to the potential to be engaged in risk behaviors.

According to studies by Lerner and Galambos (1998) and Kemper et al. (1999), ‘risk behaviors’ may include alcohol and drug use, crime and violence, school underachievement, failure, illiteracy, delinquency, dropping out of school, and early sexual experiences. Furthermore, Dryfoos (1990) defines “high-risk” as youth that participate in problem behaviors, such as committing delinquent offenses, using alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, and engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse.
However, despite the risks that are associated with living within or near an ‘at-risk/high-risk’ environment, many youths develop resiliency due, in many cases, to the protective function that after-school programs provide (Morrison, Storino, Robertson, Weissglass, & Dondero, 2000). This leads to ‘positive youth development programs’ which are defined by Quinn (1999) as programs that emphasize “supporting the normal socialization and healthy development of young people” (p. 98). Finally, ‘after-school programs’ can be defined as programs designed to provide care for and educational enhancement to children in the hours immediately following school classes (Yahoo Education Website, 2005).

This study, designed to understand the experience of youth or adolescent participants in an after-school program, was conducted in two after-school program sites. They were located in high-risk neighborhoods of the kind that are often associated with risk behaviors.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There have been a number of scholars that have researched youth programs and their contributions to the healthy psychosocial development of low-income, urban children (Hall, Yohalem, Tolman, & Wilson, 2003; Kahne, Nagoaka, Brown, O’Brien, Quinn, & Thiede, 2001; Lerner & Galambos, 1998; Winfield, 1994, Halpern, 1999; Fashola, 2003; Mahoney, Lord, & Carryl, 2005). As approximately 7 million adolescents in the United States will need assistance to avoid the ever-increasing negative social and economic factors associated with at-risk environments, the importance cannot be any more significant (Kemper, Spitler, Williams, & Rainey, 1999). Programs providing competence enhancing and wholesome activities to youth during non-school hours are one of the factors contributing to youth development and the enhancement of life skills (Eccles & Harold, 1991).

Involvement in after-school programs has also been found to be associated with positive educational outcomes (Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez, & Brown, 2004). After-school programs have increasingly formed partnerships with inner-city schools to enhance the educational experience by providing structured and safe alternatives for youth after-school. Insights into the impact of these programs on educational attainment are of quintessential importance and relevance.
Statement of Problem

The majority of teenagers spend a considerable amount of time alone and unsupervised during the non-school hours (Vandell, Shernof, Piere, Bolt, Dadisman, & Brown, 2005). According to Newman, Fox, Flynn and Christeson (2000), violent juvenile crime rates occur most frequently between three o’clock and six o’clock in the afternoon, just after students are released from school and when they have nothing to do. Many studies suggest that this discretionary time for youths is also the time when kids are most likely to become victims of crime, be in or cause car accidents, engage in risky behaviors such as smoking, alcohol abuse, drugs, sexual intercourse and dropping out of school (Jacobs, Vernon, & Eccles, 2004; Kemper et al., 1999; National Institute on Out-of School Time, 2005; Riggs & Greenberg, 2004; Sanford, James, Edward, & William, 2000; Shann, 2001). Furthermore, many young teenagers in America are currently released from school before 2:00 p.m., which leaves additional unsupervised time to do as they please (Shann, 2001).

In a nationwide study conducted by Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (2003), it was found that 17.1% of students had carried a weapon; 6.1% of students had carried a gun; 33.0% of students had been in a physical fight one or more times; 58.4% of students had tried cigarette smoking; 44.9% of students had had one or more drinks of alcohol; 22.4% of students had used marijuana one or more times, and 16.9% of students had seriously considered attempting suicide. Although this study did not specifically focus on after-school hours, it exemplifies the seriousness and prevalence of youth risk behaviors and reinforces the notion that the youth in our society are being confronted with difficult decisions.
In Las Vegas, the numbers are even more alarming. According to Ready For Life (2005), a life initiative in Clark County which is a cross-agency collaborative, a total of 6,740 Clark County School District students dropped out of school in 2004-2005. In terms of disengaged 8th grade youth in Clark County, 629 youth dropped out of school, 927 were in the juvenile justice system, and 109 were in foster care (Ready For Life, 2005). According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count Census Data, Nevada ranks LAST in the percentage of 18-24 year olds who are high-school graduates, 16-19 year olds who are enrolled in school and/or working, and 18-24 years olds who have an associates or bachelors degree. Based on the 2004-2005 Clark County School District’s Accountability Report, 9,687 students were violent towards other students, 1,342 students carried weapons, 156 distributed a controlled substance, and 1,009 students possessed/used a controlled substance. All of these incidents resulted in suspension or expulsion from school.

Environment/Risk Behaviors

In response to the growing concern about youth crime and violence, many researchers have focused on addressing and identifying risk factors (Heilbrun, Goldstein, & Redding, 2005). Youth residing in inner-cities are exposed to multiple risk factors. According to Hawkins, Catalano, Jr. and Associates (1992), “the more risk factors present in a community, the greater the likelihood of drug and alcohol abuse in that community. The more risk factors to which an individual is exposed, the greater the likelihood that the individual will become involved in drug and alcohol abuse” (p. 8). Additionally, children who reside in deteriorating and crime-ridden environments or
neighborhoods are more susceptible to engaging in other delinquent behavior (Hawkins, Catalano, Jr. and Associates). According to Hawkins (1996), risk factors may include:

...neighborhood disorganization, extreme economic deprivation, family history of drug abuse or crime, poor family management practices, family conflict, low family bonding, parental permissiveness, early and persistent problem behaviors, academic failure, peer rejection in elementary grades, association with drug-using or delinquent peers or adults, alienation and rebelliousness, attitudes favorable to drug use and crime, and early onset of drug use or criminal behavior (p. 152).

Beyond risk behaviors, many youth need additional help in their academics beyond the regular school day (Fashola, 2003). Dryfoos (as cited in Lemer & Galambos, 2002), explained that “about 25% of the approximately 40 million children and adolescents enrolled in the 82,000 public elementary and secondary schools in the United States are at risk for school failure” (p. 425). The National Research Council (2002) reported that the continuing problems for young people include: academic failure, poor physical and mental health, violent behavior, poor economic and family circumstances, and inappropriate use of time.

It is also important to note that youths from disadvantaged circumstances have less access to the ‘protective factors’ that would enable them to resist the temptation to engage in risky behaviors. Protective factors include competence and high expectations (Witt & Caldwell, 2005), nurturing environments, supportive community, positive family cohesion, constructive school, and encouraging peers (Hawkins, 1996; Pace, 2003), “connected” adult relationships (Aronowitz, 2005), healthy social bonding (Hawkins et al., 1992), sense of mastery over one’s environment, and the acquisition of various skill
sets such as problem solving, conflict resolution, anger management and critical thinking (Heilbrun et al., 2005). Hawkins (1996) further indicates that “it is clear empirically that multiple biological, psychological, and social factors at multiple levels in different social domains – that is, within the individual and in the family, school, peer group, and community – all contribute to some degree to the prediction of delinquency and drug use” (p. 152). Rew and Horner (2003) explain that sociocultural factors can either serve as risk or protective factors, such as family functioning, socioeconomic status (SES), and ethnicity, as well as community factors such as neighborhood quality, peer relationships and school environments. A survey conducted by the Nellie Mae Foundation (2003) found the following:

A national survey of 10th graders found that students from high-income families were twice as likely to spend 5 or more hours per week in extracurricular activities as students in lower income families. Students who spent time in extracurricular activities were 6 times less likely to drop out of school by senior year; 2 times less likely to be arrested by senior year; and about 75% less likely to smoke cigarettes or use drugs (p. 3).

Youth who experience risk factors, which may include living in high-risk neighborhoods, being poor, experiencing repeated racial and ethnic discrimination, and having an abundance of discretionary time during non-school hours, are particularly at risk of participating in problem behaviors (National Research Council, 2002).

Hawkins (1996) proposed the social development model to explain youth engagement in risk behaviors. The model uses antisocial behavior theory “to explain and predict the onset, escalation, maintenance, de-escalation, and cessation or resistance from
patterned behaviors that are of concern to society, namely, crime and illegal drug use” (p. 150). Because delinquency is typically initiated during childhood or adolescence, the developmental theories of antisocial behavior explain the concept of “reciprocal effects” as the probability that past behaviors directly affect future attitudes and behaviors (Hawkins, 1996). This theory emphasizes how social interactions, over time, determine youths’ engagement versus disengagement in risky behavior.

Turning Points 2000 examined approaches to improve education in middle school grades. Unfortunately, results indicated that effective changes in middle school practices have least often occurred in high-poverty urban and rural communities. Because adolescence is a time of self-discovery, it also still continues to be the time when young people first experiment with risky behaviors, which include tobacco, alcohol and illicit drug use (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Turning Points describes this adolescent process as the following:

Under current conditions, however, far too many young people will not make the passage through early adolescence successfully. Their basic human needs – caring relationships with adults, guidance in facing sometimes overwhelming biological and psychological changes, the security of belonging to constructive peer groups, and the perception of future opportunity – go unmet at this critical stage of life. Millions of these young adolescents will never reach their full potential...Early adolescence for these youth is a turning point towards a diminished future (p. 8).

In response to the predominance of these risk factors there are a growing number of specialized after-school programs targeted for low-income, “at-risk”, and
disadvantaged youth (Halpern, Barker, & Mollard, 2000; Miller, 2001; Fashola, 2003). These after-school programs serve as a safe place for kids to engage in various activities after school. According to a survey conducted by the Afterschool Alliance (2000), the following percentage of poll respondents suggested that a child should be able to do the following once he or she arrives at an after-school program: have a safe place in which to learn (93%), receive tutoring and homework help (88%), learn respect for people different than themselves (87%), receive structured, adult supervision (87%), learn ways to resolve conflicts with other young people (86%), learn to set goals (85%), learn and master new skills (83%), have basic skills reinforced (81%), and learn computer skills (77%).

**Developmental Assets and Thriving**

The focus of youth programs used to be on problem elimination or resolution, but the current paradigm in youth development is to avoid seeing children as problems to be solved. This new momentum in youth development has been centered on creating an environment where the youth of our society can thrive and develop positive assets and a sense of resilience. The current trend in youth development is to see young people as resources to be developed, rather than problems to be solved (Miller, 2001).

Benson (1997) proposed a paradigm that avoids a focus on fixing problems, and instead, centers on nurturing the positive building blocks of development that young people need which are referred to as ‘developmental necessities’ or assets. The forty developmental assets include a model of essential socialization practices for youth (Benson, 1997). The developmental asset framework suggests that there is a connection between positive outcomes, which include resisting health-compromising/at-risk
behavior, promoting forms of thriving (i.e. school success, affirmation of diversity, compassion for others, leadership), and resiliency (Benson). In essence Benson explained that resiliency is the ability that some young people have to overcome the odds. Resilient youth tend to have higher numbers of developmental assets. Similarly, Masten (2001) defined resiliency “as a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development” (p. 228).

The Search Institute’s research on adolescent development provides the foundation for the delineation of the “developmental assets” (Scales & Leffert, 1999). They have identified forty assets within eight different categories. These eight categories include four external and four internal assets. The External Assets include Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, and Constructive Use of Time. The Internal Assets include Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competencies, and Positive Identity. These development assets are the building blocks for youth to become healthy, caring, principled and productive (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Search Institute data has shown that the average adolescent has fewer than half of the forty assets and 80% of youth think that adults in their communities do not value them (Scales & Leffert). This research supports the need for programs geared towards developing positive assets in today’s youth. Furthermore, Scales and Leffert describe the multifaceted approach to youth development which includes prevention, health promotion and resilience.

Hawkins, Catalano, Jr. and Associates (1992) proposed a social development strategy in protecting against risk, which emphasized the “Communities That Care” approach to risk reduction. This program’s theoretical framework incorporated the
understanding and recognition of both (1) the factors leading to problems in adolescence (risk factors) and (2) the factors leading to healthy development (protective factors).

This social development model emphasized that healthy bonding is a key protective factor for adolescents. Moreover, Hawkins et al. (1992) suggested that there are three conditions that create social bonding, which include:

1. Opportunities to be active contributors or members of a group;
2. Skills to be able to be successful contributors to the social unit;
3. Recognition or reinforcement so youth know that they are doing well, which enhances feelings of acceptance and bonding.

Quinn (1999) suggested also that what distinguishes youth development programs from other programs is the focus on “promoting normal development; providing environments and relationships that nurture and challenge young people; building their competencies; and treating them as resources” (p. 98).

Several developmental scientists and research councils have provided solid models of youth development programs (National Research Council, 2002; Benson, 1997; Scales & Leffert, 1999, Witt & Caldwell, 2005). According to the National Research Council (2002), there are “eight features of daily settings that are important for adolescent development” (p. 88). These eight features include: physical and psychological safety, appropriate structure, supportive relationships, opportunities to belong, positive social norms, support for efficacy and mattering, opportunities for skill building, and integration of family, school, and community efforts (National Research Council). In a comprehensive review of the research on youth development programs, the National Research Council identified the fundamental human needs, attributes and
personal and social assets that can facilitate adolescents' well-being, reduction of risk-taking and successful transitions. The variables leading to positive youth development include:

1. Attainment of personal and social assets (i.e. physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional, and social development);

2. Adolescents with more personal and social assets (leading to a greater chance of well-being and future success);

3. Personal and social assets that are enhanced by positive developmental settings (National Research Council, 2002, p. 42).

A community assessment project, conducted by Kemper, et al. (1999), identified, evaluated and linked service-oriented programs for at-risk, African-American adolescent youth. Nine common themes for promoting success for at-risk African American youth emerged during the analysis of the qualitative data. The contributors to success were: healthy self-concept, success expectations, religion, reframing obstacles, goals, education, personal characteristics and traits, appropriate behaviors, and connectedness. Consistent with the existing literature, Kemper et al. found that the concepts of resilieney, protective factor and coping skills were of utmost importance for the youths' growth and development.

Witt and Caldwell (2005) presented a set of 10 principles to guide the development and implementation of youth programs to improve the ability of all youth to reach their full potential. These 10 principles include the ability to:

1. Understand that young people are assets in the making and not just problems to be fixed,
2. Move beyond deficit-based models (addressing only problem behaviors) to models that focus on developing youth capabilities (assets),

3. Base the provision of Supports, Opportunities, Programs and Services (SOPS) on a vision of a fully functioning and capable adult,

4. Move beyond thinking in terms of either/or,

5. Focus on developing a wide range of knowledge, skills, and behaviors,

6. Involve adults from the family and community in fostering youth development,

7. Support youth in being essential players in their own development,

8. Design youth development supports, opportunities, and programs deliberately,

9. Bring programs to scale, and

10. Sustain supports and opportunities over time (p. 4).

They suggested that these principles should guide the development of all youth programs, including after-school programs.

After-School/Out-of-School Programs

Halpern (1999) suggests that there are four principal factors that are driving the growing interest in after-school programs, which include:

1. A belief that public spaces such as streets and playgrounds are no longer safe for children’s out-of-school time;

2. A sense that it is stressful and unproductive for children to be left on their own after school;

3. A concern that many children need more time and individual attention than schools can provide to master basic academic skills;
4. A conviction that low-income children deserve the same opportunity as their more advantaged peers to explore expressive arts, sports and other developmentally enriching activities.

Organizations that provide after-school programming around the country includes: 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Making the Most of Out-of-School Time, National Institute of After-School Time, After-School All-Stars, After-School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnership Project, After-School Opportunity Fund, Charles S. Mott Foundation, Benton Foundation, YMCA's, and Public Parks and Recreation (After-School All-Stars website; Dungan-Seaver, 1999; Fashola, 2003; Halpern 1999; Halpern, et al., 2000; Miller, 2001; Sarampote, Bassett, Winsler, 2004). Typically, after-school programs involve school-age children from ages 5 to 18 and focus on academics, as well as non-academic, activities (Fashola, 2003). Furthermore, after-school programs are often referred to as “extended day” programs and are commonly operated in school buildings or local community centers (Sarampote et al., 2004).

There are consistent findings in the literature that suggest that there are benefits for youth participating in after-school/out-of-school programs. Generally, after-school programs have been shown to produce the following: better emotional adjustment, better peer relationships and social competence, fewer antisocial behaviors, less likelihood of endorsing aggressive behaviors, better work habits, better school performance, and better tests and grades in reading and math (Dungan-Seaver, 1999). Further research indicates that involvement in after-school programs lowers the involvement in risky behaviors such as drinking, smoking, drugs, sexual activity and violence, while increasing positive
behavior such as better social and behavioral adjustment, relationships with peers, conflict resolution strategies and parent involvement (Miller, 2001). Moreover, after-school programs have been found to provide safety for youths as well as valued relationships with staff (Halpern, et al., 2000). Research also suggests that school-based after-school programs provide youth with different opportunities, as youth tend to experience more intrinsic motivation and feel less apathetic about the world surrounding them (Vandell et al., 2005). Miller (2003) indicates that, “Quality afterschool programs promote school success by meeting the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical needs of early adolescents. Young people yeart for a sense of belonging and the feeling that they are competent in areas that are meaningful both to them and others” (p. 8). It is evident that some after-school programs promote positive self-perceptions as they enable youth to be engaged and competent in a particular activity.

In one nationwide study, 90% of respondents favored providing an after school program five days a week that would provide children with fun, challenging, and enriching learning opportunities that would give the children more individualized attention (Afterschool Alliance, 2000). In another survey, children and adolescents reported that they want safe places to go, constructive activities outside of school, and opportunities to learn and develop new skills and spend time with caring adults and other children (Quinn, 1999). Safety is clearly a primary concern of youth in today’s society. Halpern (1999) suggests that “each hour spent in the care of an after-school program is an hour during which an inner-city child may not have to fend for himself or herself at home or in an unsafe neighborhood” (p. 86).
Best Practices of Successful After-School/Out-of-School Programs

Many quality after-school programs incorporate the positive youth development approach in order to instill the necessary support and opportunities in an attempt to enable youth to succeed. Although a uniform or "single set" of best practices has not yet been established, there is a consistent research base that informs the public on the important features of quality after-school programs (Dryfoos, 1990; Dungan-Seaver, 1999; Hall et al., 2003; Halpern, 1999; Kemper et al., 1999; McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 1998; Miller, 2001; Quinn, 1999).

According to Dungan-Seaver (1999), key overall attributes of effective after-school programs included:

1. Program is guided by a theoretically sound framework but implemented with flexible, individualized strategies and relationships with strong assessment systems;

2. Content and processes are tailored to the unique needs and interests of the children involved;

3. Program complements the formal learning of the school day but is more focused on children's emotional and social development;

4. Staff collaborates with children, their families and partners to create community-based projects and "real world" competencies with the guidance of supportive adults;

5. Activities are varied and flexible, age-appropriate, challenging, intensive and have sufficient structure and duration;
6. Children are given the autonomy to choose their activities but adults are consistently engaged to ensure quality of activities;

7. Program emphasizes consistent, positive relationships and interactions between the children and adults (p. 1).

Some of the most powerful programs combine “enrichment” activities, such as sports, cultural arts, and dance, along with academic activities. Enrichment activities are seen as beneficial because they are more interesting to youth. The enrichment activities meet the social, emotional and physical needs overlooked in academic approaches, provide opportunities that are often times out of reach for lower income, disadvantaged youth, and invite more involvement from families and community members than academic programs (Dungan-Seaver, 1999).

McWhirter et al. (1998) added that small size, inclusion by choice, flexibility, and the view of school as a community which promotes a sense of belonging are all important and common features of programs. Miller (2001) suggested that effective after-school programs give youth decision-making roles, heighten public visibility of youth through performances, exhibits or presentations, and have regular opportunities for youths’ reflection on their experiences.

Halpern (1999) identified the common attributes of “good enough” after-school programs. The attributes include an adequate number of staff to assure individualized attention to children, adequate level of staff literacy to help children with learning support needs, adequate facilities and equipment to allow variety and choice in activities, a flexible and relaxed schedule, a predictable environment, opportunities to explore ideas,
feelings and identities, avenues for self-expression, exploration of one’s own heritage as well as the larger culture, and time for unstructured play and simple fun.

Dryfoos (1990) identified eleven features that should be incorporated into successful programs for adolescents. They include: intensive individualized attention, community-wide, multi-agency collaboration, early identification and intervention, locus in schools (contributing to the prevention of negative behaviors), administration of school programs by agencies outside of schools (for community-based focus, rather than school-based focus), location of programs outside of schools (community based youth-serving agencies), staff training, engagement of peers in interventions, involvement of parents, and linkage to the world of work. Although Dryfoos suggested that programs should reside both within schools and outside of schools, it is mentioned that many successful prevention models are actually located within the confines of the school itself. However, it is also noted that not every successful program is in a school.

Hall et al. (2003) conducted a study of after-school programs commissioned by the Boston After-School for All Partnership. They found key elements of effective afterschool programs included: safe, stable places; basic care and services; caring relationships; relevant, challenging experiences; networks and connections; high expectations and standards; opportunities for voice, choice and contribution; and personalized, high-quality instruction.

Quinn (1999) identified the best practices in community programs for young adolescents. These included tailoring the content and processes to the needs and interests of young adolescents; recognizing, valuing and responding to the diverse backgrounds and experiences that exist among young adolescents; working collectively as well as
individually to extend their reach to underserved adolescents; actively competing for young people’s time and attention; strengthening the quality and diversity of their adult leadership; reaching out to families, schools and other community partners in youth development; enhancing the role of young people as community resources; serving as vigorous advocates for and with youths; specifying and evaluating their intended outcomes; and establishing solid organizational structures, including energetic and committed board leadership.

The literature has provided us with information that is the theoretical foundation upon which this study rests. The cornerstones within the body of knowledge, as it relates to after-school programs, included the impact of the environment on a child’s development. This is particularly true when one considers risk factors that accompany at-risk environments. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand the outcomes and developmental impact of an after-school/out-of-school program for youths at two different after-school sites residing in high-risk environments in Las Vegas, Nevada.

The biggest gap in the literature was that of researchers being neglectful of their most significant resource, that being the participants themselves. This study is unique as it seeks responses from the youth participants, while observing the culture of the after-school program. There are several studies that demonstrate that there are several positive outcomes and developmental assets gained from after-school programs, but very few explain how these benefits come about. This study takes an in-depth look at the overall experience of the after-school program at two after-school sites, while attempting to understand how these benefits are achieved.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Qualitative research methods were used to gather information about youths' and after-school coordinators' experiences and perceptions of the after-school program. I used individual interviews and focus groups to obtain these perceptions from youth participants and after-school coordinators.

Because my research was primarily interested in the youths' perceptions and experiences of their involvement in the after-school program, I utilized interviews and participant observations to conduct a case study. As described by Merriam (1998), case studies are intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system. In this particular study, I used a sociological disciplinary orientation to understand the culture of the after-school program in two middle schools.

This study will be informed by an ideological stance of critical theory, which draws attention to race, class and gender (Creswell, 1998). This stance elects to use ideological perspectives in order to draw attention to the needs of people and social action (Creswell, 1998). Through a critical theory lens, researchers reject the idea that the world is "directly knowable." The political agenda of school-based educators, community youth workers, policy makers, and funders recognize the potential of after-school programs to eliminate inequality and increase youths' personal development and
autonomy (Kahne, Nagoaka, Brown O’Brein, Quinn, & Thiede, 2001). With that being said, social relations are often influenced by power and this should be taken into account to some degree (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

This study was approached with the belief that youth participants are the best measure of the experience of after-school programs. In my fieldwork, the ultimate goal was to learn what it is like to be in the youths’ shoes by being both empathetic and reflective. This was established by going to the after-school sites as a person who was visiting, as a person who wanted to learn and who wanted to know what it was like to be them (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), the youth participants in after-school programs. Through the critical theory lens, this study focused on the influences that affect the developmental impacts of after-school programming, which may include: “safety and valued relationships with others” (Halpern, Barker, & Mollard, 2000) and “environmental contexts” (Mahoney, Lord, & Carryl, 2005).

My role as a researcher, in relation to this study, was to balance participation and observation, as too much participation is risky in losing the original intentions of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). As suggested by Bogdan and Biklen, I continually reminded myself, “My primary purpose in being here is to collect data. How does what I am doing relate to that goal?” (p. 84). In establishing rapport with my subjects, I came to the realization that socializing is part of the process; however, there is also a fine line that I needed to be cognizant of to avoid interference with my observations and interviews. I was fully aware that my personal characteristics and status as an After-School All-Star staff member affected my relationship with the participants in this study, however, I tried my best to be discrete and serve as a natural part of the scene of the after-school program.
Everything that I saw and heard remained confidential, and I focused on talking very little in order to listen carefully and remain as neutral and unbiased as possible, while respecting the norms of reciprocity.

Sample Description

As mentioned previously, during this study, I worked for a non-profit organization called the “After-School All-Stars” that works directly with the after-school programs at the two middle school sites and spent countless hours working directly with the after-school programs. This amount of experience and history working with the after-school programs gave me a solid foundation of information that I could use to help guide the direction and interests of this study.

I decided to conduct my study at two of the after-school sites with whom the After-School All-Stars partners in order to utilize a convenience sampling technique. Convenience sampling saves time, money and effort but does so at the expense of information and credibility (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Although I was cognizant of the weaknesses of this approach, this technique allowed me to rely on available subjects in the partnering schools of the After-School All-Stars and to use relationships with school administrators and staff that were already in place. These “gatekeepers” allowed me to have access to the school sites in which after-school programs are held in order to collect the data. I was also aware of the researcher biases that would be evident in this study, since I worked for the organization that I studied. However, it should be noted that I typically had very little direct contact with the youths participating in the program, therefore, the responses from the youths should be fairly truthful and unbiased. Additionally, although my employment at the agency affected my professional judgment
in designing, conducting, analyzing and/or reporting this research, I worked under the supervision of university faculty.

*Participants*

Two participant youth groups were utilized in this study. Twelve students from Roosevelt Middle School and thirteen students from Franklin Middle School, aged 10-15 years old, were interviewed during a three month period (February 2006 - April 2006). Table 1 explains the participants that were included in this particular study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Youth Participants</th>
<th>After-School Coordinators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: R = Roosevelt Middle School and F = Franklin Middle School.*

In February 2006, students were recruited by the investigator(s) with the assistance of the after-school coordinator(s). The investigator observed the youths at their sites and identified a diverse selection of boys and girls from a variety of programs. A total of 25 youth participants and 4 after-school coordinators were asked and agreed to participate in this study. Youth participants were given "consent to participate" and "youth assent" forms in order to get the parents' and the youths' permission to participate.
in the study. Table 2 depicts the breakdown of youth participants by grade for each school.

Table 2

*Grade Level Breakdown of Youth Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Levels</th>
<th>Youth Participants</th>
<th>Total Participants Per Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Grade</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Grade</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th Grade</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: R = Roosevelt Middle School and F = Franklin Middle School.*

Youth participants were not evenly represented from each grade level at either school. As mentioned, each school has a different number of youth participants involved in after-school programs. After-school coordinators at Roosevelt Middle School explained that fewer 8th graders participate in after-school programs, hence, the low number of participants in this study from the 8th grade. Roosevelt Middle School had six (6) 6th graders, four (4) 7th graders and two (2) 8th grade. Franklin Middle School had six (6) 6th graders, five (5) 7th graders, and two (2) 8th graders.

The 25 youth participants were almost equally divided between males and females at each school site. At Roosevelt Middle School the ratio was: male (42%) and females (58%) and Franklin Middle School the ratio was: males (54%) and females (46%). The 25 youth participants were not equally represented by ethnicity at either
school, which was mainly due to the fact that both middle schools were predominantly Hispanic. The majority of youth participants at Roosevelt Middle School were Hispanic (67%), followed by African-American (17%), White (8%), and Other (8%). The majority of youth participants at Franklin Middle School were also Hispanic (62%), followed by African-American (23%), White (15%), and Other (0%).

The four after-school coordinators that were interviewed for this study included two (2) Caucasian females at Roosevelt Middle School and two (2) Caucasian males at Franklin Middle School. The two (2) after-school coordinators at Roosevelt Middle School were 21st Century Site Leaders and one after-school coordinator at Franklin Middle School was a 21st Century Site Leader and the other after-school coordinator was the GEAR UP Academic Advisor.

Settings

The two schools that were selected for this study were Roosevelt Middle School and Franklin Middle School. These schools were selected because both have an after-school program that shares a partnership with the After-School All-Stars and the schools are dissimilar in size. Roosevelt Middle School currently has approximately 300 youths enrolled in their after-school program, whereas Franklin Middle School currently has approximately 150 youths enrolled. Youth from programs of different sizes were included in the study because there is some evidence (Carruthers & Busser, 2000) that program size may affect program outcomes.

The after-school program at both school sites had partnerships between three entities, which include: 21st Century, GEAR UP, and the Greater Las Vegas After-School All-Stars. The entities are described in more detail below.
21st Century Community Learning Centers

The “21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative is the only federal funding agency dedicated exclusively to afterschool programs” (Afterschool Alliance fact sheet). 21st CCLC was reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act through which each state receives funds based on Title I funding for low-income students (Afterschool Alliance fact sheet). 21st CCLC provides: academic enrichment activities that help students meet achievement standards, services designed to reinforce and complement the regular academic program, and literacy and educational development services to the families of children that are served in the program.

GEAR UP

GEAR UP is part of The Center for Academic Enrichment and Outreach at UNLV, which “aims to help communities create new or expanded school programs and provide educational opportunities for students” (UNLV Website, 2006). The mission of GEAR UP is to significantly increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in post-secondary education. GEAR UP works collaboratively with local schools and community-based organizations in order to help students and their parents to gain knowledge and strengthen academic programs in schools.

Greater Las Vegas After-School All-Stars

The Greater Las Vegas After-School All-Stars is a non-profit organization that provides programming exclusively to “at-risk” schools and disadvantaged children. Programming includes after-school, as well as summer programs, focusing on academics, homework help, community service, enrichment and life skills. The mission of the
Greater Las Vegas After-School All-Stars is to provide comprehensive out-of-school programs that keep children safe and help them achieve in school and in life.

*Sample Selection*

In order to select a sample from each school that was as “representative” of the membership as possible, I chose youth participants that had different personality characteristics (i.e. shy versus outgoing, popular versus unpopular, confident versus timid/insecure) and that were engaged in different after-school activities (i.e. dance, art, sports, academic programs, etc.).

*Sample Selection Protocol*

In order to sample youths who may have a variety of experiences and outcomes at the after-school program, I decided to identify categories representing a variety of personality types and demographics. The first category was introverted/extroverted, or the degree to which youth are outgoing and sociable or withdrawn and less sociable. The second category was high competence/low competence, in which youth can either have high or low abilities or skills. The third category was high compliance/low compliance, as youth differ in the degree to which they follow rules or disobey and go against the grain. The fourth category was boy/girl in order to have representation from both sexes. And the final category was race/ethnicity to identify a diverse pool of youth respondents from the after-school program at both school sites. The selection criteria for this particular study included the following: introverted/extroverted, high competence/low competence, high compliance/low compliance, boy/girl, as well as race/ethnicity. It was important to identify those differences in this study, as well as to ensure that I selected a sample that is as close to representing the larger population as possible. Henjum (2001)
alludes to this when he explains, “it is only through the intensive development of different possibilities by different individuals that the society as a whole can maintain its interesting and needed array of citizens” (p. 43).

For this study, I was particularly interested in ensuring that I have introverted personality types for the youth interviews. These introverted youth included those who were shy, timid or withdrawn (Henjum, 2001). However, equally important to interview were the extroverted youth who tend to be more confident, outgoing, accessible and able to build relationships with others (Sak, 2004). Competence was another category that was deemed important because youths may have different experiences in the after-school program depending upon their level of competency or skill. The compliance category was chosen to ensure that a representative sample of youth participants was selected, therefore, there would not be an issue of only representing the compliant and well-behaved youth versus the resistant and disobedient youth in the after-school program. To ensure that gender, ethnicity and age were represented, other categories included boys and girls, different ethnic groups, and age difference. After-School Coordinators were asked to identify youth from these categories in order to assist me in the selection of youth participants for this study. Communication with the after-school coordinators regarding the selection of youth participants was established through meetings and emails to ensure that all categories were represented.

*Procedures*

Before conducting this study, a pilot study was conducted to test the interview questions and responses. This pilot study was conducted at Jefferson Middle School and an after-school participant from each grade (6th, 7th and 8th) was interviewed, as well as
one after-school coordinator. As the investigator, this allowed me to make any necessary changes to the interview questions to ensure that the questions were appropriate for this study and were easily understood (particularly by the youth participants).

This study used three separate data collection procedures in order to gather the qualitative data. They included individual interviews with youth participants in after-school programs and the after-school program coordinators, focus groups with youth participants (which included drawings), and field observations. In the interviews and focus groups, a series of semi-structured questions were asked to understand youths' and coordinators' perceptions of the impact of the program. The sub-sections below describe each of these data collection procedures in further detail.

Interview Protocol

After the youths were selected, the after-school coordinators and parents were given consent forms and youths were given assent forms to request their participation in this study, as well as their permission to be interviewed. In order to be a participant in this study, youths had to attend their after-school programs at least 2-4 days a week (i.e. at least 50% of the programming week) at their respective schools. Youths included 6th, 7th and 8th graders from ethnically diverse backgrounds involved in a variety of programs after-school (i.e. sports, cultural arts, academics).

Youths were asked open-ended questions that focused on their experience as after-school participants, as well as their feelings and beliefs about the program (see Appendix B). All interviews were audiotaped to ensure accurate accounts of responses. I conducted interviews with the youth participants for approximately half-an-hour during their academic hour, but remained flexible with scheduling interviews to allow youth
participants to expand on their comments, if they so desired. Due to the fact that the main focus of my study was structured around youths' interviews, I realized that I had to be skillful in listening, personal interaction and question framing, as well as to demonstrate the ability to gently probe for elaboration from youth participants, as their answers were sometimes brief (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). I continued to interview youths involved in after-school programs at both schools until I reached data saturation. Saturation occurs when the interview responses become repetitive and consistent.

Four after-school coordinators were interviewed during this period, as well, to gather their perceptions of the program and its developmental impacts (i.e. academically and developmentally) on the youths involved in the after-school activities/programs (see Appendix C). The interviews with the after-school coordinators lasted between a half an hour to one hour, but allowed for flexibility for elaborated responses.

**Focus Group Protocol**

In order to keep the numbers of student in each focus group small, two focus groups were conducted at each after-school site. Youth participants in the focus groups were asked questions that were similar to the ones during the individual interview (see Appendix D). A focus group is a form of interviewing where, typically, 7-10 people are selected that share certain characteristics that are relevant to the study's questions (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Berg (2001) explains that this gives the researcher an opportunity to provide an informal group discussion, which encourages “subjects to speak freely and completely about behaviors, attitudes, and opinions they possess” (p.111). Focus group interviews are distinguishable from face-to-face interviews in that they allow one participant to draw from another and brainstorm collectively with the
entire group (Berg). For this particular study, all youth participants in the focus groups were asked to draw a picture of "what the after-school program means or does for them." Drawing materials were provided to each youth participant in the focus groups. Each youth participant was asked to present their drawing and tell the other focus group members why they chose to draw what they did. Focus groups, especially those with children, may include drawing exercises so that children are better able to express themselves and their viewpoints (Berg). Member-checking was also utilized during the focus groups by returning to the data sources to double check the factual accuracy of what was said (Maxwell, 2005).

Field Observation Protocol

During this time period (February 2006 - April 2006), two observations took place at each school site to describe the different environments and programs in which the youths were engaged. These observations were documented in the form of fieldnotes which are written accounts of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences and thinks during the course of collecting and reflecting upon the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). In addition to the formal observations, I also conducted informal observations as I went to each school site six to ten hours per week during the course of this study. Furthermore, I visited each school site at least two to three times per week and although this was not part of the formal observations, I was able to observe and notice emerging patterns. During each interview and focus group, I was at the school for one hour for the interview and an additional hour for informal observations. This is where I got the chance, as the "observer," to make observations and reflect on those observations to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon that I was studying. Although a uniform set of best
practices has not yet been established, the research that I found based on the common features and elements of successful after-school programs was used as a observational checklist to determine how effective the after-school program was at each school site.

**Data Analysis**

Analysis included transcribing the audio taped one-on-one interviews of youth participants and after-school coordinators, and the focus group interviews of the youth participants. Themes were coded related to the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired through involvement in the after-school program and these themes were established using the constant comparison method. Constant comparison method is an analytical induction where the researcher looks for key issues or recurrent events in the data and identifies categories while working through the data and coding based on the core categories (Bogden & Biklen, 2003).

As suggested by Bodgen and Biklen (2003), a coding system was developed to organize and sort the descriptive data so that the material could be separated by utilizing constant comparative technique. I searched through the data for patterns and emerging themes or topics and wrote down words or phrases to represent these emerging themes or topics. As proposed by van Manen (1990), I also utilized a thematic analysis technique which supports the belief that a theme is the experience of focus, meaning or point. This process allowed me to capture the phenomenon that I was hoping to better understand, which involves the developmental impacts of after-school programs on youths from high-risk environments.

In terms of representation of the study, I framed the illustration of my findings around the implications of practice (i.e. the “so what?” question) in order to help my
research flow from the existing literature to the current findings of my study. I used the interview and focus group transcripts of the youths and after-school coordinators and field notes to explore the experiences of the subjects. These various sources of information allowed me to triangulate the data in my study. Triangulation means that many sources of data are used in a study. Multiple sources of data allow for a fuller understanding of the phenomena that is being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) and contribute to the trustworthiness of the results. Berg (2001) further explains, “triangulation in qualitative research can be important to issues of validity” (p. 127). This process helped me formulate data that is more credible by demonstrating that multiple sources of data were used to come to a more complete understanding of the after-school program at both school sites.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This study sought to investigate the youths’ and after-school coordinators’ perceptions of the youths’ experience and the after-school program’s impact. A total of twenty-eight respondents were interviewed, four focus groups were conducted, over thirty-five hours of observations were conducted at the two school sites, and over 350 pages of transcriptions were sorted through. The data analysis included coding the transcribed interviews, focus groups, and pictures of “what the after-school program means or does for them” to find data for themes, and using the field observations to triangulate and provide context. For example, one of the recurring themes was that safety was a reason why the participants suggested that they came to the after-school program. The after-school coordinators also discussed the importance of safety as providing protection for the youth participants. Several youth participants drew words such as “safety” and exemplified that they felt safe in the after-school programs through their drawings. In addition, a safe environment was also observed and noted in the field notes. Therefore, including all the data sources, triangulation was achieved and one emerging theme was that the after-school participants experienced a nurturing and enjoyable environment with sub-themes including safety, sense of family and belonging, and a fun and friendly atmosphere.
The results of the analyses yielded five major findings related to the outcomes of involvement and participation in the after-school program. These outcomes emerged from the transcriptions and were consistently expressed throughout the interviews and focus groups by both the youth participants and after-school coordinators.

Five major findings related to the developmental impact or benefits of the after-school programs surfaced. Those five findings were that youth participants

1. Experience a nurturing and enjoyable environment,
2. Learned positive values and behaviors,
3. Improved social skills,
4. Tried new activities and learned new things, thus developing the perception of competence, and
5. Started to think positively about their future.

Each of the five major findings and their sub-findings relating to respondents’ experience of the after-school program are presented below. Selected quotes from youth participants and after-school coordinators are provided to illustrate each of the sub-findings. Additional quotes are provided in the appendices in order to establish further support of these sub-findings.

*Major Finding #1: Nurturing and Enjoyable Environment*

The first major finding is that this after-school program provided a nurturing environment for the youth participants. All of the youth participants reside in high-risk neighborhoods where violence, drugs, gangs and crime are prevalent. Home environments also seem to be unhealthy for many youth participants, as several respondents suggested that they do not look forward to going home after school due to
their unstable and stressful home lives. The respondents in this study suggested that the nurturing environment of the after-school programs provided feelings of safety, a sense of family and belonging, and a fun and friendly atmosphere.

Through field observations, it was noted that the youth participants seemed to be having a lot of fun. The students were learning and enjoying themselves while they were engaged in several of their enrichment activities. Based on observations, several after-school coordinators and instructors presented a nurturing and enjoyable environment by showing a genuine interest in the youth participants and by asking them questions about their day and their grades in school. Some after-school coordinators and instructors even showed their support for the youth by giving them hugs, patting them on the back or giving them high-fives throughout the course of a given day in the after-school program. Furthermore, several after-school instructors commended the youth participants when they did something well or complied when asked to do something. In few instances, the after-school instructor would even ask the youth participants for their input and advice, thus making them feel useful and meaningful to the particular program or activity. Some after-school coordinators and instructors had a good rapport with the youth participants, as I noticed them joking around with the students and making them laugh and smile. However, this nurturing and enjoyable context was much more prevalent in some leaders than others. Due to the negative interactions and relationships between staff, there was a lack of nurturance for the youth participants which was demonstrated by a few after-school coordinators or instructors. It was obvious that some after-school coordinators and instructors did not get along, which seemed to interfere with the nurturance that they were able to provide to the youth participants.
At the beginning of the focus groups, youth participants were asked to draw a picture of "what the after-school program means or does to them". The drawings were intended to serve as another stimulus for conversation. One youth participant drew a picture that depicted being in a nurturing and safe environment (see Figure 1).

Cassandra, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School explained her drawing, as she said, "I drew a Mad Science class and then I wrote all of the classes in After-Hours."

This drawing demonstrates a nurturing and enjoyable environment as the youth participant drew two pictures with after-school instructors or tutors helping a youth participant in after-school programs (i.e. Tutoring and Mad Science).

![Figure 1. Focus group drawing by youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School.](image)

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Safety. Fairly consistently, the youth participants stated that after-school programs help them to feel safe by offering protection, keeping them away from gangs, strangers, fighting or bullying, shooting, burglary, and in some cases, even their home lives. Veronica, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School explained, “Because when I didn’t go to after-school programs, there used to be a lot of shooting where I used to live...a lot of shootings and when I came here, I never said nothing and I was scared that I might get killed when I’m outside and when I’m here...I feel safe.” Lola, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School, explained her reason for going to after-school programs when she stated, “Because I feel safe in the school when I’m doing things in After-School All-Stars, like playing Soccer outside in the field. I know we are safe because Officer Byrd is in here.” Rafael, a youth participant in after-school programs at Roosevelt Middle School explained, “Because sometimes school is the safest place to go.” The after-school program is held at the school.

During the interviews, the after-school coordinators indicated that they also felt that the after-school programs kept the kids in their school safe. One after-school coordinator at Franklin Middle School explained,

Yea okay, so one of the things....yean...that this program does that I’m proudest of is that it keeps these kids off of the streets for two hours. Because a lot of these kids, some of the reason that they are here is because their parents aren’t at home or they are here because they don’t want to be at home. That some of those kids would be out, you know, God knows where, wherever on the street because they don’t want to go home because there are situations going on in their lives or, like I
said, their parents aren’t there. So these kids are here because they need
someplace to be. They need it because if not, they could really be getting
themselves into some bad situations. So the things that I’m most proud of is just
that we provide a place for them to be, just a safe place.

Sense of Family and Belonging. Youth participants consistently expressed that
they come to after-school programs because they feel a sense of family and belonging.
Some youth participants even explained that they treated some of the after-school staff
like they were family. When asked about whether any after-school staff stood out to him
in the after-school program, Mario, a youth participant at Franklin Middle School said,
“She works here. I don’t know if she is the advisor or I don’t know what she does, but
like...before I knew she was in the after-school stuff like that. You know, I used to talk
to her and stuff like that and I just like...treated her like an Aunt. And also her son Alex
is teaching me things too.” When asked why she named a particular after-school staff
member as someone from whom she learned, Veronica, a youth participant in after­
school programs at Franklin Middle School explained, “Because she takes care of us and
she is like our mom because she is not mean to us like other moms and she don’t act
mean or she don’t look at people and just don’t like them because of their color or
something...she just acts like a normal mom.”

Walter, a youth participant in after-school programs at Franklin Middle School,
further alluded to the sense of belonging when he stated, “Well...like...they like, they do
games that a lot of kids are interested in but those kids that are interested in it here don’t
like...it’s not like a poppin’ thing that you can talk about in school and like, if you do
then someone might make fun of you or something. This is a place where kids can go
and talk to other people who like video games or things related to video games.” Walter, also explained, “I know that before this, I probably wouldn’t have tried...I don’t know...hanging out with some people. Some of the people here, I probably wouldn’t have tried hanging out with people because when you see them at school they don’t seem like they do when they are here.”

After-school coordinators agreed that they thought that the youth came to after-school programs because they felt a part of something and that they belonged. One after-school coordinator at Franklin Middle School expressed this when he said,

They have a place that is, in the winter, warm, they have food and that is a necessity for some of these kids. Because some of these kids walk down to Salvation Army and they stay in a shelter and they come to me and they say, you know, “Mr B...” all of these horror stories that I’ve heard. And it’s just good to have something like his because some of these kids don’t have a home and to have kind of that family feeling and just that, you know what, you are accepted here and you are welcome here, it doesn’t matter your story, we don’t care about that. That’s what I’m proudest of.

An after-school coordinator at Roosevelt Middle School explained,

Well and part of it is socialization and doing what their friends do. I’m a firm believer in peer group pressure, that by this age, parents’ influence is done and over with and it is your peer group...is the most important part of why you do things so I think kids come to socialize and come to be with their friends and secondary to learn and to do some new things. I truly feel that a lot of these kids are friends and so they come to be in classes together and I know that because
that's why I do a lot of the change slips because they want to be with their friends in a certain class.

Based on observations, several after-school activity programs, such as Hip-Hop Dance, Soccer, and Mariachi, seemed especially good at providing youth participants with a sense of belonging. These particular programs were structured in a way that was similar to a club atmosphere, where the youth participants all participated and there was a sense of camaraderie and support of one another. This was more evident in the after-school enrichment programs than the academic activity programs. Furthermore, a few after-school coordinators and instructors had friendships with some of the youth participants, where the youth would come up to the adult leaders and make conversation or joke around. Some youth participants would go up to a certain after-school staff member every day to give them a hug.

Fun and Friendly Atmosphere. Youth participants in the after-school program suggested that they come to the after-school program because it was a fun and friendly place to go after-school. Walter, a youth participant in after-school programs at Franklin Middle School further explained,

When you are here you get to connect with people at a different level then you would at school. It seems like a more friendly environment. Usually at school, you are more competitive or for whatever reasons, you are just more tense because of all the work. So you don’t really get to know the person so it’s hard to actually get to know people and it’s easy to make like people mad, you know? But when you’re here, it’s just like…it’s not graded and you are just here to have fun so it’s easier to get along with people and get to know them.
When asked why fun was a factor for coming to the after-school program, Pedro, a youth participant in after-school programs at Roosevelt Middle School said, “Because fun can overpower anything that you have, like a bad experience or something.” When asked how after-school coordinators are different than her teachers during the school day, Cassandra, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School, said, “I think they are different because you spend more time with them than with your actual teachers and you get to know what they are really like and you think of them as more of a friend than a teacher.”

After-school coordinators expressed that fun is an important factor for the youth coming to after-school programs day after day. One after-school coordinator at Franklin Middle School explained, “…fun is important because you have to have that balance in life. They are at school all day long and they have to have some sort of enjoyment after-school, that way, they can go home and share their experiences.”

When asked why youth participants stop coming to the after-school program, Walter, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School, stated, “Some of them stop maybe because…well…some of them like going to the incentives but they don’t like going to the academic.” One after-school coordinator at Franklin Middle School, stated,

I think they may grow tired of the same programs, so one of our challenges is to always change programs or adapt them or revise them to give them a little bit more umph, that way they go further. Sometimes if they are coming to the program and it’s the same thing day after day after, they’ll get bored with it and sometimes they do drop out. And the older they get, they may have more
challenges within their home life too, that keeps them from being in after-school programs and they may have to go home to baby-sit their little brother or sister.

**Major Finding #2: Positive Values and Behavior**

The second major outcome finding is that after-school programs provide positive values and behaviors for the youth participants. Several respondents admitted that they used to have bad attitudes, made bad choices, and did not get along easily with others. However, through the youths’ involvement in after-school programs, they were able to modify and improve their behavior, as well as develop the desire to “do the right thing”. The respondents in this study also stated that youth participants learned character values through their involvement in the after-school program. This internalization of character values included respect, responsibility, and caring.

Through field observations, it was noted that certain after-school instructors seemed to be able to get the youth participants’ attention and respect easier than other instructors. Some instructors, most specifically in Hip-Hop, Mariachi, and Art Club, seemed to have a really good rapport with the youth participants. Some after-school instructors provided positive reinforcement and encouragement. In Kickball, the after-school instructors were reinforcing character traits, such as sportsmanship and caring, while the youths were playing. Also, in Hip-Hop Dance, one particular instructor took time at the end of the activity each day to talk to the youth about a different character trait.

Character traits were not emphasized in all of the after-school activities. The most consistent character traits that were expressed in the majority of the after-school program activities were respect and encouragement. Often times, the trait was
reciprocated by the youth participants if the instructor exemplified this behavior. In another observation, the opposite was recognized, as a few after-school coordinators and instructors were very brief and curt with the youth participants, almost as though they were too busy to converse and direct the youth.

Both after-school programs provide an hour of academic programs, followed by an hour of enrichment programs. Youth participants reported that this first hour of the after-school program was quite helpful because they were able to get assistance and complete their homework for school. The respondents in this study suggested that the after-school program enhanced their commitment to academics, because it provided homework assistance. They stated that it increased their ability to turn in their homework, it enhanced academic skills, and improved school grades.

Modify and Improve Behavior. It was consistently stated by youth participants in the after-school program that being involved in the after-school program helped them and their peers to modify and improve their behavior. Katie, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School explained, “My attitude has gotten better. I've learned more things that I should have learned in class time. I learn better stuff in After-Hours than I do in class time.” Similarly, Mario, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School talked about noticing changes in other youths’ behavior as a result of the after-school program. Mario said, “When After-Hours wasn’t going on, there was some people that used to go home or went to hang out with their friends and just go like bully people or sometimes get bullied. But then when After-Hours started, then those same kids started coming to this.” Shawn, a youth participant in after-school programs at Franklin Middle School, alluded to the same notion when he
explained, “Because when they [bullies] come here they usually have fun and so they change during school. So let’s say that I picked on him and then he goes to After-Hours and then I went with him and then I started changing my mind about bullying people.”

Katie, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School also added, “...because just like I said when I changed my attitude towards teachers during school time and it helps me to do better in After-Hours because it changed my attitude to teachers.”

After-school coordinators also indicated that the after-school program helps youth participants to modify and improve their behavior by giving kids autonomy and the opportunity to try new things. One after-school coordinator at Franklin Middle School said,

…and it changes their behavior because they don’t feel like they are being judged by the teachers the whole time. They can make a mistake and it’s all right, they are not going to be yelled at and they are not going to be referred to the Dean.

We, you know...it’s a completely different atmosphere and I think that helps them to feel more comfortable in coming.

“Do the Right Thing”. Youth participants in the after-school program consistently suggested that they learned and internalized character values. Many youth participants explained that they learned about making positive choices and developing the mentality to “do the right thing”. Shawn, a youth participant in after-school programs at Franklin Middle School explained, “It’s helping me to do better things, like don’t hurt myself, don’t do anything bad.” Maria, a youth participant in after-school programs at Franklin Middle School, explained what she learned about responsibility through the
after-school program by the following statement, “By being a good kid. To do something good that you like.” Mario, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School, summed up the notion of “doing the right thing” when he stated, “Sometimes I use like Mariachi to like calm down because I have like a lot of problems during the day. So I use that time in After-Hours to calm myself down and just focus on what I’m doing instead of focusing on the problems that I have and not getting more madder.” Jorge, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School explained, “This is the best thing that ever happened to my life because I can now see the difference between good and bad about like what to do good instead of being bad.”

When asked to draw a picture of “what the after-school program means” to him, David, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School, drew an image that depicted a student making a good choice through his involvement in the after-school program (see Figure 2). David explained his drawing by saying, My picture is about comparing the after-school program to smoking or something like that. And I drew a picture on one side of a kid playing basketball and so it says, ‘Instead of doing this…’ and there is a picture of a boy smoking and then it says, ‘You can do this…’ where I have a picture of a kid playing basketball.
In terms of character development and learning how to do the right thing, I believe that the youth participants were most responsive to comprehending this trait when the after-school coordinators and instructors were engaged in the activity with the youth. An after-school coordinator from Franklin Middle School explained,

…and if you are engaged with the kids, you know, if you are playing Kickball with them, they are more likely to act appropriately as well. And you can actually model behavior for them, how to interact with others, if you do have a problem talk about it instead of fighting. And so, it’s a good way for teachers to just get in there and show them how real people react to different situations.

Based on observations, this particular after-school coordinator was highly involved in the after-school activities with the youth. This after-school coordinator would participated in Hip-Hop Dance and Kickball as though he were one of the youth participants. By doing this, he allowed youth to model and reflect his behavior, as he
always chose to do the right thing and followed directions from the instructors. In Kickball he exemplified good sportsmanship and teamwork and in Hip-Hop Dance he would help other kids who did not understand the dance moves and paid attention to the instructor.

*Respect.* Youth participants in the after-school program also alluded to the belief that through their involvement in the after-school program, they learned about another character value, which was how to treat other people with respect. Rosa, a youth participant at Roosevelt Middle School, explained, “Well you learn respect and to care for others, to be responsible and that we should be coming here because we want to learn.” Similarly, Jorge, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School, said, “I learned how to share, respect them and be responsible to help them...so they could do the same to me and like show me what to do.” Lola, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School expressed, “To respect people and you will be respected back and to help people and treat people how you would want to be treated, and how you would want anyone to treat you and treat yourself with respect too.”

*Responsibility.* Youth participants in the after-school program suggested that through their involvement in the after-school program, they learned an additional character value, which was how to be responsible. Mercedes, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School explained, “I wasn’t that responsible until I came to the after-school program and they would be like do your stuff and get honors and you will get prizes, not because of prizes only but because of my grades and what I’m going to do with my life and stuff, so it helped me to be more responsible.”
Walter, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School discussed how he learned about responsibility in the after-school program when he stated, "Last year, me and this teacher Ms. Fuss were running the Gamerz Corner program and it kind of helped me seeing how I was in charge of who got on the machines and stuff...it kind of helped me learn like how responsible...like how it was to be on the other side...like from the teacher’s point of view.” Lola, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School further alluded to this concept of responsibility as she explained, “I think it helps me to be more responsible because I’m always on time to my classes, so I’ve been getting better at getting to my other classes on time too during school.”

_Caring._ Youth participants in the after-school program suggested that through their involvement in the after-school program, they learned another additional character value, which was how to care for others. Many youth participants suggested that their ability to care for others was developed through helping their peers in after-school programs. Rosa, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School said, “Because when I’m in my program and my partner doesn’t know, we get to teach them and we get to help each other out and be there for each other. It makes me feel really proud of myself helping others and make them look good too.” Jorge, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School, expressed, “Sharing the computers and all of that stuff, help them with their um...problems that they have and if it’s someone new and they don’t know where to go, then I can show them the school or the classes.” Pedro, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School further detailed this phenomenon of caring for others by stating, “Because I’ve
been helping some kids that I don’t even know. I’ve been telling them a cool website that they can go to and they start playing and laughing and stuff.”

Academic Commitment. Youth participants in the after-school program consistently explained that they developed a stronger commitment to academics through their involvement in the after-school program. Mario, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School explained,

The only thing that I can remember right now that I have changed is like...um...when I wasn’t in it, I used to be the kind of guy that didn’t want to study and didn’t want to do their homework and just got into problems and stuff like that. And like now that I’m in this, I know that there is better stuff to do then to be a lazy kid doing nothing and stuff like that. And now with this, this has just helped me because before I didn’t have accelerated classes and stuff like that but now since I’ve been in this, I only have like A’s and B’s in all of my classes and now I have honors classes.

Cassandra, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School explained, “Like you get more help and attention doing your homework in After-Hours than you would get at home because like you know that they would understand what you were doing and like most parents don’t read English.” Luisa, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School explained that her focus on school shifted dramatically due to her involvement in the after-school program. Luisa said,

How I have changed is...I think I was the same thing...I used to mess around a lot at school and I used to not pay attention. I used to play around too much and I
think that is how I changed is because I come and see other students do programs and that’s the thing that gets me. Like I used to mess around a lot because I didn’t understand how to do mathematics and stuff. I think I’ve changed going to class and sitting in the front row because I used to sit all the way in the back. I sit in the front row and pay attention and turn all of my homeworks in.

After-school coordinators consistently suggested that the after-school program helps the youth improve their commitment to academics. One after-school coordinator at Franklin Middle School explained,

They have a Homework Help, which some of the students, they come to me, they are in my class, and they are like, “Mr. B, I wouldn’t have done this homework if Mr. Mac wouldn’t have made me do it in Tutoring.” So there are opportunities where the kids can just better themselves and it does help them through the school day.

*Academic Skills.* Beyond gaining a commitment to academics, youth participants in the after-school program also indicated that they learn academic skills in the after-school program. David, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School explained, “In Reading Plus I can use my reading skills that I learn from the Reading Plus program for my future.” Veronica, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School stated, “Yea it helps me do better at school because it helps me learn how to spell and how to use my spelling words in my regular schedule in school.” Mario, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School said, “…and I learn how to use the computer more and stuff like that.”
Major Finding #3: Improve Relationships and Promote Social Skills.

The third major outcome finding is that this after-school program improved social skills for youth participants. Many respondents suggested that they used to feel like a “loner” without any significant people that cared about them in their lives. Furthermore, the after-school coordinators expressed that several youth participants were brought up in environments where appropriate social skills were rarely emphasized or learned. The respondents in this study stated that youth participants learned social skills, such as how to make friends, work with others, and improve their relationships with family members. Youth respondents also stated that they established positive relationships with after-school staff.

Through field observations, it was noted that the youth participants were working in groups, pairs or teams in several after-school activities, such as Math Academy, Hip-Hop Dance, Soccer, Broadcast Journalism, Game Time, Mariachi, and Sports and Recreation. Many of the instructors and youth participants had positive relationships with one another.

Make Friends. Youth participants in the after-school program indicated that they were able to be around their current friends and make new friends. Luisa, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School, stated, “I used to be shy but now I come after-school and I have more people to talk to. I have more friends to talk, like, “Hey girl with the red hair that I go to Hip-Hop class with! Or “You with Yoga, hi!” Stephanie, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School, explained that her relationships with her teachers were enhanced through the after-school program, as she stated, “I make friends with teachers too.” Stephanie also
explained, “Well, we get to meet new people and talk to them and make friends and stuff like that. And we learn about one another, what each other likes and dislikes and stuff like that.”

The after-school coordinators also found that youth participants were able to make new friends, while improving their socialization skills in the process. An after-school coordinator at Franklin Middle School alluded to this by explaining,

...they are able to make themselves better at the same time, just hanging out with their friends, whether it be in an Art class or playing Kickball or, you know, being in Broadcast Journalism or Hip-Hop. So they are able to communicate and hang out with their friends but they are still making themselves better.

*Improve Relationships with Family Members.* Several youth participants in the after-school program also indicated that they were able to improve their relationships with family members by sharing what they had accomplished in the after-school program. Isabel, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School expressed, “When I didn’t go to after-school programs, I used to be all bored and never talked to no one. Um, at school...um....at school or at my house and I never talked to my mom or nothing. But when I came...when I went to after-school programs, I started talking to everyone in my classes and my mom, and I started to show some stuff to her and talked to her.” Maria, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School explained her reasoning for choosing to participate in the after-school program, as she stated, “Because I know that if I didn’t do it, then I wouldn’t listen to my mom.” Mario, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School mentioned,
When you have problems at school and then when you get home, your parents get you even more mad and you just want to get your mad away so you take it out on them. And like right here, we have to like calm down and by the time we get home, we are not as mad and if my parents say something that makes me mad, I wouldn’t get as angry as before.

*Communication Skills.* Youth participants in the after-school program alluded to the concept that their communication skills were enhanced as a result of their involvement in the after-school program. Walter, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School, expressed, “I learned how to communicate with people better. Ah...I learned that if I want something then I have to work for it and if I keep trying for something, sooner or later I will get it.” Cassandra, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School, said, “I learned to talk to people in my own way, to be more expressive with them and to speak to them without being shy.” Walter further suggested, “You learn a lot of things here, but most of the things you learn here...you learn to do things to do when you are by yourself but normally what you learn here is how to do things with other people and not just by yourself.”

The after-school coordinators also agreed that the youth participants in the after-school program are able to improve their communication skills by learning how to socialize on a regular basis. An after-school coordinator at Roosevelt Middle School alluded to this notion of improving communication skills by stating, “Well I think the communication is a big thing because after-school there is more time for that, the kids to ask questions, and to interact and to talk with their peers, their friend, talk with their teachers. You know, it’s hard when you have forty
kids in your classroom for every kid to be able to talk and communicate and even
do cooperative learning and group things. So I think with MOOMBA having a
smaller class, has been…the kids feel more comfortable and more confident and
they can be able to ask questions that they normally wouldn’t be able to ask
during the school day.

*Major Finding #4: Opportunities to Learn and Try New Things, thus Developing the
Perception of Competence*

The fourth major outcome finding is that the after-school programs provide
opportunities to learn and try new things, thus developing the perception of competence.
Many youth participants come from low-income families that are typically unable to pay
for youth programs. The two after-school sites that were examined in this study were
free to youth participants. Furthermore, the respondents in this study stated that youth
participants acquired an enjoyment for learning, which gave them skills to utilize during
their free time. Additionally, many youth participants reside in high-risk neighborhoods
with unhealthy situations at home. The after-school coordinators stated that if youth
seldom receive positive feedback or support, many begin to adopt and accept this
negative way of life, rather than feeling capable of forming optimism and sense of
purpose. The respondents in this study also stated that the after-school program provided
feelings of self-worth, which included confidence, pride, and accomplishment.

When asked to draw a picture of “what the after-school program means or does”
to her, Isabel, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School,
drew an image that depicted several different programs in the after-school program that
allowed her to try new things and learn new skills (see Figure 3). Isabel explained her
drawing by saying, “I drew this girl like dancing in Hip-Hop and this girl in Soccer and this girl with a mask on and this girl in Art Club.” When asked to identify the words on her drawing, Isabel said, “The After-Hours means a lot to me because if I never knew about After-Hours, I would be at home doing nothing but just sitting down and watching TV all day long. In 4th grade was the first time I went to After-Hours. At first I didn’t like After-Hours, but when time passed I started to like it. And that’s what the After-Hours program means to me. Oh yea and Ms. Ranna Rocks!”

![Focus group drawing by youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School.](Figure 3)

**Figure 3.** Focus group drawing by youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School.

**New Skills.** Youth participants in the after-school program consistently stated that they were given opportunities to learn and try new things in the after-school program, which ultimately helped them to develop the perception of competence. Jahmal, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School explained, “Because
before I never had the courage to try anything else, but once I started this program it’s like I had the courage and the ability to try new things.” Rosa, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School, said, “Well the only thing that I would be doing at home is watching TV or doing my homework so here I am learning new things. I’m dancing and having a great time and it makes me feel good that I’m learning new things and learning how to dance.” Jorge, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School explained why he decided to participate in the after-school program by stating, “And so I entered that because I know you can play computer games and because I really want to cook, like you know, so that when I baby-sit, I can like cook all of this stuff for my little brother.”

Several youth participants in the after-school program explained that they were able to learn and develop new skills for their discretionary time. Cassandra, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School, expressed, “I don’t know, because like they show me how to do new things when I can do them in my free time when I can like be alone and nobody will be bothered.” Lola, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School explained,

If you are in Homework Helpers, you do your homework and they have people that help you in there. In Poetry Slam, the one I’m in now,, they are teaching us how to do poems and memorize them and then we go in…and some people can memorize their poem that are not nervous, they get to go to the competition and win computers and laptops and things like that.

**Self-Worth – Feeling Good about One’s Capabilities.** Youth participants in the after-school program overwhelmingly indicated that they developed a sense of self-worth
and feeling good about their own capabilities through their involvement in the after-school program.

When asked how he felt from his involvement in the after-school program, Shawn, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School simply stated, "I feel like a star." Stephanie, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School, explained, "It helps me to feel good about myself because I can do a whole lot of stuff, chat with my friends, experience new things and get my homework done right here at school."

After-school coordinators agreed that the youth participants involved in the after-school program were able to develop a sense of self-worth and accomplishment from their participation in the after-school program. An after-school coordinator at Franklin Middle School explained,

Well I think that with them coming to after-school programs and going back to how they are accomplishing things, they are learning that if they put the time in and work hard enough it may, you know, they are going to see the results in the end. I think that, hopefully, you know I hope that as they grow older then they will have that same motivation to move forward and to always learn from whatever experiences that they are getting involved in.

Walter, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School, said,

I've always felt pretty good about myself because if I won't then no one else will. But I guess I'm not entirely sure how it has. I haven't really changed that much because I've always felt good about myself. But I know that my friend Oscar
feels a lot better since he came here. He used to always get picked on. I guess this year he earned the title of “Harry Potter” and since he started coming here that has stopped. I guess he feels better about himself. Well people know him better so they stopped picking on him. He got to hang out with kids like him outside of the school environment.

**Major Finding #5: Positive View of Future**

The fifth major outcome finding is that after-school programs provide the ability to think about the future and provide youth participants with an optimistic view of their future. Several youth participants live in economically deprived areas where exposure to negative experiences has serious implications for development, such as youths’ understanding of the social world, morals and health (Salzinger, Ng-Mak, Feldman, Kam, & Rosario, 2006). The respondents in this study suggested that their involvement in after-school programs encouraged them to think about their future and career goals. This was most commonly due to youth participants’ relationships with after-school coordinators and instructors and the information that they were given during their after-school programs. Based on observations, a few after-school coordinators and instructors would discuss the option of going to college with the youth participants. One after-school program even had an after-school activity that was based on career explorations.

*Future.* The youth participants in the after-school program indicated that after being involved in the after-school program, they started to aspire to some future goals. Jahmal, a youth participant at Roosevelt Middle School, explained, “I’ve learned that if you put your mind to anything, then you can achieve it.” Cassandra, a youth participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School explained that the after-school

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coordinators and staff helped her to begin to think in terms of her future goals, when she stated, “They influence you in like different kinds of careers and opportunities to get to know what you want to be when you get older.”

The after-school coordinators agreed that the after-school program enables the youth participants to begin to think about their future goals and aspirations. An after-school coordinator at Franklin Middle School expressed,

Definitely setting them up for the future and their life because they are getting to see different ways of learning then just the school day. There is math, there is science, there is English, there is reading and they learn those same topics and they are things that they could use in their classes, but they are seeing it in different ways.

Another after-school coordinator at Franklin Middle School explained,

“It may be that if they are in Broadcast Journalism they are learning something that they want to do once they graduate high school and go on to undergraduate programs, that may be something that they have carried with them since middle school.”

The after-school coordinators stated that they believed the after-school program helped the youth participants to think about their future career goals and aspirations. An after-school coordinator at Franklin Middle School explained,

...or like with me, we do the True Life class, we learn how to budget and write checks and stuff like that. Those are skills that they may not use right now because they don’t have checking accounts but they are going to be a step ahead whenever they get to high school or as soon as they graduate. So it’s just introducing them to the world that’s out there and to the realities of the world, so
that there are not naive to the fact, that you know, if you write a check and you
don’t have money for it you are going to get in trouble, there are repercussions.
So it’s just overall, that opportunity to just realizing that this is their life and that
the choices that they make now will determine where their life goes.

Career aspirations. The youth participants in the after-school program also
indicated that through their involvement in the after-school program, they began to think
about their career goals. Katie, a youth participant in the after-school program at
Franklin Middle School, explained how she began to develop competencies regarding her
future, when she said, “Learning how to do things and then… and then see how you grow
up and see if you become one of those things.” Nalini, a youth participant in the after­
school program at Roosevelt Middle School, explained, “Like in Hip-Hop, it’s showing
me like more moves because I want to be a Choreographer when I grow up. Because
like, the teachers went at Rex Bell and here and they came over to Rex Bell too and they
told me that they are choreographing so I wanted to be like them.” Walter, a youth
participant in the after-school program at Franklin Middle School, expressed,

I know that during the After-Hours program, they had a summer camp and I
learned a lot about Law which is what I was planning on doing with my future.
Pursuing something in Law, Art… well I have a lot of different things. It made
me aware of all the different things that I can do. It made me think about them,
instead of just Law itself, I thought about many other different things like
Engineering and stuff like that.
Summary of Findings

Research question 1. What is the experience of youths involved in an after-school program in a high risk environment?

It is clear that youth participants in the after-school program enjoy their time in the after-school program, due to several factors which may include: a sense of safety, learning new skills, the ability to make new friends, and assistance with their homework. Many youth participants in the after-school program said that if they were not involved in the after-school program, they would be bored at home, getting into trouble, or attempting to do their homework alone without much success. Overall, the experience for youth participants in the after-school program was a positive one.

However the study also illuminated some areas for changes and improvements. Through observations, it was evident that there was little consistency among staff in the nurturance provided to the youth participants. Some after-school coordinators and instructors were much more nurturing and friendly than others. Furthermore, some after-school activities were more focused on competence building than others. This lack of consistency prevents the after-school program from cultivating an environment that uniformly sets a high standard for learning new skills and developing a sense of competence. For instance, the Hip Hop Dance activity was extremely high in competence building due to the step-by-step instruction and assistance. Activities like Yoga were not as high because the youth simply followed a video, and the instruction was not as thorough or personalized. Furthermore, the after-school program at each school differed in structure. One was highly structured and the other was more relaxed and unstructured, sometimes resulting in a sense of chaos, which may have disrupted the
potential impact of the after-school program. However in some cases, this lack of structure is what drew youth into participating because it was dissimilar to the school day.

Some interview respondents suggested that they would like to see some changes in the after-school program. While the youth participants identified many positive aspects of the after-school program, they also provided many suggestions for improvement. Additionally, the interviews and field observations uncovered some potential areas for improvement to the after-school program. These areas included: youth input in programming, additional time in both academic and enrichment sessions, more tutors and instructors, especially during the academic hour, and further development of the after-school program.

Luisa, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School, explained

That you should like...you should have a little bit more activities, like more fun activities because the teenagers do not want to stay for Yoga or Tennis. Maybe something more fun, ask them, like maybe doing an announcement at school, “If you want a program just go to the office and write a report.” Because a lot of kids like kickball or maybe baseball or something like that. So I think that if you ask the students, then maybe it would be better.

David, a youth participant in the after-school program at Roosevelt Middle School, stated, “I would change Homework Helpers to more teachers in the class because there are so few teachers and they can’t get around to all of the students so sometimes all of the students be on their own.” Jorge, a youth participant in the after-school program at
Roosevelt Middle School, suggested adding more programs when he said, “Like more sports, more science, more cooking, more dance.”

Research question 2. What are the developmental impacts of the after-school program on youths involved in an after-school program in a high risk environment?

It is obvious from this study that youth participants in the after-school program received benefits, including developmental assets, from their involvement. These developmental assets include: safety, a sense of family and belonging, improved behavior, character values, an increase in academic commitment, improved relationships, social skills, new leisure skills, competence, self-worth, and an awareness of the future. A common theme with several of the youth respondents was that their participation in the after-school program led them to a better understanding and completion of their homework, which oftentimes resulted in better grades. The after-school coordinators agreed that youth participants in the after-school program experienced opportunities that they may have never had if they had not been a part of the after-school program, due to financial and transportation limitations. Due to the fact that the youth participants in this study are from high-risk environments, the after-school program provided them with a safe place to learn new things and develop skills, friendships and a sense of competence while engaging in activities that were perceived as fun and enjoyable.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand the outcomes and developmental impact of an after-school/out-of-school program for youths at two different after-school sites located in high-risk environments in Las Vegas, Nevada. Responses from youth participants and after-school coordinators were examined to determine whether developmental assets were derived through participation in after-school programs. This chapter includes a discussion of the general findings, limitations, generalizability, and recommendations for future research.

General Findings and Professional Implications

The youth participants and after-school coordinators in this study suggested several factors relating to the developmental impact of involvement and participation in the after-school program. Interviews and focus groups were open-ended, which allowed for elaboration and enhanced the depth of responses.

Five outcomes were strongly expressed by the respondents in this study, including:

1. Nurturing and enjoyable environment,
2. Positive values and behavior,
3. Improved relationships and social skills with others,
4. Opportunities to learn and try new things, thus developing the perception of competence, and

5. Positive view of future.

The findings supported several claims from previous research and yielded new findings. This study supported the research reviewed by the National Research Council (2002) which claimed that there are eight program features that are important for adolescent development, which include physical and psychological safety, appropriate structure, supportive relationships, opportunities to belong, positive social norms, support for efficacy and mattering, opportunities for skill building, and integration of family, school, and community efforts.

Research suggests that safety appeared to be one of the main reasons why the youth participants chose to participate in the after-school program, as all of the youth participants resided in high-risk areas which often contribute to risky behaviors. Similarly, respondents in this study indicated that the after-school program kept them safe from strangers, violence, bullying and getting into trouble. Bullying took the forms of physical and well as psychological harassment, through hurtful words, teasing, or fighting. Due to the prevalence of bullying, the after-school staff should be trained on bullying reduction and conflict resolution, as the youth mentioned that this took place during the time directly after-school. Based on findings from the National Research Council, which suggests that only 45% of kids in this country feel safe, it is important to create a place that is both physically and emotionally safe for the youth.

In terms of structure, one of the after-school program sites was highly structured with multiple tutors for each after-school activity, while the other site had a more
unstructured program with fewer tutors. Each site with its differing views on the level of structure had its benefits. The more rigid structure provided youth with clear guidelines, however, less structure provided flexibility and gave youth the feeling that they are not in an extended school day. The National Research Council suggested that there should be clear, and developmentally appropriate expectations and boundaries present in youth programs. That does not mean that rigidity is the goal, yet a certain amount of structure is necessary and is conducive to adolescent development. Youth thrive in a relaxed atmosphere, yet organization is still important in establishing some control and structure to the program.

Program size also varied between the two after-school program sites. The smaller program tended to have more connectedness, stronger personal relationships, and more opportunities for character building. However, the larger program, due to greater resources and facilities, allowed for more youth to engage in competence building and skill development. A large after-school program has the advantage of serving more youth who can reap developmental rewards. However, a large after-school program must be highly organized for competence building and focused on relationships to be successful. In other words, program size does not become a positive factor unless the program is organized, structured, and has highly qualified and well-trained staff to support the size of the program.

Relationships were another strong theme, as youth participants explained that they gained positive relationships with both their peers, after-school staff, and sometimes even with their own family members. Many youth experienced supportive relationships, but this was inconsistent among the different program activities. There were also differing
levels of nurturance by after-school coordinators and instructors. Some of the after-school staff provided a great deal of support and encouragement to youth participants, while others provided very little. Through observations, a very small percentage of staff were able to provide meaningful and trustworthy relationships with the youth participants, which was mainly due to the differing levels of nurturance among staff. Almost every youth development paradigm discusses the importance of adult relationships, which suggests that this is key to adolescent development and the reinforcement of positive behaviors. Training staff to model supportive and encouraging behavior towards the youth is extremely important. Staff should learn the children's names, talk to the youth and take the time and energy to connect with them.

Being in an accepting and enjoyable environment was another theme that emerged in this study. The youth participants felt a sense of belonging in the after-school program. Again, staff training is essential in order to create an environment that instills this sense of belonging in the youth participants. Staff should learn how to make the youth feel comfortable and part of the program by inviting them to assist in making program decisions and modifications, such as which programs to add for the next session. It is essential for the youth to feel connected to the social institution in which they are a part, and in this case, it would be part of the after-school program.

Positive values and behavior was another theme that emerged in this study, which can be included under developing positive social norms. Some character values that the respondents indicated that they acquired through their involvement in the after-school program included respect, responsibility, and caring. Additionally, several respondents indicated that they learned social skills, such as how to make friends and work with
others. However, character traits were not emphasized in all of the after-school activities. In an ideal youth program, consistency in character development is important as the youth come to expect the same emphasis in character enhancement from program activity to program activity. Furthermore, staff training in character development is crucial because much of what the youths learn is based upon what they see their instructor modeling and emphasizing throughout the program activity.

In terms of support for efficacy and mattering, this theme was not as prevalent as the others, which was due mostly because the youth participants were not given roles to create leadership skills. As indicated by Scales and Leffert (1999), youth are empowered by social acts through which they feel valued, feel resourceful, and contribute to a larger whole. Furthermore, adults can empower youth by giving youth chances to have a voice in decisions that ultimately affect them and make them feel that they can make a difference (Scales & Leffert).

Several respondents suggested that they acquired competency in a particular skill (skill building), which led to developing a sense of self-worth and confidence. Many respondents indicated that they were able to try new things and learn new skills in the after-school program. However, the after-school activities also differed in that through some activities the youth developed a tremendous amount of skill and competency, while other activities were merely spaces with adult supervision and included no skill development. In terms of professional implications, program development is imperative for developing competency and skill building in youth. After-school coordinators should continually evaluate their programs to determine which programs should be added or
eliminated in order to make the biggest developmental impact on the youth in their after-school program.

Several youth mentioned that their relationships had improved with their families since their involvement in the after-school program. Youth participants had something to go home and talk about or show their parents, which created more interaction, interest and involvement from parents. The majority of the youth participants also stated that they gained a stronger commitment to their academics. Many of them stated that in the after-school program they improved on their homework completion, which lead to increased grades in school. Furthermore, the after-school program at both school sites were a collaborative effort between three entities: 21st Century Community Learning Centers, GEAR UP and After-School All-Stars. This allowed the after-school program to use expanded resources.

From this study, it was found that youth participants gained valuable developmental assets; however, there are still changes and improvements that can be made to the after-school program. Although this study was done on the entire after-school program, there were certain areas that needed improvement more than others. Overall, there seemed to be a lack of uniformity in the structure and instruction in the after-school program. There were some instructors that seemed to be more focused on nurturance and enhancing skills, while others provided supervision primarily.

The after-school coordinators agreed that rather than perceiving the after-school program as an extension of the school day, after-school coordinators emphasized the importance that they placed on making their after-school program fun and enjoyable for the youth participants. This is achieved through competence building, developing
positive relationships, giving youth a sense of autonomy, learning new skills, instilling a sense of achievement in the youth and stimulating the youth with new and fun program activities.

The after-school coordinators further expressed that program development, youths’ perceptions of the after-school program, and teacher burnout are all issues that need to be addressed in their after-school program. All of the after-school coordinators discussed the need for continual improvement and adjustment to the after-school program.

Program development, payroll issues, lack of qualified staff and lack of interest in the program were all issues that were brought up by the after-school coordinators. Respondents indicated that there is a constant need to evaluate and develop their after-school program in order to make improvements. The payroll system for after-school instructors also seemed to present a problem as the after-school coordinators had little control of when the checks were delivered to the after-school instructors. Several of the after-school instructors were also teachers during the school day, which presented an issue within itself, as this oftentimes lead to teacher burnout. All of the after-school coordinators felt that some youth were unwilling to try the after-school program due to the perception that I might be “boring” or “not cool”.

Teacher burnout was consistently reported as a problem by the after-school coordinators, which trickles down and affects every part of the after-school program. This may lead to a lack of qualified after-school instructors, ineffective after-school activities, or downsizing of the programs offered in the after-school program. Given the fact that there was very limited training, which was only observed to precede the
beginning of each program session and was utilized to discuss program activities and schedules, it was apparent that training was an essential need for the after-school program. Adequate training and on-going meetings between the after-school coordinators and instructors seem to be a necessary change in order for all of the after-school staff to be on the same page. At these meetings, expectations and responsibilities could be expressed, as well as discussions based on continuing program development. As suggested previously, during training sessions, after-school instructors could be trained on character traits and development as well as bullying and conflict resolution. Furthermore, the after-school staff could exchange ideas on the best practices of after-school programs, which could lead to a program that was more inclusive, and developmentally based. Program evaluation should be implemented as an element of all model programs.

This particular study provides further evidence of the importance of providing after-school programs to disadvantaged youth in high-risk environments. Adolescence is a time when youth are seeking self-identity and independence, while simultaneously overcoming the effects of poverty, racism, isolation, negative influences, and lack of parental guidance (Miller, 2003). After-school programs can provide a positive foundation for youth to grow and develop skills for their future.

This study found that although the after-school program provided positive developmental assets to youth, there is much of room for growth and improvement in order to make it a stronger and more successful program. Overall, there seems to be a lack of uniformity and consistency from program activity to program activity, and
although each is unique in what it offers to the youth, a certain amount of structure and consistency is needed to have a universal impact on the youth.

Limitations

There were a few limitations in this study. One limitation was that the participants in this study were selected by after-school coordinators and myself, which might introduce some potential biases due to our involvement with the after-school program. The fact that I was working with the After-School All-Stars during the time of this study presents some potential bias, however, I remained aware of these potential biases and attempted to remain as neutral as possible. Furthermore, the sampling process may also be perceived as a limitation because the youth participants were not randomly selected. However, I established the sample selection criteria to make the youth sample as representative as possible. The sample selection criteria included introverted/extroverted, high competence/low competence, high compliance/low compliance, boy/girl, and race/ethnicity. I did this to assure that different perspectives of youths’ experiences with the after-school program were portrayed. Furthermore, the program participants were young and their reflective and expressive abilities were somewhat limited.

Generalizability

This study was not conducted to provide generalizability for after-school programs. Furthermore, this study was designed as a case study which is an “exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell,
1998, p. 61). This particular study was focused on a sociological disciplinary orientation of the culture of after-school programs in two middle schools.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The promise of the positive impact and influence of after-school programs on youth is clear, but obviously there is a need for further research, particularly focusing on youths’ perspectives and experiences and their involvement in after-school programs. The research that consistently shows that there are direct benefits to after-school programs should compel schools and community service-based organizations to conduct more research that further delineates these benefits and outcomes in order to justify funding and continuation of these after-school programs. Parental input regarding their perceptions of the developmental impact for youth may be another source of information to include for research. Additionally, given the benefits of after-school programs, it would seem logical to create a study that would seek to understand the youth that are not involved in the after-school program and chose not to be a part of the after-school experience.

The importance of this topic is relevant to the both the future of our children and the service-based organizations that provide the essential service of after-school programs to today’s youth. It is imperative that scholars and educators continue to develop an awareness of the influence and importance of after-school programs on the youth in our society. In order to prevent today’s youth from engaging in risk behaviors, there must be alternative positive choices in place to keep them engaged and constantly developing and improving their self-perceptions and self-efficacy. If society does not provide positive alternatives to our youth, then how can we expect them to make good choices during their
out-of-school time? Nonetheless, it is important to note that it is not the responsibility of
after-school programs to compensate for American society’s neglect of urban, minority
youth. These programs can, however, fill a void in the lack of resources and become a
safe space in which youth can consider their options and their potential future. Today’s
youth need choices, alternatives, positive environments, and engaging activities to keep
them on the right path. It would be ideal for every predominantly “at-risk” inner-city
school to provide after-school programs to their youth, but until we create awareness and
reiterate the importance and absolute need of these programs this aspiration will be
relatively unreachable. Youth development and safety is critical today and it is obvious
from this literature that the absence of these programs could be detrimental to inner-city
youth.
NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:
Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.

DATE: January 20, 2006
TO: Dr. Cynthia Carruthers, Sport & Leisure Studies
FROM: Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
RE: Notification of IRB Action
Protocol Title: Examining the Influence and Developmental Impact of After-School/Out-of-School Programs on Youths from High Risk Environments in Las Vegas
Protocol #: 0511-1810

This memorandum is notification that the project referenced above has been reviewed by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45CFR46. The protocol has been reviewed and approved.

The protocol is approved for a period of one year from the date of IRB approval. The expiration date of this protocol is December 8, 2006. Work on the project may begin as soon as you receive written notification from the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS).

PLEASE NOTE:
Attached to this approval notice is the official Informed Consent/Assent (IC/IA) Form for this study. The IC/IA contains an official approval stamp. Only copies of this official IC/IA form may be used when obtaining consent. Please keep the original for your records.

Should there be any change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a Modification Form through OPRS. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved by the IRB.

Should the use of human subjects described in this protocol continue beyond December 8, 2006, it would be necessary to submit a Continuing Review Request Form 60 days before the expiration date.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at OPRSHumanSubjects@ccmail.nevada.edu or call 895-2794.
APPENDIX II

Interview Questions for Youths in After-School Programs

1. How long have you been coming to the after-school program?
2. Describe a typical day in your after-school program.
3. Which after-school programs do you go to each week? Describe the academic and enrichment programs that you participate in.
4. Why do you come to your after-school program?
5. What would you be doing if you were not involved with after-school programs?
6. What is it about your after-school programs that you like the most?
7. What are the most important things that you have gotten out of your after-school program?
8. If you could change anything about the after-school program, what would it be and why?
9. Who do you learn the most from during your after-school program?
10. What do you learn from him or her?
11. Why do kids stop coming to your after-school program?
12. How have you changed as a result of the after-school program?
13. How has the after-school program impacted the way that you feel about yourself?
14. What have you learned in your after-school program that will help you be better with other people?
15. How has the after-school program given you any skills or information that you can use in the future?
16. Have you learned any skills that will help you make a better life for yourself?
17. What have you learned from your after-school programs about (rank cards and explain):
   School
   Trying new things
   Getting along with others
   Safety
   Responsibility
   Self-esteem/self-worth
   Skills to use in my free time
APPENDIX III

Interview Questions for After-School Coordinators

1. How long have you been involved with the after-school program at this site?
2. Tell me about your after-school program.
3. Why did you choose to become involved with your after-school program?
4. What is it like to be an after-school coordinator?
5. Describe your leadership style. Why do you think that is an effective style to utilize with kids?
6. How is your after-school program different than other youth programs that are available to these kids?
7. What do you think the kids get out of coming to the after-school program?
8. What are the most important things that your after-school program provides? Why do you consider these things to be important?
9. How do you think after-school programs affect the children’s behavior or academic performance during school time?
10. Why do kids come to this after-school program? Why do they stop coming?
11. What does your after-school program do for families and the community? Please describe.
12. Have you noticed changes in any kids as a result of the after-school programs? Please describe.
13. Do you think that your after-school program impacts the way that kids feel about themselves?
14. Do you think the kids have learned things from your after-school program that will help them be better with other people?
15. Do you think the after-school program has given the kids any skills or information that they could use in the future?
16. Do you think the kids learn any skills that will help them make a better life for themselves?
17. If you could change anything about the after-school program, what would it be and why? What could make the program more successful?
APPENDIX IV

Questions for Focus Groups

A focus group is a form of research where groups of people (like this one) are asked about their attitude or experience about something. Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where you are open to speak freely and completely about behaviors, attitudes and opinions that you have. I expect an open, polite and orderly environment where everyone in the group can participate in the discussion if they would like to. I will be tossing out questions to the full group, which can be answered by anyone, but please raise your hands and I will call on you.

Remember I had asked all of you to draw me a picture of “What the After-Hours Program does for you” or your experience in the After-Hours Program. Well today I am going to ask you some questions about that and your drawings that you created.

1. First, I would like all of us to go around the circle and tell us your name and present your poster to everyone. Tell us and show us what you drew on yours poster and why you drew what you did.
2. Did anyone notice any similarities or differences between their drawing and someone else’s?
3. During our individual interviews, many of you had mentioned that your reason for coming to After-Hours was because it was fun. Can some of you talk to me about that and why you find this after-school program fun?
4. Also, during our individual interviews, safety seemed to be an important thing that you get out of the After-Hours program. Let’s talk about that a little bit.
   a. By show of hands, does the After-Hours program make you feel safer?
   b. Why does it make you feel safe?
   c. What are you safe from? Bullying?
5. Some of you had mentioned some of the staff and instructors/teachers of the After-Hours program. Some of you told me that they are like family or that they taught you a lot of important things. Let’s talk about that a little bit.
   a. What do you learn from the After-Hours staff/instructors/teachers?
   b. Why do some of you treat them like family? Or why do they seem like family to you?
   c. How are they different from the teachers at school or other adults that you know?
6. From the interviews, homework help and academics seemed to be another reason for you all to come to After-Hours. Why is that? How does After-Hours help you in school?
7. In what activities do you feel more confident in because of After-Hours? Do you feel more confident or better about yourself, in general? Is so, how?
8. Many of you talked about learning new things for your future, career and having goals. Let’s talk about how and if the After-Hours program helps you with that. How has After-Hours helped you with your future goals?
9. During the interviews, I heard a number of you talk about your behavior changing since you had been involved in the After-Hours program.
   a. Can someone talk to me about how their behavior changed (if it did)?
   b. And some of you talked about how kids change their behavior when they come to After-Hours... like they might be mean to some other students during the day but are nice to these same students during After-Hours. I'm curious to know more about that, so let's discuss that a little bit.

10. Social skills and relationships with others seemed to be another thing that some of you had gotten out of the After-Hours program, so let's go into that a little bit.
   a. What types of social skills have you learned at After Hours? How have you learned to interact better with other people?
   b. How does the After-Hours program promote social skills? Or what type of social skills does it help you with?
   c. How have your relationships with other people changed after being involved in After-Hours?
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