Afterschool Matters

table of contents

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Colleagues,

The Robert Bowne Foundation is pleased to present the sixth issue of *Afterschool Matters.* What is most exciting to me about this issue of our annual journal is that it presents fruits from another RBF project, our Research Fellowships. Two of the five articles in this journal were submitted by RBF Research Fellows: Susan Matloff-Nieves conducted research on the practice of hiring participants as staff in after-school programs, while Jon Gilgoff studied an empowerment program for young inner-city males of color. In both cases, and among RBF Research Fellows generally, the writers have conducted participatory research in their own programs.

When we initiated the RBF Research Fellowships four years ago, the outcome we hoped for is exactly what we are seeing in this issue of *Afterschool Matters.* Our goal was to address the need for more research in our developing field by nurturing writers and researchers from among the ranks of afterschool program staff. Members of the academic community have built-in incentives and support for research and publication. We hoped to provide a parallel structure for program staff because we know that people working "on the front line" are continually developing new ideas that deserve to be disseminated throughout the afterschool field.

RBF Research Fellows receive a small stipend for their participation and, more importantly, meet regularly to learn qualitative research methods, conduct site-specific research, and participate in a writing institute that helps them frame their findings for an audience of practitioners and academics. Each of the last two issues of *Afterschool Matters* has included one article by an RBF Research Fellow, but this is our first issue to include two such articles. Our research officer, Sara Hill, and I are gratified to see that our Research Fellowship program is having the desired effect: to develop a cadre of researcher-writers in the field.

I hope my excitement over the two Research Fellowship articles won't keep you from learning also from the other three articles in this issue of *Afterschool Matters,* which address some of the most crucial issues in the field of out-of-school-time education. Lily Rabinoff-Goldman leads off with an essay on her personal experience of the differences between in-school and out-of-school education—a topic that will resonate for many of us. Lanya Samuelson explores the important roles school principals play in the success of school-based afterschool programs. Finally, evaluators from ActKnowledge highlight the advantages and challenges of using focus groups with young people in afterschool evaluations. Together with the articles from our Research Fellows, these pieces add up to an issue of *Afterschool Matters* that is sure to expand your thinking and inform your practice.

LENA O. TOWNSEND
Executive Director
The Robert Bowne Foundation

keeping the faith

How Moving from School to Afterschool Kept Me an Educator

by Lily Rabinoff-Goldman

During my first year of teaching, I began what I was sure would be my first bestseller. It was entitled *Failure: Confessions of a First-Year Teacher.* It opened like this:

I don't know what you do, or how your friends and strangers you meet at parties and bars respond to your profession, but I wonder how you respond when you meet a teacher. Do you wonder aloud why they chose that career? Do you say, "Wow, what a wonderful job you're doing!" although you've never seen her classroom? Do you think that teacher is making a difference in children's lives? People say those things to me a lot. It's amazing how much good faith and trust grown-ups place in my ability to teach and do important things. Let me tell you now: So far, I'm not a very good teacher. You and I will both wish that the stories I'm about to tell had happier outcomes and that I were more skilled in averting or diffusing crises. Let's all hope that these things come with experience and, please God, some coinciding elements of consistency and systemic change.

I never finished that piece of writing. Not only did I have no perspective on my experience, but I was attempting to write it during a period when I could barely keep my eyes dry, a time when my assistant principal asked me, "Lily, do you even like children?" In the two years since that question, I have thought about it a lot. Though the question hurt my feelings, it also made me think about why I was a teacher and is part of why, after I finished my two-year Teach for America commitment, I was able to remain an educator. I found my answer in meaningful afterschool instruction.

I was hardly the only new college graduate to have a difficult time teaching public school. My experience as a sixth-grade teacher in the Bronx was unusually bad, but some of my Teach for America and New York City Teaching Fellows colleagues tell even more nightmarish stories. Today, I am lucky enough to be part of a small,

LILY RABINOFF-GOLDMAN is director of literacy projects and special programs at StreetSquash, an afterschool program in New York City. She graduated from Brown University in 2003 with a B.A. in history, completed the Teach for America program, and holds a master's degree in education from Bank Street College of Education. Her current interests are in curriculum development and fiction writing.

unnamed cohort of ex-teachers who have joined the staff of effective, child-centered afterschool programs. Ex-teachers and afterschool programming have a mutually beneficial relationship. Schoolteachers know how to build curriculum, discipline children, and work in teams—the cornerstones of both classroom teaching and good afterschool programming. Afterschool programs, unconstrained by public school bureaucracies, look at children holistically and give them opportunities to expand their minds—factors that remind practitioners that we do, in fact, like children, and want to work with them in ways that enrich their lives and improve their prospects. StreetSquash, the program for which I work as director of literacy projects and special programs, has kept me an educator. Other quality community-based afterschool programs do the same for some of my colleagues.
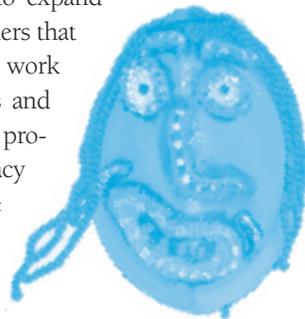
Public School Initiation

I joined Teach for America three weeks after graduating from Brown University in June 2003. After a grueling summer training program, I was hired by an enormous Bronx middle school that had consistently ranked among the bottom ten middle schools in the city. The school's poor performance and reputation were the result of factors that plague most public schools in high-need neighborhoods: large classes, under-educated students from failing elementary schools, and extremely high teacher turnover. The year I finished teaching, almost a third of the school's faculty also left. This particular school's architectural model—partial walls divided many of the classrooms—further hampered instruction. In my first year of teaching, my self-contained sixth-grade class was collapsed due to under-enrollment. I became a cluster teacher in two classes abandoned by their previous teachers. A student who would end up in a juvenile detention facility before reaching the seventh grade commented on the size of my breasts. At twenty-one, I had never before experienced real failure. I cried at home virtually every night.

Looking back, part of me thinks I was out of my mind not to quit. I had never been so unhappy. Two things kept me teaching. First, I was too proud to admit that I couldn't handle my job. I truly believed, however unrealistically, that the next day I would get it right, the kids would start to listen, and the school would magi-

cally overcome its challenges so it could function the way I thought a school should function. Second, I had a wonderful advisor and conference group at Bank Street College of Education who showed me that I was not alone. Those seven women helped me see that just showing up every day with a well-planned lesson was a success. Reminding me that it was all about the kids, they convinced me to stay for another year.

The second year was exponentially better. I spent much of that summer in deep anxiety, which led me to work hard at planning lessons and classroom management strategies that turned out to be fairly successful. In addition, I now knew the lay of the land at the school—who to approach for support and who to avoid—and how to quietly run my classroom the way I thought it should be run. But by February break, I knew I wouldn't stay beyond my two-year commitment, not because I didn't want to be a teacher anymore but because I had to get out of a system in which I couldn't do what I thought best for the kids.

Thinking to try something new, I sent résumés to publishing houses and museums. Though my friends laughed, I even briefly considered investment banking. I felt, though, that I had to give education another shot, having had such a bad experience. I went looking for a job that would renew my faith in children and in education—a tall order. I applied and was hired for my current position with StreetSquash, where, as it turned out, the support I needed to work with kids was available in abundance.

Afterschool Redemption

In the years since its founding in 1999, StreetSquash has expanded from a small program that provided academic tutoring and squash instruction for 28 students to serve over 100 students with tutoring, squash instruction, community service, literacy programming, college preparation, and mentoring. Though many afterschool programs recruit students on a year-to-year basis, StreetSquash requires a six-year commitment from all program participants. Long-term, consistent involvement is central to achieving the program's and our students' goals. Additionally, StreetSquash is not a school-based program. Though we work closely with teachers and administrators at our

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partner schools, our participants are primarily self-selecting, rather than being mandated to participate due to low academic performance.

Much of StreetSquash's success has to do with the diversity of our programming. On a given weekday afternoon, 20 ninth graders at Columbia University and 20 seventh graders at the West Side YMCA are working in pairs with tutors on homework and study skills. They then move to the squash courts with a coach and volunteers to practice specific shots and compete in challenge matches. Meanwhile, at one of our partner schools, tenth graders are working on SAT preparation and personal statements. Individual students may have appointments with their therapists at the City College Psychological Center or dinner plans with their StreetSquash mentors. StreetSquash and other community-based afterschool programs approach children holistically, attending to their academic, physical, emotional, and social needs in a way that public schools cannot. Coming into this environment from the strictly defined role of classroom teacher can create an entirely new way of thinking about how best to serve children and their families.

Beyond the impressive statistics showing our students' academic improvement and college admission rates, one of the most significant and intangible strengths of out-of-school-time programs like StreetSquash is the deep trust the children and their families place in us. A case in point is one of my ninth-grade girls, Shanese. Shanese is a small girl with a huge personality. Although she is not a high-achieving student, she was one of the best-liked students in her grade, getting all the teachers on her side. Shanese's likeability served her well last year when her mother grew increasingly ill with lung cancer through the fall and died in early winter.

The day before the funeral, Shanese, her older sister, and her father came to see the squash coach, Pat, and me at an afternoon practice. It was one of the most difficult conversations Pat and I had all year. The grieving family explained to us how important it was to them that Shanese stay in the program, which she loved, so that she could stay focused in school and do well in a way that would have made her mother proud.

Pat and I went to the wake the next day. In this private family moment, we were the only people there who were not part of the community—but we were not ignored. Shanese's aunt, for instance, greeted us warmly, hugging and kissing us and saying how much Street-

Squash meant to Shanese. She told us that, since she lived in Virginia, it was important for her to know that Shanese had a support network here in New York.

That year, StreetSquash worked to strengthen and expand that support network. Through our long-standing partnership with the City College Psychological Center, we connected Shanese and her sister to counseling, including weekly sessions to help them deal with their grief. Throughout her tumultuous emotional range, from manic excitement to anger, indignation, and sadness, Shanese came to StreetSquash every day. "I had a really bad day, and I didn't want to come, but I needed to see you," she said on more than one occasion. Shanese trusted Street-Squash as a safe and nurturing place that could serve her needs in a way that her school could not. In the marking period following her mother's death, Shanese raised her grades from a C-minus average to a B, an achievement of which she was rightfully proud.

Shanese, and others like her, remind us that our work is not ultimately about report cards, standardized test scores, or teacher observations. It's about making meaningful experiences for children—whole children, with all their complex experiences and diverse needs.

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Digging in Our Heels

Many programs throughout New York City are doing work similar to StreetSquash's, often with former schoolteachers as staff. George Polsky, StreetSquash's executive director, is fond of saying that squash need not be the "hook" for kids—it could be art, chess, or any other nonacademic activity. When I was a kid, StreetSquash might not have appealed to uncoordinated me, who only wanted to draw pictures and write stories. That's why a diversity of programs, focusing on all the different things kids are interested in, is so important.

One program that has a different nonacademic emphasis but shares the same principles with Street-Squash is 826NYC in Brooklyn. Hidden behind the front of the Brooklyn Superhero Supply Shop is a program dedicated to getting kids excited about creative writing and to bolstering their skills through tutoring and workshops. Joan Kim, the education director of 826NYC, is a former schoolteacher. She told me that many of 826NYC's volunteers are current New York City Teaching Fellows. I imagine that those teaching fellows choose to spend additional time tutoring kids—after a full day

of classroom teaching in some of the lowest-performing schools in the city—because there is something fundamentally different and revitalizing about out-of-school-time education. The same skills and aptitudes that teachers need in the classroom—patience, diligence, a sense of humor, and compassion for children—are invaluable to meaningful and productive afterschool programming. Invaluable to the staff, including current and former schoolteachers, are the warmth of the environment, our connection with the kids, and the feeling that we are doing something concrete to help children.

My colleague Claire taught eighth grade at a school about a mile from mine before joining StreetSquash. We often talk about how different our afterschool work is from anything we experienced in our public schools. Our executive director respects us, and we respect him. We spend our days and weekends with children who have chosen our program and are committed to being there. The whole dynamic of being an afterschool practitioner is much more positive and exciting than my life as a teacher ever was.

This positive dynamic is reflected across community-based afterschool programs. On a professional level, the flexibility, responsibility, and authority granted to afterschool educators is a far cry from the constant threat of evaluation that is the unfortunate currency at many public schools. On a personal level, we work in a kind of "in-between" space for children, combining the roles of teacher, big brother or sister, camp counselor, social worker, parent, and friend. We can be real allies to children in a way that teachers cannot always be. In afterschool programs, the ratio of children to adults is so much smaller than in urban public schools that children can feel visible, nurtured, and safe. Kids can know the educators both as individuals and as representatives of a program that supports them and provides them with opportunities—a combination that is a boon to both children and practitioners. All these factors are why I want to stay on for the indefinite future.

The promise of longevity echoes throughout Street-Squash and similar afterschool programs. Afterschool organizations and practitioners have dug in their heels. The community-based organizations want kids to know what to expect when they return each year. Individual practitioners commit to stay for the long term—and

therefore grow and improve to become better practitioners. This kind of commitment and longevity is part of what many public school systems lack. If young teachers had the support they need to be able to stay on past one or two years in the classroom, the crisis in public education might be at least slightly less severe.

Staff retention is central to positive and effective afterschool programming. Equally important is the philosophy toward and perspective on children shared by StreetSquash and other programs like it. We take a holistic approach, filling the roles that our children need at specific moments. When a child comes to the program without having eaten breakfast at home or lunch at school, we nourish her with healthy food. When a child comes in sad over an argument with a friend or a family member, we comfort and advise him as friends and counselors. When a child comes in having failed a test, we become teachers, showing her how to solve a math problem or understand a science concept. Our children are lucky to have committed adults who are flexible enough to fill all these roles. But staff members are lucky, too. We get to work outside the limitations that a teacher, a social worker, a friend, or a parent might have, developing uniquely meaningful relationships with the children. This holistic approach is why afterschool programs are places where staff want to be and where children can become the people we're working for them to become.

No one can foresee his or her future, professional or otherwise, and I am certainly no exception to that rule. However, I know for certain that the chances that I will remain an educator—which I never doubted until I became a teacher in a public school—have been re-energized by working at StreetSquash. The influence on and connection with children that I imagined for myself, because I saw them as central to what it means to be an educator, have become realities here. The work former schoolteachers and lifelong afterschool practitioners are doing side by side at StreetSquash and in similar afterschool programs across the city is giving kids educational options and hope for the future. Working in afterschool programming helps us remember that the kids are the reason we are doing what we do. Afterschool programming is key in the quest to find, keep, and inspire educators who are making real changes for children.

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after the last bell

The Multiple Roles of Principals in School-based Afterschool Programs

by Lanya Samuelson

For most primary and secondary students, the word *principal* suggests authority and power. The U.S. Department of Education has said that principal leadership is critical to school improvement and to academic achievement (Office of Educational Research & Improvement, 1990).

Meanwhile, extensive research says that afterschool programs are important in the lives of children (Community Network for Youth Development [CNYD], 2001), and recent studies suggest that principals are essential to afterschool program success (Rinehart, 2003). However, formal inquiry into specific roles played by principals in school-based afterschool programs has been limited. As afterschool programs receive increased attention from policymakers and the public (CNYD, 2001; Halpern, 2004), efforts to identify and implement promising practices will greatly serve the field. Clear consensus between school administrators and afterschool providers on their respective roles and responsibilities is crucial for afterschool programs to achieve their desired outcomes. Reaching this consensus requires discussing the role of principals. How do principals' roles in afterschool programs differ from their roles during the regular school day? How should principals be involved in afterschool programs on school sites? This article offers a framework through which principals and afterschool providers can explore these questions and build consensus on effective principal involvement.

This article is based on survey and interview research I conducted in fulfillment of a master's degree in social welfare at the University of California, Berkeley. I first became interested in principal involvement in afterschool programming while working as the afterschool program coordinator in a large urban middle school. Comparing the autonomy I experienced with my

LANYA SAMUELSON is the program director of YouthCares, an afterschool program of the International Institute of San Francisco that employs high school students to provide community service for immigrant senior citizens and peer tutoring for newly arrived immigrant youth. She earned her Master of Social Welfare degree, with a concentration in Management and Planning, from the University of California–Berkeley in 2006. She managed a school-based afterschool program for four years and has worked extensively throughout the Bay Area in afterschool program design, development, and policy.

own principal to the challenges other coordinators encountered with their principals, I concluded that the coordinator's relationship with the principal had the potential to make or break a school-based afterschool program. In my research, I found that the importance of this relationship, and of principal involvement after school generally, is consistent across sites and districts.

This article presents six potential roles played by principals after school, exploring why each is important and how each can be challenging. Can what is known about effective principal leadership be applied to afterschool program management, leadership, and implementation? Since the role of the principal in school sites is central, while afterschool program models are diverse, how can we engage in useful dialogue about principal involvement after school? Investigation of these questions in the existing literatures on principal leadership and afterschool programming is limited. Believing that afterschool programs must be tailored to the distinct needs of school sites, I hope principals and afterschool program staff can use the framework presented in this article as a practical tool with which to understand and delegate roles, thereby increasing the success of their programs. For staff working in programs at community-based organizations, this framework may be useful in designing and assessing program leadership structures and designating responsibilities.

The Importance of Principal Involvement

Several current trends in afterschool programming validate the need to understand principal involvement in afterschool programs. First, as the field continues to professionalize, a set of promising practices has emerged regarding program design, leadership, and implementation. Many of these promising practices confirm the importance of principal involvement and offer insight into ways principals can effectively interact with programs at their sites. For example, to be successful, afterschool programs need teachers, partners, staff, and families to be involved in program design (After-School Summit Committee [ASSC], 2005). The principal, who is the direct supervisor of all teachers and has access to families and the community, can facilitate this involvement. The ASSC cites other promising practices including effective partnerships that promote student learning and adequate compensation for qualified staff (ASSC, 2005). A study of programs of The After-School Corporation includes additional important aspects: a close relationship between the school site and the afterschool program, mutual respect between the principal and site coordinator, and the value the school places on the afterschool program (Birmingham, Pechman, Russell, & Mielke, 2005).

More specifically, research illustrates the importance of principals' active involvement in program development and management and of their commitment to afterschool programs (Jordan-Meldrum, 2005). Rinehart (2003) notes that principals should provide opportunity for staff development, encourage collaboration, recognize the academic value of programs, and support program vision. With these promising practices as a launching point, defining tangible actions that demonstrate principal support and commitment can greatly benefit afterschool providers and participants.

A second trend validating the importance of understanding principal involvement is the emphasis in No Child Left Behind on standardized tests to measure achievement (Halpern, 2004). Schools now look to afterschool programs to supplement their efforts or to compensate for students' poor academic performance. Though there is no consistent evidence that program participation increases standardized test scores (Halpern, 2004; Shann, 2001), this climate of benchmarks and strict consequences may lead to principals' increased interest in afterschool programming.

In California, where this research was conducted, principal involvement after school is particularly pertinent at this moment in history. The funds from Proposition 49, approved by voters in 2002, became available for applicants in September 2006. Proposition 49 dedicates $550 million annually for school-based afterschool programs serving children in grades K–8. In the district I researched, the number of state-funded school-based afterschool programs will increase from 32 to approximately 80. The impact of this legislation is not only local but also national, as California's commitment to afterschool programs is seen by many as an indicator of potential future initiatives in other states. Such enormous expansion in school-based programming provides an incredible opportunity to inform principals of the critical role they play in the success of afterschool programs.

Methods

My research consisted of one-on-one interviews conducted in the spring of 2005 with afterschool coordinators and principals in a large urban school district in the San Francisco Bay Area and of a survey distributed to leaders in the afterschool field throughout California. This mixed-method approach to inquiry is consistent with current trends that incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methods (Pidgeon & Henwood, 2004).

Logic Model

As a visual framework for my research, I created a logic model that defines six central roles principals can play in afterschool programs and assigns actions, or indicators, to

each role, as shown in Figure 1. The six roles and their associated indicators were devised from extensive observations during my direct service and management experience in the afterschool field, as well as from my review of the literature. The promising practices cited above in the literature on principal involvement after school were most helpful in informing the roles in this logic model that are more ideological or philosophically based: the roles of Liaison, Visionary, and Supporter. On the other hand, my direct experience and observations informed the roles that are more task-based and action-oriented, primarily Communicator, Resource Provider, and Decision Maker.

Recognizing that there is no limit to the potential roles of principals after school, the logic model attempts to incorporate as many opportunities for involvement as possible.

The logic model is based on the premise that a key desired outcome of any afterschool strategy is to provide an effective program that achieves its stated goals. As suggested by the afterschool literature (Rinehart, 2003), the logic model presents the role of the principal as a critical variable to this outcome. I offer this logic model as a starting point, and used it to inform my research, while recognizing that there could be other ways to conceptualize the many roles of principals in afterschool programs. By categorizing roles and assigning tangible actions to each one, the logic model can expand the professional knowledge base and offer a tool for improved practice on school sites.

Interviews and Surveys

One-on-one interviews were conducted at five school-based elementary afterschool programs with four principals and five coordinators. I chose these five from among all the school-based afterschool programs in the city to achieve a mix both of lead agencies—the school or a community-based organization (CBO)—and of principal involvement. One coordinator was hired directly by the principal, while four were employed by CBOs. To achieve a mix in terms of principal involvement, I asked three people in the central district office, whose role was to serve as liaison between school sites and the district and

ROLES OF PRINCIPAL

COMMUNICATOR
- Maintains ongoing communication with coordinator regarding program needs, challenges, successes, and progress.
- Is accessible to afterschool staff when specific needs arise.
- Facilitates structured communication between afterschool program and regular school day.
- Facilitates communication between program and families.

RESOURCE PROVIDER
- Provides afterschool program access to adequate space, facilities, materials, & equipment.
- Allocates school resources, reflecting dedication to meeting afterschool goals.
- Shares knowledge of resources with program staff.

LIAISON
- Integrates afterschool and regular day staff by including them in staff meetings and communication flow.
- Provides program staff access to classroom teachers.
- Shares afterschool information with teachers.
- Assists afterschool program in identifying needs and tracking academic progress of students.

VISIONARY
- Understands value of afterschool program and its connection to regular school day.
- Communicates vision for program to coordinator and supports movement towards this vision.
- Infuses vision into program design.
- Articulates vision to staff, participants, families, community.

DECISION MAKER
- Serves as active partner in collaborative decision making.
- Provides support to coordinator in his/her decision making process.
- Shares knowledge and experience with coordinator to inform decision making.

SUPPORTER
- Presents afterschool program as integral part of school.
- Participates in program meetings and events.
- Advocates for program within and outside school.
- Dedicates time to creating effective working relationship with coordinator and moving program towards its goals.
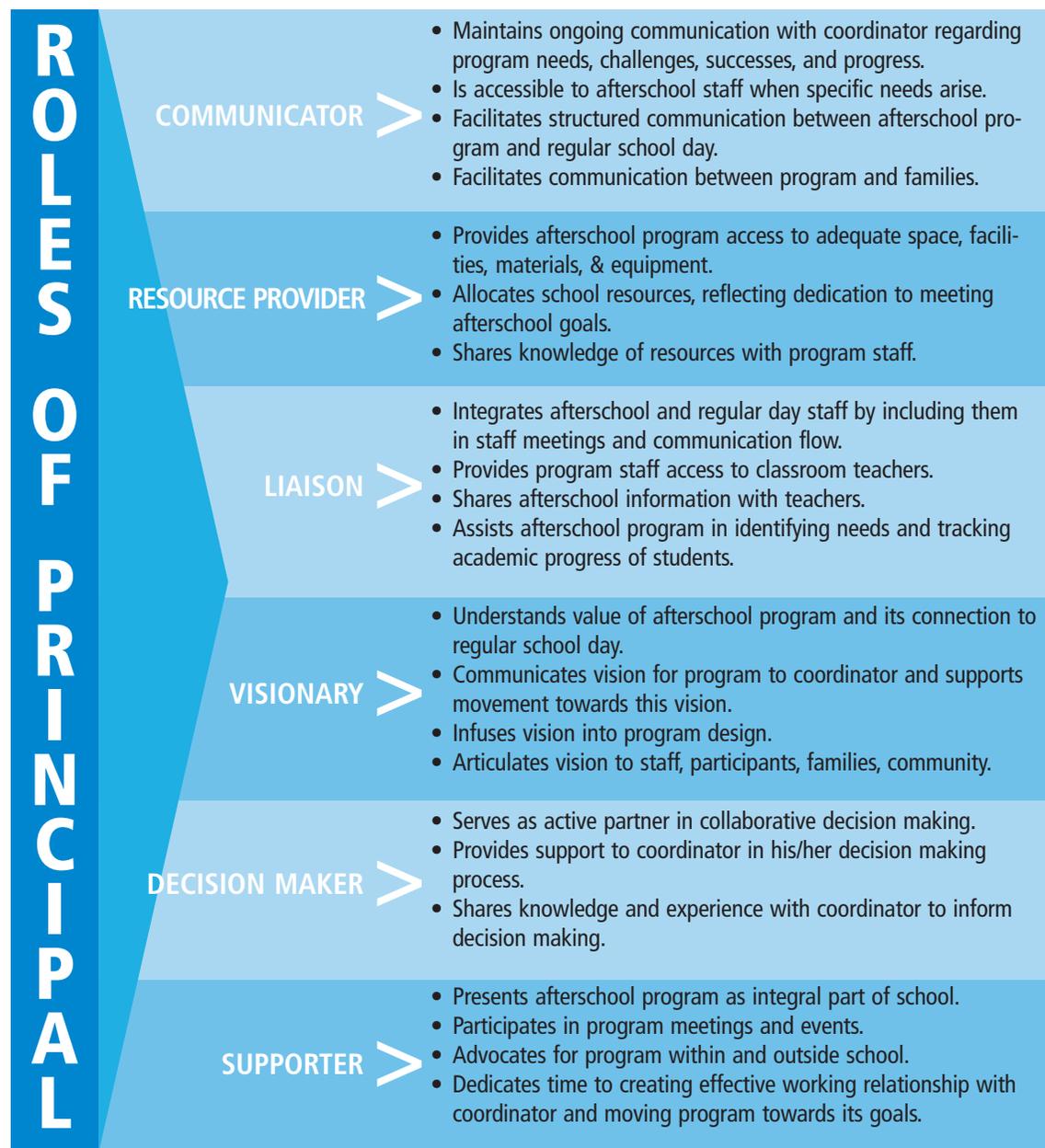
Figure 1. Roles of Principal

state, to evaluate how involved the principals were. I incorporated a full range of levels of involvement in choosing the programs for this study. The schools also varied in terms of size, cultural demographics, and surrounding neighborhood characteristics, though all served a majority of low-income students. Finally, to a certain extent this was a convenience sample, because another criterion was simply whether the principals responded that they were willing to participate in my study.

The survey was completed by 24 leading afterschool professionals involved in policy and program management across California. They served in school districts and CBOs as well as state offices. The survey asked for their perspectives on the six principal roles defined by the logic model. Respondents rated each role in terms of its importance and the frequency with which it is played by principals. The survey also posed open-ended questions on the challenges of principal roles and on strategies for effective principal involvement.

Six Roles of Principals after School

I used the interviews and surveys to refine the logic model presented in Figure 1. This section presents my findings, organized around the six roles defined in the logic model and the indicators associated with each. These findings contain valuable insights from study participants on the reality of each potential role on school sites.

Principal as Communicator

> The [former] principal would leave right when the bell rings. You never [saw] her after the bell. [The current principal] stays here till 6 pm, 6:30 pm. It's like she's always available. —*Coordinator*

Communication among afterschool staff, school day staff, and families is an essential component of well-implemented afterschool programs (Birmingham et al., 2005; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001). Though this seems like a given, establishing systems of effective and productive communication is a common challenge voiced by school-based afterschool programmers. The role of communicator has at least two parts:
- Communicating with the coordinator
- Facilitating communication between the afterschool program and other school groups

Both principals and coordinators described experiences that confirm the importance of ongoing communication between them. Such communication can range from holding regularly scheduled weekly meetings with set agendas to checking in informally every day. Depending on the site's needs, various models of communication can be effective, but both principal and coordinator must agree on and be satisfied with the model they use. Because principals hold ultimate authority in their schools, they must be accessible to their coordinators and respond to their needs. Furthermore, principals should directly communicate the schools' needs and student performance goals to coordinators and afterschool program staff.

Because principals have access to both school day staff and families, they can facilitate communication between these groups and the afterschool program. Since the extensive demands on principals can hinder their ability to facilitate this communication, time spent creating communication systems that can function independently of the principal is a good investment. The sites in my study shared several models by which principals facilitated communication. For example, principals put afterschool program news in their weekly family newsletter or dedicated a permanent item on staff meeting agendas to the afterschool program. Other recommendations included highlighting afterschool programs in school-wide events such as parent nights and giving programs an easy and clear means of corresponding with other school staff, such as a mailbox in the school office.

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Principal as Resource Provider

> Five or six mentors, we all use the same space, so I'm telling the principal, "Look, we can have this whole room to ourselves. We need our own space."
> —*Coordinator*

Anyone who has worked in afterschool programs on school sites can attest to a consistent concern about the adequacy of resources and funding. At a minimum, afterschool programs need sufficient and appropriate space in which to hold their activities. Often, this means using teachers' classrooms. In the district where I conducted research, some coordinators had their own offices and meeting spaces, while others operated out of file boxes stored in the cafete-

ria closet. Some coordinators had their own computers, while others slipped onto the office secretary's computer between other tasks. This range of access to basic resources has a great effect on the efficacy of management and service delivery.

To varying extents, all programs rely on shared facilities and materials. The principals and coordinators in this study viewed the principal as the individual with the most capacity to share school resources, especially facilities. At the same time, participants acknowledged the multiple demands on limited space. As Resource Providers, principals must be aware of the real needs of afterschool programs. They must understand, for example, that tutoring sixty students in the cafeteria is not conducive to learning or that their coordinator needs a computer in order to submit grant reports. Principals who understand the requirements of program management and facilitation are better able to allocate limited resources fairly. Thus, program managers, grant administrators, and afterschool staff, including coordinators, must ensure that principals have ongoing access to this crucial information.

Principal as Liaison

We build our own relationships with each other even though the principal hasn't brought us together in the same room. We're saying it and the teachers are saying it. —*Coordinator*

This coordinator speaks of the importance of linking the afterschool program and the regular school day. In extended-day programs, this link may happen organically because the same teachers and students are involved. When afterschool staff are employed by an outside agency and arrive as classroom teachers are leaving, building connections between the school day and the afterschool program is more challenging, but no less important. As supervisor of regular day staff, the principal is key to integrating school and afterschool. Study participants suggested the following ways in which the principal can serve as Liaison: inviting afterschool program staff to all-staff orientation, incorporating afterschool staff into teachers' professional development, providing opportunities for both entities to share information about student progress, contributing to afterschool staff training meetings, and encouraging afterschool staff and students to participate in regular school day events.

> As Liaisons, principals can ensure that curricula and expectations of students are consistent both before and after the bell rings.

The coordinators I spoke with said that classroom teachers must understand and support the afterschool program's purpose in order for the program to be effective. They viewed the principal as having the ability to address this support. In one success story, a coordinator attributed recent improvements in her program's relationship with school staff to the principal's advocacy for the program, in response to classroom teachers' criticisms of the afterschool program. This principal assumed the role of Liaison by explaining the program's challenges to the teachers and successfully facilitating a positive connection between school and afterschool.

Disconnect between the school day and the afterschool program can be frustrating for both entities and hinders the afterschool program's ability to meet its goals, especially academic goals. As Liaisons, principals can ensure that curricula and expectations of students are consistent both before and after the bell rings.

Principal as Visionary

I have the big-picture idea of the afterschool program, whereas during the day, sweetie, every last blink, I take care of. —*Principal*

While defining tangible responsibilities for the role of Visionary is difficult, the limited literature on principal involvement after school suggests the role is significant. For example, a 2005 case study of principals' experiences in afterschool programs highlights the importance of the principal's ability to see the afterschool program as an asset and to communicate this view to others (Jordan-Meldrum, 2005). Rinehart (2003) emphasizes the critical value of the principal's support of the program vision. If, for example, a principal has a standards-based, academics-only vision of the program while the lead community-based organization has a more holistic and creative approach, the program cannot be effective. In such cases, the lead agencies, particularly through coordinators, need to secure principals' buy-in. Principals and coordinators must be aligned in their vision and goals for the program. All of the coordinators in my study were aware of their principals' vision for their programs and wanted the principals to share this vision with staff and families.

Several coordinators noted that principals' ability to communicate their vision to classroom teachers and parents, as well as to afterschool program staff, is an important component of program success. One envisioned a principal who

could "…lead her staff and have them all understand the importance of a great comprehensive afterschool program…and that would make things a lot easier." Though the role of Visionary may be largely symbolic, it holds significant implications for practice. For example, two coordinators explained that their principals' high standards for performance encouraged them to improve program quality. One remarked, "She tries to give us that extra space [for growth] but she won't be too lenient, and I like that. She'll give me that extra push that I need [and] that helps me a lot."

Principal as Decision Maker

The teachers tell the students, "You don't disrespect [the coordinator] because she's like the principal of afterschool. She's in charge." —*Coordinator*

During the school day, principals are involved in decision making on multiple levels. Though leadership structures vary greatly across school sites and strong emphasis may be placed on collaborative decision making, principals are faced with endless decisions throughout the day (Brown & Anfara, 2002). However, is this level of involvement in daily program management and supervision sustainable after the last bell rings?

While the principals in my study wanted to have input into and approval of program decisions, they said the demands of their jobs did not allow them to make daily decisions for the afterschool program. They wanted to be able to trust their coordinators with day-to-day operations. One principal I interviewed said that she had taken on the daily decisions because she didn't trust her coordinator's leadership—but she also said she could not sustain this level of involvement. Furthermore, coordinators, confident in their leadership abilities, often said that they viewed themselves as "principals of afterschool." They told me that parents shared this vision of their role; principals also agreed with this description. Therefore, as Decision Maker, the principal's role is to support the coordinator's decision-making process. In my study, the form that support took varied in terms of the level of involvement, from principals who wanted to be informed of (but not make) daily decisions to those who wanted input only on "big picture" decisions. Principals in the study who viewed their coordinators as "co-leaders" expressed higher levels of satisfaction with their programs than those who were burdened by daily management decisions.

Maintaining a vision of the "big picture" and leaving the decisions on day-to-day operations to the coordinator is a role transition for the principal. Principals must feel confident in the leadership abilities and expertise of their coordinators. Coordinators must be highly qualified professionals with access to the information they need to make effective decisions. The implications of these roles lead to discussion of the principal's role as Supporter.

Principal as Supporter

So if [the principal] doesn't buy into our program, then we can't go [anywhere]. I mean we can try, but it's not going to be as effective.… If you don't have her support, then basically this program won't be as successful as it is. —*Coordinator*

Perhaps the most powerful theme to emerge from my interviews was that coordinators needed their principals' support in all aspects of programming. In some ways, the role of Supporter encompasses the other five roles in the logic model. Playing the roles of Communicator, Resource Provider, Liaison, Visionary, and Decision Maker—in ways that create an effective relationship with the coordinator and move the program toward its goals—captures what it means to be a Supporter. When explaining how principals can be Supporters, coordinators listed such specific actions as communicating with classroom teachers, facilitating training for afterschool program staff, and providing afterschool staff with access to facilities and materials. One principal, for example, discussed her role in rebuilding parents' faith in the afterschool program following difficult staff transitions.

All coordinators, when describing ideal principal involvement, envisioned principals attending all afterschool program events and meetings, showing support and advocating for the program's value. One coordinator articulated the power of principal support by saying, "She has a certain power where, if she doesn't like it, then it's not going to happen. If she doesn't buy into the goals then we can work as hard as we want to try to reach these goals—but if she doesn't approve of it, then it's just another hurdle." Overall, the interviews illustrate that principal support and advocacy for the afterschool program must be both action-oriented and ideological.

> Principals must feel confident in the leadership abilities and expertise of their coordinators. Coordinators must be highly qualified professionals with access to the information they need to make effective decisions.

Implications for Principals

Through an analysis of my investigations into the logic model's six roles, I identified three general themes with important implications for any model of principal involvement in school-based afterschool programs: the necessity of role transitions, the importance of an effective coordinator, and the critical nature of the principal-coordinator relationship. Afterschool sites that want to define their own sets of promising practices should address principal involvement as an independent program component, considering these themes in the process.

The Necessity of Role Transitions

Because afterschool programs are inherently different from school programs, sites must successfully negotiate a role transition when the last bell rings. As discussed under Decision Maker above, all participants in my study agreed that principals cannot devote the time and energy to manage daily operations and decisions in afterschool programs. The coordinator is the appropriate staff member to fulfill such responsibilities; he or she is the "principal of afterschool," with the school principal as his or her key support. This role transition requires deliberate negotiations on the principal's part to delegate responsibility and institutionalize this alternate leadership structure. As Liaison to the school day staff and families and as Supporter of the program in general, principals must consciously initiate and follow through with this role transition. Though coordinators are just as crucial in this transition, principals can empower the coordinators by allowing them space to take on responsibilities and assume leadership.

The Importance of an Effective Coordinator

The role of coordinator must be central to any discussion concerning afterschool programming or leadership. While one coordinator told me, "I'm here just to make sure everything goes the right way," another described himself as "the glue" that holds the program together. Coordinators are responsible for everything from managing daily program operations to evaluating student progress, training staff, and fundraising. Given the wide range of requirements of the position, coordinators must be highly qualified individuals with the capacity to take on multiple roles.

How does this connect to principal involvement?

> Principals and coordinators who shared common visions and expectations, who communicated regularly within a structure that worked for both of them, and who collaborated to link the afterschool program with the classroom expressed satisfaction with their working relationships.

First, principals must be aware of the extensive demands on coordinators and the diverse skill set required to do the job effectively. This awareness should directly guide the process of hiring and selecting a coordinator. Even when the coordinator is hired by an outside lead agency, the principal should—and usually does, at least in the programs in my study—have input on the selection. Second, as Liaison and Supporter of the afterschool program, principals must convey the complexity of the coordinator position to their regular day staff so that the staff values the coordinator as a professional. Finally, as Resource Providers, principals must do everything in their power to secure salaries for coordinators that reflect their qualifications. If the lead agency rather than the principal determines the coordinator's compensation, the principal can advocate on the coordinator's behalf. The more principals believe in the value of the position, the more likely they will be to allocate or advocate for sufficient funding.

The Critical Nature of the Principal-Coordinator Relationship

The youth development literature tells us that relationship building is an essential component of successful afterschool programs (CNYD, 2001). My study demonstrates that this is especially true in regard to the principal-coordinator relationship. Any discussion of principal involvement in afterschool programs must adequately reflect the critical nature of this relationship. The information shared by study participants highlights the value of integrating the afterschool program with the school day and of aligning principals' and coordinators' visions and expectations of the program. Principals and coordinators who shared common visions and expectations, who communicated regularly within a structure that worked for both of them, and who collaborated to link the afterschool program with the classroom expressed satisfaction with their working relationships. These principal-coordinator teams viewed their programs positively, despite any challenges they reported.

Building a positive and effective principal-coordinator relationship requires input and effort from both individuals. Program design and staffing decisions must take this relationship, and its implications, into serious consideration. In matching coordinators with principals, it is important to

look at both individuals' expectations, goals, communication practices, and leadership styles. Aligning these components from the start increases the likelihood of successful programming. Principals must be aware of the expectations they have for their coordinators and of the extent to which they want to maintain or let go of program leadership. Principals should understand the collaborative nature of afterschool programming and expect to work closely and consistently with their coordinators. Outside agencies responsible for placing coordinators at school sites must dedicate adequate time to getting to know individual principals and coordinators so they can pair teams accordingly.

Implications for Coordinators

Coordinators need to understand potential principal roles as much as principals do. Coordinators stand to benefit from taking part in creating a model of effective principal involvement. In applying my logic model to their specific sites, coordinators can explore the following questions: What roles is my principal currently playing? What roles do I need my principal to play? What roles do *I* want to play? Coordinators can use the logic model to identify specific aspects of principal involvement that have the potential to increase the effectiveness of their programs. In doing so, they can improve their own professional practice as well.

Because an effective program depends on an effective coordinator, coordinators must take initiative in ensuring that they have the resources, access, and information necessary to do their job. Taking active part in determining the model of principal involvement at their site is one way to do so. Coordinators can help their principals to be effective Communicators by requesting regular meetings and institutionalizing a structure to ensure such meetings take place. They can increase the likelihood of their principals' being effective Resource Providers by keeping principals abreast of program needs and of the potential consequences for students if these needs are not met. They can help their principals to be effective Visionaries by discussing their own visions for the program with their principals and finding common ground. They can encourage their principals to be effective Supporters and Liaisons by seeing that principals get copies of program memos, inviting them to all program events, and inviting *themselves* to regular day staff meetings and professional development opportunities. In sum, coordinators must devote time and energy to developing effective working relationships with their principals and do everything in their power to ensure that their principals have confidence in the coordinators' abilities and qualifications.

Though programs are diverse in their designs, leadership structures, and school cultures, principal involvement is essential in any school-based afterschool program. Programs must assess their unique strengths and challenges to determine a model of principal involvement that works for them. Effective principal involvement that supports program goals requires consistent input and buy-in from coordinators, agency partners, grant administrators, program managers, and principals themselves.

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growing our own
Former Participants as Staff in Afterschool Youth Development Programs

by Susan Matloff-Nieves

We are in the cafeteria of a middle school in Queens, New York. I am making a routine site visit to an after-school program that serves 100 sixth- through eighth-grade students five days a week. The participants sit at long cafeteria tables in small groups.

Two of the older boys begin play-fighting, delivering air kicks and waving their arms at each other. Within seconds, Scott is moving toward them. Approaching from another direction is his colleague Luis. Both are college students, age 20.

"Do you need help, Scott?" asks Luis.

"No, thanks, I got it covered," replies Scott. He calmly separates the two boys, stepping between them and speaking to them in a low voice. They respond quickly, dropping their flailing limbs and returning quietly to their seats. (program observation, Spring 2003)

While scenes like this are common in well-run afterschool and youth development programs, I am impressed. I have known Scott since he was a shy ten-year-old in the Forest Hills Community House (FHCH) summer day camp. In those days, Scott seemed to avoid conflict and often kept to himself while other kids engaged in horseplay. As a teen, he was an active participant in every youth development activity available, forming close relationships with adult mentors. However, it was his role as an after-school program staff member, in which he applied the lessons learned in his earlier youth development activities, that solidified his leadership skills.

Observing Scott and other graduates of our teen programs as they integrated what they learned in FHCH programs into their work as staff members with younger children sparked my interest in the

SUSAN MATLOFF-NIEVES, LMSW, is the assistant executive director for youth services at the Forest Hills Community House in Queens, New York, where she has worked with youth for 15 years. Prior to joining FHCH, she spent 13 years as a community organizer. She holds an MSW degree from Hunter School of Social Work. Her current research interests include professional development and youth development workforce issues.

benefits of the practice of hiring participants as staff. Another participant-turned-staff-member spoke to me about the impact of his job as a youth worker on areas of his life that had been a source of past difficulty. These two threads led me to explore what it means to youth participants to be hired as staff.

Hiring former participants as staff provides a dual benefit, to the agency and to the youth. The program gets a worker who is already well oriented to the program's and agency's mission, policies and procedures, and philosophy of youth development. The young people benefit from an exemplary youth development practice that offers an opportunity to make a real contribution to the life of their community while developing their social, cognitive, and employment skills. Working in an afterschool program helps bridge the protected world of childhood and the independent world of adults. Parents often support young participants' decisions to work in the programs that nurtured them. The example of the strategies employed at the Forest Hills Community House in Queens, New York, will show how the benefits of hiring participants as staff can be enhanced through staff development and supervisory practices that address the potential challenges of the practice.

A Time-Honored Practice

Robert Halpern's wonderful history of afterschool programs in *Making Play Work* (2003) traces the practice of hiring local youth and former participants as staff or volunteers back to the beginnings of afterschool programming in the early 1900s. According to Halpern, the practice weaves through the history of the field, born of practical necessity. Lack of resources and low budgets made employing former participants a cost-effective choice (Halpern, 2003). Youth development and childcare jobs typically are not well paid and have low social status, but first-time job seekers from low-income and immigrant neighborhoods have few opportunities for meaningful work and are generally pleased to secure a job that pays minimum wage. Then, as now, the jobs were a way station for many youth who were undecided or undirected in their lives.

For many summer programs in New York City, the city- and state-funded Summer Youth Employment Program, which provides six to eight weeks of employment for income-eligible teens, helps programs meet mandated staff-to-child ratios. The advent of the Beacon youth development model, which serves young people continuously from age 5 through 21 and even potentially into adulthood, created opportunities for youth who "aged out" of childcare programs to volunteer or work in afterschool programs. Eighty Beacon centers in New York City, operated by community-based organizations in public school buildings, offer comprehensive youth and community development activities after school as well as evenings and weekends. Though a search of the Harvard Family Research Project database (2006) reveals few studies of the practice of hiring former participants, two studies of Beacon programs confirm that the practice can serve as a youth development strategy that provides age-appropriate avenues for older youth to continue their learning.

Beacon Profiles: An Overview of the New York City Beacons Initiative, published by the Youth Development Institute (YDI) of the Fund for the City of New York (2002), describes the importance of employment opportunities within the Beacons, where hiring both youth participants and adults from the community is a common feature of the program model. According to this study, Beacons build community involvement by hiring youth and adults who are community residents, thus increasing young people's opportunities to contribute to their communities, providing community role models for younger Beacon participants, and creating career stepping stones through volunteer and paid jobs of increasing responsibility (YDI, 2002).

The Academy for Educational Development conducted an extensive evaluation of six Beacon programs that describes both the value of cross-age activities and some of the challenges of relying on young employees. The study notes that youth hired to work with younger children often have weaker group-management skills than more experienced staff members, but it also describes a positive effect on teens' risk-taking behavior and sense of responsibility. The evaluation found cross-age activities to be a valuable part of the Beacon experience. The importance of good training was a key finding (Warren, Feist, & Nevárez, 2002). Both of these studies identify the hiring of youth as a salient feature of the Beacon programs and as a positive youth development strategy.

> Lack of resources and low budgets made employing former participants a cost-effective choice.

Research Context and Methods

Founded in 1975, the Forest Hills Community House (FHCH) is one of the newest settlement houses in New York City. We provide comprehensive services to 20,000 residents of all ages in Queens. Programs include afterschool, summer camp, and youth development programs for young people ages 5 to 21 at our main site; two community centers; a facility operated by the NYC Parks Department; and youth development programs based in public school buildings, one of which is a Beacon program. Nearly 80 percent of our youth participants are immigrants or children of immigrants, representing as many as 40 language groups. While economically diverse overall, most come from working-class families.

FHCH youth development practices have been recognized for their quality. Our teen outreach program has been replicated in 25 New York City neighborhoods and internationally. Our arts activities are cited as a model of curriculum-based afterschool arts programming in Halpern's *Making Play Work* (2003). Our Access for Young Women teen leadership program has been selected three times for study by federal agencies as a model for promoting youth development. In-house and external evaluations since 1995 have documented consistent patterns of positive youth development including improved communication skills, greater awareness of career options, increased interest in reading for pleasure, better school attendance, and improved engagement in education. In addition, four of our teen programs have documented levels of youth retention in high school at 100 percent; two of these have 100 percent of participants enrolling in college (Fox 1999; Mosatche 2004, 2006).

At all levels, from administration to part-time line workers, are employees who have worked at FHCH for decades. As an FHCH youth director since 1992, I have watched young people grow up to work as staff with children and youth who are as old as the staff members were when I first met them. Investment in staff is a part of the FHCH culture; we take risks to hire and develop relatively inexperienced staff. Some former participants have continued as staff for over a decade and moved into supervisory positions. Reaching the 30-year mark means that we have now seen an entire generation grow through participation as children into increasingly responsible staff roles. We are thus uniquely situated to examine the practice of hiring youth participants as an emerging part of our work.

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Like the programs Halpern (2003) cites, we initially hired youth for cost reasons. Over time, FHCH has come to value both the positive youth development and the unique staff contributions that result from hiring former participants. The practice enhances our ability to build community and strengthen the surrounding neighborhood. By developing care-taking and employment skills in youth, we are creating a resource: young people who are effective employees with a passionate sense of purpose and a visceral understanding of the FHCH mission.

This article grew out of a participatory research project conducted with support of the Robert Bowne Foundation from January 2003 through January 2004. Six young people who had been participants in FHCH programs for eight years or longer agreed to be interviewed in depth about experiences that had affected their development. Initially, I simply asked them to tell their stories about how they came to the community house and about what it was like to make the transition to a staff role. I also shared some of my memories of them as younger people. As we spoke, they suggested questions that I subsequently incorporated into all interviews. I supplemented the data from these interviews with program observations. I also drew on my own memories, as well as those of colleagues, and spoke to the young people's supervisors. Our collective memories of and reflections on our shared history, together with our observations of each other over time, have been rich sources of data.

After combing through the interview transcripts, notes, and tapes for themes, I re-interviewed the young people at least once to follow up these themes in depth. In order to broaden the scope and in response to strong interest from colleagues, I also conducted interviews with staff of five other youth programs. Accompanying the interviews were weekly observations of the programs and interviews with program directors. Other Robert Bowne Foundation (RBF) research fellows contributed their own experiences with former participants as staff; one participated in a formal interview. I inquired during RBF and other citywide networking meetings about colleagues' experiences with youth staff and, in some cases, their own experiences as former participants. I then reviewed the data for common themes and followed up with additional interviews to expand on and clarify the themes throughout 2004 and 2005.

Employment as a Youth Development Strategy

Through these interviews, former participants clearly articulated the benefits of working as staff in their after-school programs. These benefits go beyond the basic need for a job that allows teens to contribute to their households or pay for college. Assuming a staff position meets an essential developmental need of older adolescents: the opportunity to take on adult roles.

Facilitating Individual Development

Joan Wynn (2003) describes the importance to youth development of offering a "system of opportunities for adolescents." This system should be composed of four types of opportunities: "engaging activities, apprentice-ships with skilled professionals, work-site internships, and part-time and summer jobs" (Wynn, 2003, p. 60). Employment in a comprehensive afterschool, summer camp, or mixed-age youth development site such as a Beacon can complement other program or community offerings to create a full range of opportunities for teens. Work in a community center also fits Wynn's criteria for ideal jobs for youth: that they "should not reproduce the often-routinized work available to teenagers, which isolates them from adults and reinforces disenfranchisement" (Wynn, 2003, p. 62). The opportunity for youth to make authentic contributions is a characteristic of a quality youth development program.

The opportunity to assume adult roles as colleagues and employees enables young people to remain connected to the adults who mentored them. We've found that young men, in particular, often continue to need the support and structure provided by our teen programs into their 20s. Working in our programs provides a transitional stage in which they learn to assume adult responsibilities for younger people while retaining contact with supportive adults. The expectations of their staff role provide an appropriate level of challenge for their developmental stage.

The staff role can also reinforce a reduction in the young people's risk-taking behavior. José,[1] who came to FHCH when he was eight and remained throughout adolescence, overcame difficulties with substance abuse and was given an opportunity to work with younger teens. He said:

Now I tell my friends: "If you're going to do that, I have to leave, because the younger kids look up to me and I can't have them seeing you do that [drinking] around me." …I tell them [the youth he works with], "There goes my friend; he does that and I don't; that's his path and we're still friends, but I don't have to do what he does." (personal interview, May 1, 2003)

José's experience is confirmed by that of youth interviewed for the AED report: "[O]lder youth repeatedly mentioned that they felt responsible to serve as role models for younger children, and that seeing themselves in this way helped them avoid negative behaviors such as fighting or using drugs" (Warren, Feist, & Nevárez, 2002, p. 12). This strategy, which builds on young people's assets and ability to contribute, is the essence of a youth development approach.

Supporting Educational and Employment Goals

Youth employees of afterschool programs benefit from working in a situation that supports their success in school and encourages their educational goals. Most youth programs I examined have a policy that young people must be in school in order to be employed. Young people's academic progress may be tracked and their work schedules adjusted if their grades drop. This approach to promoting school attendance and performance is consistent with the youth development principle of building on young people's assets and ability to contribute.

Many youth programs offer college and career counseling, including financial aid advice, as well as exposure to different fields of work. FHCH offers such counseling to youth employees as well as to participants. With our in-depth knowledge of the young person, we can offer detailed guidance. At least one staff member was able to secure a partial college scholarship as an employee benefit. Adult staff members write letters of reference for jobs and recommendations for colleges, citing not only the young people's present achievements, but also their growth and accomplishments throughout their teen years. Some long-term participants find meaningful careers in related fields such as education, social work, physical therapy, law, and medicine—or in unrelated fields. *Beacon Profiles* calls this benefit "providing stepping stones for careers" (YDI, 2002, p. 13).
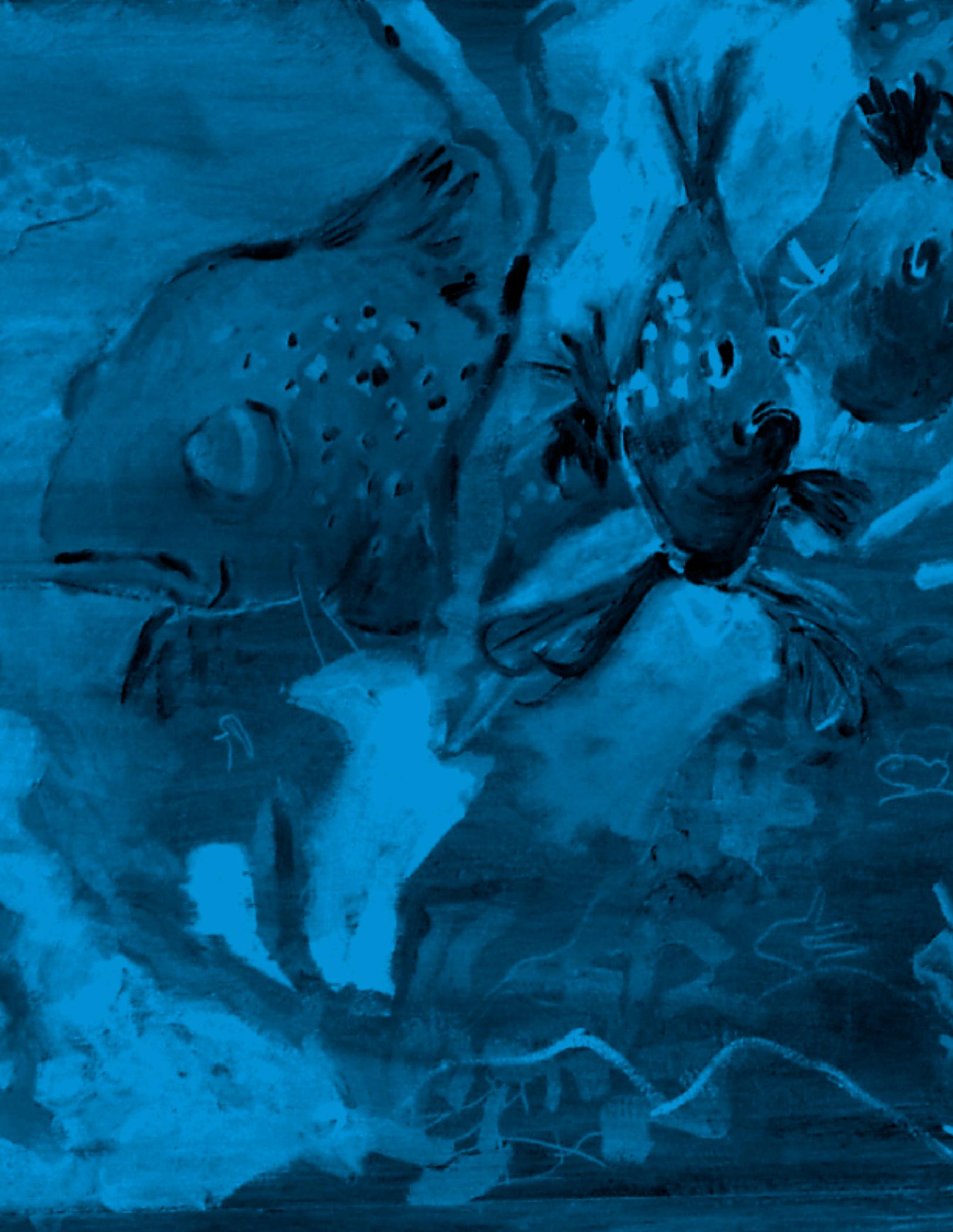
> Now I tell my friends: "If you're going to do that, I have to leave, because the younger kids look up to me and I can't have them seeing you do that [drinking] around me."

Employing young participants also develops their academic and employment skills. As Wynn (2003) puts it, "Through these opportunities, young people can develop and deepen specific content knowledge and know-how. In addition, they can acquire the kinds of soft skills—leadership, decision making, negotiating, and working as part of a group—that are important for participating effectively in education, employment, and civic life" (p. 63).

Building Community

Without being prompted, each of the young people interviewed mentioned a concept of neighborhood. All cited the benefit of the community house as a place where they could find and maintain friendships from throughout the neighborhood. The area surrounding the FHCH main site includes a population that is diverse in every way: economically, ethnically, racially. In fact, the mission of the founding board was to provide a bridge among diverse sectors of the community. The young people expressed their value of having a place where they can mingle across barriers. When they become staff, they become part of the continuous community fabric, where they could maintain positive social relationships and network with the community— another important youth development strategy. One young employee noted, "There is a group of friends that are my community house friends who I see when I come back from college" to work in summer camp (personal interview, June 23, 2003).

A number of interviewees used the phrase "second family" to describe the community house. A similar feeling is expressed in *Beacon Profiles*, describing a young woman who worked in several positions at the La Plaza Beacon run by Alianza Dominicana: "La Plaza is now her second home and she considers each staff person a cherished uncle or aunt" (YDI, 2002, p. 19). *Beacon Profiles* also cites the benefit of connecting young people more closely with their communities, quoting John Kixmiller of the Center for Family Life as saying, "You need people at all developmental stages to build a strong community center" (YDI, 2002, p. 13).

> Young people who were summer campers eight years ago are counselors now, sometimes working under program directors who were their own camp counselors. This continuity offsets the notable turnover in the afterschool field.

Reinforcing Families

Parents in the youths' "first families" know that their children's educational goals will be respected and encouraged. Program employment policies that promote school attendance and check in on academic progress create a seamless support system with families and schools. Particularly in neighborhoods with high rates of high school non-completion, the employer's message can be a factor in raising retention and graduation rates.

Friends and family play a part in a young person's decision to maintain long-term relationships. Stated one interviewee: "My father always tells me, 'Stay close to those people at the community house; they are good people and they can help you'" (personal interview, June 25, 2003). Parents of young employees meet with staff for guidance on the college application process and for assistance in filling out financial aid forms. They may also seek assistance in finding fulltime jobs for their children outside the agency when it is time for them to move on.

Young employees also learn parenting skills, as one young woman pointed out in her interview. Teens working in afterschool programs learn effective, non-punitive ways to discipline children, as well as how to listen and to communicate assertively but not aggressively. Such skills strengthen the fabric of families and the communities they live in.

Benefits to Programs

The "generations" of youth participants who become staff mimic the generations of families. Young people who were summer campers eight years ago are counselors now, sometimes working under program directors who were their own camp counselors. This continuity offsets the notable turnover in the afterschool field documented by Halpern (2003). The multi-year retention of young people fosters continuity of staffing and relationships between adults and youth.

Staff who grew up in programs often have a strong sense of loyalty and identify with the agency mission. States a Beacon staff person who joined the program at age 14 and is now a fulltime staff member: "I am grateful to the program. Sometimes I wonder what I would

have done without this program and where I would be" (personal interview, August 14, 2003). Her esteem for the program is reflected in the intensity she brings to her projects and her dedicated efforts toward continuous improvement of the program and her own work in it. Staff members who engaged in learning activities when they were participants associate education and growth with the program. They are receptive to continuous staff development because it is consistent with their past program experiences. All of the interviewees articulated many ways that they learned on the job, describing the methods with enthusiasm.

Employment of older youth becomes a retention strategy for adult staff as well. "Every time I think about leaving, I think about having to say good-bye to the kids," confided one program director who entered the agency as a participant in the summer youth employment program. The pleasure of watching young people grow up to share our history becomes the glue that keeps good adult staff in a program.

Components of Successful Youth Employment

Continuing staff development is not only key to the success of youth employees, but also an important youth development strategy. Our young people learn by a variety of methods, including mentoring, observation, formal opportunities for reflection, and careful supervision.

Apprentice/Mentor Roles

Working as staff under the supervision of an experienced youth worker is like an apprenticeship. In some staffing structures, young staff members are intentionally paired with more experienced staff members who are charged with developing their skills. A young staff member may also be paired with an older staff member who has professional expertise in an area of interest to the young person. For instance, a high school student with a strong interest in theater found employment as coordinator of the cultural committee of the FHCH Beacon, also staffed by an adult who operated her own theater company.

In some cases, staff learn by observing the actions of more seasoned staff, particularly when learning to defuse conflicts and handle challenging behavior. One young staff member noted, "I learned from experience and by observing…. I try something, and if it doesn't work, I try something else, and if that doesn't work, I ask someone. But usually it works" (personal interview, July 10, 2003).

These youth-adult partnerships exemplify strategies for promoting learning in a youth development setting. Steve came to FHCH at age 13 through the Hot Spots Street Outreach program, where he remained until he aged out at 19. As a youth worker, he is highly skilled at engaging young people, mediating conflicts, and guiding groups. Scott, the young man described in the opening vignette, cited him as one of the people who plays a key role in setting the positive and welcoming tone of FHCH: "He makes it a comfortable place to be, and everyone knows he's there to help." When I asked Steve how he learned, he credited the outreach director:

> Everything I know I learned from [the outreach director and the senior outreach worker].… My first few weeks as an outreach worker, [the director] really put me to the grind. We had meetings; he gave me reading material. We had training sessions. Through my trainings as an outreach worker, I learned so much about understanding people, the importance of listening to people, the importance of continuity, the importance of being a role model... I also remember how [the staff] were with me, and I try my hardest to emulate them. (personal interview, June 13, 2003)

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Feedback

Our formal evaluation system incorporates an extensive process of self-reflection and a joint process with the supervisor to plan for growth. Senior staff try to provide clear parameters so that younger staff can think through the logical consequences of their assumptions and behavior and act independently while alone with children and youth. Supervisors offer a great deal of feedback, both orally and in writing. One supervisor has his staff keep journals. He encourages workers to use the journals to reflect on their practice and periodically reviews their writing to give feedback.

Paths of Progressive Responsibility

Returning staff receive progressive training for positions of increasing responsibility. Employment offers young workers an opportunity to integrate lessons introduced to them through curricula and activities when they were

younger. Cathy, who graduated from the FHCH Access for Young Women girls' empowerment program, began as a counselor-in-training and ended up as assistant director of the summer day camp. She ultimately went into the field of therapeutic recreation. She described her progression through specific skills that built on previous skills, beginning with her leadership experiences (personal interview, June 25, 2003). Another employee articulated a similar theme:

> I became a better person as staff; I learned responsibility. I couldn't act like a regular teen. It made me mature a lot. Even as a volunteer, my time was more my own. But being a staff person was better, beyond the salary; I like the recognition and being integrated [into the program staff] and becoming a leader. I like showing my peers we can make a difference and being a role model. (personal interview, August 14, 2003)

Staff also have an opportunity to try new approaches and new roles, including serving on teams that design and facilitate staff development sessions and on agency and departmental committees.

Challenges

Hiring former or current participants as staff is not without its dilemmas. The work of child and youth development requires a high level of skill. Quality, experienced supervision is required to bring out the best in young staff. With our pattern of promoting young people from within, we often find that our young staff are supervised by a director who is also inexperienced. The supervisors themselves need the supervision of seasoned directors who understand and appreciate this challenge and can work with the advantages inherent in the situation. Smaller programs, with fewer staff who can receive more attention from the director, can be an asset in adopting this model.

We generally hold that we can work with any young person who is motivated, but directors must bring a blend of good judgment, good communication skills, personal balance, and consciousness in developing their staff. Youth staff seem to benefit most when they have a close supervisor who can observe and give feedback and with whom they can honestly raise questions.

> Boundary issues can be complicated in a community setting, even for mature staff. The web of relationships that enriches layers of support for young people also adds layers of confusion.

Dual Roles and Boundary Issues

Our young staffers have dual roles: In some ways, they are still participants. A staff member running an activity at one site may, at another site, be a team member with a participant from the activity she runs. Staff who have been around for a long time may assume that unprofessional conduct will be tolerated as it was when they were participants. At FHCH, a job candidate who was a former participant assumed a level of familiarity in the interview that was inappropriate to the situation. Similar dilemmas may exist for adult staff: A staff member's counseling client may be hired as staff in another program, so that the client is also a colleague. Mattison, Jayaratne, and Croxton (2002), addressing this dilemma in adult social work, ask, "When, if ever, does an individual cease to be a client?" They conclude that the answer may vary depending on the roles and the community and agency setting.

Boundary issues can be complicated in a community setting, even for mature staff. The web of relationships that enriches layers of support for young people also adds layers of confusion. Staff members may be friends with participants through pre-existing relationships, putting agency guidelines about maintaining social relationships with participants into a gray area. A participant may enter the program with a group of friends and subsequently be hired as staff, complicating his or her social relationship with peers. Furthermore, supervisory and administrative staff enroll our own children in our programs. While there is no higher recommendation of our faith in our staff, being charged with care of our families can be a burden for junior staff.

Finding an appropriate balance between fostering young people's growth and ensuring that they meet employment expectations requires the supervisor to be clear about those expectations and the staff member to be willing to accept challenges. Clear and consistent codes of behavior are key. Supervisors communicate a common message about how staff members should conduct themselves, providing time in staff development and supervision sessions to reflect on these codes. They remind young staffers that the purpose of our work is to promote the growth of participants rather than our own gratification. Supervisors work with young employees on trusting their own authority, extending respect, and

holding participants to expectations. They point out that young staff are role models who represent participants' own near-term future. Perhaps the most important factor is a strong and trusting relationship in which young staff can speak frankly about their dilemmas and adult staff can respectfully challenge young people to grow.

Time to Move On

In the FHCH peer counseling program, a strong group of young people remained for several years as staff. At a certain point, the "peer counselors" were highly skilled, but they were no longer peers of the high school students. Now in their 20s, they needed to move on so that teens could take their positions. Young workers' level of comfort with their programs may stunt their professional growth if they stop looking for opportunities elsewhere. Supervisors must be sensitive to young staff members' need to move on and gently encourage them to make the break. One strategy we've found promising is to maintain relationships with other agencies so we can refer our staff members when they need a new opportunity in order to continue to grow.

Equity Issues

Some groups of young people, though they may have something important to offer, experience barriers to employment in a youth program. We had to deny employment to a former FHCH participant with a strong interest in coaching sports because he lacked the necessary literacy skills due to learning disabilities. Another long-term participant, who was successfully getting his life back on track during a felony probation, was barred by NYC regulations from working with children or youth. A young woman who was in a wheelchair was able to volunteer one day a week tutoring younger children and gave workshops to other teens on disability awareness but was not able to work full time.

At FHCH, we are addressing such dilemmas through annual job fairs organized by the Youth Employment Program and by posting and referring afterschool jobs in FCHC and other agencies. Potential employees are pre-screened by the youth employment coordinator and then referred to afterschool sites for employment. Through this process, young people receive assistance in preparing good résumés, as well as coaching on the interview process, in order to present

their skills in the best light. Over the years, staff have received training on the Americans with Disabilities Act and the rights of youth with felony convictions.

Another equity issue has to do with the web of relationships in a community-based program. Every group of children and youth includes those who are comfortable reaching out for adult attention and those who hold back. The young people interviewed for this project all related well to adults and reached out to staff throughout their tenure as participants. For this reason, they were close to the directors who were in charge of hiring. Other young people, less skilled at reaching out to adults, may be missing out on employment opportunities—and they may be the very young people who are most in need of supportive employment. Attending to the importance of employment as a youth development strategy can help us to look past the obvious candidates and see those who might benefit more. A willingness to take a chance on a promising candidate who is struggling with personal issues can provide significant rewards. As one senior director stated, "Sometimes the staff person we hire is the one who most needs the job."

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Supervision and Training

Supervision and training—which should be both universal and individualized—are the keys to meeting these challenges. Universal training includes giving all staff a set of common parameters: the values, protocols, and language of the program. Many former participants have already absorbed the values, but the specifics of protocols may have been invisible until they happen to "bump up against" one. Clarity about policies and procedures, ample opportunities for discussion, communication through weekly individual and group staff meetings, and formal staff development are essential elements of a good supervision and training system. Staff should also be exposed to training outside the organization so they can meet colleagues from other agencies and develop an understanding of the language and practices of the field.

Supervision must also be tailored to each young person. For example, an FHCH staff member who exhibited exemplary skills and abilities with younger teens was subsequently hired into a program serving older teens who were nearly peers. In spite of his pride in the new position and support from supervisors, he

was never comfortable working with the older teens. He couldn't establish the necessary balance between friendliness and authority. He was terminated in a gentle interview in which it was acknowledged that the position was not a good fit. The supervisor, concerned with the staff member's opportunity to learn about himself, wanted him to experience the termination as an occasion for growth and reflection rather than as punishment. The staff member continued to work successfully with the younger teens. This experience helped us remember that the youth development model of our programs can serve as an educational framework for supervising young staff members.

The Bottom Line

The practice of hiring former participants as staff in youth programs is a salient feature of the youth development field. Originally an expedient and cost-effective way of staffing programs with thin budgets, it is beginning to be recognized as a youth development strategy that is effective in providing older youth with a pathway to adult roles. The benefits to the sponsoring agency include a strong sense of mission among staff members as well as continuity of relationships in the program. The challenges of this strategy can be offset and the benefits maximized by attentive and supportive supervision, reflection by both adult and youth staff, and honesty on both sides about when it is time to move on. The youth development field would benefit from further research on this practice, particularly on the most effective supervisory techniques and program practices. Examination of best practices through case studies, as well as broadscale documentation of the extent of the practice of hiring youth participants, could advance our knowledge of this often-used but little-studied strategy.

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[1] All participant and staff names in this article are pseudonyms.
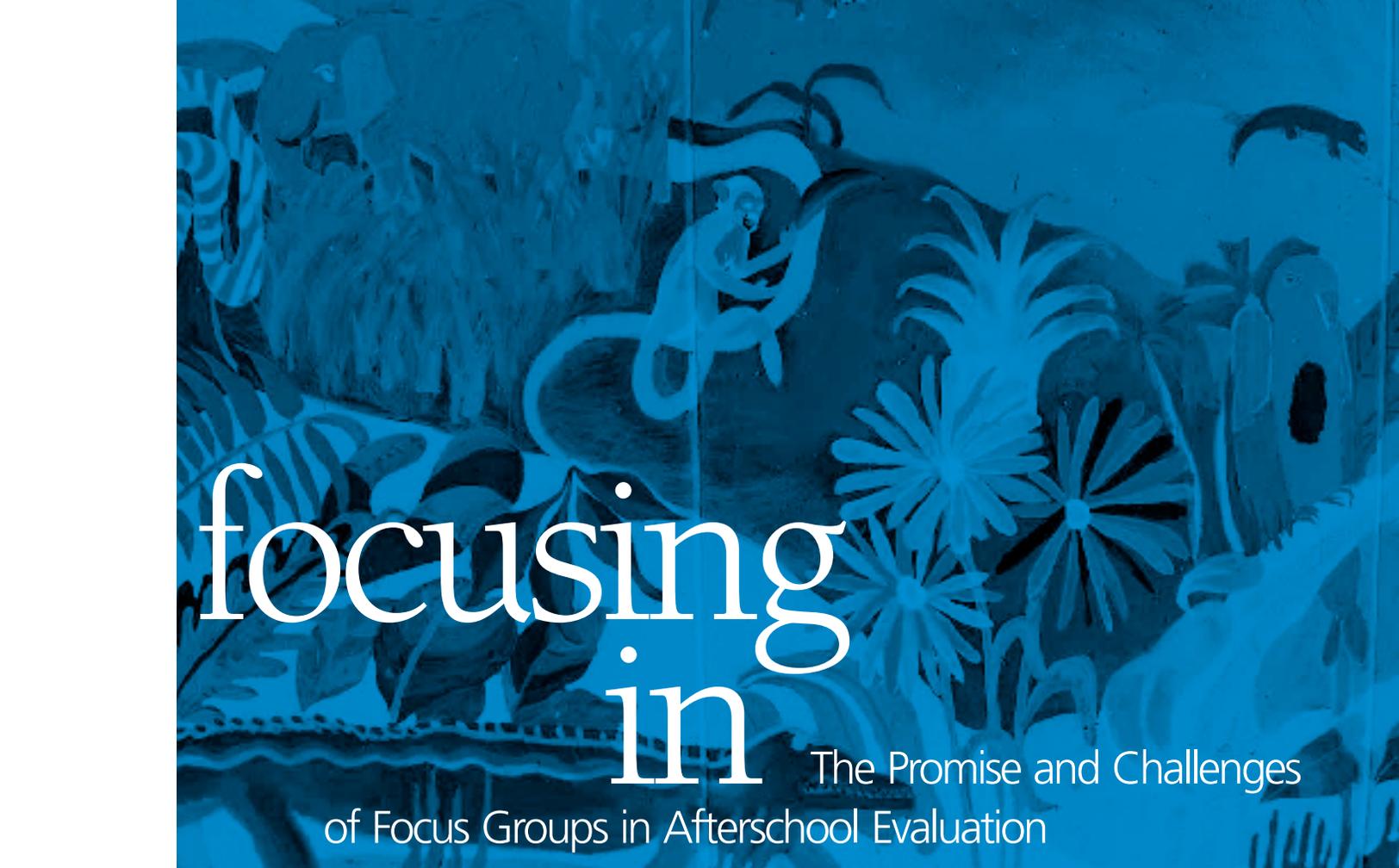
focusing in

The Promise and Challenges of Focus Groups in Afterschool Evaluation

by Nicole Schaefer-McDaniel, Kimberly Libman, Sarah Zeller-Berkman, and Kira Krenichyn

In these days where "accountability" is the byword, organizations more and more frequently seek to evaluate their programs. They often hire outside evaluators to help them assess the effectiveness of their programs, to find out what works and what doesn't, and to determine what programmatic changes would be beneficial.

ActKnowledge, a New York City action research organization, is one such evaluator. In this paper, we examine an evaluation we conducted of an afterschool program operating in New York City public schools to reflect on the use of focus groups as a means of evaluating afterschool programs. Since the administrative office that hired us to do the evaluation and the directors of the program we evaluated wanted to learn more about the young people enrolled in the program and the staff that runs it, the use of focus groups as a research method seemed a logical choice. The literature on focus groups as a methodology provides a rationale for using this tech-

NICOLE SCHAEFER-MCDANIEL is a research associate with ActKnowledge, an action research organization in New York City, and a doctoral candidate in Environmental Psychology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY). Prior to joining ActKnowledge, she worked at Pathways to Housing, where she conducted an evaluation of a housing-first program for homeless and psychiatrically disabled adults in New York City.

KIMBERLY LIBMAN is a research associate with ActKnowledge and a doctoral student in Environmental Psychology at the CUNY Graduate Center. She has worked with young people for nearly a decade in formal and informal educational settings, as well as in her own research.

SARAH ZELLER-BERKMAN is a research associate with ActKnowledge and a doctoral candidate at the CUNY Graduate Center in the Social Personality–Psychology department. Her research interests include exploring the impact of incarceration on families and communities. For the past few years, she has been using participatory action research designs, with youth as co-researchers, as a way of investigating social issues and creating social change.

KIRA KRENICHYN is director of research at ActKnowledge, where she oversees evaluation research with youth development programs in New York City. She has a doctoral degree in Environmental Psychology from the CUNY Graduate Center. In the past, she has also worked as a counselor in youth programs.

nique although it also suggests some of the challenges. To this research, we bring our own experience in evaluating the afterschool program, discuss the challenges we encountered in using focus groups, and conclude with suggestions for future work involving focus groups in afterschool evaluation. While we reflect here from the point of view of evaluators, we hope that this article will be useful to program staff and administrators, as well as fellow program evaluators, so that full and ethical partnerships between the numerous stakeholders involved in evaluation work can be fulfilled.

Use of Focus Groups in Research and Evaluation

Focus groups have been a popular research method in the social sciences since the 1980s (Asbury, 1995; Bader & Rossi, 2002; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1996; 1997; Smith, 1995). Focus groups typically consist of a small group of six to twelve participants who have some salient characteristic in common, such as belonging to a particular program. One or two trained facilitators moderate the discussion and encourage participants to share their opinions and experiences (Asbury, 1995; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1996, 1997). Besides asking questions, facilitators are also responsible for bringing the discussion back on topic if it loses focus. As Morgan (1996) notes, focus groups are different from everyday group conversations in that the purpose is to discuss a particular phenomenon, reaction, or experience. The emphasis is on the interaction the group creates (Morgan, 1996). This emphasis on group interaction is what differentiates focus groups from individual interviews. The discussions that emerge during focus groups allow researchers to explore a topic in greater depth than is possible with some other instruments such as surveys. Facilitators' ability to ask participants to clarify certain areas of discussion allows the facilitators to better interpret focus group findings (Nabors, Reynolds, & Weist, 2000).

Wilkinson (1999) notes that the interactive nature of focus groups addresses a number of problems of social research, including the possibility that the research can ignore and thereby reproduce power imbalances, that it may be looking at phenomena out of context, and that it produces artificial accounts of people's

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lived experiences. By tapping pre-existing groups such as a group of staff members, focus groups can gather information specific to the workplace. In focus groups, the information shared is produced in the same social context that the evaluation is trying to understand. As group members talk out their agreements and disagreements, researchers can observe and document both what information is shared and how that information is socially constructed.

Recently, focus groups have become a popular method in program evaluation (Christie & Rose, 2003; Morgan, 1996, 1997; Smith, 1995). Fitting focus groups into existing program structures, such as staff meetings and youth councils, has advantages, since it brings the research into the social and physical setting it aims to understand. It also enhances the potential focus groups have for creating a collective consciousness within a group about the political forces and resource structures in which group members operate. This consciousness, apart from formally articulated research findings, can be a critical motivation for creating positive change.

Because focus groups are easily adaptable to different settings and cultures (Morgan, 1996, 1997; see Balch & Mertens, 1999) and because this method is particularly beneficial for participants with different perspectives from those of adult facilitators (Bender & Ewbank, 1994), program evaluators are increasingly conducting focus groups with young people who are participants in the program being evaluated. Evaluators and researchers in general praise the use of this method with youth because it actively involves them in the research process and values their feedback (Kitzinger, 1995; Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell, & Britten, 2002). This insight led the evaluators of the Core Arts program in Mississippi to conduct separate focus groups with program staff and child participants to explore the program's successes and areas of difficulty (Harvard Family Research Project, n.d.). In New York City, Thompson (2005) conducted focus groups with children enrolled in an afterschool fashion program to learn about their experiences.

Despite the rosy picture the social science and evaluation literature paints of this technique, implementing focus groups in program evaluations can also have drawbacks. For example, "groupthink," the phenomenon in

which participants conform to the consensus of a group rather than voicing their individual opinions and concerns, can occur during these discussions (MacDougall, 1997). Fitting focus groups into existing program structures can also have disadvantages. As we will illustrate below, difficulties with sampling and participant selection can alter the outcome of the discussion and, in turn, color evaluation findings. Further, conducting focus groups in existing groups of staff can reproduce power imbalances. Preexisting tensions or internal alliances, invisible to researchers, can limit the honesty and depth of discussion.

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Context

The afterschool program we evaluated was operated by a community-based organization (CBO) in public schools in low-income New York City neighborhoods. We reflect here on the second year of a three-year longitudinal evaluation in which we collected program information through surveys and observations in addition to focus groups. The afterschool program typically served one-quarter of each school's population and offered academic support, academic enrichment, and youth development programs, such as sex education and decision-making curricula, as well as fun activities such as theater and dance. In addition to these activities, the afterschool program also provided students and families with such resources as health and social services, delivered either by the CBO or by other organizations with which the CBO had developed links.

Students in the program faced multiple barriers to school success: The majority tested below state and city standards, almost half spoke Spanish at home, all were exposed to violence in their communities, and many faced other family issues. Academic support and enrichment were thus key activities in the afterschool program, which sought to make learning fun and engaging for students.

Challenges of Using Focus Groups in Afterschool Evaluation

Our experience with this evaluation both illustrates the challenges of using focus groups with young program participants and suggests ways to address those challenges. We used focus groups as an evaluation tool because the sponsoring organization and its program directors wanted feedback from program participants and staff. Focus groups, because of the advantages of the technique outlined above, were chosen as a means to gather such feedback through meaningful dialogue among participants and staff.

The focus groups were conducted in the middle of the school year so that students and staff who were new to the program had sufficient time and experience to build opinions about it. In focus groups with young people, we explored their experiences by asking which aspects of the program they particularly liked or wished to change. Focus groups with program staff discussed issues related to youth development as well as the challenges and supports they encountered in their work.

Although we have used focus groups successfully and extensively in other projects, we were surprised to discover that conducting focus groups with adults and young people in afterschool settings was not as easy or straightforward as we had anticipated. Though we continued to find that focus groups were a valuable evaluation tool, we also faced challenges with a number of issues related to logistics, ethics, and sampling.

Physical Setting

We found that the physical setting in which a focus group is conducted can strongly influence its progression and outcomes. In this evaluation, we conducted focus groups with students and staff in school cafeterias, libraries, teacher lunchrooms, offices, classrooms, kitchens, and staff lounges. Each setting carried its own built-in behavior program, which we had to consider and sometimes modify. For instance, when we conducted focus groups in classrooms, youth would often raise their hands instead of just jumping into a conversation. Social norms about who usually uses a space and what activities are allowed or forbidden are communicated both by what people already know about the space and by such physical attributes as furniture.

Although moderators can and do temporarily alter focus group settings, any space has physical limitations, some of which are easier to manipulate than others. The open echoing space and long, narrow, benched tables of a cafeteria, which limit the interaction and privacy of a group discussion, are difficult to change. Whenever possible, we used a space such as a teachers' lunchroom, where students are usually not allowed. Such a space not only helped ensure privacy but also indirectly let young people know that we valued their comments and took

their suggestions seriously, because we conducted the group in a room usually reserved for adult staff.

Privacy

Hand in hand with concerns about space were concerns about ensuring privacy. Once a focus group begins, interruptions disrupt both the content of conversation and the sense of cohesion among participants. However, when doing this kind of research with young people, the need to create and maintain privacy is complicated by practical concerns about who is responsible for the young people's safety and how they may react to an unfamiliar adult. During this evaluation, we asked program staff to leave the room when we were talking with young people in order to allow them to speak more candidly. In a few cases, participants tested our facilitation skills by disengaging from the conversation, being disrespectful to other youth, or walking out of the room. These incidents highlighted the need to balance privacy with practicality and safety.

Privacy is also extremely important for focus groups with staff, because their comments could affect their employment or their subsequent interactions with—and trust of—supervisors and peers. During this evaluation, more than one program director ignored our request for privacy—including, in one case, a sign posted outside the room—and entered the session with program staff mid-discussion. In these cases, staff sometimes expressed that they were upset by the lack of respect they experienced. Similarly, we felt frustrated because the interruptions disturbed the flow of the focus groups and indicated that the program directors were not taking our efforts seriously. Such disruptions thus provided valuable information about the context of a program, which we captured in the documentation and considered in our analysis of the discussion. From experiences like these, we learned to speak with program staff, and especially with supervisors, beforehand about the arrangements for the focus groups and to agree on ground rules to ensure privacy. Similarly, at the outset of every focus group, we discussed with participants what they hoped to learn, what we would and would not do with the material shared, and what limiting factors or concerns group members felt.

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Sampling

Though much has been written on ethics in social science research, Smith (1995) notes that relatively little has been written about the ethics of focus groups, despite their increasing popularity. Social scientists generally adhere to specific ethical responsibilities including *respect for autonomy,* which means that research participation must be voluntary; *non-maleficence,* or the researchers' obligation not to inflict harm; and *beneficence,* or consideration of the benefits, risks, and costs of participation (see Beauchamp & Childress, 1994).

Because we take these principles quite seriously, we could not ignore the ethics of our work as we talked to youth and staff about their afterschool programs. We often confronted practical constraints, group dynamics, developmental considerations, and institutional power dynamics whose ethics we were forced to navigate more or less on our own, since the literature does not provide guidance on these issues (see Smith, 1995).

Though the selection of participants for focus groups would most commonly be considered a sampling issue, it raised ethical concerns as well. In our search for a group of young people who would be willing to talk to us, we naturally turned toward the program directors. We hoped they would pick groups of engaging youth who were not afraid to share their views. While this method of choosing participants was practical, we wondered after the fact how we could assure these youth that their identity was protected when they had been hand-selected by the very directors whose programs they were critiquing. Aside from concern about possible sampling bias that could affect the validity of findings, we pondered how we could honestly tell youth that they should share their concerns openly. In retrospect, we realized we should have been more honest with youth about what protections we could or could not provide so that they could decide which opinions they wanted to share about their programs. Respect for autonomy includes giving all individuals, youth or adult, the information necessary to make informed decisions.

Participant Confidentiality

Another ethical concern was confidentiality. Participants in a focus group can reveal information about other group participants. As facilitators, we always mentioned

that anything shared in the group should not be shared outside the group. However, we also had to clarify that we would have to tell a staff member if any participants expressed harmful thoughts such as wanting to injure themselves or others. A transparent introduction to the focus group protocol can accurately reflect the extent to which the information shared in the focus group is available to people not located in the immediate setting. In our case, we explained that we would write reports summarizing what everyone said in the focus groups without identifying any individual participants by name. We also reminded youth that, although we would be sharing the group's input with the program, no one in the group should share outside the group anything a particular participant said.

Staff Support

Other experiences in this evaluation emphasized the importance of having the support of the program staff. Staff support can consist simply of helping set up a room or providing extra paper and pens. More importantly, staff support is vital to the care and safety of the young participants. In one instance, we arranged for a staff member to be nearby while we conducted a focus group with youth; however, when we needed help finding a participant who suddenly walked out, the staff person was nowhere to be found. Addressing this situation took up a lot of the time allotted for the focus group and disrupted not only the flow of discussion but also the group's sense of safety. While we thought we had taken precautions beforehand, we learned that we should have explored support logistics and expectations with staff much more clearly.

Such experiences taught us that evaluators and program administrators need to be clear with one another about the logistical requirements for conducting successful focus groups. Evaluators need not only to share what a focus group is, how it operates, and how it contributes to the overall evaluation, but also to engage all staff members who assist in scheduling and organizing the groups in discussion of the requirements for running a smooth focus group. Similarly, evaluators must accommodate the lived realities of the organizations they evaluate. For example, we sometimes had to accept that a director chose a group of young people for our focus

groups based on the fact that those youth were free during our meeting time, though we wanted to include different groups of youth as well. Evaluators and program staff need to find a balance between methodological idealism and realistic practicality by communicating in advance about arrangements for the focus groups. We learned to ask staff and administrators what they would like to learn from the focus group. Reflecting on possible positive outcomes for the program provided an incentive for staff to ensure that the group went smoothly.

Youth Development and Safety

Following the principles of positive youth development increasingly adopted in afterschool settings meant shifting our ethic about the goals of the research and raised additional concerns about ensuring youths' safety.

We learned to view focus groups not simply as a way to extract data, but as group activities that could promote positive youth development ideals. In the afterschool setting, the principle of *beneficence* (Beauchamp & Childress, 1994) needed to include positive youth development ideals such as encouraging the young people to participate actively on multiple levels and helping them to feel valued, safe, and supported. Integral to positive youth development is a respect for the importance of youth opinions and the significance of their knowledge in creating quality youth programs. We found that open communication with the youth helped them feel valued from the beginning. We used transparent introductions to make it clear that both we and the program administrators wanted to hear the young people's thoughts and opinions in order to make better decisions about programming. Laying ground rules about how to respect others' opinions also helped to ensure a safe space. Cursing at others or interrupting peers was discouraged from the beginning and reinforced consistently throughout the group meeting. We engaged the young people in setting the ground rules and in other aspects of facilitation in order to gain their investment in the process and outcomes of the groups. For example, besides participating in the ground-rules discussion, participants also were engaged in note-taking and in such aspects of group

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moderation as ensuring that our conversation had one speaker at a time, stayed on topic, and kept within our time limit.

In our experience, problems with youth disrespecting each other or the facilitator mainly arose when a child had been forced to participate. We therefore told program staff that we wanted young people to participate in the focus group of their own accord. Young people's participation is helpful and important only when it is voluntary; a focus group will not yield useful results if it produces feelings of coercion and frustration.

What if an argument or a physical fight does break out in the focus group setting? When we ran into such precarious situations, we had to "decide if and how to intervene" (Smith, 1995, p. 483) in each instance. Although we had to be prepared to act, we also coordinated with a staff person to be available if the need arose. To ensure privacy, we tried to have a staff person located outside the room, or available by cell phone or walkie-talkie, in case a child wanted to leave or we needed help in controlling the group. Addressing this logistical issue prior to conducting focus groups helped alleviate stress not only for the youth, but also for us and for program administrators, who were concerned about the youths' safety and the program's liability. The need to have a staff member available reinforced the need to establish a clear understanding with staff about what we might need while facilitating focus groups and what the program could provide. We learned that it was more effective to reschedule a group when we became uncomfortable with the logistical arrangements than to continue in order to finish all groups on a timetable.

Some of our discussions with youth and staff were dominated by two or three individuals, while other participants felt uncomfortable speaking in the focus groups or were not able to express themselves verbally due to language barriers. Multiple avenues for participation, another youth development concept, helped address this problem. In our focus groups, we tapped into multiple intelligences through drawing, mapping, writing, and role play in addition to guided collective conversation (Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell, & Britten, 2002). Both adults and youth can participate in such activities, which serve to mediate power differentials and create a comfortable atmosphere (Yuen, 2004). When working with immigrant youth, we addressed language issues by ensuring that the facilitator was bilingual. These methods allowed all participants to express their opinions so that we could capture vital information that might otherwise have been lost.

Following our philosophy that youth and staff should continually inform the evaluation process, we provided opportunities for participants to offer feedback to facilitators at the close of focus group meetings. The Participatory Action Team in New York (Zeller-Berkman, in press), a group of youth researchers, used this technique in conducting focus groups with other youth; their findings have led to important insights about and improvements in protocols and facilitation techniques. Simply extracting data without attention to process is not in line with the ethics of the positive youth development that guides our work and that of the programs we serve.

Flexibility of Methods

Even with good communication and preparation, we found we had to be ready to adapt protocols and be flexible in facilitation strategies when plans changed. For example, one staff focus group conducted as part of a regularly scheduled staff meeting had an unusual high attendance of 25 people. Conversely, a similar focus group at another site involved only five participants. Though the ideal focus group is six to twelve people, evaluators can facilitate a productive group of a different size if they are prepared to change the focus group protocol. When we met with the large group, we shifted from our planned strategy of talking in one group to using a cluster of breakout groups along with writing exercises. At intervals during the focus group, smaller groups shared major themes of their discussions with the other groups. This combination allowed staff members to talk to one another about their ideas and experiences and still captured individual thoughts on paper. Focus groups with fewer than six people are challenging because participants tend to speak to the moderator rather than to one another. In our group of five staff members, we emphasized that participants should use questions or probes and came up with techniques to encourage them to do so. For example, the moderator can sit down among the participants rather than stand, so that the group focuses less on the perceived role of the moderator. Another strategy is to flip statements directed to the moderator back to the group by asking, for example, "Do you all agree?" With these techniques, we found that the few participants engaged in a meaningful discussion rather than simply providing short answers for the researcher.

We sometimes used role play and dramatizations as facilitation strategies in our focus groups with youth. However, we found that these techniques worked best

at sites where the afterschool programming included drama or theater activities. When young people had experience using performance as a communication tool, the role plays were engaging, fun, and informative. At sites where youth were less accustomed to this kind of activity, the young people sometimes found the use of role play frustrating, confusing, and even draining, so we had to find other ways to engage them.

Incentives

Since we were asking young people to take time away from their programs to talk with us, we wanted to compensate them for their time. While such compensation may not be common practice in evaluation work, social science research with children and young people generally recommends providing young participants with incentives (see Morrow & Richards, 1996). Interestingly, the literature on focus groups does not discuss the nuanced consequences of this practice; this apparently simple decision brought on new discussions in our team. We needed gifts for a rather large group of young people but operated under a tight budget. We were thus forced to ponder whether we should provide each participant with a present or pool the money to buy a DVD or a pizza party for each program. We also worried about how young people who were excluded from the group would feel about not receiving gifts. After much back and forth, we decided to give individual gifts only to participating youth, which meant that we were not able to spend much money on each present. We wondered how the young people would interpret our simple present of a school supply item. Would they be excited that we gave them a gift or offended because it was not very expensive? While most of the youth seemed content with their presents, some commented on the fact that the pen they picked was on the cheap side. Our experience with incentives on a low budget was thus mixed and inconclusive; our own solution was to go back to our funder to ask for enough money to purchase better gifts in subsequent phases of the evaluation.

Another challenge with the incentives was the question of when to distribute them. We gave them at the start of the focus group, using the activity of grabbing a gift out of a bag as an icebreaker. We thought that giving presents early on would show youth that they were not required to participate in order to "earn" their gifts and let them know that we valued their participation. Unfortunately, we found that giving presents at the beginning all too often distracted youth as they complained about their gifts or attempted to trade with other participants.

Program Change

After listening to the concerns youth and staff were voicing, we often asked ourselves, "What is being done with the recommendations?" While organizations initiate evaluations in order to improve their programs, they vary in their ability and willingness to implement the changes that an evaluation report suggests. We were asking youth to share their opinions in order to inform their own programming with no assurance that their input would in fact be used. To address this concern, we went above and beyond standard evaluation protocols to ensure that the programs responded to the findings. For example, we often created brief intermediate reports to be distributed earlier than our traditional report at the end of the year or term. We sometimes helped staff sort through recommendations to see which were feasible and to create an action plan for implementing changes. The evaluation feedback became a dialogue between the evaluators and the program staff.

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Lessons Learned

We value the use of focus groups with afterschool program staff and participants because such groups allow dialogue, provide information that we cannot explore through close-ended surveys, and give youth, in particular, the chance to express their experiences. Because use of focus groups with young people is a fairly new methodology, we found ourselves learning good strategies for engaging young people "on the fly." Perhaps the most important strategy we discovered was the need to be flexible.

We learned several valuable lessons through our qualitative evaluation work with afterschool program

staff and youth. First and foremost, we discovered that conducting focus groups is not as straightforward in afterschool settings as in some other contexts; it requires a deeper level of preparation than simply arranging for time and materials. We needed a definite plan of action, considering such questions as: How many participants do we need? Where can we conduct the focus group with minimal interruption? What is our goal for this focus group? Evaluators and program staff should work closely together to discuss needs and concerns, particularly those related to space, safety, and privacy. Focus groups are more likely to be successful when thought goes into creating a space that is trusting, open, and safe.

We learned to explain our agenda and set rules for discussion at the beginning of each focus group with youth. To do so, of course, we had to ponder these rules with program staff prior to the session, carefully examining which rules were important and why. Young people also can and should weigh in on behavioral guidelines for focus groups, which may be different from those appropriate in other spaces such as classrooms and program activities. In a related point, evaluators and program staff should have a clear plan of action in case something goes wrong, for example, if youth start fighting.

As an agency, ActKnowledge is reflecting on ways youth can participate in evaluation beyond simply being part of a focus group or other evaluation technique (Krenichyn, Schaefer-McDaniel, Clark, & Zeller-Berkman, in press). On Hart's (1992) continuum of youth participation, we are still in the beginning phases of creating opportunity for deep youth involvement. We are pushing ourselves to find ways of including youth as more active, responsible participants in the research process, for instance, by involving them in research design. We hope fellow evaluators and other programs will join us in the attempt to involve youth stakeholders not only as participants but also as co-researchers in the evaluation process.

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Recommendations for implementing focus groups in afterschool evaluations with staff and participants

Evaluators and program staff should:

- Discuss focus group needs for space, privacy, and support.

- Discuss outcomes of the evaluation with staff to get their buy-in.

- Do as much as possible within program constraints to ensure participant confidentiality.

- Include in focus groups not just whoever is available but participants who can speak knowledgeably about program experiences, both positive and negative.

- Engage in dialogue about how to use what has been learned in focus groups.

Evaluators should:

- Establish a focus group protocol that is flexible enough to accommodate unforeseen changes.

- Be honest with participants about how much their privacy can be protected.

- Use focus groups as a continuous evaluation of practice, but be mindful of the potential effect of frustration about what can and cannot be changed.

- Offer immediate feedback, for example, in the form of short reports.

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Boyz 2 Men

Responsible Empowerment for Inner-City Adolescent Males

by Jon Gilgoff

"Can I have Kisses if I'm good?" Manny[1] asked, eyeing the bag of Hershey's chocolate I had brought to our weekly Boyz 2 Men group for an icebreaker activity.

I shook my head, knowing what was coming. As the Director of Gender-Based Programs for the Educational Alliance, a social service agency based in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, I had led too many boys' and young men's groups *not* to expect consequences when a guy asked for "kisses" from another guy. Though the purpose of such groups was to facilitate the responsible empowerment of males to develop healthy relationships within a just and equitable society, teasing and specifically homophobia-laced remarks were all too common in the sessions I led at the agency's various youth centers. At Project TRY, an alternative education and drug treatment program for urban adolescents in recovery, the frequency and severity of this behavior was particularly high.

It therefore wasn't surprising when the class erupted in laughter and side comments, with some students getting out of their seats.

"That sounded kinda funny," Jerome said, bending over with his hands on his knees.

"Okay, okay," I began, dejected but also heartened that the guys seemed to be at least avoiding the use of homophobic language. This consolation proved to be short-lived, however, as Manny quickly attempted to cover his "mistake" by saying, "No homo!"

In response, I reminded the guys of the group agreement we had created. The first rule was "Respect," originally written as one word, then progressively amended by the group at my prompting to include, "for all people," and then, "including females and homosexuals."

Chiming in with a couple of half-hearted prompts of "C'mon y'all," some of the more mature

JON GILGOFF is the Boys Services Manager of the Youth Justice Institute in Oakland, California, and a former Robert Bowne Foundation Fellow who researched Boyz 2 Men through his work with the Educational Alliance in New York City. He is a graduate of Columbia University's School of Social Work, where he helped to found and direct the Male Action Coalition, a community organizing experience featured in the journal *The New Social Worker*.

group members helped us move on. Until the last couple of sessions, however, the next interruption always seemed moments away. Unpacking the reasons for these reactions, in an attempt to prevent or at least minimize such stifling of free expression, became one of my goals as the Boyz 2 Men group leader.

The Man Box and Man-Hood

Such reactions to words or gestures perceived as being *kinda funny* constituted a definite and significant pattern, extending not only to accidental double entendres, but also to mannerisms seen as effeminate. Verbal expression of emotions was also strictly regulated under unspoken but powerful expectations, variously referred to as the Boy Code (Pollack, 1998), Codes of Conduct (Canada, 1995), Codes of the Street (Anderson, 1999), and even more forcefully as Commandments (Marshall & Wheeler, 2000) for inner-city males of color. By raising participants' awareness of the limits traditional gender socialization placed on their behaviors and creating a safe space to step out of this constricting "man box," Boyz 2 Men aimed to provide a positive alternative to drugs as a means of coping with the multiple challenges these young men faced.

There was a sense of urgency in helping as many as possible. Moving into what one participant described as their "man-hood"—that is, growing up male in the inner city—participants had fallen into substance abuse. Many had also joined gangs and already were involved in the criminal justice system. They were constantly threatened with being remanded to court and possibly to prison—not to mention the risk of injury or death—if they slipped up again. Nearly one in three black males between the ages of 20 and 29 is under some form of criminal justice supervision on any given day (Mauer, 1999). In some inner cities, homicide is the leading cause of death among minority adolescent males (Foy & Goguen, 1998). In this dire context, the struggle simply to keep young men of color "alive and free" (Marshall, 2005, p. 1) into their adult years is a challenge.

Boyz 2 Men was one gender-based program that aimed to build boys' resilience in the face of such dangerous realities and to help them examine their socialization as males. It created a safe space in which participants could freely express their hopes and fears, supporting one another toward a safer and healthier manhood. My experiences as facilitator of Boyz 2 Men

illustrate both the promise and the challenges of such efforts. In this article, I will examine the ways in which the group helped participants explore both the pressures and privileges of growing up to be a man in the 'hood, and how for some this process led to fuller expressions of self and increased responsibility in their treatment of others.

Project TRY and the Birth of Boyz 2 Men

A program of the Educational Alliance, Project TRY helps youth not just to survive the perils of their neighborhoods, but to thrive in spite of them. It offers participants education toward completion of their GEDs or high school diplomas, as well as counseling and case management to help them stop using drugs and address underlying issues.

Project TRY participants range in age from 15 to 21 and are almost entirely Latino/a and African American. Though participants attend TRY voluntarily, urine sample results and student progress are reported to probation officers or other court officials for youth involved in the criminal justice system. Participation is thus mandated for some youth in the sense that failure to follow the TRY program could result in even more severe loss of freedom. In terms of sexual orientation, not one participant made any reference, publicly or privately, to me about being gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning. Students spoke jokingly of one past TRY participant who was gay, with the unlikely implication that no one since then was anything but heterosexual.

I initiated gender-specific programming as a social worker through the Educational Alliance afterschool program at P.S. 64 during the 2003–2004 school year. Student participation and satisfaction were high enough to inspire the Educational Alliance and me to write a grant to bring the program to other sites, including Project TRY, the following summer and school year.

During the initial summer cycle at Project TRY, results were similarly positive. Program enrollment was naturally low and consistent. I was co-facilitator with on-site counselors, delivering the group twice a week as well as attending program meetings and outings. Some of the aspects that made the summer session successful, unfortunately, were not possible when the program was extended through the school year at multiple sites. For example, I could facilitate Boyz 2 Men at Project TRY for

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only one hour a week rather than two. I also lost the support of the on-site counselors, who, as men of color, could often connect more readily with participants than I, a white middle-class man, could do. Enrollment also became a challenge in the fall, growing to an unmanageable 17-to-1 participant-to-staff ratio before we closed the group at 10 in the spring 2005 semester, the period during which I gathered the data presented in this article.

In examining how homophobia and the man box affected the communication in Boyz 2 Men, I will cite the words various participants offered in group meetings and particularly the insights Manny offered in one-on-one interviews. Though Manny is clearly a success story—he dared to step out of the man box on multiple occasions and graduated from Boyz 2 Men bound for Job Corps—the main reason he serves as our guide is his ability to analyze behaviors as only a professional sociologist or an extremely resilient youth could do.

The Boyz 2 Men Curriculum

The Boyz 2 Men curriculum had as its goal responsible empowerment of male youth. Grounded in a strength- and asset-based perspective consistent with best practices in social work and youth development, it sought not only to facilitate individual growth and foster healthy relationships and coping skills, but also to raise participants' awareness of social injustice and enhance their ability to engage in community and social change.

Rationale

As gender-based programs have for decades helped girls grow into assertive and successful young women, more recently programs such as Boyz 2 Men have attempted to facilitate the healthy development of males by helping them question their own gender socialization. Because appearing soft or weak does not go along with the traditional cowboy or gangsta image of a strong and powerful man, male emotions often pass through what Kivel (1999) calls the "feelings funnel," in which anger is expressed even if behind it lies shame or jealousy or disappointment. When a male expresses emotions or associated behaviors seen as "unmanly," he is often called derogatory names used to describe femininity or homosexuality. In response to such name-calling and the general rigidity of gender socialization, males may

attempt to "prove their manhood," not only by disassociating themselves from perceived non-masculine behavior, as in the Kisses episode, but also through posturing or real violence. Since males are perpetrators of many types of violence, including not only fighting but also intimate partner abuse and gay bashing, facilitating a strength based on power that is not expressed in control *over another* is both responsible empowerment and responsible practice.

As an example of the sense of authority that males enjoy in our society, one Boyz 2 Men participant, when asked what makes being a young man easy, responded, "Doing anything you want." Yet while Boyz 2 Men participants did enjoy many privileges based on their gender, they still had to deal with the pressures of the Boy Code and the harsh realities of inner-city life for male youth of color. In our conversations, the young men of Boyz 2 Men were keenly aware of such socio-economic and legal barriers to success, citing: "The pigs and you can't do a damn dollar," and "When I got locked up and I thought you had to be grown to go to [prison]."

In response to the inner city's few legal money-making opportunities and high levels of police presence and incarceration, one participant reflected, "It's crazy and difficult with everything around you and you watching it go by." Watching all the craziness go by, Boyz 2 Men participants had arrived at Project TRY because they had dropped out of school and started using drugs. Like many who suffer from "the secret legacy of male depression" (Real, 1997), participants got high in part as an escape from their difficult situations and the vulnerable emotions they may have felt they could not express safely.

Responsible facilitation to empower the youth to confront such challenges meant helping them to deconstruct their reality and then reconstruct it on their own terms. To do so, I adopted a social work person-in-environment approach to empowerment, helping participants explore their "man-hood"—the process of growing up as boys in the inner city.

Models

To assist participants in their development as responsible men in the 'hood, I relied on models that sought to empower males and to hold them accountable for their

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individual behavior while examining the context of oppression, social justice, and social change.

One organization whose afterschool work helped inspire Boyz 2 Men was Harlem-based Brotherhood/Sister Sol, whose mission is to develop critical thinkers committed to themselves and to community change (Wilcox, Lazarre-White, & Warwin, 2003). The Brotherhood/Sister Sol approach to responsible empowerment includes curriculum units on "Leadership Development" and "Pan-African and Latino History" as well as "Sexism and Misogyny." Another model was Men Can Stop Rape, based in Washington, D.C., whose Men of Strength clubs provide support and develop skills for male youth to feel strong without being violent.

Influenced by themes in the field of domestic violence, and specifically batterers' intervention groups, Boyz 2 Men aimed to help participants derive their sense of power and control from healthy sources such as art and education. This goal meant that, as facilitator, I could not condone participants' sexist and homophobic comments, or even collude by my silence. Fulfilling this goal was often a challenge.

Curriculum and Activities

Part of overcoming this challenge was to avoid the issues altogether by engaging participants in typical afterschool program activities that created a positive environment of healthy self-expression, sharing, and respect for others. While Boyz 2 Men aimed to prevent such behaviors as intimate partner abuse, peer violence, early and unwanted pregnancies, and substance abuse, it was, after all, a voluntary afterschool group. Students could choose to return from lunch for my program or not. It was therefore important to make the sessions as engaging as possible.

When I asked participants what they wanted from our sessions, their responses were typical: trips, sports, and interaction with females. In terms of topics, they wanted to discuss relationships, gangs, drugs, and incarceration. All these requests were fit into ten curriculum components, designed from many experiences but strongly influenced by my work with Legacy International's Global Youth Village, a cross-cultural camp in Bedford, Virginia, which had consistently served as a useful guide for my clients on their journeys from past to present to future:

• Team, Trust, and Identity Building
• Male Gender Socialization
• Peer Relationships
• Partner Relationships
• Family Relationships
• Coping Skills
• Education and Employment
• Community Activism
• Global Awareness
• Graduation

We generally spent two weeks on each topic in a five-month school semester. Though groups were run therapeutically, the Boyz 2 Men format was more like a workshop than like counseling. I used culturally based activities drawn from rites-of-passage programs as well as media literacy and arts activities. Interactive exercises were frequently used to explore such topics as the man box and the feelings funnel. I responded to the participants' responses on the kinds of activities they preferred in a variety of ways. Interaction with female students included a lunch and outing to a cultural museum outside our regular group time, as well as two joint sessions with a local hip-hop/theater troupe. Boyz 2 Men participants also took a field trip outside our normal sessions to attend a domestic violence conference workshop. For sports, I distributed two free baseball tickets to the members, many of whom then asked other Project TRY clients, male and female, to come with them. Such activities gave participants valuable practice in applying the information and skills learned in group, while the counselors had a chance to coach them through this process.

In theory, groups began with a check-in, followed by a proverb or *dicho* (traditional Spanish saying) related to the topic of the day. Sessions continued with a core activity such as a ritual, video screening, or drawing or writing exercise. I then facilitated a dialogue based on the activity, and the group closed with participants reflecting on what they learned and expressing any final thoughts they wanted to share.

In practice, leading discussions in Boyz 2 Men often felt more like dentistry than social work. Participants were understandably hesitant to express themselves in front of their peers. Because "Thou shalt get thy respect" (Marshall, 2005, p. 9) is one of the most important commandments of the street, many chose not to risk the ridicule Manny endured for his verbal *faux pas*.

Unpacking Sexism and Homophobia

In order to better comprehend students' use of homophobic language to disclaim or cover up non-traditional behavior, I asked students what the term "no homo" meant to them.

"People just saying that because they got dirty minds, first of all. Sometimes they just saying that to hype something up," Manny suggested.

"It's kinda like a game," said Vince.

"It's usually funny," Enrique concurred.

Behind such surface reasons, however, lay the homophobia implicit in one student's comment that it "just doesn't sound right." Of the use of homophobic language, Manny said, "They hype it more in the 'hood." King and Hunter (2004) describe the results of such negative reactions to homosexuality in the African-American community: Black men who sleep with men often identify as "straight" and live a secret life "on the down low."

During my initial conversations with the TRY administration around using clients as research participants, administrators expressed concern over another reason program participants might be uncomfortable with issues of sexuality. Some participants had known histories of child sexual abuse, while others had spent time in all-male group homes or detention facilities, where, as Gilligan (1996) notes, male-on-male violence and sexual violence occurs but often goes unreported. Though male-on-male sexual abuse is in no way equivalent to homosexuality, and in fact I tried to help participants distinguish between the two, the concern they expressed that other men would try to "get up on them" seemed to influence their behavior. Even though none shared publicly any abuse they had suffered, a few participants angrily related occasions when they had experienced unwanted verbal or physical advances from other males. Of course, one of my private reactions was to note the hypocrisy of this complaint from males who I'd seen "hit on" uninterested females. Besides facilitating their understanding of such double standards, however, I also learned to be sensitive to their discomfort and fears.

Developing Trust

Based on respect for their experience and safety, I always gave group members the right to participate or pass, though I continually confronted expressions of sexism or homophobia. Since every session centered on a writing, art, or media activity, participants could express themselves privately even when they chose not to share.

Holding one another accountable, the group used the phrase "that's nasty" to put a stop to remarks that referred to women in sexually degrading ways.

One such activity was a letter-writing exercise, part of the unit on coping skills. Participants wrote letters to someone with whom they'd been in conflict, attempting to express their feelings, empathize with the other person, and identify ways to move forward. One participant, Travis, had publicly spoken with bravado more than once about how he had convinced his girlfriend to get an abortion because he didn't want the child. In this writing exercise, he admitted to different feelings: "I felt sad, because that can hurt the girl inside." The influence of Travis's peers may have been a factor in this admission. The group had made clear during the previous week's session on family their disapproval both of men who fathered children but were unprepared to be responsible parents and of men who pressured women into abortions as a quick fix for unwanted pregnancies. Members had begun to do what young men's groups should do in response to irresponsible behavior: confront it.

Though at the outset participants were more apt to collude, toward the end of the term they began to replay some of the Boyz 2 Men messages. This process showed itself more clearly in relation to sexist than to homophobic remarks. Participants identified their use of the word "bitch" to describe females as a "bad habit," which they then attempted to unlearn. When classmates used this word, Jerome could be heard quoting Queen Latifah's song "Unity," which we'd listened to, singing, "Who you callin' a bitch?" This is one example of how I helped participants develop their media literacy to raise their awareness of the messages behind popular song lyrics and their own sexist statements. Holding one another accountable, the group used the phrase "that's nasty" to put a stop to remarks that referred to women in sexually degrading ways.

To facilitate participants' development as allies in the struggle to end sexism, we attended a conference whose topic was preventing violence against women as part of the education and employment unit. Though at the outset participants seemed more interested in flirting with the female volunteer checking them in, in the workshop they engaged with the material. By the end, they were the stars of the group, showing off their media literacy skills through active participation in a discussion

of how music videos and advertising affect violence against women. That the Boyz 2 Men group was able to move through a transitional phase of resistance around the issue of respect for females to a more responsible and productive working phase is representative of group process generally (Corey & Corey, 1997).

According to Manny, a major determinant of whether students could safely express themselves, or whether they would resist by remaining silent or disrupting the process, was the topic under discussion. Finding topics that were engaging to participants, ones that dealt with their "man-hood," but were not so personal as to make them feel vulnerable, was key.

Jon: If you were a student researcher, if you had to pick a pattern, what consistently happens in the Boyz 2 Men group, what would you pick?

Manny: I don't know. That's a big-ass job. You gotta think. Because sometimes you gotta think of a subject that don't affect them in a bad way, that also could let out things in a good way.... Like you don't want to pick a subject that everybody gonna be like, "I don't want to talk about it" because it's personal things. But then you also want to pick a subject, that's something we relate to.

Manny identified gangs as such a subject, remembering a session on peer relationships in which we watched a video about a young spoken-word artist who uses his writing to survive gang conflicts in prison: "It was a good subject because it attached to my personal stuff. Things that really going on. But it wasn't too personal, or too boring, like right there, on the spot."

Another engaging and safe topic was partner relationships. For instance, all group members actively participated in an exercise in which they drew a picture of where they'd meet their ideal partner. A couple of students were bold enough to share that they would meet that person in the park, because they liked nature, or at the library, because they wanted to date someone smart. These traditionally "manly," and therefore safe, topics of gangs and women inspired fairly free expression with few homophobic comments. If homophobic remarks were for the group a way to "hype things up" and "just a game," it was a game they played when groups became boring. Pro-

> Providing consistently engaging topics was one way to combat participants' unhealthy coping mechanisms.

viding consistently engaging topics was one way to combat participants' unhealthy coping mechanisms.

Confronting Homophobia's Continuing Presence

Progress in participants' ability to speak respectfully about women did not bring similar progress in their communications about homosexuality. Homophobic expressions continued up until the last few sessions, when a number of students stopped attending. For example, in one session guest hip-hop teaching artists facilitated what is called playback theater: A group member shares a personal story, and other participants represent the story's emotions non-verbally. To represent the happy feeling of a participant's story, Sergio jumped up and clicked his heels.

"Gay!" Vince screamed out, shocked.

"Faggot!" Miguel shouted to laughter. "[He] clicked his heels!"

After the group briefly considered how frequently Vince and Miguel made homophobic remarks and the severity of this particular incident, I sent the two home for the day. As they knew preparations for graduation were beginning the following week, it's not surprising that Vince and Miguel didn't choose to attend the last sessions.

The remarks of a few individuals, however, were only part of the story. Participants' reactions to me as the group leader were another, as Manny explained:

Jon: So why is it that people put on that attitude if at least for some of them really they are engaged or really they are interested?

Manny: Sometimes people think like what other people are going to say. Like, "Oh, he's soft. He's in that group. Jon's favorite boy." [He winks.] It goes by what other people say so that's one of the reasons they put a front.

Jon: Do people say that about the group?

Manny: Yeah, like last time, we was over here having group. The guys came upstairs…Jerome, and all those guys. They was like, "Oh, go to your daddy, Jon. [He winks again.] So things like that could piss somebody off and like, "I don't want to be in this group.... They going to talk shit if I go to group." And if they do come, they put a front.

Manny's comments reveal how some participants reacted to me as the Boyz 2 Men facilitator. A Caucasian man brought up in a middle-class section of Queens, I am not, as the Boyz 2 Men group correctly perceived, a product of the 'hood, despite the fact that I've worked for ten years in low-income urban communities of color. Our differences played out most obviously one day when a participant asked me a series of "have you ever…" questions: Had I ever been locked up, been stabbed, been shot at, or seen a friend die? Despite my best efforts to acknowledge and process our differences, the fact that I hadn't experienced any of this was an obstacle that kept the group from fully engaging. Moreover, though I am heterosexual, the way I expressed myself at times impressed the group as *kinda funny*. Participants' reactions to me as the sole group leader made the loss of my on-site co-facilitators—one Latino, the other African-American—particularly disappointing. With the on-site facilitators present, the group tended to get into the material more quickly and consistently, with less diversion. Kicking off our discussions by modeling how men of color could express vulnerable emotions and be respected not in spite of, but because of, their disregard for the rules traditionally governing male behavior, these counselors created the safety for participants to follow their example.

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Progress

On the last day of Boyz 2 Men, I wanted to reward the four participants who had stuck with the program the entire five months, while others had stopped coming and started razzing them for their participation. As one of their graduation gifts, I brought the group a plant. Besides providing the young men with a safe way to express caring, the plant would give them an ongoing opportunity to practice libation, a ritual we had performed in which pouring water both gives life to the plant and honors deceased relatives, fallen peers, public icons, and others who are no longer with us.

I expected group members might only say thank you, if that, not daring to admit they might like the traditionally feminine enterprise of gardening. But Manny unabashedly shared that his mother kept plants and described his long and significant involvement in their upkeep. To my surprise, the other students did not take the opportunity to tease but listened intently, nodding their approval.

In the libation, we called out to ancestors to connect with us on this important day. We proceeded, without interruption or lack of focus, to reflect on our time together and share plans for the future. Participants recited pledges explaining what they had learned—"anger management," "how to avoid the Army," "to learn from our mistakes," and to "be more careful how I express myself to people"—and how they intended to apply this knowledge. Lastly, certificates, gifts, and a celebratory meal were bestowed on the proud graduates.

Developing Afterschool Boys' Work

Given the success of the graduation, the question becomes how to make the first session more like the last. Creighton and Kivel's facilitator guide to *Young Men's Work* (1998) helps to answer this question. The first session, "Power and Violence," is based on an exercise called "Who's Got Power?" which can help low-income male youth of color see that their gender gives them a great deal of power, but that they also belong to groups that are potential targets. This awareness can help them address obstacles while acting as allies to other groups facing systemic challenges, such as women and homosexuals. For facilitators like me whose privileged ethnicity and socio-economic status may be a barrier, deconstructing an unjust system and acknowledging unfair advantages up front can help us ally with participants to reconstruct a more equitable relationship and thereby prepare us to influence society as a whole.

As I helped initiate and coordinate Boyz 2 Men, the need for organizations strictly dedicated to supporting boys' work became apparent. Girls, Inc., provides training and support for empowerment programs for females, but there is no Boys, Inc., to help practitioners develop responsible boys' programming. Boys' work professionals need to develop linkages with other boys' programs, as well as with those working with female and LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning) youth, so they can learn from peers, work through differences, and celebrate commonalities. An example of such a coalition was the Partnership for After-School Education's Gender Affinity Group of

2004–2005, which convened youth workers representing these three overlapping constituencies to share best practices and organize a citywide conference. Such professional alliances are beneficial in that they can hold boys' work professionals accountable for the responsible behavior we aim to develop in our youth and allow us to work together toward long-term social change.

For those who do not work in gender-specific programs, there are many valuable ways to contribute to boys' healthy development. One is to create from an early age a safe environment in which boys can express nontraditional behaviors, being patient and supportive as the boys develop the necessary trust. Another is to hold boys accountable for responsible words and actions: not to let one more "no homo," "that's gay," or "this bitch I was messing with" go by without confronting and processing it. To help boys express their full selves, we can look for and name the behaviors that perpetuate the counterproductive man box. We can take advantage of teachable moments to raise awareness that such rigid socialization is ultimately harmful both to the individual and to society. We can engage youth in responsibly reconstructing their words and actions, freeing them to express their full selves, and from there involve them in a larger movement to create greater equity and justice in their world.

Boyz 2 Men helped at least one participant make significant internal and external shifts. Manny expressed in an interview that he had gained the courage and the knowledge to publicly remove the mask of traditional masculinity and pursue a more peaceful and productive life.

Manny: The group really like made me think how I talk to people and how I react, towards females, towards males…. It's like I learned a new way how to react, to express myself…. Before, I was just disrespectful; you know, "I don't care what people think. I'm going to talk how I want to talk." Now, if I want to meet new people and I want to have friends and I want to have somebody to talk to I should approach them in an educated way.

Jon: And what about the group made you make that shift?

Manny: I don't know. It's like the group…. It's like a step forward on your manhood. It's perfecting your ways of being as a boy or a man.

> "It's like a step forward on your manhood. It's perfecting your ways of being as a boy or a man."

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[1] All participants' names are pseudonyms.

Afterschool Matters Initiative

The Robert Bowne Foundation (RBF), seeking to have a long-term and substantial effect on the field of out-of-school education, launched several initiatives to accomplish this mission. Afterschool Matters is one of the initiatives, the goals of which are to:

- Generate and disseminate research about community-based organizations serving youth during out-of-school hours
- Build a network of scholars studying community-based organizations serving youth
- Contribute to basic knowledge and the improvement of practice and policy in the area of community-based youth programs

Afterschool Matters/Occasional Papers

One of the projects of the Afterschool Matters Initiative is the journal *Afterschool Matters*, a national, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to promoting professionalism, scholarship, and consciousness of the field of afterschool education. The journal serves those involved in developing and running programs for youth during the out-of-school hours, in addition to those engaged in research and in shaping policy. Articles for the journal are solicited from the field, and a range of academic perspectives are considered along with personal or inspirational narratives and essays, book reviews, artwork, and photographs.

The RBF Occasional Papers is a peer-reviewed series published twice a year. The goal of the Occasional Papers is to provide a venue for publishing research that explores key issues and topics in the practice and theory of afterschool programming, youth development, and learning during the non-school hours. In addition, the Occasional Papers address key policy issues in the area of youth development. The intended audience for this series includes researchers, university staff, afterschool program managers and practitioners, and policy makers. Prospective papers are solicited by the RBF.

Copies of both *Afterschool Matters* and the Occasional Papers are available on the RBF website, www.robertbownefoundation.org.

Research Grants/Research Fellowship

The RBF sponsors a national Research Grant competition. Four grants of $10,000 are awarded to support either original empirical research in or about community-based youth programs during the non-school hours or research syntheses or policy analyses of community-based youth programs.

Now in its fourth year, the RBF Research Fellowship is dedicated to building the capacity of youth program staff to design and conduct research in the areas of youth development and education during the out-of-school hours. The goals of the Research Fellowship include generating and disseminating research in the area of education in community-based organizations serving youth during the out-of-school hours, building a network of scholars, contributing to basic knowledge and the improvement of practice, and informing policy in the area of community-based youth programs.

For more information about the RBF Afterschool Matters Initiative, contact:

Sara Hill, Ed.D.
Research Officer
The Robert Bowne Foundation
55 Water Street
New York, NY 10041
sara.hill@bowne.com

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p. 39: Boyz 2 Men

Your Program in Art

Does your youth development program have children's art that you would like to contribute to *Afterschool Matters*? If so, please submit high-resolution image files to:
Sara Hill, Ed.D., Research Officer
The Robert Bowne Foundation
55 Water Street
New York, NY 10041
sara.hill@bowne.com
We will ask you to fill out a form indicating that you have the artists' permission to publish the works in *Afterschool Matters.*

Afterschool Matters

Call for Papers
Spring 2008 Issue

Afterschool Matters, a national, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to promoting professionalism, scholarship, and consciousness in the field of afterschool education, is seeking material for the spring 2008 issue. Published by the Robert Bowne Foundation, the journal serves those involved in developing and running programs for youth during the out-of-school hours, in addition to those engaged in research and in shaping youth development policy.

Afterschool Matters seeks scholarly work, from a variety of disciplines, which can be applied to or is based on the afterschool arena. The journal also welcomes submissions that explore practical ideas for working with young people during the out-of-school hours. Articles should connect to current theory and practice in the field by relating to previously published research; a range of academic perspectives will be considered. We also welcome personal or inspirational narratives and essays, review essays, artwork, and photographs.

Any topic related to the theory and practice of out-of-school-time programming will be considered for the 2008 issue. We invite you to discuss possible topics in advance with our editor. Suggested topics include:

- Descriptions and analyses of community-based youth organizations as institutions that support youth development through civic engagement, social and emotional development, arts development, academic achievement, or other means
- Descriptions and analyses of programs that collaborate with a range of community institutions, such as faith-based organizations or businesses
- Exploration of employment-related topics, including, for example, youth organizations as spaces for training and employment, youth as workers, community economic development, and youth programs

Submission guidelines
- Deadline is May 15, 2007, for the seventh issue of *Afterschool Matters,* to be published in January 2008.
- Submissions should be double-spaced in 12-point font, including quotations and references, and submitted electronically or on a disk in Microsoft Word or Rich Text format.
- Submissions should not exceed 5,000 words.
- Include a cover sheet with the manuscript title, authors' names, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses.
- The names of the authors should not appear on the text, as submissions are reviewed anonymously by peers.
- Follow the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5th Edition, for reference style guidelines. Present important information in the text and do not use extensive footnotes or endnotes.

Inquiries about possible articles or topics are welcome.
To inquire or to submit articles, contact:
Jan Gallagher, Editor
The Robert Bowne Foundation
55 Water Street
New York, NY 10041
jgallagher@robertbownefoundation.org