The Four Cs of Afterschool Programming
A New Case Method for a New Field

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Executive Summary

Growing public and policy interest in the use of afterschool time has led to a need for research methods that allow investigators and stakeholders to examine and refine program models and activities. The case study method offers promise for afterschool research, but case study models must be refined in order to adequately study afterschool programming, which is characterized by collaboration among numerous stakeholders. "The Four Cs"—collaboration, communication, content, and coherence—provide one such framework. This method allows researchers who study afterschool education to respect its unique characteristics as an intermediary space that must accommodate the needs of many stakeholders and as a transitional space that serves the needs of children and youth in their various stages of development.

Few recent social movements have awakened such a strong combination of excitement and support as the reorganization of afterschool time. There is an emerging social consensus that out-of-school time plays a critical role in the health, academic growth, and overall well-being of children, so that this time must therefore be used wisely.

One major reason for the growing significance of afterschool programming is widespread public recognition that school time inhabits only a fraction of children's social, educational, and recreational lives—that children spend about 80 percent of their waking hours outside of school. Education reform, changes in welfare laws, and the growth of prevention services for youth have also played roles in creating the consensus that afterschool education belongs at the forefront of the public agenda. Leaders in education, mental health, juvenile justice, youth development, arts and culture, recreation and sports, and other fields have all made concerted efforts to promote the positive potential of the out-of-school hours—especially in our nation's cities, many of which are developing comprehensive afterschool initiatives (e.g., Noam & Miller, 2002). In recent years, public support for afterschool programming has soared, as confirmed by a 2001 survey indicating that 94 percent of U.S. voters believe children and teens should have organized activities or places to go after school that provide opportunities to learn (Afterschool Alliance, 2001). Coinciding with this increased national interest, the No Child Left Behind Act has increased congressional appropriations for federally supported, state-administered 21st Century Community Learning Centers to $1 billion (21st Century Community Learning Centers, 2002).

Public support for the expansion of afterschool programming has, however, created vigorous debate over how to use afterschool money and time most effectively. Investigators seek to define more clearly the evolving social space that is afterschool time, as well as to determine how best to focus, for research and development purposes, the organizational arrangements, communication practices, program content and delivery, and stakeholder perceptions that make up afterschool programs (see Noam & Rosenbaum Tillinger, 2004). The case study approach seems particularly well suited to the task of analyzing and clarifying the social and organizational complexities involved in afterschool settings. The case study method, unlike experimental or quasi-experimental

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methods, rarely produces definitive results, but it does offer valuable ways to enter into the complexity of human situations, develop strong hypotheses, and bridge the qualitative-quantitative schism. Case studies are also essential tools for effective teaching and training, both areas of special importance for afterschool practitioners now that the field is developing its professional base. As used in the social sciences, in the evaluation of government programs, and more recently in education, the case study approach could prove to be a powerful tool in the study of afterschool contexts.

But one must be careful in adapting existing case study approaches to a field that is defined by its collaborative character—by linkages and interconnections amongst stakeholders in a multitude of contexts. Is it possible to develop a case study approach specifically adapted to examining the collaborative features of afterschool programming? As public interest in better understanding the impact of afterschool programs grows, we believe that the case study method, appro-

priately fine-tuned to the complexities of afterschool education, will have significant impact on research, evaluation, design, and practice. In this paper, we propose a case study approach we have developed specifically for the purpose of analyzing afterschool programs. We hope this approach will prove widely useful not only for research and evaluation, but also for teaching, training, and technical assistance. This case study method centers on "the Four Cs," four areas we have concluded to be of special relevance to the success or failure of afterschool programs: *collaboration, communication, content,* and *coherence.* As a conceptual organizing device, the Four Cs allow researchers and evaluators to survey the strengths and weaknesses of particular afterschool programs in a structured way and to suggest changes that can strengthen afterschool practice. We will illustrate how the Four Cs can be used for these purposes by describing one case study we conducted in an afterschool program whose implementation was not, at the time, living up to its promise.

SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMMING

One reason we developed the Four Cs as an adaptation to case study methodology is related to two central institutional aspects of the afterschool field. Afterschool programming is:

- **Intermediary**. The afterschool setting is a space in which differing stakeholders must constantly adjust to each other's needs and demands.
- **Transitional.** Afterschool programs play a special role in youth development by providing developmentally appropriate learning opportunities.

Afterschool Programs as Intermediary Spaces

Afterschool environments, which seek to promote young people's healthy psychological, social, and educational transitions as they navigate multiple worlds, are increasingly located at the intersection of collaborating entities. Afterschool time thus represents an *intermediary* environment: a unique social space in which the purpose, goals, design, and activities do not belong to any one institution or group. Rather, each entity brings unique resources and differing frames of reference to this space in an effort to affect its functions and arrangement (Deich, 2001). Cahill (1996) explains that contributors to youth initiatives come together for common purposes, including improving educational achievement, promoting youth development, creating alternative schools and governance structures, and championing community and economic development.

At the grassroots level, families look to service providers to arrange welcoming places and motivating programming for their children after school. Parents and caregivers are also looking for programs that value their input (Deich, 2001). Meanwhile, direct service providers seek to deliver quality programming to youth while remaining responsive to the goals and needs of families, partner agencies, and funders. As front-line staff, afterschool practitioners are required to implement collaborative objectives, so they are necessarily concerned with issues that directly affect their delivery of services and programming to children. For example, in many programs, increasing stakeholder demands for homework assistance, test-readiness support, and curricular alignment have changed the kinds of experiences afterschool practitioners are able to design for youth. Meanwhile, at the school level, administrators and educators pursue a variety of linkages with families and with afterschool programs in order to improve students' scholastic achievement in compliance with federal and national standards (Crowson & Boyd, 1993; Deich, 2001; Dryfoos, 1994). Although these interests certainly overlap, stakeholder groups retain distinct foci, so that a degree of tension arises as partners pursue common goals.

In addressing the needs of a rapidly expanding field, various supporting organizations and researchers have initiated work with afterschool partnerships to develop enhanced theoretical frameworks, better information sharing and technical assistance, and stronger advocacy. These organizations enter the afterschool community to investigate, document, link, and strengthen programs in an effort to lay a solid groundwork for sustainability. At a governmental level, municipal, state, and federal agencies recognize that improved academic, social, and emotional outcomes for youth require more effectively integrated youth and family

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services. Accordingly, they bring financial and administrative resources to afterschool partnerships in an effort to shape and expand these services. At a policy level, issues of funding, structure, evaluation, and governance are of concern to stakeholders. Added to all these parties is a diversity of partnering entities centered on improving outcomes for youth in afterschool time. Potential afterschool partners include representatives from private enterprise, philanthropic interests, community- and faith-based organizations, mental health providers, law enforcement agencies, and many others. This characteristic diversity of many stakeholders has created a unique organizational and social reality for afterschool partners—one we term *intermediary space* (Noam, 2001; Noam & Rosenbaum Tillinger, 2004).

Afterschool Programs as Transitional Spaces for Youth Development

British child psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott (1975) provided creative insights into what he terms *transitional phenomena,* a concept that has influenced not only child clinical psychology and programs but also ways of conceptualizing organizational arrangements

in afterschool programs. Winnicott views transitional phenomena as holding environments that are essential for early child development. For example, the very young child develops anxiety when parents are temporarily unavailable. At that time, a "transitional object," typically a teddy bear or a blanket, plays a large role in the child's life. Winnicott views such transitional objects as part of a transitional play space, a world that is not quite reality and not quite fantasy. This world, besides allowing children to soothe themselves when separated from caregivers, also provides a safe space for learning and mastery.

Developmental theorists suggest that individuals may construct and participate in many such transitional environments throughout childhood and adolescence, and even into adulthood (Noam, 1999; Noam, Higgins, & Goethals, 1982). Pretend play spaces and dress-up corners in preschools are examples of transitional environments where young children can try on new roles, such as being "mommy or daddy" or "the scary monster" from their nightmares. In adolescence, young people require safe transitional spaces for experimentation, identity formation, crisis solving, and decision making; afterschool or extracurricular activities often serve this developmental role. For late adolescents, college represents a transitional learning and social environment in which they can experiment with and gradually assume adult roles. In the transition to the world of work, mastery is often gained through relationships with career mentors and coaches.

Winnicott's theory about transitional phenomena reveals much about the way in which afterschool programs and community collaborations create compelling developmental spaces for children and youth. Developmentally sound transitional environments take into account the fragility of human growth and the need to provide the right conditions to protect individuals in times of transition. Because these environments are *developmental,* practitioners and caregivers expect that children and youth will outgrow one transitional environment after another. Effective transitional spaces are protective and age-appropriate, taking into account the psychological, social, and educational needs of youth.

The Intersection of Intermediary and Transitional Spaces

Understanding and embracing the intermediary and transitional aspects of the afterschool environment can better position emergent afterschool alliances to iden-tify new opportunities for leadership, governance, and programming within the field, as well as to bring fresh approaches, resources, assets, and skills to the enterprise of creating effective out-of-school opportunities for families and youth. This interorganizational approach stands in contrast to the more philosophically uniform social service partnerships that have conventionally been mobilized to focus on correcting youth problems rather than on identifying proactive opportunities to promote positive youth development (Sagawa & Segal, 2000).

Though the convergence of interests focused on afterschool time presents potential for innovation in supporting youth, the multiple claims on this time also correspond to a number of competing agendas. Overrepresentation of any one agenda may threaten the integrity of afterschool time as a truly intermediary and transitional space for youth. The present climate of educational reform, for example, presents some danger that school-driven goals, with their circumscribed practices and content, can overwhelm the emergent culture of the afterschool environment. To support school-related objectives, afterschool programs are charged with providing academic assistance ranging from individual homework help to opportunities for exploration according to personal interests or strengths. Our research suggests that, in attempting to bridge school and afterschool contexts, partnerships must safeguard afterschool environments from the increasingly high-stakes atmosphere of the regular school day. The challenge is to effectively bridge school learning while protecting the afterschool environment's ability to provide differentiated developmental opportunities that build young people's competencies.

Building effective youth-serving spaces that harness the advantages of collaboration and interorganizational linkages, while satisfying the inherent range of interests, is a complex proposition. Crowson and Boyd (1993) emphasize the need for a more lucid understanding of the inner workings of interorganizational collaborations:

> Whatever the ultimate promise of community-connections experimentation, the full potential is unlikely to be realized without a better theoretical and practical understanding of the organizational, administrative, and implementation issues associated with such ventures. What conditions and governance arrangements foster or impede coordination, integration, and community connections? What incentives and disincentives operate?

What are the dynamics of interorganizational collaboration? (pp. 142–143)

As we examine afterschool programming, we must find an appropriate methodology to study the unique interorganizational characteristics and linkages of afterschool initiatives. In studying school-community collaborations, Chavkin (1998) emphasizes, "We need to go further than just finding out if school, family, and community partnerships are helping education; we also need to know how, when and which parts of the partnership are improving education" (p. 10). One of Chavkin's recommendations for bolstering the research of educational partnerships is especially appropriate for the afterschool field: the development of "multiple, detailed case studies" that furnish a "baseline of repeated measures" (p. 16). Such data would provide an essential foundation from which to develop more controlled longitudinal studies and empirically valid intervention studies. The growing demand for cases in afterschool that elucidate issues specific to the field has not yet brought about commensurate dialogue among investigators about methodological considerations in conducting case study research.

THE CASE STUDY METHOD

The case study method, which has steadily gained popularity, has been subject to many developments and refinements that have added to its effectiveness as both a research and a training tool. In the research literature, case studies are often referenced loosely within a wider discussion of qualitative methods, leaving much ambiguity about their format and application as a methodology. Merriam (1998) asserts that the general consensus among investigators is that the case study method falls within the "qualitative" division in the dichotomy between logical positivism and naturalistic inquiry. Indeed, the case study method does share some philosophical assumptions and data collection strategies with other naturalistic approaches such as ethnography and grounded theory. However, a number of researchers note that the case study method is not usefully defined through a qualitative/quantitative framework because good research case studies employ *both* data collection methods. Contributors to the case study method assert that the methodology is more usefully defined by its characteristic designs and by its analytic and evaluative purposes (Platt, 1992; Shaw, 1978; Smith, 1978; Wilson, 1979; Yin, 1993).

In order to better understand how case methodology can be applied to the study of afterschool collaborations,

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it is important to understand these defining features. According to Yin (1993, 1997), three primary characteristics define case methodology as a research strategy:

- **The case study method assumes that the phenomenon under study is influenced by a complex social and structural context.** Yin (1993) defines

the case study as "an empirical enquiry in which the number of variables exceeds the number of data points" (p. 32). In a single case study, there may be only one data point: the case itself. The case study method, therefore, necessitates development of a diverse data collection strategy that uses multiple sources of data in order to bolster the study's construct validity.

- **The case approach requires that analysis be based on consistent findings from data across multiple sources of information** (Yin, 1993; Stake, 1995). Compelling case studies obtain both qualitative and quantitative data—via observation, interviews, and document analysis—which are then triangulated to identify the most robust evidence (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997; Merriam, 1998; Milley, 1979; Yin, 1993; Yin, 1997). Triangulation is required as an analytical tool because traditional statistical analysis cannot be used given the relationship between variables and data points (e.g., Stake, 1995).

- T**he case study method relies on analytic generalizations rather than statistical generalizations** (Yin, 1997). Researchers can use a range of analytic techniques to test rival theories or to examine findings across cases. According to Yin (1997), "Developing, testing, and replicating theoretical propositions" is the core analytical work to be carried out in the case study method (p. 70).

Case Study Design

Case study researchers recognize the methodology's appropriateness for describing and probing complex settings, as well as for evaluating and providing explanations for events. In attempting to clarify case designs within the methodology, early efforts at refinement categorized case studies broadly as either descriptive or analytical/theory studies (Shaw, 1978; Wilson, 1979). To further cultivate this framework, Yin (1993, 1997) has developed a refined typology that is used widely to differentiate case study models according to three research designs: *exploratory* or pre-experimental, *descriptive* or illustrative, and *explanatory* or evaluative. Any of these three designs may be applied to single or multiple cases (Yin 1993, 1997). Yin outlines five components essential to solid case design: the research question(s), the propositions, the unit(s) of analysis, the logic linking the data to the propositions, and the criteria for interpreting the findings (1997)**.** Stake (1995) has developed a similar typology that identifies

case designs according to their purposes: instrumental case studies aim to elucidate complex issues, intrinsic case studies probe deeply to gain a rich knowledge of the case, and collective case studies attempt to investigate a phenomenon across contexts.

When case methodology is applied as an explanatory or evaluative design, investigators must develop their hypotheses with great specificity. The goal is to ensure that what is being observed is an empirical example of a theoretical construct, so that the case findings can be generalized (Eckstein, 1975; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; U.S. GAO, 1990; Yin, 1993). To define the focus and scope of a case study, investigators must also clearly determine the most effective unit of analysis. Possible units could include individuals, a curriculum, a teaching approach, a policy, or organizational links (Feigin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991; Yin, 1997).

The case study method is often used for research purposes in order to develop theoretical constructs and advance professional knowledge (Merseth, 1991; Towl, 1954; Yin, 1997). The method can also be used to build preliminary theories, as well as to test theories against best- and worst-case instances (Eckstein, 1975). In addition, the case study method has proven effective as a teaching tool in studying situations "where the truth is relative, where reality is probabilistic, and where structural relationships are contingent" (discussion participant quoted in Barnes, Christenson, & Hansen, 1994, p. 38). Ideally, the case study method provides rich material and interactive familiarity with the core content, logic, practices, approaches, and processes that are distinctive to a specific professional field (Merseth, 1991). Cases designed for training in management and administration are constructed to provide the "raw materials out of which decisions have to be reached" (Cragg, 1954, p. 7). The task of a case writer in this context is to "present the raw material of analysis—facts, events, people—so the class can figure out what went wrong, what went right, and what needs to be done" (Kennedy & Scott, 1985, p. 4). Such an evaluative approach seems to hold special promise for the study of afterschool programs.

The evaluative approach has flourished over the past decade in response to the growing need to measure the effectiveness of complex educational and social initiatives (U.S. GAO, 1990; Yin, 1997). The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) has developed and currently uses a well-defined framework, tailored to perform multifaceted program evaluations, for case

study research design, data collection and analysis, and reporting formats. GAO (1990) outlines six case study models appropriate for evaluation purposes: exploratory, illustrative, critical instance (cause-and-effect), program implementation, program effects, and meta-analysis (cumulative case study review for gener-alization purposes).

With particular reference to educational phenom-ena, researchers are increasingly tailoring case study designs to meet highly specific purposes, including analysis of effective educational innovation (Gross, Giacquinta, & Bernstein, 1971; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). Lawrence-Lightfoot's *portraiture* methodology examines exemplary leaders, programs, agencies, and organizations using data collection and fieldwork techniques borrowed from ethnographic, narrative, and phenomenological perspectives. A por-traitist's goal is to create an accurate and rich portrayal of a site (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). Concerned with the "how" and "why" of innovative organizations, portraitists draw on a host of qualitative methods and analyze multiple data sources to identify the phenomena, or "relevant dimensions," to be studied in an organization, as well as to unearth the organiza-tion's central metaphors and themes. Portraitists are primarily concerned with finding the "goodness" in effective organizations (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997).

A Case Study Methodology for Afterschool Settings

Clearly, an examination of the case study approach furnishes afterschool investigators, evaluators, policy-makers, and practitioners with innovative frameworks, strategies, and tools. Because out-of-school time is sit-uated under the rubric of educational reform, a sensi-ble approach is to select from among existing case designs and finesse them to fit the needs of afterschool education, research, and evaluation.

However, because afterschool time and space arrangements typically belong to no single organiza-tion or interest, investigators must consider carefully whether existing evaluative case designs are suited to the task. In our estimation, the range of configurations unique to afterschool education calls for new approaches to inquiry. Questions at the forefront of the methodology quandary include:
- What investigative strategy best reflects the institu-tional arrangements of transitional afterschool envi-

ronments, and how are units of analysis best selected, observed, and described?
- In what ways might afterschool researchers and evaluators harness the most effective features of existing evaluative case designs while transforming them to be responsive to the unique interorganiza-tional and contextual arrangements characteristic of this emergent field?

Many new evaluative designs have been created in response to the growth of complex federal programs over the past decade; a similar endeavor must take place in response to the growing interest in creating effective afterschool environments. Case studies of afterschool programs should focus on domains related to intermediary and transitional spaces, always keep-ing in mind that afterschool programs are distinct from any of the other institutions that serve children. Using the observational and analytic lenses developed for other social and educational organizations, such as schools, would necessarily leave out the aspects that make afterschool programs unique. All aspects of the intersecting lives of children, youth, and adults in afterschool programs are defined by the *relationship* of the different parties, the way the diverse constituencies communicate about mission and practice and about the content of curricula and activities.

Remembering that no solitary stakeholder owns the afterschool space, understanding the workings of the distinctive partnerships that characterize after-school education, and keeping in mind the transitional role of afterschool space for children are all central to boosting the effectiveness of afterschool programming. Therefore, in examining issues of resource allocation, institutional practices, and collaborative evaluation, researchers must develop specialized evaluative designs that elucidate key components of what we are viewing as the essential Four Cs—collaboration, com-munication, coherence, and content—to better inform afterschool research, policy, and practice.

THE FOUR Cs

Our research team developed the Four Cs heuristic method to focus on four essential aspects of successful programs—particularly school-based programs or community-based programs with school links—with an eye toward elucidating our definition of intermedi-ary and transitional spaces. *Collaboration* is an essential aspect of survival in a tight funding market in order to provide sufficient positive programming and adult involvement. *Communication* is a key aspect of man-

agement that takes account of the fact that afterschool education is a collaborative effort not governable by traditional fiat and authority; afterschool programs require a high level of communication among all stakeholders, including adults and youth. *Content* addresses the essential features of afterschool programming: goals, curricula, and activities. *Coherence* is crucial to the functioning of any informal, relatively non-hierarchical organization that represents a meeting ground of common interests.

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While the Four Cs are not the only possible categories for investigation (and should in no way limit the development of other case study methodologies), they are the categories that have emerged most powerfully from our theoretical, research, and training work with afterschool programs and staff. The Four Cs are not just four dimensions chosen at random from among many others; they are central pillars of good programming.

Collaboration

The first *C* includes collaborative structures, the nature of collaborative decision-making, collaborative governance, and collaborative use of resources. *Collaboration* is essentially a spirit of teamwork and integration among school and afterschool interests that translates into an agreement about mutually supportive activities and goals for students. It includes strategic partnerships to meet the social, emotional, and learning needs of students, as well as joint problem solving to confront shared challenges. Typical chal-

lenges include troubleshooting the arrangement of shared space and materials or interpreting school-day curriculum to guide afterschool activities.

Collaboration implies that all parties participate in planning and share power, so that all contributors have a "seat at the table."

Communication

Communication refers to exchange of information among school, afterschool, and community-based personnel, leading to informed understanding of each other's activities. It includes reciprocal outreach activities between the school and the afterschool program, regular shared meetings, joint workshops and professional development, and, preferably, some involvement of the afterschool staff in the school day.

Communication should occur early and often in bridging partnerships in order to sort out inevitable conflicts around goals and practices. Even if a program is unified and run by only one organization, an enormous amount of communication is necessary given that afterschool programs by definition serve multiple stakeholders. Communication between adult leaders and youth participants is also part of this category.

Content

Content refers to the learning and recreational goals of a program and the activities designed to meet those goals. Is the program primarily focused on school outcomes, so that it uses a school-based curriculum and focuses heavily on homework? Or does the program aspire to youth development outcomes, focusing primarily on sports, arts, or recreation? How are various interests, such as parental interest in the completion of homework, reflected in the program's use of time and types of activities?

Coherence

Coherence refers to how primary stakeholders, including students and staff members, experience the relationship of the school and afterschool day. Do both subscribe to a unified mission and vision? Coherence does not imply that the school and afterschool day should be identical in organization or practice, but rather that they should be mutually supportive and harmonizing.

Coherence is the product of good communication and collaboration. Experiencing coherence across the entire day is especially important for youth who must navigate several linguistic and cultural worlds.

A FOUR Cs CASE STUDY OF BRIDGING IN AN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM

Our case study of a pilot afterschool program at what we will call the Forsyth School addresses the ways in which various stakeholders engaged in planning and then applied theory to practice in the early phases of the program. This case provides an example of a collaborative project that lost its role as a true intermediary space to become a school-controlled and school-extending program. In the process, as one might expect, the program also lost some of its strength as a transitional space for the children involved, since the intermediary and transitional aspects of the afterschool setting are tightly bound together. Though our case analysis will focus on problems of collaboration, the effect of the breakdown of intermediary space in this instance was to make the afterschool program much less relevant than it might have been to the developmental needs of the children involved.

Research Design

We were hired not to conduct an evaluative study of the Forsyth afterschool pilot but rather to analyze what worked and did not work and to explore why many stakeholders in the community became discontented with the program's mission, performance, and management. The method chosen for the Four Cs case study we conducted in 2002–2003 combined participant observation, quantitative data collection and document analysis, and in-depth interviews. This multi-method approach helped us triangulate the data and gain confidence in the data points. Though this precise method of data collection is not necessary to a Four Cs analysis, such a method does help to anchor the analysis in detailed facts and observation. In line with the "grounded theory" approach, the study helped us to evolve the Four Cs as categories to make sense of the data.

A Context of Municipal Involvement in Program Development and Implementation

The Forsyth afterschool pilot program[1], developed in a mid-sized Western city, had already received much attention by the time we entered the scene as investigators. We soon recognized that were we observing not only the workings of this single pilot program, but also a broader landscape of competing community interests and dynamics. We saw that the unfolding controversy surrounding this program pointed to familiar civic issues including fair distribution of resources across programs and neighborhoods, com-

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peting philosophies of school-based versus community-based programming, and debate surrounding program effectiveness and evaluation. Although our study centered on one school and one program, it was simultaneously creating an agenda for dialogue about the common issues confronting school-based afterschool programs throughout the area. Central to this discussion was the question of how to develop a program that could, as many stakeholders expected, become a model for other afterschool programs.

The Forsyth afterschool pilot program had received much attention in its host city because it was at the heart of municipal policy debate about how best to organize out-of-school time. The municipal leadership had granted the pilot a substantial budget to create a model program for replication throughout the city. The municipality wanted to evaluate the program

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to ensure that the money was well spent, that the program maintained a strong community reputation, that clients were satisfied (meaning that parents appreciated the program and that children wanted to attend), and that cooperative and productive partnerships were established between school and afterschool staff. The program was a focal point for evaluation because it was designed to align with one of the city's key priorities: providing families with equal access to safe, stimulating, nurturing, and beneficial afterschool activities. With a successful pilot model, the city would be in a position to expand the model to include more afterschool programs.

The Forsyth School

The Forsyth student body was both ethnically and linguistically diverse; the school hosted a municipally supported Spanish-English immersion program for grades K–8. Many of Forsyth's students were of low socioeconomic status; 77 percent were eligible for free school lunch in 2000–01. In grades K–5, 65 percent of students had been designated as having special needs, as compared with 47 percent district-wide. The Forsyth School stated its core values to be academic focus, mutual respect, a positive and safe environment,

and critical thinking. A new curriculum, whose aim was to establish rigorous learning standards across diverse classrooms, was used for the first time in 2001–02. The leadership at Forsyth was invested in ensuring that the afterschool program supported students' scholastic achievement because of the school's enduring record of academic underperformance.

The Forsyth Afterschool Pilot Program

The Forsyth afterschool pilot program opened its doors in 2000 to serve children in grades K–8. Initially, 145 students were enrolled in the program. During the 2001–02 academic year, 100 to 120 students participated at various points throughout the year. The program enrolled a high proportion of special-needs students.

This pilot, designed to help bridge students' school and afterschool experiences, was initiated in response to the recommendations of an outside consultant. Accordingly, a task force including representatives from various municipal departments was formed to focus on increasing coordination between schools and afterschool programs. The task force guided the model's eventual design but was not actively involved in implementation. It is not clear that the task force was able to secure adequate buy-in from outside stakeholders and from those who would ultimately implement the model.

During the planning process, leadership from the public school department worked collaboratively with other departments, such as human services, and with other organizations, including youth-serving institutions, to develop the Forsyth afterschool pilot structures. Our meetings with leaders from these and other city departments revealed a collective interest in engineering the program to be as effective as possible so that it could fulfill its potential to serve as a prototype for the city and beyond. The city appointed a municipal coordinator specifically focused on afterschool organization. This appointment was a sign not only of the city's desire to work closely with the pilot program to shape students' out-of-school time, but also of its broader interest in leading the creation of an afterschool delivery model.

The municipal leadership needed the Forsyth afterschool program model to be clarified, evaluated, and improved in order to justify its comparatively liberal budget allocation. The per-pupil allocation was $4,200, more than twice that allotted to most afterschool programs nationwide (McKinsey & Co, 2001).

Our examination of the budget revealed that most of the funds were, appropriately, allocated to personnel: reasonable salaries for the director (called "teacher-in-charge") and the program assistant, as well as competitive salaries with benefits for the afterschool teachers. The teachers' backgrounds were varied: Some had college degrees or had taken college courses, some had experience working in schools, and some came from the youth development field, while for others this was their first job. The afterschool teachers were employed full time, assisting in the classroom during the school day and then helping students make the transition to the afterschool program. The program also offered a modest stipend for school-day teachers who were paired as mentors with afterschool staff. Other expenses included such standard costs as transportation, snacks, books, games, and supplies.

Program Mission and Vision

Despite agreement on the need for a coordinated afterschool program, a good deal of discussion arose among community groups, municipal leadership, and stakeholders in the school itself about the program's mission and how this mission should translate into practice. The primary tension involved disagreement on whether the program emphasis should be primarily academic—focused on raising test scores and providing homework supervision—or enrichment—targeting students' individual interests and providing kinesthetic and arts programming. Forsyth afterschool teachers and administrators, as well as those involved in the planning process, agreed that the program should feature a mixture of academics and enrichment. However, some felt this mix should be achieved through project-based learning; others believed the school curriculum should guide their work; still others were convinced the program should provide a great deal of unstructured time for children to engage in free play.

In a carefully considered planning process, the task force ultimately designed a well-rounded program that incorporated academic, socio-emotional, aesthetic, and kinesthetic learning elements. The pilot, however, appeared to be implemented hastily, so that this conscientiously designed balance was impaired. Decisions about management and structure were made without task force oversight and without open dialogue and consensus building among those responsible for implementing the program. The role of the task force did not extend past the planning phase, and adequate oversight and feedback mechanisms were not estab-

lished. Because school teachers and afterschool teachers had expressed a broad range of developmental priorities during the planning process, they appeared confused about the program's mission.

The decision about who should lead the afterschool program was left to the Forsyth school principal. In light of the school's academic performance, we were not surprised to see that the principal had chosen a leader who was philosophically rooted in school-based learning and who essentially managed the program as a direct extension of the school day. Staff members' titles were symbolic of the priority the school leadership placed on school-based practices and purposes, as opposed to youth enrichment goals or unstructured play. The leader initially held the title of "vice-principal," which was subsequently changed to "teacher-in-charge." Line staff were called afterschool "teachers" rather than "practitioners" or "specialists."

Thus, the Forsyth afterschool program began with a homework and academic orientation, mimicking the structure and management of the school day. This bias did not go uncontested. One school committee member noted that there were "too many kids sitting in seats" during this preliminary phase. "If they are going to do so much sitting," she said, "let's see test scores go up!" Since its preliminary incarnation, the program has gradually moved toward including more creative enrichment activities. Front-line afterschool teachers, who expressed interest in leading enrichment projects, have completed several such projects over the past year.

Many programs that juggle complex collaborative arrangements and multiple stakeholders grapple with tension arising from competing aims. Inevitably, school departments take a perspective on the goals of afterschool programming that is different from those of youth service programs or arts institutions, while municipal interests maintain a standpoint unique to their own goals. At the Forsyth School, regular day and afterschool leadership experienced difficulty in circulating and communicating vision and mission statements and in developing a set of benchmarks by which staff could monitor outcomes.

A Bridging Model

While the Forsyth afterschool model was only one example of the city's school-based afterschool initiatives, it was distinctive by design. It was specifically intended to bridge children's school and afterschool experience through cooperative partnerships and structures. The innovation of the model was that it

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involved afterschool staff members in the regular school day and designated classroom teachers to serve as afterschool mentors.

Municipal leadership implemented this ambitious initiative with the objective of supporting students' school activities while extending the learning day in a coherent, academically strong, and child-centered way. In the planning phase, the intent of this deliberate staff integration was to ensure that children's afterschool experiences were specifically aligned with, but did not replicate, learning during the school day. For this reason, afterschool staff members were integrated into school activities primarily by participating in classrooms for several hours per week and by attending school cluster meetings along with day teachers. To support coordination, designated day teachers functioned as mentors to afterschool staff. Afterschool teachers were allotted three hours each day for planning, meetings, classroom support, and other bridging activities to support the linking objectives.

The Forsyth afterschool program had access to the school's facilities: six classrooms, the gymnasium, and other common spaces in the school. The Forsyth

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School was also fortunate to be situated in a community with a newly renovated youth center, a swimming pool, numerous playing fields, and a public library—all just steps away from the school building. Personnel from the youth center and branch library expressed to us a desire to share resources with the afterschool program and to collaborate on programming efforts. The wider surrounding community also featured many museums, parks, and other cultural and recreational resources for children.

The structural and philosophical issues the Forsyth program faced reflect the difficulties confronting programs across the city and nationwide as they attempt to bridge the school day with afterschool programming. The Forsyth afterschool program exhib-

ited potential, pushing the boundaries of what bridging programs can offer. The professional role of "afterschool teacher" positioned afterschool personnel in school classrooms to create a bridge between the school and afterschool day. This approach held many potential benefits, such as creating stronger collaboration and coherence between the school day agenda and the afterschool program, increasing communication with parents, and creating opportunities to build supportive relationships with students and families in multiple contexts. It also allowed the program to attract and retain dedicated candidates by offering full-time jobs. Actual practice in the Forsyth afterschool program, however, trailed program potential by a considerable margin. The controversy surrounding the program, especially in regard to its mission and budget, contributed to uncertainty among program staff and to tentativeness in program development and delivery. Qualitative changes in program structures, content and practices, and communication processes needed to occur to make the program as effective as it was designed to be.

A Day in the Life of a Forsyth Afterschool Student

It's after 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and Ana Prado[2] is finishing the school day in Mrs. Sanders's third-grade classroom at the Forsyth School. When the bell rings, Ana and a few other afterschool classmates wait for Mrs. Sanders to walk them to the cafeteria. Once there, Ana quickly spots her afterschool teacher, Mr. Miller, and some of her afterschool classmates. She makes her way through the tables filled with children from other afterschool classes and immediately jumps into conversation with her friends. Mrs. Sanders checks in with Mr. Miller, telling him about one of Ana's classmates who had had a hard time in class that afternoon. They quickly touch base about the other students in the afterschool program and then confirm that Mr. Miller will, as usual, spend his regular weekly times assisting in Mrs. Sanders' classroom. Both Mr. Miller and Mrs. Sanders know that regular check-ins are important in building clear communication about their respective roles in the afterschool model; they feel they have come a long way since the program began.

As Mrs. Sanders says goodbye, Astrud, the assistant afterschool teacher, arrives and oversees Ana's table while Mike, another staff member, goes to pick up trays of snacks for the class. Ana, happy to see Astrud, greets her immediately. Ana counts on Astrud's homework help because, like Ana, Astrud speaks both Spanish and English. Since her family immigrated from Ecuador three years ago, Ana has been trying hard in her bilingual classroom, but she still has challenges with reading and writing. Ana's parents both speak some English, but because they work long hours and are far from fluent, they are often unable to help her translate and complete her schoolwork. For Ana's parents, the Forsyth afterschool program provides her with a safe place to get her homework done and to develop new interests and skills. They see Astrud as a valuable link to Ana's teachers and to her schoolwork.

After everyone has finished snack, Mr. Miller gathers the attention of the group with a rhythmic clapping, which signals to the group that the time has come to move to their afterschool classroom. Soon the whole group joins in the clapping and starts forming a line to walk to class. On the way to class, Claude, one of Ana's classmates, lags behind and starts jumping up and down. Mr. Miller tells him to get back in line; when Claude does not obey, Mr. Miller takes five minutes off his free play time that afternoon. Ana wishes Claude and a few others who misbehave would just pay attention to Mr. Miller, because the whole class ends up with less time for fun activities when the teacher spends so much time talking to a few difficult students. She also knows that if they keep misbehaving, they could be suspended from both school and the afterschool program, and she wonders why they don't seem to be scared of getting in trouble.

Once in the classroom, Ana and the others take their assigned seats while Mr. Miller stands in front of the class. He begins by giving each student a chance to say how he or she is feeling and what he or she plans to do at home that evening. Ana likes to tell Mr. Miller about herself because he really seems to care. After the activity, Mr. Miller pulls out an easel showing math problems at the level most of the students have been doing in their day classes. The class spends about 30 minutes taking turns filling in the blanks in front of the class. Ana gets her math problem right and feels bad for her classmates who struggle, but she is glad the other students are nice and do not tease. Mr. Miller is glad that nearly all of the students participate willingly in the exercises. He takes daily planning time to develop activities that have at least some link to the third grade curriculum. He senses that his class activities are supposed to be even more linked to the school day but does not see clearly how to make that happen. Having observed how the day teachers instruct, he uses their approaches as his model for now.

After the math exercise, the class settles in for 45 minutes of homework time. Ana knows today's work will be hard, because she has a lot of reading and writing to do. She begins her homework but is distracted by Claude and his friends, who are talking loudly and moving around the room. Mr. Miller and Astrud give them warnings and further restrict their free time. Eventually, Ana makes it through most of her homework, with Astrud's help, and the class breaks for free play time, Ana's favorite part of the day. Once they move to the gym, Ana and her classmates have 20 minutes to run around, play kickball with Mr. Miller, and shoot baskets.

They return to the classroom for a second snack accompanied by announcements from Mr. Miller. He reminds the group of the upcoming roller-skating field trip. Then he tells them that on Friday they will start, with two other afterschool classes, a special enrichment unit on African drumming led by one of the other afterschool teachers. Ana and her classmates are excited; shrieks and giggles erupt as they continue to

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talk. The whole class loves field trips, and most like the idea of drumming with the other classes. A few students ask Mr. Miller when they are going to visit the neighborhood youth center and the children's museum, as they had discussed. Mr. Miller tells the class he is working on it, but he feels frustrated because it has taken longer than expected for the afterschool teachers to access the funds that would make field trips and enrichment activities possible. He has learned about project-based and experiential learning in his college classes and is eager to give his students such opportunities. His supervisor, the teacher-in-charge, has said the money is coming, but Mr. Miller nevertheless decides to bring it up again, more urgently, at the weekly afterschool staff meeting.

At 4:25, Mr. Miller asks the group to get ready for choice time. Most days, choice time ends up being

more homework time for Ana because she takes longer than her classmates, but today she really wants to join her friends in finishing a puzzle of the United States. Mr. Miller and Astrud remind Ana of her homework, and she insists she will do it later. A few minutes into choice time, about six of the students are picked up by their parents at early dismissal. Ana watches the parents come in to greet Mr. Miller, ask questions, and sign out their children.

After a while, Astrud asks Ana to join her with a small group of students who are still doing homework. Ana knows she had better complete her work or else her parents will be angry with her. She grudgingly gives up the puzzle and sits down to finish her homework. It is quieter now that some of her classmates have gone home, so, while Mr. Miller helps other students and works on his plans for tomorrow, Ana has time to get all of her work done. Ana's father, Mr. Prado, arrives to take her home at about 6:00 and tries, haltingly, to communicate in English with Mr. Miller. Astrud jumps in to translate and reminds Mr. Prado that the program will be having a parents' night in two weeks. Mr. Miller asks Astrud to tell Ana's father that she did a great job in class on the math board, and Ana smiles shyly while her father pats her on the back. Ana seems to feel tired and happy; she says she has had a good day at the Forsyth afterschool program.

A Four Cs Analysis

The Forsyth afterschool program had an excellent beginning. It was conceived as a model project boasting generous funding and an engaged, collaborative group of community and political leaders. It was poised to forge community consensus, increase academic success, support working families, and provide enriched and playful time for children. These goals were to be pursued by a full-time staff with benefits. Yet something was fundamentally flawed, and a great potential was transformed into a mediocre reality. As Ana's experience shows, the Forysth afterschool program became a second-rate program that offered limited enrichment and creativity, instead importing many of the rules and rituals of the school day, such as sitting at assigned desks and filling out worksheets. Ana benefited from having a safe place to go after school where she could complete her homework and extend school learning, but she was a pressured little girl, anxious to please and to conform to unreasonable expectations. Parental expectations, school-like activities, and a somewhat punitive environment made for a mixed experience—though, interest-

ingly, parents and youth were relatively satisfied with the program and remained loyal to it. However, dissatisfaction was rampant at the political level, increases in test scores remained elusive, and staff were strongly discontented. Lack of support for the original agenda and its implementation led to gathering opposition outside the school and cast a shadow over future funding. The Four Cs framework will help us develop a picture of what went wrong with this model afterschool program.

Collaboration

The Forsyth afterschool pilot program lived out two incompatible realities. On the school level, it was not really an intermediary space bringing together a number of major stakeholders, but rather a school-dominated program whose goal was to extend the learning of the school day. This reality led to a set of strategic decisions about mission, practices, and language that did not reflect the realities and expectations outside the school, or even the deeper needs for collaboration within the school. Funding was distributed by the school departments, the leadership staff was on the school department's payroll, and the person leading the program, who was philosophically rooted in the school-based learning tradition, was viewed as a lead teacher or vice-principal.

On the other hand, external stakeholders placed high expectations on the program; its generous level of funding called for something other than one more school-based afterschool program. Strong forces in the community and municipality wanted the program to provide opportunities for children to engage in creative, nonacademic play and exploration. Many of these voices also wanted some of the funding to go to community organizations to enhance their ability to go into schools and support children in the afterschool time.

Internally, lack of collaboration took a subtler form: The afterschool teachers did not typically work closely with the classroom teachers, even though they spent a great deal of time in their classrooms and emulated their teaching methods in the afternoon. With a few exceptions, day teachers did not have input in afterschool programming, nor did the daytime classroom climate change because of the presence of the afterschool teachers.

Interestingly, the collaborative effort was strongest in the initial planning stage, when the program was being conceptualized at the city level. But due to budget-cycle considerations, the program began before it was ready and before true partnership agreements could be established. There was no steering committee to continue the good work, nor were there any agreed-upon ways to work together within the program. The basic problem was there from very early in the process: The mandate was to bring multiple parties together, and the various political forces demanded collaboration, yet no collaborative mechanisms were established by the funders and the city. This lack made a real focus on the original goals impossible. Because the program was located in a school, implementation was defined as extending the philosophy and the parameters of the school. In the process, the program missed chances to collaborate with the community, despite the fact that many community programs, libraries, and museums were in close proximity to the school, and, ironically, despite the fact that many of the main parties in the school department had declared themselves in principle open to collaboration.

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This basic misunderstanding of the nature of the collaborative process had even more significance in this case because the afterschool teachers, in contrast to all other personnel, were funded and hired by the city rather than by the school department. Thus, nonalignment of the different parties involved played itself out at every level of the program. Until these collaborative understandings, and the related power and decision-making issues, were revisited and resolved, the program could not prosper—and stood at risk of losing its support.

Communication

Afterschool programs inhabit a space in which no party is able to exert total control, in which forging a mission out of disparate parts is essential, and in which significant compromise is a daily requirement. Processes that are typically participatory rather than hierarchical—though hierarchies do, of course, exist in afterschool programs—put a premium on communication at all levels: among funders, leadership, program staff, parents, students, and other stakeholders.

At the Forsyth afterschool program, despite the fact that the planning process was marked by plenty of communication and a hopeful spirit, the actual day-to-day functioning of the program was marked by sporadic communication that was rarely effective. Once

the program was established, many critical decisions were made behind closed doors. Hiring the director, for example, was not a joint project; the school principal reassigned a school administrator who had little expertise in afterschool education. Working out communication between school teachers and afterschool teachers was left to each individual partnership. It was the exceptional pair who took the time to communicate, define goals, and work closely together. A lack of clear role definition was primarily responsible for the squandering of so much potential at all levels.

In other aspects of the program, results were mixed. There were pockets of positive communication among children and between afterschool teachers and youth. Though communication between the afterschool staff and students was good, it lacked warmth and ease. The role definition that gave professional status to the staff detracted from the informality of communication and relationships that is one of the hallmarks of great afterschool programs. Our observation notes convey the impression that children like Ana were left to interpret many practices without much help from adults. Rules and norms, rather than being set in communica-

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tion with all partners—including the kids—were handed down by teachers. Meanwhile, communication between parents and staff, though respectful, was minimal. Parental involvement was not encouraged. Communication between the afterschool director and the staff, not unexpectedly, broke down after many unresolved issues—such as Mr. Miller's desire for funding for a museum trip—had accumulated over time.

Content
Since the Forsyth afterschool program was based in the school and linked to the school day, it offered a great opportunity to align learning content and practices. Some in the community resented this content continuity, wanting the afterschool program to be fun, playful, and nonacademic. No matter how strong the program might become, those voices would have rejected an academic focus. But there were others who thought

that an afterschool program at this funding level could become a hothouse of creativity in which school standards could be pursued using non-school methods. According to this vision, learning would transcend desks and blackboards to become exploratory, experiential, and entertaining. Finally, yet others were willing to tolerate turning afterschool time into an adjunct of the classroom so long as test scores and grades were boosted significantly. The fact that the program ended up extending the school day without resulting in significant gains for the children led to demands from these stakeholders to change the program's content.

There is nothing wrong, in general, with strong content continuity between the school day and the afterschool hours. Afterschool programs have a democratizing function: In supporting all children to do well, they can help reduce the achievement gap. One innovative feature of the Forsyth program was the inclusion of afterschool staff in the school day; afterschool teachers had the opportunity to better understand how children learn by working with day teachers. The focus on homework help, besides responding to a typical demand of parents and children, also supported continuity of content.

However, one major dimension of best practice was missing: a recognition of the uniqueness of afterschool learning. While some content can, and often should, be aligned with school standards and learning goals, the ways to learn practiced in afterschool programs should feel distinct to children. Afterschool learning should be experience-rich, including many different kinds of expression for different learners: movement, art, music, sports, and so on. Homework assistance should be given in a relaxed way, making a hard chore as comfortable as possible. In fact, in general the Forsyth afterschool teachers needed to relax a little; unfortunately, the very definition of their roles as non-certified teachers without the full status of classroom teachers made them aspire all the more to practices that should not have been imported into the afterschool hours. The afterschool teachers did want to create project-based activities; our case notes show that they could not fulfill this desire because their communication with the director did not lead to results. However, even without much support, the afterschool teachers did develop pedagogical strategies that were in line with good afterschool practices, facilitating such activities as fashion shows, dance, and theater productions. The spirit of good afterschool programming lives, even in settings that do not succeed in creating innovative learning environments.

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Coherence

Admittedly, this program exhibited a high level of coherence between the school and the afterschool program, as well as in staff overlap and use of space. The program did not have the "turf battles" over use of space that afflict so many school-based afterschool programs. But there is more to coherence in intermediary spaces than simple continuity, as the Forsyth afterschool program can teach us.

Coherence is partly a product of successful collaboration; it cannot come from the school alone when the program is funded and supported by a wider constituency and when the planning process asks for a recognized difference between the school day and the afterschool hours. The coherence of the Forsyth program needed to come from all stakeholders, and too many of them were unhappy with what they saw as a lack of purpose. These stakeholders wanted afterschool time to be a space where recreation, homework, and experimentation were brought together in an informal setting. We heard many times from many different stakeholders that the sight of children sitting at desks following external rules epitomized everything that was wrong with the program.

Thus, different stakeholders defined coherence in different ways. For the school, it meant to create an afterschool environment that truly extended the school day. For many others, coherence meant the creation of a different kind of space that included the school and some of its practices, but in a larger, more open setting where new principles were applied. The differences in definition of what a coherent program would look like led to a great deal of criticism and counter-criticism, and finally to less overall cohesion for the program. Clearly, the teachers and principal also wanted new and enriching experiences for their children.

Advocates for a different, more playful environment also knew that parents wanted their children to do homework and get help to succeed academically. But the lack of collaboration, communication, and creative content alignment made the creation of a coherent philosophy and reality for the program impossible.

Results of the Four Cs Case Study

The follow-up of our work with the Forsyth afterschool program has so far been very positive; it shows that intermediary spaces can change even after long periods of trouble or stagnation. Changing afterschool program is actually easier than changing schools or other institutions, because afterschool programs are more informal and because staff turnover allows for annual reflections on how to develop new practices and procedures with new personnel.

Based on our analysis and recommendations, which revolved around the issues we have defined as the Four Cs, partners have already made many important changes. A steering committee was formed that included parents; funders developed joint expectations and agreed to a set of benchmarks. New leadership in the school hired a new director, and new role definitions were introduced. The afterschool staff no longer regard themselves as "teachers," and their role as facilitators and mentors for the children have been highlighted. Project-based learning has become the central teaching method, with a sharp increase in free play and choice time. By accepting the intermediary and transitional nature of afterschool settings and by making changes in all four of our afterschool Cs, the directors of the Forsyth program have made it more interesting, more effective, and more enjoyable for adults and children, in the process creating a stronger alignment around the core philosophy of afterschool learning as distinct from—though connected

to—the school day. *Collaboration, communication, content,* and *coherence* are all quite different today, as the Forsyth program transforms itself.

Afterschool programs can thrive only if stakeholders understand their special contributions rather than trying to make them into mirror images of the school experience. The special nature of this new social space requires researchers to develop new case study methods so they can both learn and teach a new generation of professionals and volunteers. By focusing case stud-

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ies on core elements of success or failure in afterschool programming—such our Four Cs—researchers can help practitioners create more productive outcomes for children, families, communities, and society as a whole. Program staff can also use this flexible framework for self-assessment and to clarify the mission and vision of their program.

Few social arenas provide us with the opportunity to define a field in the historic moment of its emergence, even as good research is evolving and productive training opportunities are being introduced. The evolving field of afterschool education requires us all to envision a new space for learning and development and to create theoretical tools that allow us to enhance that space with best practices.

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NOTES

[1] Some inessential details, including names, have been changed to protect the anonymity of the program.

[2] This vignette describes an actual afternoon, as recorded in our observation notes.