Afterschool Matters

Special Issue: Professional Development

YOUTH FOR YOUTH

WestEd

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Welcome

We are pleased to provide this special issue of *Afterschool Matters* to the attendees of the 2010 National Afterschool Association Convention in Washington, DC. We are grateful to our partners Synergy Enterprises, Inc., WestEd, and the National Afterschool Association for their support of and contributions to this issue.

Professional development for out-of-school time and youth development practitioners is critical to delivering high-quality programs to children and youth. Across the country, local communities, cities, and states are conducting vital work in the areas of core competencies, training, certification, and credentialing. This convention is a timely opportunity to share that good work and the progress that has been made. This issue of *Afterschool Matters* brings together many examples of this professional development work and highlights the critical need to create a comprehensive professional development system that supports out-of-school time and youth development practitioners.

We open this issue with an interview with Sylvia Lyles, Ph.D., program director of the Academic Improvement Programs Group in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education. She shares her vision for the role of the 21st Community Learning Centers in meeting the academic and developmental needs of children and youth and for the importance of staff development. In "Right Time, Right Place: Building an Online Learning Community for Afterschool Practitioners," Y4Y colleagues introduce You for Youth, a user-centered web portal and learning community that includes multimedia learning modules. Attendees will have an opportunity to journey through this exciting web portal during the NAA Convention.

"Body and Soul" captures NIOST's research findings on two professional development credential pilots in Massachusetts. It focuses on the connection between credential participation and quality program experiences for children and youth: how professional development can lead to change in participants' knowledge, skill levels, attitudes, beliefs, and practice. In "Shared Research Dialogue: One College's Model for Professional Development of Youth Practitioners," Fusco and Espinet share their experience in developing and teaching a certificate program at York College, City University of New York. They highlight the value of action research and reflective practice as crucial components of professional development for out-of-school time and youth practitioners.

Marquart, Rizzi, and Parikh, in "Using E-learning to Train Youth Workers," offer an effective model for overcoming familiar challenges to staff training such as limited resources, staff turnover, and multi-site programs. BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life) has successfully implemented blended online and in-person training to train its summer program staff. In our last paper, "Enhancing Program Quality and Care through Supervision," Olsen and Kowalski make the case for strengthening staff members' capacity to supervise young people as they engage in afterschool activities.

We hope your experience at the 2010 National Afterschool Association Convention is memorable and that this issue of *Afterschool Matters* will contribute to the national discourse on professional development for the out-of-school time and youth development fields.

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moving forward and growing together

Interview with Sylvia Lyles

Afterschool Matters had the opportunity to talk with Sylvia Lyles, Ph.D., program director of the Academic Improvement Programs Group in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, DC. Sylvia works on behalf of all of us in the out-of-school time and school domains to keep our concerns front and center so we can reach our goal of providing the highest-quality learning experiences for our children and youth.

Afterschool Matters (ASM): We would like to re-introduce you to the audience of the Annual National Afterschool Association Convention and the readers of *Afterschool Matters*. Can you tell us about yourself and your own journey into the field of afterschool?

Sylvia: I grew up in Portsmouth, Virginia. When I was growing up, I was part of the ballet troupe, school band, and track team. But in addition to being involved with those activities, my parents had me involved with all types of activities in the recreation center we had in our neighborhood. That was how I became familiar with the afterschool world. Most of the staff came from the elemen-

tary school that I attended. But it wasn't a very formal, structured process, because we didn't have to apply to participate. Activities were announced at the elementary school—what was happening after school at the recreation center—and parents in the neighborhood just got you involved. It was a low-income neighborhood, so I'm pretty sure the funds were subsidized. That's how I became involved, and that's what I know.

I spent 23 of my 29 years of federal service focused on adult literacy, and then I landed at the Department of Education. There is a huge literacy issue here in the United States and particularly in DC. I became interested in what happens before we become adults. What's happening in our school systems? And lo and behold, the position came open in elementary and secondary education, and for me it was a lateral move. I thought it was my opportunity to really make a difference, especially when I heard it was afterschool within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.

ASM: Why a particular focus on professional development?

Sylvia: Coming from adult education, when I came into the world of afterschool I had a lot to learn. I had a huge learning curve. So I spent a lot of time my first year out in the field, talking to afterschool professionals, providers,

researchers, practitioners—people down on the ground who are doing the work every day. And what I continue to hear is that we need a system in place where we can all share ideas, we can all learn and grow together. I would love to say that this idea, the work that I'm doing now, is based on my creativity and innovation. But no, it's from the people who work every day down on the ground. And what they say to me is, "We really focus on professional development." I heard that so much while I was out there in the field. When I looked at all of the things that I needed to do to improve the afterschool program for the U.S. Department of Education, I had to prioritize, because there's so much we need to do. I am always fighting for more funding at the department, and I am going to continue to do that. That's my number one priority. But what the people said to me is that we need a focus on professional development. I think it's important because we have to change, we have to grow, and that's what professional development is about. We can't just continue to provide the same things for the kids of today that I had when I was growing up in the afterschool programs. We have to move forward and grow together.

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ASM: From your own experience, what does it take to motivate people to take advantage of professional development opportunities and to grow and advance in their fields?

Sylvia: I call it the "WIIFM," the "what's in it for me." I've been associated with the military for a long time, and the military has taught me that when you look at strategic planning, you have to look at the WIIFM. (You know the military likes acronyms.) We can't try to grow this profession and professional development without incorporating the principles of adult education. What I think will make professional development work is being able to provide something to the people: something that has clear benefit, is delivered in a way that meets their learning goals or the way that they learn, can be applied right away, is engaging and innovative, and gives them what they need to do their job better right now. It's got to be something that people in the afterschool and youth development fields own and buy into.

ASM: How does the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program fit within the larger Department of Education agenda including No Child Left Behind, Promise Neighborhood Initiative, education reform, and so on?

Sylvia: We have so much going on. Secretary Duncan talks about—and a lot of my colleagues aren't comfortable with it—a longer day. He realizes that six hours a day, five days a week, nine months out of the year just doesn't work for successfully educating our nation's children. So he talks extensively about extending the time the children have to learn. He believes that we have an unprecedented opportunity to support all student learning, especially through positive youth development. My colleagues at the department, when they go out and talk to the states and to other folks, they are very clear about including extended learning time. And they use examples of extended learning time such as "afterschool" and "summer learning." So our work is ingrained across the department and all that's going on with the education innovation and reform.

My position is this: For many years now, we have worked across the community. We *are* the extended learning time program. We have done what he has talked about doing for a long time. So we are his experts. What we need to do a little bit differently is to work more closely with the schools. I think the secretary realizes that if we extend the school day, we can't give children the same thing that they had in school. We have to give them something different. That's afterschool.

ASM: Much has been said about the achievement gap between groups of students and sets of schools. Do you see the 21st CCLC program, and afterschool and youth development programs in general, playing a role in closing that gap?

Sylvia: Research suggests a clear relationship between participation in afterschool programs and an increase in student achievement. I always go back to the original intent of this program, and that's to keep the children off the street and safe, in a nurturing environment. Over the years it has evolved, because there's no mistake that this program is grounded in the Department of Education.

However, I do not believe anybody would disagree with me when I say that a child who is under pressure from his or her peers can find it difficult to learn because he or she is sitting in class and in school scared. A child who doesn't have the confidence, or who does not have assistance to help build the confidence, can't learn. All these different things are part of making a

student successful. You can't separate that from the academic achievement. That's the story that I talk about at the department.

Of course we know that there are some gains in achievement when we're helping them with their homework, when we're working with them well in afterschool programs. But I think there's still part of the story that needs to be told. We need to find a way to capture the work that we do and measure it. We have to be able to measure exactly what we're helping these kids with, what helps them to learn each day. Academics are very important, and we have to measure that. I think we have some research that does, but I think it goes beyond that. Children have to be positioned so that they are confident, so they can think in a classroom and learn.

ASM: What promising practices have you observed in partnerships between community-based organizations and schools to deliver high-quality afterschool programs?

Sylvia: There is a program in Pennsylvania where the community-based organization works very closely with the school district to identify youth to come into the afterschool program. This program is focused on tutoring, but there's something a little different about this program. These afterschool staff—college students and teachers—go to the home or they go into the community, to other facilities, to offer tutoring or homework help. It's not always in one location; it's various and many locations across the community. They identify the youth and what their needs are. They address their specific needs and reach them where they are.

Another program is in Miami. This program is focused on science. One project is scuba diving. The whole community came together to purchase equipment for the youth so they could scuba dive. The youth are mapping the ocean and learning what happens in the sea. What really fascinated me about this particular program is that the youth who are involved are from low-income families. They would never have the opportunity to participate in these programs if it weren't for the community partnership. These youth are motivated; they're eager. They're doing well in school because they want to participate in this program. The whole community is wrapped around it. That's what it's going to take, and that's what President Obama talks about when he talks about "promise neighborhood."

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ASM: What approaches can we use as program providers and researchers to reach out to particular populations such as rural and tribal communities, English language learners, and special needs children?

Sylvia: I'll never forget the first thing a colleague with expertise in special needs issues said to me. I called them "special needs children," and she said, "Oh, no, Sylvia, it's 'children with special needs,' because they're children first." It made me realize that I really didn't know who these children were and what they needed. And so the first approach I used is understanding. I oversee rural programs, and, in addition to 21st Century, I am also the program director for Native Hawaiian and Alaska Native programs. I've been involved in those programs for a long time.

I think the first approach is that we really need to get all groups to the table. We need to be genuinely concerned and want to know and understand what they need. The second approach is that they need to have valuable and significant involvement in the decision-making process. They need to be at the table at every opportunity. I don't move, I don't make any decisions about making proposals to the department, without discussing with the groups involved what the issues are and getting their feedback. The Secretary of Education talks explicitly about rural education and children with special needs and what the issues are. He's committed, and so am I.

ASM: Finally, what inspires you to do what you do each day?

Sylvia: I am really committed to making a positive difference in a child's life. What better place to do that than in the U.S. Department of Education, doing the work that I do in the afterschool community? I love children and the impact that I can have in making life better for them. That's what causes me to get up every day.

right time, right place

Building an Online Learning Community for Afterschool Practitioners

by the You for Youth project team

In 2008, the U.S. Department of Education awarded a contract to a team of education, youth development, and web development specialists to develop an online professional learning community for grantees in the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC). The online community, You for Youth (Y4Y, www.Y4Y.ed.gov)

will support afterschool practitioners' professional development, encourage their discussion and reflection, and support positive change in their professional practice. During the first year of the contract, the team assessed the professional development needs of the 21st CCLC community. Using this input, we designed a prototype for a *user-centered* web portal and learning community, which includes multimedia learning modules in several topic areas. The result will be an efficient system for delivering professional development based on the expressed needs of the afterschool community.

21st Century Community Learning Centers

The 21st CCLC program recently entered its 13th year of operation. This U.S. Department of Education program, which has grown from $40 million in 1998 to $1.31 billion in 2009, has contributed significantly to the expansion of formal afterschool programming in the United States.

21st CCLC programs provide safe havens for students in out-of-school time hours while addressing educational enrichment needs. Programs that receive 21st CCLC grants must provide academic enrichment activities, such as tutoring in reading and math, and services that reinforce and complement the regular academic program, such as recreation, technology education, counseling, and character education. Grantees partner with community groups and schools to support students who attend high-poverty,

low-performing schools. More than 3,300 active grants fund more than 8,900 centers that serve 1.4 million students in 53 states and territories (U.S. Department of Education [Dept. of Ed.], 2009a).

Policymakers at the U.S. Department of Education rely on data from practitioners and evaluators to improve the 21st CCLC program. State coordinators and key stakeholders have indicated a serious need for high-quality, low-cost professional development. In response to this request, the department contracted with two partnering organizations, Synergy Enterprises, Inc. (SEI) and WestEd, to build an online learning community of interactive, multimedia learning modules in areas of critical need, with a focus on areas that will most enhance quality programming.

The Need for Centralized, Customized Afterschool Resources

Most afterschool practitioners are committed to building their skills and finding a professional community that supports their growth. Practitioners at all levels identify a need to increase their knowledge of youth development and resilience and to learn to create an environment that is physically and psychologically safe. A 2006 professional development needs assessment conducted in the Illinois 21st CCLC programs showed that areas of need included conflict management, positive behavior strategies, and student engagement (Billman & Smith, 2007). Building relationships—with students, colleagues, community partners, and school staff members—also emerged as an area in which staff members wanted to build their skills. Program staff also wanted to learn techniques to "make learning fun." Managers expressed a need for a host of other skills, including grant and financial management; hiring, training, and coaching staff; and using assessments to guide their professional development programs. Finally, practitioners identified a need for shared understanding of the 21st CCLC program's goals and best practices (Billman & Smith, 2006; U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2009b).

Over the past decade, training opportunities have been created to address the needs of people who work in afterschool programs. The

> "Although money is an issue, the most important resources in an afterschool setting are the people (staff and youth), and their talents and values should be considered in the change process…. The wisdom and experience of front-line staff should be respected, and opportunities for them to assist each other should be maximized."
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> (Durlak, 2008, p. 12)

THE YOU FOR YOUTH PROJECT TEAM

Along with program officers at the U.S. Department of Education, the Y4Y project team consists of staff members from two partnering organizations:

- **SYNERGY ENTERPRISES, INC. (SEI)**, a woman-owned, full-service organization providing research and evaluation services and technical assistance in the fields of health, education, and communication

- **WESTED**, a research, development, and service agency committed to expanding opportunities for education, communication, and collaboration in the public policy arena

The project's Stakeholder Panel and Technical Working Group have approximately 24 members who are state-level 21st CCLC coordinators, directors of grantee programs, and other practitioner experts from national and policy organizations. More than 500 practitioners from 21st CCLC programs around the country participated in three events during the needs assessment process: an initial stakeholder panel meeting in February 2009; a three-day WebDialogue in June 2009 with invited participation from all staff levels; and focus groups with program directors, site coordinators, and activity leaders conducted at the 2009 21st CCLC Professional Development Summer Institute.

Y4Y learning community will not replace existing efforts; rather, it is intended to fill gaps identified in the needs assessment and to take advantage of technology changes that offer potent ways to enhance professional development. The Y4Y site will offer learning modules on specific topics requested by the afterschool community, from techniques for working directly with youth to program management strategies.

Here's a quick summary of what we learned when we asked afterschool practitioners about the specific features of professional development that would work for them (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2009b):

- Practitioners say emphatically that they need a way to connect with their colleagues to share and reflect on what works and what doesn't.
- Practitioners indicate that they need professional development that they can access at any time. Given the short operating hours of most 21st CCLC programs and the part-time status of many staff members, resources and training need to be easy to access.
- Practitioners want to see examples of best practices in real programs, and they want to learn how to use these practices in a combination of self-paced and cohort-driven professional development.

Those are some of the major needs we heard during our year of gathering data from the field. Together, they add up to the creation of an online professional community that takes full advantage of web 2.0 tools. These tools, and the learning experiences they can support, open the door to new ways for people to learn and work together.

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Critical Elements of a High-Quality Program

A broad body of research suggests that high-quality afterschool programs have an important, positive impact on the lives of children and youth (Beckett, et al., 2009; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Granger, Durlak, Yohalem, & Reisner, 2007; Hall & Gruber, 2007; Hammond & Reimer, 2006; Little, Wimer, & Weiss, 2008; Palmer, Anderson, & Sabatelli, 2009; Vandell, et al., 2006). In a recent synthesis of the literature on program quality, Palmer, Anderson, and Sabatelli (2009) suggest that well-prepared staff with adequate resources and professional development supports can build afterschool programs with a safe, enriching climate; foster positive relationships with the youth they serve; offer focused, intentional programming; and build strong partnerships with families, school leaders, and the larger community to enrich and enhance their work.

Core Competencies

A grassroots movement to define a core set of competencies for practitioners working in youth settings has gained momentum, and several states and professional organizations are organizing to develop a national set of standards (Starr, Yohalem, & Gannett, 2009; Wilson-Ahlstrom, Yohalem, & Pittman, 2008). Defining a set

of competencies may help everyone involved in afterschool and out-of-school time programs to find common ground. Policymakers and program directors can use core competencies as a guide in hiring and promoting staff. Staff members can use core competencies to assess their current qualifications and to determine areas in which they need to grow. Core competencies can also help to define a clear career path.

Findings from recent research and surveys point to the importance of defining core competencies. A descriptive study of 21st CCLC program practices notes that "research . . . suggests that when students receive guidance from instructors with education and experience relevant to their roles, students are more likely to benefit from program activities" (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2009a, p. 25). This same study notes that retaining instructors has been a challenge. Low pay, lack of benefits, desire for full-time work, and completion of an educational program were cited as the major reasons for leaving an afterschool position.

According to the afterschool practitioners who participated in our needs assessment process, "hiring high-quality staff could be facilitated if directors and coordinators had a system to evaluate potential staff based on specific competencies and qualities" (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2009b, p. 8). Practitioners also noted that professionalizing the field is an important goal, one that could be supported by training that leads to professional credentials. A competency-based credential, or possibly continuing education credit, would be a powerful motivating factor for staff to participate in professional development.

The youth work field is moving toward defining a national set of core competencies that would be based, in part, on competencies already outlined by many organizations and individual states. (For an excellent overview and analysis of these existing competencies, see Starr, Yohalem, & Gannett, 2009). The professional development experiences and learning modules offered through the Y4Y site will align with and support the content and spirit of existing core competency documents.

The 21st CCLC program recognizes the need for a series of competency-related professional development activities that lead to a credential for afterschool practitioners. The 21st CCLC program plans to convene a group of national stakeholders to help shape discus-

sions and build buy-in at local, state, and national levels. This group will advise on the feasibility of aligning the Y4Y professional development modules with a nationally recognized 21st CCLC credential. This initiative is in an early stage of development; it will require federal approval and state commitment.

Y4Y Development Principles

As the Y4Y team sorted and analyzed the data received from practitioners, we envisioned a web portal that offers a dynamic and welcoming working environment for afterschool practitioners. We followed basic user-centered design principles, drawing on an approach that has roots in research on human-computer interaction. A user-centered design ensures that developers do not separate the technology from the people and the content. We intend to test and validate the content, presentation, and interactivity as development proceeds.

Professional Development Standards

The Standards for Professional Development from the National Staff Development Council (NSDC, 2001) were our starting point for designing the learning environment. For example, NSDC's first context standard would have adults organized into learning communities. Another context standard mentions the importance of resources to support adult learning and collaboration. Our online learning community will support both peer-to-peer learning and social networking.

We consulted the Southern Regional Education Board's Standards for Online Professional Development (n.d.), which expanded the NSDC standards to cover online learning. Here, the context standard about learning communities suggests that participants should have opportunities to work in pairs or teams, with access to follow-up discussions to share information. One of the process standards highlights the importance of meeting different learning styles by integrating online and face-to-face delivery. Y4Y learning experiences will offer self-paced "starter" lessons for all staff; these will include guides for site coordinators or program directors who might lead discussions or activities that expand on the content.

Findings from Research

A recent U. S. Department of Education (2009c) meta-analysis and review of online learning studies provided our team with additional guidance on best practices in online adult learning. Although this meta-analysis was intended to explore the use of online learning with K–12 learners, most of the studies that researchers found suitable for review were done with undergraduate and older learners. The authors noted that relatively few rigorous studies have been conducted with any group of learners, and even fewer have documented the most recent advances in technology. Given these caveats, the findings provided useful information for constructing the Y4Y learning environment and supported its key elements:

- Blends of online and face-to-face instruction tend to have stronger learning outcomes than face-to-face instruction alone.

- Any script developed for online instruction should offer learners the chance to interact with each other by discussing critical questions.

- Learning a complex body of knowledge requires a *community of learners*; online technologies can be used to expand and support such communities.

- Video alone does not necessarily enhance learning. For video to produce learning results, it should be interactive—the learner must be able to control it.

The Y4Y infrastructure is holistic in the way that its technology and design support an adult learning community. The user-centered design flexibly accommodates team building as well as individualized, student-centered teaching and learning opportunities.

The Site Takes Shape

The working vision of the Y4Y team is to build a community of caring and competent afterschool professionals who nurture, motivate, and engage children and youth in 21st CCLC programs. In this vision, every child has access to quality afterschool experiences, and every afterschool staff member has access to quality training.

This vision was the genesis for our name. *You for Youth* represents our commitment to empowering after-

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school practitioners through the delivery of interactive online training and materials based on research and best practice. Afterschool educators and experts will meet at this site to learn and reflect together.

Our Audience

Although we intend to make 21st CCLC program directors and site coordinators our initial priority, Y4Y will welcome everyone who works with young people in formal or informal learning programs. The site can support activity leaders who want to become afterschool professionals and program directors who want to use data for improvement. It can help site managers, program staff, and volunteers grow their skills. Youth group leaders, summer program directors, and museum educators can learn from and add to the information they find here.

Our Passion

Quality afterschool and out-of-school time programs can offer powerful ways for young people to grow both academically and developmentally. Afterschool programs create opportunities for students to work together, share ideas, and develop positive relationships with adults. Best of all, youth can discover, explore, and act on their dreams and passions.

Y4Y Topics and Learning Modules

The Y4Y site will focus on five topic areas that 21st CCLC practitioners identified as critical professional development needs:

- **Working with youth.** Youth thrive in healthy environments that promote positive relationships. With a commitment to youth development, resilience, and strengths-based practices, this section will present concrete strategies that help program staff demonstrate genuine concern for students, effectively communicate messages of high expectations, and provide meaningful opportunities for youth to contribute and participate.
- **Creating engaging learning environments.** In this section of the website, 21st CCLC staff will explore instructional strategies that enrich student learning and maximize student participation in an afterschool environment. Topics will include project-based learning, service learning, and ways to create academically enriching environments for youth.

> The project team will need solid community support to implement and test the effectiveness of the professional development available on the Y4Y site.

- **Creating partnerships with schools, families, and communities.** Effective partnerships can dramatically enhance a program's impact on students' lives. This section of the site will help visitors learn how to align their programs to the school day, to effectively market their programs to multiple communities, and to promote parent participation.
- **Managing a 21st CCLC program.** Program directors and site coordinators want tools and strategies to streamline their management practices. This section of the site will help managers align program assessment tools with relevant professional development offered on the site. We will offer additional assistance in strategic planning, grant management, and financial management.
- **Leading program staff.** Managers need to build a team of individuals committed to learning and growing professionally and collegially. At this site, afterschool professionals will find effective strategies for recruiting talented individuals and will learn strategies for providing quality professional development despite limited resources and time. This section of the Y4Y site will offer managers opportunities to learn and share best practices related to maintaining and supporting their staffs.

Within each topic area, Y4Y content will feature a series of learning modules complemented by a variety of activities and resources. The modules will introduce concepts and best practices, often demonstrated by video clips from quality afterschool programs in a variety of settings. The learning modules will provide discussion guides and suggestions for program leaders to extend the learning with program staff. The complementary resources may include targeted discussion rooms and webinars, ready-to-use tools—for example tools for assessing individual knowledge and program practices—and relevant findings from research.

Commitment on Both Sides

As this article is published, the Y4Y team is refining the website and planning its online professional development modules. One of the first modules available on the site will focus on project-based learning, a powerful strategy to engage youth in educational enrichment and community service activities. The project team will

need solid community support to implement and test the effectiveness of the professional development available on the Y4Y site.

Y4Y requires continued commitment from users and the afterschool community. Its design must continue to be based on input and buy-in from users, and it must reflect the major results from research on youth development and resilience practices (Benard, 2004). It also needs commitment from leaders in the U.S. Department of Education, because the vision for this learning environment is a long-term one. Since building a technology-based systemic approach to training and professional development requires a commitment of resources, future work will require a long-term commitment.

Community buy-in and use of the Y4Y portal are essential for it to thrive. Throughout the development of Y4Y, stakeholders have been engaged in a number of ways. When implementation occurs, continued leadership support for the project will rely heavily on the use of the system by those it is designed to help. Continuous improvement must reflect the needs of users. Extensive evaluation of its technology and content will make the Y4Y portal fluid, changing with the needs of the users and with education reforms.

Y4Y's return on investment should demonstrate a streamlined, cost-efficient, systemic approach to delivering training and professional development. While the Y4Y site is not intended to replace all of the training opportunities that are offered across the 21st CCLC program at the state and local levels, we want the site to serve as a tremendous resource for its users, freeing up dollars that can be used to expand other afterschool activities across the program.

Acknowledgement

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body and soul

Reflections on Two Professional Development Credential Pilots in Massachusetts

by Georgia Hall & Ellen Gannett

In many fields, the concept of professional development for workers at varying levels is well entrenched. At the heart of professional development is the desire to expand the "toolbox" of workers' skills. However, for out-of-school time (OST) staff and youth workers, experiences with professional development can vary widely, from high quality to no quality. The field continues to pay attention to professional development because we believe that staff training is associated with high-quality learning for children and youth.

Findings from the Massachusetts Afterschool Research Study (Miller & Hall, 2007) showed that, in a large sample of afterschool programs, staff development had a significant relationship with program quality. Programs with more highly educated and trained staff, both program directors and direct service workers, demonstrated higher quality staff engagement, youth engagement, activities, and homework time. Other studies show that professional development initiatives have had a major impact on afterschool and youth work staff, particularly since these workers are often without pre-service training or academic degrees (Costley, 1998; Harvard Family Research Project, 2004). Guskey (2000, p. 4) concludes that "one constant finding in the research literature is that notable improvements in education almost never take place in the absence of professional development."

Historically, funding levels for workforce development and professional development have been modest and, "where possible to estimate, are small considering the size and breadth of the youth-serving workforce"

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(Cole & Ferrier, 2009, p. 5). Some of the common approaches to professional development for afterschool and youth workers have included single workshops, seminars, coaching, learning communities, technical assistance, professional networks, distance training, and higher education. As the OST and youth development fields mature, many professional development models are emerging. Certification and credentialing systems in many forms are being developed and piloted across the country.

Credentials are a means by which a profession recognizes an individual's performance based on a set of defined skills and knowledge (Dennehy, Gannett, & Robbins, 2006). Credential programs typically define what types of training, number of training hours, and evidence of skill development are appropriate for certification. They thus provide a clear, consistent path for professional development and recognize individuals who demonstrate competence and skill (Starr, Yohalem, & Gannett, 2009). Two successful, long-term early childhood credentialing models, the Child Development Associate (CDA) and the Military Child Care Act (MCCA), demonstrate the impact credentials can have on programming, staffing, and training in a child care system. Workers who have earned credentials report greater self-confidence and feelings of efficacy in performing their jobs, increased skills and knowledge, greater interest in pursuing higher education, and increased wages. Programs that employ credentialed staff have noted reductions in turnover rates (Dennehy et al., 2006). Research suggests that credentialed OST staff offer significantly higher-quality programs than their equally educated but non-certified peers (Dennehy & Noam, 2005).

The time is ripe to professionalize the afterschool and youth development fields, as evidenced by an increased focus on student academic achievement, a growing public interest in high-quality afterschool programming, and the recent development across several states of competencies

> *It's important that your role in the world is valued. That whole piece is so missing from this field. Many people in this program work 45 to 50 hours per week. They get comp time that they don't take. They are very committed and dedicated but invisible. I think a lot of people feel they grew personally and professionally in terms of being confident about the work that they do, and more dedicated to it, feeling like they are part of a profession. A number of people have said that "I am humbled by this experience."*
> —SAYD Coordinator

and professional development systems to hire, train, and retain staff (Starr, Gannett, & Mello, 2009).

Across the country, states are conducting key work in the areas of professional development, training, certification, and credentialing. Much can be learned from this work about how to build from existing models, link credentialing to core competencies, create an infrastructure to support a credential, and attend to accessibility and affordability. Massachusetts, like several other states, has begun to pilot credential programs. The example of two pilot credentials in Massachusetts, The School-Age Youth Development Credential (SAYD) and the Professional Youth Worker Credential (PYWC), can help us to understand the importance of establishing credentials and what we can expect to accomplish in doing so. This knowledge can guide the next steps in establishing a national credential for afterschool and youth workers.

About the Massachusetts Credential Programs

The two credential programs have a great deal in common, as the following descriptions show.

School-Age Youth Development Credential

During the spring of 2002, a group of organizations came together to plan a professional development system for afterschool providers and youth workers throughout Boston. The mission of Achieve Boston is to improve the quality of afterschool and youth programs by developing a professional development system featuring comprehensive training and educational opportunities for program staff at all levels. These opportunities would enable staff members to strengthen their skills, develop their knowledge base, and advance their careers.

This professional development system was laid out in a "blueprint" in January 2005. The Achieve Boston Blueprint was a substantial document that represented historic efforts by many organizations to support afterschool and youth workers in Boston. It included cutting-

SAYD COMPETENCIES
developed by Achieve Boston

1. ACTIVITIES/CURRICULUM*
Activities and curriculum build upon the importance of a well-balanced structure where activities promote life skills and enhance the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development of all children and youth, including those with special needs.

2. BUILDING CARING RELATIONSHIPS/BEHAVIOR GUIDANCE*
Building caring relationships with children and youth includes promoting teambuilding, active listening, and a variety of communication strategies. Understanding acceptable and appropriate behaviors in a variety of situations and cultural contexts is a learned skill. Children and youth develop this understanding and feel more secure when consistent limits, appropriate consequences, and realistic expectations of their behavior are clearly and positively defined.

3. CHILD AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT*
To provide a program that meets the multiple needs of children and youth, practitioners must understand comprehensive child and youth development, including developmental stages, children and youth with special needs, competencies, and positive youth outcomes.

4. SAFETY/HEALTH AND NUTRITION
Understanding how to maintain personal health and safety, prevention information, crisis intervention, CPR, and first aid.

5. CULTURAL COMPETENCE*
Understanding differences and inclusion principles and techniques.

6. ENVIRONMENT
A carefully planned learning environment fosters children's and youth's involvement and development in all areas. Such an environment includes physical and human qualities that together promote self-esteem, social interaction, and community values, and address physical and mental boundaries while promoting cultural awareness and inclusion.

7. FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS*
Creating and sustaining relationships with families, teachers, and other school personnel is essential to enhancing the quality of after school and youth services. Coordination and information sharing among schools, families, and afterschool providers/youth workers help to create a supportive learning environment.

8. PROFESSIONALISM*
Understanding one's role in the organization, professional boundaries, and professional advancement.

9. PROGRAM MANAGEMENT*
Having an accountable practice of program management enhances quality and promotes efficiency.

10. WORKERS AS COMMUNITY RESOURCES
Afterschool and youth workers can serve as a resource to children, youth, and families. They also must know how to identify community resources and partner with other organizations to most effectively serve those in their programs.

11. BUILDING LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY*
Afterschool and youth workers serve as a connection between families, schools, communities, children, and youth. They can play a natural role as community leaders speaking out on behalf of the importance of quality afterschool and youth services and can influence public policy by sharing their expertise. They can also help children, youth, and parents or family members build their own leadership and advocacy skills.

Competencies used in PYWC

edge strategies and thinking incorporated from workforce development models in other fields and locations. It represented groundbreaking work in professional development for afterschool and youth workers.

Building on this blueprint, Achieve Boston piloted the SAYD in January 2007. The SAYD pilot was a competency-based credential that included a three-part sequence of college coursework, community-based training, and direct field experience. At the end of 18 months, participants had completed three credit-bearing college courses and 45 hours of community-based training. They had also demonstrated skill gain through on-site observation and a portfolio presentation.

SAYD participants were sponsored by their employers and supervisors. Sponsorship included recommending the employee for participation and committing to pay a $1,000 one-time salary bonus on the condition that the employee remained with the sponsoring organization for six months after completing the credential. Supervisors also agreed to meet with SAYD participants to discuss their progress in the credential and its application to their work.

Twenty-nine program workers began the first college course of the SAYD in January 2007. The first cohort consisted of 17 males and 12 females. Almost half of the group (14) worked exclusively with school-age children; nine worked exclusively with older youth and seven with children and youth of all ages. More than 20 different employers were represented. Most of the participants had some experience in college classes, though only four participants had already obtained a bachelor's degree. By summer 2008, at the close of the pilot implementation, 10 of the original participants had completed all components of the SAYD.

Professional Youth Worker Credential

The PYWC is part of the Massachusetts Pathways to Success by Twenty-One (P21) initiative, a statewide effort to improve the prospects of vulnerable youth ages 16–21—including both those who are in school and those who are out of school and unemployed. The PYWC was piloted in Hampden County, Massachusetts, from December 2007 to January 2009. A second cohort began in fall 2009. The Commonwealth Corporation, with support from the Hampden Partner Group, managed the P21 PYWC pilot and, jointly with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, issued the credential. A local intermediary, Health Resources in Action, administered the selection of instructors and workshop leaders, provided direct instruction, and worked with the PYWC

project coordinator and student support coordinator to implement the pilot project and support pilot participants.

Participants for the pilot were chosen from a pool of 50 applicants. The pilot began in December 2007 with a cohort of 25 participants. A total of 23 completed the program in January 2009. The P21 PYWC pilot combined 50 hours of training with two credit-bearing college courses. The curriculum was framed around eight core competencies. The training and coursework were held one morning per week for 14 months, beginning in December 2007. Following the final training segment, participants prepared summary portfolios and demonstrated their skills in an on-site observation. On successful completion of the PYWC, participants received a $1,000 stipend from the Hampden County Regional Employment Board.

Study Methods

We conducted evaluations of the SAYD and PYWC pilots for the National Institute on Out-of-School Time at the Wellesley Centers for Women at Wellesley College. The purpose of the evaluations was to:

- Profile participant experience in the credential pilots
- Inform strategies and actions towards program improvement and development
- Suggest preliminary outcomes related to changes in staff skills and knowledge, as well as impact on program practices
- Examine use of cross-agency networking and resource sharing
- Provide recommendations for policy development

For both evaluations, we reviewed meeting notes and agendas as well as other documents. We conducted interviews and focus groups with credential participants, instructors, and program leaders. In addition, we collected pre- and post-survey data related to participant experiences, supervisor experience, and core competencies; we also conducted field observations of course instruction, training workshops, portfolio reviews, and program management meetings.

The Impact of Professional Development Models

Both of these credential pilots pushed along the process of achieving a statewide credential in Massachusetts and offered insight into the requirements, challenges, and benefits of developing a credential. The evaluations provided an avenue to examine issues such as scheduling, higher education and intermediary partnerships, employer support, coordination, participation, and funding models. Ultimately, what is most important to examine

is the connection between credential participation and quality program experiences for children and youth.

Guskey (2000) provides a useful framework of five levels of impact of professional development:

1. Participants' reactions
2. Participants' learning
3. Organization support and change
4. Participants' use of knowledge and skill
5. Student learning outcomes

Each level builds on the one before, so that success at the lowest levels is necessary for success at the levels that follow.

Guskey's level 1 is probably easiest to document: Pre- and post-participation surveys can capture participant reaction to training. Level 2 investigates if the professional development experience led to any change in participant's knowledge, skill level, attitudes, or beliefs. Evaluation of level 3 requires documenting organizational conditions before and after the professional development, including such aspects as organization culture, policy leadership, collegial support, and organization structure. Level 4 evaluation requires follow-up with participants after "sufficient time to reflect on what they have learned" and how that learning has been adapted into their particular settings (Guskey, 2000, p. 178). Assessing impact at Guskey's level 5 is notably challenging. Few studies have collected youth data specifically tied to training or professional development. We regularly make the leap of faith that high-quality training and professional development have a positive impact not only on the professionals who receive it but also on the youth they serve. Effects on youth may not be immediate; they most likely take place over time. Use of new content and strategies gained in training or professional development is often delayed due to program or personal constraints.

A study of the SAYD and PYWC afforded a unique opportunity to examine effects at Guskey's levels 2 and 4. Researchers conducted extensive interviews with after-school and youth workers and employers within two to three months after credential completion. A skill inventory survey administered to employers also helped to examine the effects of the credential experience on participants' demonstrated knowledge and skills back in their programs.

Use of Knowledge and Skills

A credential can be broadly accepted and respected only when employers are committed. Such commitment hinges on the perceived added value that participating employees bring back to the organization, whether that value comes in the form of new skills, teaching and learning strategies, personal fulfillment, or commitment to the field. When employers can see workers using the knowledge and skills gained in professional development, they are more likely to "buy into" a credential.

As part of the application process, employers pledged support for SAYD participants. In addition to paying a one-time salary bonus, they agreed to meet formally with the SAYD participant at least three times to "help incorporate lessons learned" into the work environment. Employer support varied from personal writing assistance to allowing workers to complete homework or conduct field observations while on the job. Several employers noted during interviews that it was always a challenge to figure out how they could best support their employees so the employees could get everything they needed out of work, and employers could get everything they needed out of the employees.

Employers reported that, after completing the SAYD credential, participants took more initiative in conversations and staff meetings, suggested ideas for other staff members, and had a clearer understanding of youth development. Some employers commented that participation in the SAYD increased employee confidence and expanded the toolbox that employees could draw on to serve the needs of children and youth in programs. Some also mentioned the value of increasing the general pool of trained workers who may transition to other employers. Here are two examples from interviews of employers' assessment of their staff members' progress:

> Like many of the participants in the SAYD, [our participant] didn't have a college degree.… He knew what he was doing but didn't really have the theory to connect to it. It was an amazing change in just a year. He feels more confident in talking with other staff here. I have seen an immediate impact in kids that he works with. There is more structure to his programming with teens. —*Employer*

> This was the first opportunity to have staff go to a very intensive experience instead of going to a training where you are spending a lot of time listening. Here you had to listen and produce. They would get college credit and certificate of completion.… Participants would think it's valuable … even if they were to not stay employed with us forever. They could take the experience and credential with them to other youth work. —*Employer*

Table 1. Percent of Supervisors Reporting Change in Competency-Based Skills in PYWC Participants

COMPETENCY	NO CHANGE	SOME IMPROVE-MENT	MUCH IMPROVE-MENT	NOT APPLICABLE
Planning and implementing youth activities and curriculum	7%	15%	64%	14%
Building caring relationships and providing behavior guidance to youth	14%	43%	43%	—
Understanding and applying principles of child and youth development	7%	29%	64%	—
Demonstrating an understanding of the cultural backgrounds of the youth being served and providing activities relevant to those backgrounds	21%	22%	57%	—
Performing tasks in a professional manner and making efforts to grow professionally	7%	50%	43%	—
Managing and connecting program activities with intended outcomes	23%	15%	62%	—
Providing opportunities for youth to develop communication, decision-making, and leadership skills	14%	50%	36%	—
Communicating regularly with parents/guardians of program youth	29%	21%	36%	14%
Planning and implementing activities that engage family and community members	29%	—	50%	21%
Connecting with and utilizing community resources/colleagues/partners to access the services needed for young people	35%	29%	29%	7%
Youth workers' level of enthusiasm for their work	21%	36%	43%	—

Through a skills inventory survey, PYWC supervisors assessed the changes in competency-based skill levels for employees who participated in the credential program. They were asked to rate the level of change with the following options: no change, some improvement, much improvement, or not applicable. In general, supervisors reported seeing moderate to significant changes in each of the competency-based indicators, as shown in Table 1. The greatest improvements were reported in three competency areas: activities and curriculum, child and youth development, and program management. In some instances where supervisors indicate no change in performance, their comments indicated that the employees were already at such a high level of performance that they could improve only marginally.

Several employers commented that employees who participated in the PYWC gained new confidence in their abilities. One employer noted that her employee was now ready to be groomed for a program management position. Other participants, according to their employers, demonstrated improved casework and youth support skills. As employers noted in interviews:

[The participant's] confidence level has improved since completing the PYWC, and her enthusiasm to continue with her formal education has been greatly affected.
—*Employer*

I have seen my employee grow professionally, and she is currently learning the job duties of the program director and has the confidence to take over the duties when needed.
—*Employer*

I can see the growth in [the participant's] work. He has better insight…. He has a better understanding of young people and how they develop and what our role is. To do youth work you have to understand the population and know how the organization can be meaningful. He was able to move from just being simply kind-hearted to really figuring how [he] can help the young people to solve their own problems and challenges. —*Employer*

During interviews, employers commented that having a participant in the credential program had a positive effect on the organization. Some said they expected these positive effects to grow and compound over the long term. Several employers mentioned that their employees were better able to connect with other organizations through relationships developed during the credential program.

> PYWC participants are thinking outside the box. They are connecting with other agencies. I know they knew of the other agencies in the community, but we are all so busy they never really knew what they did or how they served our community. Now they are working with these other agencies to help the people we serve, and it's great. —*Employer*

> One of the things that I observed was that not only does it [PYWC] help the participants as individuals but it brought our local agencies together. There are national connections for many of these people. They have friends. But it is much easier for someone from one program to pick up a phone and call the other program because there is the person now who is really going to do them a favor. And this is something that is not measurable. —*Employer*

Participants' Learning

A credential program can help connect workers to a larger community of practice, organize a career pathway and remuneration system, and establish a common body of knowledge and competencies that both define and give value to the work. Many workers in OST and youth development report feelings of isolation—that they are

boating in unchartered waters. They also feel that they are not appropriately compensated for their work. Yet they give body and soul to youth work, sharing the complexities of developing lives and embracing both heartbreak and triumph.

Some SAYD and PYWC participants indicated in interviews that the experience of spending 14–18 months in college-level learning and of presenting a professional portfolio was transforming, both personally and professionally. Some said that their learning transcended course content to extend to self-reflection and self-discovery about their identity as an OST or youth worker, about the place of youth work in the community, and about their capacity for lifelong commitment to the field.

For many participants, the credential programs provided an opportunity to reflect on the reasons they started working in the field and to affirm their commitment to it.

For many participants, the credential programs provided an opportunity to reflect on the reasons they started working in the field and to affirm their commitment to it. Their voices, as illustrated in the following quotes, testify to the transformation that can occur through the extended study and training with peers that the SAYD and PYWC programs provided.

> I have to be fully attached to the work that I do. Young people deserve that. What I am learning from young people is that they look for consistency from people in their life. It's kind of like training wheels…. They have training wheels until they learn to ride the bike on their own. Then when they do run into some rocky situations and you are not there to hold them up, who's going to be there? This class has taught me and made me question myself, Is this what I want to be? The work is rewarding. When I hear people speak in our group you can tell there is a lot of passion. This class made me search for who I was. It made me search for my passion and my voice. I am thankful for that. —*OST / Youth Worker*

> I used to push my passion aside, because I didn't know if it was something that I could really believe in. When I sat in that room with people and they felt like I felt, it made me realize that there are a whole group of us in this room specifically, in Boston on Wednesdays, that feel like this,

and I am quite sure there are many more. It made me feel like this is my field. It is not just a job.
—*OST / Youth Worker*

I have a brother who plays ball and he has been playing forever. He explained it to me that he felt like he was a kid playing ball until he went to a basketball camp when he was around other ball players who took it seriously. He was able to judge himself against them in their efforts and their successes and failures while they were together. He told me when he came home that he felt like a ball player, rather than just someone just playing ball. It was similar with this experience. When I went to this program, I felt like someone who was a youth worker in the city, who just had the position and I was just trying my best without a template. When I walked into that room and there was more youth workers, I felt intimidated like their ideas and perspectives were more impassioned than me, or have more of a skill set or have more of a repertoire. As I spoke to them, I felt more comfortable with them. I am a youth worker. I have a place with these people that I respect in the room, and it made me feel more validated. The process is important for that, if nothing else, then being around people who do what you do.
—*OST / Youth Worker*

For me, I would say that I have been transformed. It obviously helped me at my job—articulating what I want and what would be good for the program, the content, and the participants.… Not only that, but I can be a significant youth advocate in my city. I can make change. I know how I want to make change; I just need the education and credentials to support me.
—*OST / Youth Worker*

Credentialing Moving Forward
Studying the pilots of two credentials in Massachusetts was an opportunity to see the transformative power of deep engagement in a credential model framed by a core set of competencies aligned to the daily work of the OST and youth development fields.

A nationally recognized credential that is grounded in a set of recognized indicators of quality programming could professionalize the OST and youth development fields and give us a solid identity.

In response to the growing expectation that OST and youth development programs extend the learning day for children, and in order to meet public demand for high-quality OST programs, several states have made great strides in developing professional development systems. Some of these systems use a credential program to support the development of core skills and knowledge while providing a viable career path for workers.

Some researchers believe that without a shared vision and standards, the needs of young people and communities will eventually become too great for society to provide sufficient developmental, educational, and social support (Eckles, et al., 2009). A nationally recognized credential that is grounded in a set of recognized indicators of quality programming could professionalize the OST and youth development fields and give us a solid identity. A national credential could also address what the National Afterschool Association (NAA) feels is now a crucial task: to "ensure that afterschool work becomes a 'destination' occupation, not a transitory stop along the way to another career" (National Afterschool Association, 2006).

Based on NIOST's significant investigation and review of professional development credentials for the OST workforce, along with recent studies conducted by the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition (Cole & Ferrier, 2009), The After-School Corporation (2009), The Finance Project (2007), School's Out Washington (Starr, Yohalem, & Gannett, 2009), and the Partnership for Afterschool Education (1999), we conclude that credentials are most effective when they are embedded in well-designed professional development systems that link them to:
- **Core competencies** that define what staff need to know and do to work effectively with children and youth
- **A training system**, including links to higher education, that is grounded in the core competencies and responsive to the diverse nature of the workforce
- **A training and trainer approval system** that ensures the quality of both the content and delivery of training
- **A professional registry** that documents all relevant training and education completed by members of the field

- **Careers lattices and pathways** that link roles, responsibilities, and salary ranges
- **Wage increases and incentive programs** that include salary ranges commensurate with a professional's training, education, and experience
- **A quality rating system** that informs consumers and funders about afterschool and youth development programs and helps programs identify areas for improvement and training

The field has reached an exciting crossroads as the momentum for credential development builds. Also contributing is a renewed national focus on program quality, professional development and assessment and how these three interlace. Moving this work forward toward a nationally recognized credential will ultimately yield benefits for children and youth as it provides necessary support and validation for an essential and impassioned workforce.

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Endnote

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shared research dialogue

One College's Model for Professional Development of Youth Practitioners

by Dana Fusco and Ivana Espinet

You are hired by a community-based organization because of your passion, energy, and understanding of youth and local culture. You begin developing relationships with program youth and are off to a good start—fitting in and building trust. Now what? You know the mission of the organization and the objectives of the program, but you are not sure how to reach them.

How do you structure opportunities that support team building and cooperation? What approaches can you use to maximize the participation of diverse groups of youth? How do you know when you are having the desired effects and when you need to try something different?

Until recently, youth practitioners learned the answers to these questions through experience, ingenuity, mentoring, and an occasional workshop. As research amasses about the critical role of staff quality in predicting positive outcomes for children and youth, the professional development of youth practitioners is becoming more intentional (Little, Wimer, & Weiss, 2008; Phelan, 2005). Even higher education is playing an increasingly intentional role

in the professional development of youth workers. Well into the 1990s, youth workers who enrolled in college had to register for courses in multiple departments such as education, psychology, or business because there was no

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centralized curriculum for youth work. Ten years later, college programs designed for youth workers and afterschool practitioners began emerging across the United States at a rapid pace. Many of these programs earn participants a certificate and/or college credits transferable toward a degree. York College, a senior college of the City University of New York, developed such an offering in 2001. The Certificate Program for Child and Youth Workers is an interdisciplinary program designed to support the increasing number of competencies needed for youth practitioners to handle their jobs effectively. One author of this article, Dana Fusco, developed the curriculum for this certificate program. The other, Ivana Espinet, taught its capstone course, Action Research for Educators.

In this paper, we reflect on how what we call the "shared research dialogue" emerged throughout the semester and served as a valuable component in the professional development of youth practitioners. We discuss the Action Research method used in the course and consider how the participants grew from the experience. We conclude by arguing for the inclusion of a consistent set of competencies in the college curriculum for youth workers, making the claim that supporting the capacity for reflective practice should be a component of that curriculum.

The Action Research Course

Practitioners often feel isolated in their work sites because of a lack of time to interact with colleagues and share their practices. The action research course at York College fostered a community of learners and researchers. Collaboration with other practitioner-researchers gave students a crucial source of support to sustain and enrich their work as they shared their research projects and received feedback from their peers. In the course of the semester, students came up with a research question about their practice, collected data using a variety of methods, analyzed their findings, and considered how to use the findings to improve their practice. An explicit goal of each research project was to affect change in the students' practice at their work sites.

In addition, the objectives of Action Research for Educators were that students would:
- Deepen their knowledge of pedagogy and research through an intensive study of an educational issue related to their practice

> Collaboration with other practitioner-researchers gave students a crucial source of support to sustain and enrich their work as they shared their research projects and received feedback from their peers.

- Learn to question the assumptions and biases of knowledge and knowledge construction as they learned about the principles of action research and critiqued existing research
- Recognize that teaching and learning require ongoing, critical reflection
- Engage in a cyclical process of raising questions about practice, planning and implementing data collection, reflecting on and analyzing their data, sharing and discussing results in and out of class, and using what they learned to improve their practice
- Contribute to a youth development knowledge base for practitioners through their action research projects

The teaching that brought these objectives to life was informed by the Critical Friends model, which fosters professional inquiry communities as a form of staff development for educators (Curry, 2008; Himley & Carini, 2000; Nelson, Slavit, Perkins, & Hathorn, 2008) and the Afterschool Matters Practitioner Fellowship, which uses an experiential model to foster afterschool practitioner research (Hill, Matloff-Nieves, & Townsend, 2009).

Students

The students enrolled in spring 2009 in the action research course taught by Espinet included four females and three males. All but three were of traditional college age. They were afterschool practitioners from various community-based organizations in New York City. All were frontline workers, with the exception of one program coordinator who had additional responsibility for staff training. Some had been working as youth practitioners for up to thirty years; others had just begun and were uncertain about their commitment to the profession. All of the students were from ethnic minority groups. Some had prior college experience, but only one was steadily working toward a bachelor's degree.

Strategies and Activities

Action Research for Educators placed strong emphasis on self-reflection and ongoing group dialogue as means to deepen inquiries and interpretations and to examine implications. Various tools supported reflection throughout the semester. For example, in a "video confession

booth," students talked to the camera early in the semester about their experiences, questions, and challenges. They viewed these "confessions" later to reflect on their learning process.

With reflection and shared research dialogue as the essential means of engagement, the activities of the course were divided into three sections:

1. Brainstorming topics and questions
2. Learning various data collection tools and gathering data
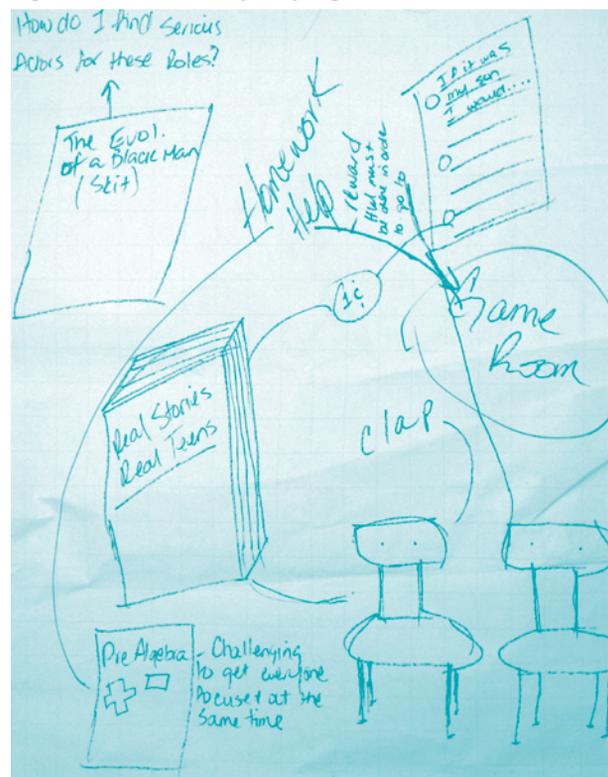3. Analyzing and disseminating findings

1. BRAINSTORMING TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

TOOLS: Mapping, critical incidents, inquiry briefs

Two initial activities, mapping and critical incidents, were adapted from the Afterschool Matters Practitioner Fellowship. Students began their inquiries by creating visual descriptions of their organizations and programs and by identifying and mapping essential components. This activity served as the impetus for students' research projects and helped highlight the difference between pragmatic questions and research questions. For instance, in Figure 1, a student mapped the activities in her program. Under one of the activities, a skit on the Evolution of a Black Man, she asked, "How do I find serious actors for these roles?" She also mapped "Real Teens, Real Stories," an activity in which youth write about their lives. She talked about the difference in young people's engagement when they participated in "Real Teens" *versus* when they were doing homework help. One of her peers suggested that she study the question, "How can programs keep young people engaged?" Here the shared research dialogue scaffolded the student's ability to distinguish between pragmatic questions and research inquiries. Pragmatic questions, such as how to find "serious actors" and understanding why youth connect to "Real Stories," were transformed into a research inquiry when framed in the context of engagement.

A second activity that generated ideas for research topics was identifying "critical incidents." Students had to write about one moment in their practice that was critical, either because it represented an essential aspect of their practice and organization or because it was so different from the usual routine that it begged for examination. Like the maps, critical incidents allowed students to look closely at their work and tease out issues for fur-

Figure 1. Student map of program activities

ther sustained study. Writing critical incidents was also of value because it supported the youth workers' practice as researchers without interfering too much with the busyness of their workdays. These tools provide platforms for unearthing questions and tensions that are part of the everyday work but can "disappear" when practitioners are caught up in dealing with immediate needs.

One student shared a critical incident involving a conversation with a child in her program. The practitioner noticed signs of problem behavior that were out of character for this child. The conversation with the child helped the student and her staff understand how academic stresses were affecting the child. After reading this critical incident, class members came up with what they saw as significant questions and issues. They generated a long list of topics ranging from academic pressures in students' lives to how afterschool staff members deal with young peoples' emotional issues. In the ensuing dialogue, the key question that this student wanted to explore emerged: "How do we as practitioners find appropriate ways of communicating with children and families?"

These early inquiries capture the starting point of students' thinking in becoming researchers and reflective practitioners. Their initial "video confessions" reflect additional early attempts at inquiry:

How do I catch my students' attention? I deal with the twelve- and thirteen-year-olds. They bore very easily.

How do we give them tools, how do we challenge them to find other alternatives, other programs, growth mechanisms outside of school?

My topic is growth, just people, growing the staff, the participants. Ways to do this, identifying this growth.

How do we bridge the gap between school and afterschool and not make it seem like it's school all over again?

How are teens in the afterschool program being affected by the current economic crisis?

Most educators ask questions about their work every day, often without consciously acknowledging it. The key is to turn those "wonderings" into research questions that can be pursued systematically. In the action research class, students created "inquiry briefs" (Dana & Yeldon-Silva, 2003) with the help of their peers. In preparing an inquiry brief, students addressed the question: Why is this question important to me, to my organization, and to the field of afterschool education?

As participants wrote these briefs and did some pilot research, their questions shifted and evolved. New insights emerged when they expanded their perspective to include their organizations and the field of afterschool education. For example, the student who originally thought that he wanted to investigate how teens in afterschool programs were affected by the current economic crisis decided, after conducting a few interviews, to broaden his question to "How are *afterschool programs* affected by the current economic crisis?" He determined that this issue needed to be explored from multiple perspectives. He continued to interview program youth, but he also interviewed program directors from various afterschool programs to understand what was happening at multiple levels. In his final paper, he described how this issue affected his own site:

> During the process of collecting my data and interviewing several colleagues and afterschool participants, I was struck with the harsh reality of the situation, when the building that served as a home away from home for me between the ages of six through thirteen (as a participant) and fourteen through twenty-four (as an employee) was slated for closure before the end of the school year, due to budgetary issues stemming from the economic downturn.

As this example illustrates, the inquiry briefs wrapped a context around students' original questions, shifting the relevance of the inquiry to a broader audience.

2. LEARNING DATA COLLECTION TOOLS AND GATHERING DATA

TOOLS: Observations, interviews, artifacts

Students needed to experience various research methods in order to decide which would work best for their particular inquiries. They practiced doing observations, interviewed afterschool participants and colleagues, created surveys, and examined how artifacts, such as student work, had been used in previous research.

One of the most significant activities that almost all students referred to in their end-of-semester reflections was their in-class observation of a videotaped afterschool session. Before viewing the 10-minute video, students were asked to refrain from interpretation; instead, they were to take only descriptive notes. After the first viewing, they shared their observations. Most were surprised at how different students had focused on different things in the video. Some also noticed that their peers had made observations that they had completely missed. Then the class watched the video again, this time making interpretations about what they saw. Once again, they found that even though everyone had observed the same events, interpretations did not always match. Some students made interpretations that contradicted their initial observations. Students also observed things in the second viewing that they had not seen the first time.

Many activities in this section, like this group observation, used protocols to structure the conversation. Use of such protocols channeled the focus, so that different conversations could accomplish different tasks. This strategy is based on the Critical Friends model of support for collaborative inquiry. Himley and Carini (2000) explain that, "through oral inquiry, teachers build the 'thick descriptions' that deepen their understanding of the local situation, while also opening up larger implications of their work" (p. 200).

Because the class was set up as a collaborative research process, many of the students brought queries about their process to the meetings. As they discovered the challenges of doing research at their sites, they found support in dealing with those challenges. For example, one student, in sharing the results of a survey of fellow youth workers in her program, noted that her respondents completed the multiple-choice survey items but

not the open-ended items. Her classmates, conjecturing that the respondents might not be comfortable with putting their thoughts into writing, recommended that she follow up the surveys with interviews. When she conducted the interviews, the youth workers talked extensively about how their experiences at home and in other non-work contexts had shaped how they learned to talk to young children. Later, in class, this student talked about how the interviews helped her understand the survey data, providing anecdotes that allowed better interpretation of her findings.

3. ANALYZING AND DISSEMINATING FINDINGS

TOOLS: Data coding, graphing, interpretations

The process of analyzing what a researcher has learned is like fitting the pieces of a puzzle together to create a picture. Even though the bulk of the analysis was done in the last few sessions of the course, the work was scaffolded throughout the course as participants shared with peers the data they had collected. During these sharing sessions, they received feedback about how to interpret the data and how to proceed in their research. Sometimes peers' interpretations of their data were quite different from their own.

Closer to the end of the semester, students coded data collectively, looking for emerging themes. Participants talked about these themes and how they might share their findings with others. In one session, a student brought data from a survey she had done with participants in her program. The class divided into two groups. Each group tabulated her data, came up with a graphic representation of it, and shared what the group thought was most significant about the survey answers and why. Students talked about how the graphic representations shaped their understanding of the data, noting that such graphics could actually misrepresent the results, depending on how they were constructed.

A key feature of action research is that practitioners think about the implications of their research findings. Many of the youth workers said that they were going to share their final papers with their supervisors; all had already engaged in discussions with their colleagues and supervisors during the course of the semester. One student talked about using her findings to prompt a discussion at her site about the need to give older students more ownership and voice in shaping the afterschool activities. Anecdotal information suggests that colleagues and supervisors at the sites were supportive of new

ideas and eager to share in the learning. For example, one supervisor in an interview described the certificate program as providing her employee with the opportunity to participate in multiple conversations on issues relevant to the field of out-of-school programming as well as to translate concepts learned in the classroom for the student-employee's staff. The supervisor felt that such professional development had been especially important in the last two years when the mandates of the program had been changing.

The participants also talked about the value of using research tools to improve their practices, and some applied research tools from the course to their sites. For example, one student who supervises other youth workers incorporated the course's observation protocol to help him observe his staff performance and conduct internal staff development.

Becoming Researchers and Reflective Practitioners

"Inquiring professionals seek out change by reflecting on their practice. They do this by posing questions or 'wonderings,' collecting data to gain insights into their wonderings, analyzing the data along with reading the relevant literature, making changes in practice based on new understanding developed during inquiry, and sharing findings with others" (Dana & Yeldon-Silva, 2003, p. 5).

The main challenge in the action research course was helping the participants shift into the role of researchers. Most of them wanted to find immediate answers to the questions that they or their peers presented. It was hard for them to understand that the goal of the course was to explore the questions before trying to come up with solutions. One student wrote in her final paper:

Although I knew the staff and children, I had to approach the situation as a researcher. This allowed me to see things I didn't see before. I was able to observe my coworkers and students in activities and see how things really work.

This comment illustrates how the research process helped the students to see their practices with fresh eyes. Looking closely at one issue through a variety of lenses sharpened their powers of observation, making them more attuned to what was going on in their programs and helping them become aware of their own underlying assumptions. In addition, those who shared their research findings with their sites became leaders in fostering conversations about improving their practices and their organizations.

Action research alone might not have the effect we saw here. In a recent external evaluation of the certificate program, one of the key components that participants valued was the opportunity for deep dialogue (Fusco, 2009). Through in-class discussions of concepts and real-world experiences, students found a language to articulate what they knew intuitively. The value of dialogue and the formation of a learning community were critical in allowing participants to share their experiences and views and to learn from others. In short, action research based on the Critical Friends model not only allowed students to learn the valuable skills of observation, reflection, and inquiry but also created a shared research dialogue that supported learning and had an impact on their thinking about their work.

Collaborative inquiry groups for teachers have been part of school reform efforts for many years. Yet this model of professional development is not as common in afterschool environments. The assumption of the model is that practitioners are in a unique position to make regular observations of their practice and of the issues that emerge there and that they bring to those issues a depth of knowledge and response when the observation is framed by systematic and reflective study. This model positions practitioners as co-constructers of knowledge who can contribute richly to their field. The process places practitioners in the center of inquiry as researchers of their own practice.

What the college classroom added was an opportunity to form a collaborative learning environment that surrounded these individual inquiries and transformed them into *shared research dialogue.* We believe that this shared research dialogue was the key ingredient not only in students' growth as practitioners but also in their future capacity to effect change at their program sites. As one student said in a follow-up interview:

> It was a class based on experience. We got to share different things, you know? 'How would you respond to a student doing XYZ?' And then we'd give each other feedback. And sometimes it got heated, but at the end of the class we all had a response to it. You know, we all knew, that this is the right way to go about this.
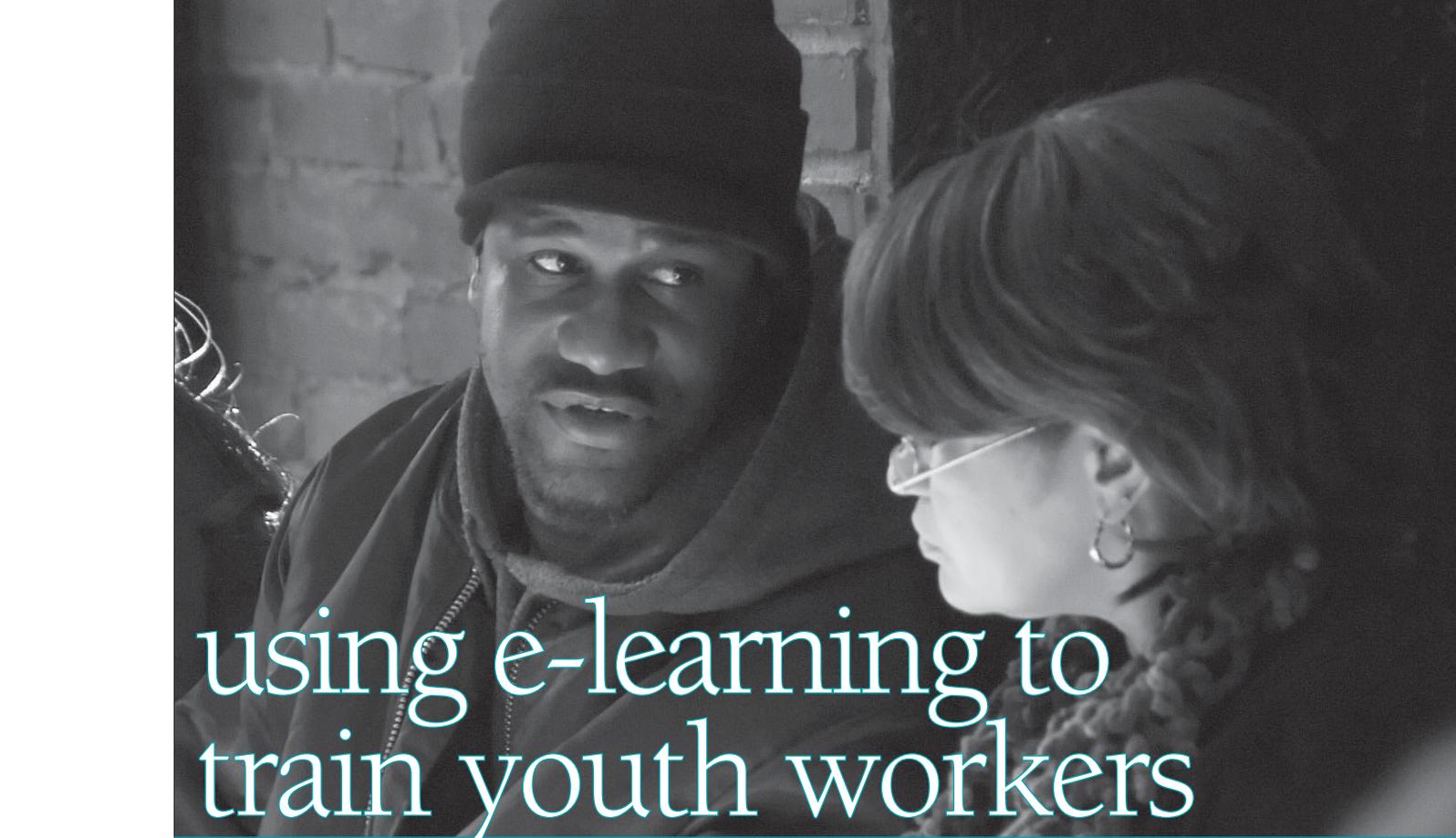
Many students in college-based programs bring extensive professional experience to their studies. In fact, the context of youth work is so rich that even less experienced workers have much to share. The shared research dialogue created here was a vital component of the action research course and the certificate program, affording opportunities for sharing, scaffolding, and support. Since youth practice is group based, the shared research dialogue had the added benefit of reinforcing the culture and values of the profession. College classrooms can provide space for youth practitioners to form such learning communities so that they develop competencies in an environment that mimics the best of youth work and supports reflective practice as an essential ingredient.

> This model positions practitioners as co-constructers of knowledge who can contribute richly to their field.

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using e-learning to train youth workers

The BELL Experience

by Matthea Marquart, Zora Jones Rizzi, and Amita Desai Parikh

A national provider of afterschool and summer programming plans to expand quickly into new regions, bringing its successful model of out-of-school learning to more children in disadvantaged schools and neighborhoods.

A large number of staff members must be trained in the provider's program model in a short window of time.

The organization needs to maintain its high training standards while reserving the bulk of its funds for the education of the children it serves.

For BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life), the answer to this conundrum was e-learning—or, more precisely, a blended learning solution combining web-based learning with traditional classroom-based training. In 2007, BELL's summer training for teachers and teaching assistants consisted of three consecutive ten-

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hour days of classroom training. That summer, BELL served three regions: Baltimore, Boston, and New York City. In the summer of 2008, BELL expanded to two additional cities: Detroit and Springfield, Massachusetts. The organization trained over 800 instructional staff and their managers in all five regions using the new blended training format.

BELL had three goals in launching the e-learning program (Marquart, 2008):

- To improve outcomes for the children served by BELL—called *scholars*—by providing world-class standardized training to the staff so that they could provide the highest quality tutoring possible.
- To cut the cost of training so that a higher percentage of BELL funds could be directed toward scholars.
- To enable BELL to expand quickly to new regions or to partnerships so that as many children as possible could benefit. Nimble training that could serve a rapidly growing number of staff in a number of regions was key to this expansion.

The pilot met all of its goals, resulting in strong outcomes for BELL scholars served by staff trained in the new format, a reduction in training costs to roughly one-third of the cost of classroom-based training, and a smooth training experience for staff in the two new BELL regions.

Why E-learning?

Founded in 1992, BELL is a rapidly growing nonprofit organization that provides summer and afterschool tutoring in order to enhance the educational achievements, self-esteem, and life opportunities of elementary school children in low-income, urban communities. BELL served over 7,000 scholars in the 2007–2008 academic year and over 4,000 scholars in five cities in the summer of 2008.

One key to BELL's growth is its strong training program for both the instructors who work directly with scholars and the site managers of the tutoring locations. Because BELL training is standardized, the organization can grow into new regions with confidence that the new sites will be equipped to implement the program model even when staff have no prior experience working with BELL.

Prior to 2008, BELL's training was conducted exclusively in a classroom-based format. BELL's four training department staff traveled to manage three-day classroom training events in each region. This training configuration was a potential bottleneck in BELL's plans for aggressive expansion. Therefore, the organization's board and senior management charged the training team with developing an e-learning program for site instructors and

managers. By reducing the amount of classroom time, the training team could become more nimble and efficient in support of BELL's strategic goals.

As an initial step, BELL needed to decide what form of e-learning to develop. E-learning comes in many constantly changing forms; the American Society for Training and Development (2009) continually updates its E-learning Glossary webpage. Though e-learning can include such modes as, for instance, online classes, digital collaboration, podcasts, and information distributed via CD-ROM, BELL chose to develop web-based asynchronous e-learning modules. These are stand-alone learning content and activities that individuals complete on their own, without the guidance of a human facilitator. Completion of the online modules is a prerequisite to classroom training. BELL's staff training is thus an example of a blended learning solution: It combines e-learning and classroom-based training. For its site managers, BELL offers synchronous ("real-time") webinars using conference calling and web conferencing. The blended e-learning we discuss in this article is for instructional staff as well as site managers.

Initial Challenges

In developing its e-learning program, BELL faced a number of challenges that are relevant to any afterschool program considering e-learning, including unknown computer technology, a wide variety of learner expertise and computer skill levels, and other challenges that seem to be inherent in e-learning.

Unknown Technology

Because administering computer technology is not central to BELL's mission, BELL did not provide computer labs or computer technology for staff. Staff members completed the e-learning on computers in their homes,

Figure 1. BELL e-learning home page

at libraries, at school computer labs, and in other people's homes. The e-learning therefore needed to run on almost any computer and had to be useable even on a dial-up Internet connection. BELL could not assume that users would have expensive graphics cards, video cards, or a variety of software, so the e-learning could not include a lot of animation or other features that draw heavily on computer resources. In fact, learners might not even have CD drives or the ability to install new software on computers that did not belong to them. The e-learning thus needed to be web-based.

Learners' Familiarity and Comfort with Technology

In addition to the normal variety of adult learning styles and needs, BELL was aware that staff using the e-learning had a wide range of experience with education and with computer technology. For example, while BELL's teaching assistants are frequently college students with limited classroom teaching experience, the teachers are often experienced educators with graduate degrees. Yet because elementary school teaching does not usually require daily use of a computer, many BELL teachers have limited experience with computers. At the other end of the scale, many teaching assistants grew up playing video games and are inseparable from their mobile devices. Even among teachers, there is often a split between newly certified teachers, who are familiar with the latest educational theories and may have taken an online class in graduate school, and veteran teachers, who have decades of practical teaching experience but may not have used computers at all when they were in school. These divides meant that the e-learning needed to include detailed directions to help learners who were new to computers, but it needed to do so in a manner that would not frustrate digital natives.

Recent research has shown that barriers to teachers' use of computers and the Internet are falling. School-based educators, at least, are already using online tools in both their professional and personal lives. For example, a recent survey of 1,000 educators (edWeb.net, MCH Discover, & MMS Education, 2009) found that 61 percent of them were members of social networking websites as shown in Figure 2. A survey by *Teacher Magazine* (2009) found that 62 percent of teachers use the Internet to get teaching ideas at least once a week, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Teachers who participate in online learning may find themselves participating more fully than when they attend traditional professional development sessions. One reason may be that they like the anonymity of the online world, where they may feel they can be more open about their

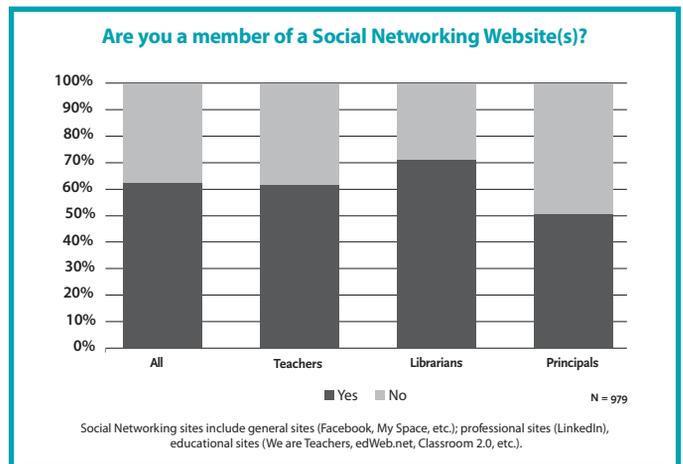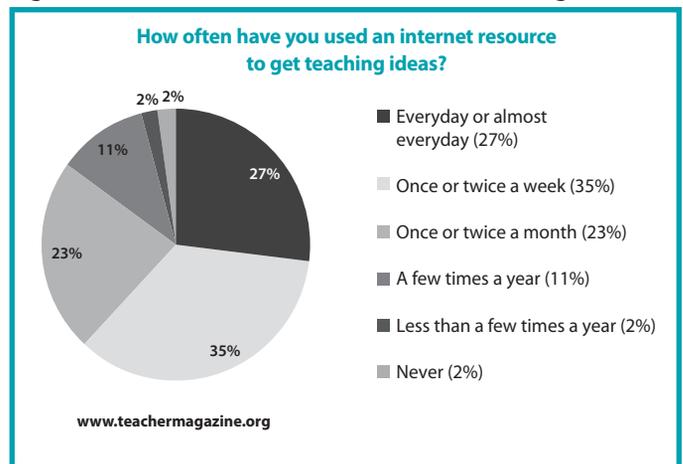**Figure 2. Educators' use of social networking websites**

Are you a member of a Social Networking Website(s)?

Social Networking sites include general sites (Facebook, My Space, etc.); professional sites (LinkedIn), educational sites (We are Teachers, edWeb.net, Classroom 2.0, etc.).

Figure 3. Teachers' use of the Internet for teaching resources

How often have you used an internet resource to get teaching ideas?

■ Everyday or almost everyday (27%)
□ Once or twice a week (35%)
■ Once or twice a month (23%)
■ A few times a year (11%)
■ Less than a few times a year (2%)
■ Never (2%)

www.teachermagazine.org

concerns and frustrations and can talk freely about what they aren't doing as well as they should. As Chris Dede, a professor of learning technology at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, put it in an interview, "The online format provides a layer of distance that helps people feel more willing to share things that are a little bit risky than they might in a face-to-face environment" (Rebora, 2009, p. 8). Teachers may also enjoy sharing professional knowledge and communicating with colleagues.

Inherent Challenges

BELL also needed to tackle, from the outset, several challenges that are inherent in the model of e-learning the organization chose. For instance, since learners were to complete the e-learning on their own time, BELL needed to build in accountability for learning the content. Users had to log in with a username and password, and then they had to complete all of the activities in the e-learning. The activities were not considered complete until every question was answered correctly and every possible action, such as viewing a video or posting to a discussion

forum, was taken. The e-learning system tracked the learners' actions, and the training department reported on learners' progress to their site managers, the regional directors, the staff recruiters, and senior management. When staff fell behind, they received email reminders and phone calls. The fact that the e-learning was capped by a classroom segment deterred potential cheaters with the knowledge that they would be held accountable, in person, for meeting the learning objectives.

E-learning inherently has the potential to be isolating for learners, de-motivating, and dull. BELL needed to build in balances against these challenges. For instance, as outlined below, the learning was designed to be interactive and motivating whenever possible.

As with any training program, BELL's goal was to increase program quality by providing a superior training experience. Every year, BELL scholars have strong outcomes. The dramatic change in staff training was a potential risk to program quality. Staff needed to be as well or better prepared by the new format as they had been in previous years.

Another challenge is inherent whenever organizations implement change: staff resistance. BELL's previous classroom training was highly interactive and engaging. BELL summer staff are trained each year so that they can start powerfully and make every program day count. Thus, many staff were familiar with the previous classroom training, and some were not pleased to see classroom time cut by two-thirds to be replaced by e-learning. BELL's communications with staff about the e-learning program had to persuade staff of its value and emphasize that it was mandatory.

BELL's E-learning Program

In response to the e-learning project's goals and challenges, BELL created an e-learning program that led into the classroom training. The e-learning introduced BELL's program, policies, and curricula. It was structured in 13 modules that provided information and then challenged learners to apply the learning.

Building the E-learning Site

BELL began the process of building its e-learning by going through a request for proposals (RFP) process. In drafting the RFP and reviewing it with senior managers, the training team clarified the e-learning project's objectives and laid out expectations regarding interactivity, technology, and look and feel, so that the organization was on the same page about what the e-learning project needed to accomplish.

Over two dozen e-learning vendors from around the world responded to the RFP; some had been invited to respond due to their reputation in the field while others saw the RFP on industry discussion boards. Finalists were invited to do in-person presentations for a cross-functional committee representing BELL's management, finance, technology, and training teams. After the committee selected a vendor, a rigorous background check had to be conducted. Because the e-learning field is relatively new and volatile, BELL needed to be confident that its e-learning investment would not be not lost.

Once the contract was awarded, the design phase kicked off with a week of meetings for creating detailed user profiles, running focus groups, brainstorming potential designs, exploring ideas, introducing the potential and limitations of particular e-learning design tools, laying out project expectations, and discussing work and communication styles among the team members who would be working on the fast-paced project. Feedback from instructional staff, site managers, senior managers, trainers, and e-learning experts helped determine which information should be emphasized. Focus groups with instructional staff provided insight into the learners' needs and helped guide decision making. For example, younger instructional staff confessed that they would be tempted to get through the e-learning as quickly as possible, even though they actually wanted to learn the content; this led to the decision to lock the "next" button on slides until questions were answered correctly. In another example, managers emphasized that they wanted the e-learning to maintain the classroom training's focus on BELL's mission and values; this led to the decision to have learners memorize BELL's mission early on and to infuse the mission throughout the e-learning.

After the project kicked off, internal staff collaborated daily with the e-learning vendor, Kineo, on scripting, selecting images, planning, and reviewing designs. With the tight deadline and ambitious goals, frequent communication and feedback on early drafts were key. In addition, internal staff needed to quickly learn simple e-learning authoring software such as Hot Potato, Audacity, and Moodle. Their ability to create straightforward, basic e-learning modules in-house allowed BELL to allocate expensive and limited consultant time to the more complex components of the e-learning.

Throughout the design process, BELL emphasized interactivity to engage learners, a variety of activities to prevent monotony, relevant images and scenarios to help learners understand that the training was applicable to their jobs, practical information that would raise the qual-
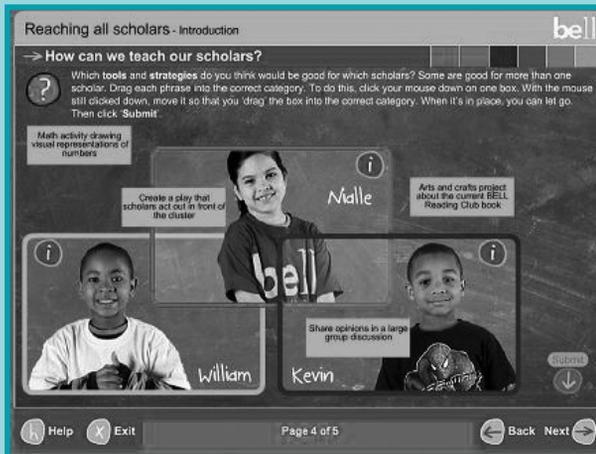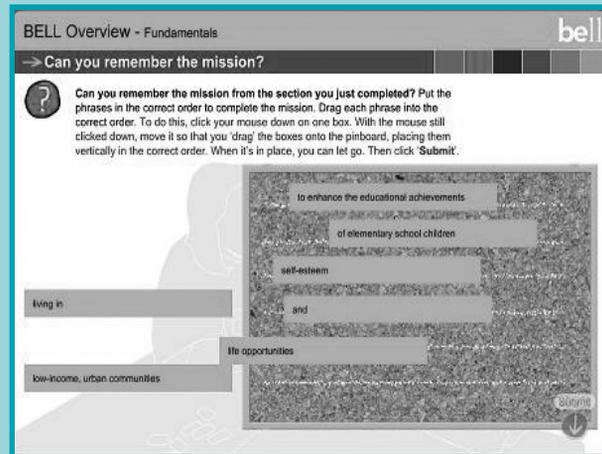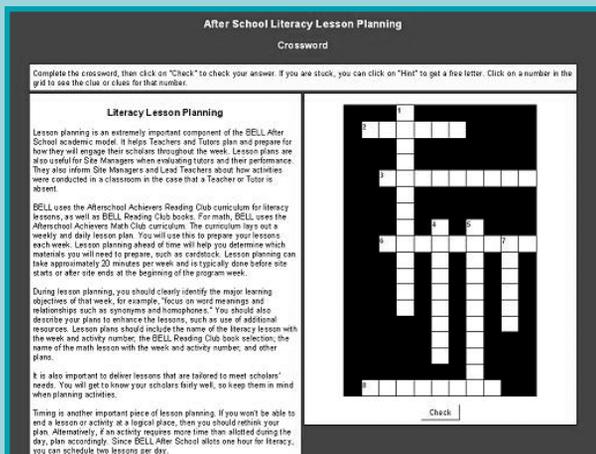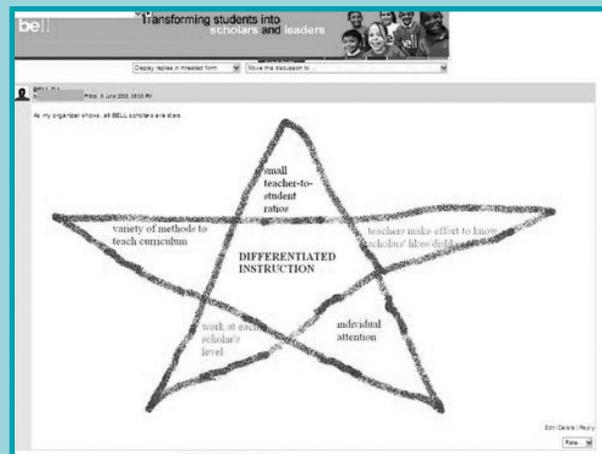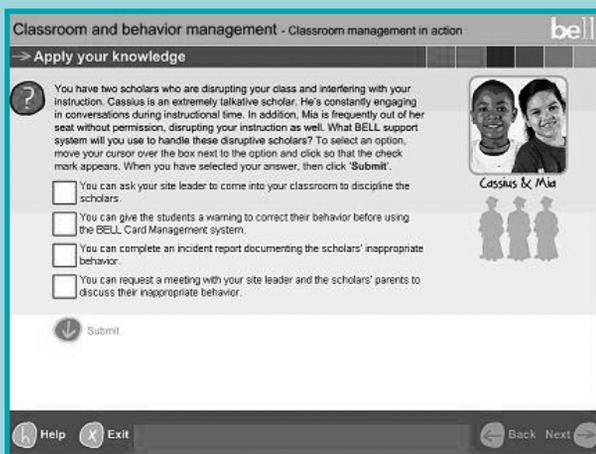
FIGURE 4

FIGURE 5

FIGURE 6

FIGURE 7

FIGURE 8

FIGURE 4. A drag-and-drop activity. Learners match potential activities with the learning styles and needs of scholars introduced in an earlier activity.

FIGURE 5. Another drag-and-drop activity. Learners must put the phrases of BELL's mission statement in order.

FIGURE 6. A crossword activity. The material on the left is used immediately to fill out the crossword on the right, making the presentation more engaging. The crossword questions focus on key learning points.

FIGURE 7. An assignment posted to a discussion forum. Learners are directed to apply what they have just learned about graphic organizers to create a graphic organizer showing how differentiated instruction is built into BELL's program design.

FIGURE 8. A scenario screen. The outlines of scholars in graduation caps and gowns indicate the number of questions left in the scenario. As questions are answered correctly, the outlined images are filled in with a photo of a scholar in a cap and gown.

ity of BELL's program, and an inspiring look-and-feel to drive learner motivation. BELL wanted both to build staff skills in implementing the program model and to convince staff to commit to BELL's mission, vision, and program.

E-learning Features

The e-learning home page shown in Figure 1 (page 29) illustrates the numbered steps and clear directions that allowed BELL's users to navigate the e-learning easily. On the home page, BELL's CEO contributed a blog that emphasized the value of training to prepare staff to serve scholars and that expressed appreciation for their contributions to BELL's mission. This visible buy-in from the highest level of management added to the staff's perception of the importance of the e-learning.

In addition to the home page and the learning modules, the e-learning system included a Help area and five regional information modules, each of which contained information specific to one of the cities BELL served. The system also featured downloadable resources that learners could use at their sites, such as lesson plan templates and job descriptions. The e-learning itself was a resource, as learners could access it for reference after they began their jobs.

In order to engage learners and to overcome some of the inherent challenges of e-learning, the e-learning modules featured:

- Interactive activities
- Text written in a conversational style
- Photos, as well as limited video and audio, of real BELL scholars and staff rather than models
- Graphics that matched the look and feel of classrooms
- Feedback from virtual coaches that explained why users' answers were correct or not

Depending on the user's experience with teaching and expertise with technology, the e-learning took 10–15 hours to complete. The BELL e-learning took advantage of one of the most positive features of asynchronous web-based learning: It was available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

In the e-learning modules, interactive activities included drag-and-drop images that put learners in the context of a classroom, as well as puzzles, polls, wikis, discussion forums, audio, video, and scenarios. Samples of these activities can be seen in Figures 4–8.

In the classroom training that followed the prerequisite e-learning, trainers built on the participants' prior knowledge from the e-learning. They provided opportunities for participants to demonstrate their learning,

clarify questions, create learning communities, and put their learning into context. Staff members were trained in the same room with their coworkers for the summer, including the site managers. All learners were provided with a participant workbook. Workshops were standardized through highly structured leaders' guides, a slideshow for each workshop, and a train-the-trainer workshop conducted by BELL's director of training.

Evaluation and Results

BELL conducted an extensive evaluation of the e-learning program, with assessments starting while the e-learning was in use and stretching to nearly a year afterward. The Evaluation Data box (page 34) details the 12 types of data BELL collected.

The evaluation found that according to the e-learning platform's learner tracking, 100 percent of staff who worked at summer sites were trained through the blended e-learning and classroom training. Of almost 800 staff, only three did not complete 90 percent or more of the e-learning; these three did complete at least half. These e-learners were well prepared to work with BELL scholars. For example, after completing classroom training, 90 percent of teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) said on the paper survey that the e-learning gave them a good understanding of BELL's program model; 80 percent said that the e-learning was interesting and easy to understand. At the end of the summer program, on the staff survey, 95 percent of teachers and TAs "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the blended training prepared them to affect scholar development. At the end of the summer, 87 percent of site managers said on their survey that they "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the blended training had prepared staff to implement the literacy curriculum; 88 percent "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with a similar statement about the math curriculum.

The project cut the classroom training time from three days to one. The largest training expenses—trainers, space rentals, catering, printing, and so on—were reduced to roughly one-third of the previous year's cost. However, organizations considering building an e-learning program from scratch should know that it's an expensive proposition. Development costs include significant time for many levels of staff, e-learning vendor costs, outsourced secure e-learning hosting, outsourced technical support for users, outsourced videography, focus groups, and software licenses for developing e-learning modules and materials in-house. Though there is potential for future revenue through licensing the e-learning to other organizations, and the savings in classroom training costs

are important, the up-front costs are significant. Ongoing costs include maintaining the e-learning platform, developing new content, site hosting, and outsourced technical support.

The e-learning project positioned BELL to expand rapidly and cost-effectively to new regions. Cutting the amount of classroom training time was key. Summer programs across the United States begin at approximately the same time, so that summer program staff in all regions must be trained at the same time. Cutting the in-person training to one day enabled the BELL training team to handle the expansion to two additional cities without adding staff.

In addition to the scalable logistics, the e-learning supported the quality implementation of BELL's program model in new regions. For example, during summer 2008, all of the approximately 150 teaching staff in Springfield, Massachusetts, were new to BELL. The majority of staff members were fully engaged in teaching until 10 days before the program began, so there was an extremely short window of time in which to wrap up their academic year jobs, complete the hiring process with BELL, and get fully trained. The BELL curriculum, behavior management systems, parent engagement strategies, and holistic approach to summer learning are dramatically different from typical summer school models. However, staff were trained well enough to successfully implement the BELL program and achieve significant results.

Student Outcomes

According to an evaluation of BELL's pre-tests and post-tests using the Stanford Diagnostic Reading and Math Tests, during the six-week summer program the Springfield BELL scholars gained nine months' worth of both reading and math skills. Older scholars showed the greatest gains: eighth-grade scholars showed 16 months' gain in literacy and 14 months' gain in math. Another new region staffed exclusively by educators who were new to the BELL model, Detroit, also achieved significant results, with seven months' gain in reading and eight months' gain in math. See Table 1 for a comparison between students' academic gains in 2007, when training was strictly classroom based, and 2008, when the blended training including e-learning was piloted.

External Recognition

The recognition BELL's blended training has garnered from outside the organization is further evidence of its success. Most notably, *Training Magazine* awarded BELL its Technology in Action (TIA) award for the category

of 2008 Blended Learning and Performance Project of the Year. The caliber of this award is indicated by the other four TIA winners in different categories: Accenture, Microsoft, Realogy Corporation, and the U.S. Joint Forces Command Joint Warfighting Center. In giving the award, the judges cited their appreciation for specific features of BELL's e-learning solution: its interactivity, the interesting combination of tools used, the clear cost savings, the extensive evaluation, and the fact that the program targeted the "least common denominator" desktop environment (Weinstein, 2008).

In 2009, BELL's e-learning has been received positively at demonstrations for educators at the National Afterschool Association Convention and at Johns Hopkins University National Center for Summer Learning Conference on Summer Learning. It has also been well received at demonstrations for e-learning and training professionals at the International Conference on E-Learning in the Workplace, the eLearning Guild's New England Regional Instructional Design Symposium, the eLearning Guild's Online Forum on Best Practices in eLearning Instructional Design and Management, and at a webinar hosted by InSync Training. It has been written about in the *International Journal of Advanced Corporate Learning* (Marquart & Rizzi, 2009) and discussed in a guest expert interview on the Accidental Trainer (www.theaccidentaltrainer.com).

Lessons Learned

The six key lessons BELL learned in launching the e-learning program may help other programs that want to implement their own e-learning projects.

1. Run a limited pilot. Before launching a full-scale pilot, BELL implemented a limited pilot, replacing BELL's annual in-service classroom training with two e-learning modules for a small number of staff. The pilot, which ran in only two regions, provided feedback on BELL's first e-learning offering; the results could be compared with the feedback from previous classroom trainings with the same content. Feedback from the pilot informed improvements to the full summer e-learning. For example, learners in the limited pilot did not appreciate creatively designed homepages with animations and graphics. They preferred simple course homepages in which everything was numbered and directions were included in the headings for every task.

2. Over-communicate with internal stakeholders. Implementing a new e-learning project requires teamwork across all functional areas, including the site managers. BELL's training team provided managers and the staff recruitment team with frequent reports on their staff's e-learning progress. Both groups followed up with staff to assure 100 percent completion of the e-learning. The training director provided regular project updates to cross-functional organizational leaders in order to build awareness of and support for the project. The internal stakeholders' support made it much easier for the training team to over-communicate with the staff about e-learning requirements and progress.

3. Create ways for learners to help themselves with technical questions. The recruiters who hired staff gave learners a one-page flyer introducing BELL e-learning and a FAQ document. This material was also emailed to learners with their e-learning account information, and managers had additional copies. The training team also created wallet-sized cards for staff that included e-learning log-in information and a few points about the value of the e-learning. A system checker on the home page allowed learners to see whether their computers needed to disable pop-up blockers or update software to run the e-learning

Table 1. Student Gains Before and After E-learning Launch

	Summer 2007		Summer 2008	
	Reading	**Math**	**Reading**	**Math**
National	**4 months**	**4 months**	**5 months**	**5 months**
Baltimore	4 months	8 months	3 months	4 months
Boston	4 months	3 months	4 months	2 months
Detroit	N/A	N/A	7 months	8 months
New York City	8 months	9 months	5 months	7 months
Springfield grades 2–5	N/A	N/A	7 months	7 months
Springfield grade 8	N/A	N/A	16 months	14 months

Source: Building Educated Leaders for Life (2008)

modules. In addition, a Help forum allowed BELL learners to access the answers to commonly asked questions or to post new questions. These tools significantly cut down the volume of technical support calls.

4. Plan how to handle remaining requests for technical support. Learners who could not help themselves using these tools frequently needed significant hand-holding and multiple phone calls. BELL training team members initially tried to handle technical support calls and emails but quickly realized that they needed to outsource this function to a technical support call center. The call center was selected with the help of the e-learning vendor.

5. Keep directions simple and explicit. Basic but thorough instructions will help learners without much experience with technology. More experienced learners can easily skim the directions. Assume that learners don't know computer language, and keep the language user-friendly and basic.

6. Keep it real. A number of features of the e-learning modules made the material relevant and realistic. For example, BELL displayed images of real scholars and teachers rather than using models or stock photographs. Learners loved seeing the realistic images.

Because an e-learning project can be so exciting, filled with potential benefits for organizations that are strapped for time and resources, it can be tempting to jump right into creating learning modules. However, developing e-learning is an expensive and complicated proposition. BELL's example demonstrates the worth of allocating significant time up front to set clear goals, establish ways to measure effectiveness, develop internal expertise about e-learning design, and plan how to meet anticipated learner and stakeholder needs. This up-front time pays off when expensive pitfalls are avoided and business objectives are achieved on time and within budget. Most importantly, the time spent in planning demonstrates its worth when e-learning produces youth workers who are trained to serve children well.

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enhancing program quality and care through supervision

by Heather Olsen and Christopher L. Kowalski

In this age of accountability, afterschool programs are increasingly held responsible for providing youth with quality care and education. Afterschool programs play a critical role in helping youth develop their intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, often by engaging them in activities in which they interact with their peers. Such activities require afterschool program staff to carefully supervise children and youth in order to manage risk and ensure the young people's safety. Relationship building and mentoring are also part of such supervision.

The *supervision* we explore in this article is the watchful guidance provided by staff members to program participants rather than the mentoring a senior staff member provides to a less experienced youth worker. This article explores the "best practices" of this kind of supervision in afterschool programs, outlining programs' responsibilities and suggesting practical supervisory techniques. A framework of supervision for small- and large-group activities outlines the respon-

sibilities and duties of supervisors and can help afterschool programs develop their own supervision plans.

Is Supervision Necessary?

The question itself may seem unnecessary, but discussion of supervision in the afterschool literature is limited. Afterschool programs have a legal obligation and responsibility to ensure the safety of participating youth. Supervision is one of the most important connections between physical activity and risk man-

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agement; it has been raised in nearly every negligence lawsuit (Dougherty, 1993; van der Smissen, 1990).

Supervision is a broad term implying responsibility for the safety of physical locations and of program activities. According to Gaskin (2003), supervision includes "coordinating, directing, overseeing, implementing, managing, superintending, and regulating" (p. 138). Supervisors are alert, competent professionals who are confident in intervening when youth behave inappropriately.

According to van der Smissen (1990), approximately 80 percent of legal cases involving program situations in park and recreation, leisure service, and afterschool agencies allege lack of supervision or improper supervision. The implication may be that afterschool programs can be found negligent if they are not properly monitoring youth. For instance, a negligence claim may arise if a staff member is indoors gathering activity supplies when an incident occurs among unsupervised children outdoors. A "reasonable and prudent" person would have known that the children should not be left unsupervised; thus, such action would generally qualify as negligence under the law (Black's Law Dictionary, 1978, p. 930).

Afterschool youth workers should be able to make good decisions when assessing situations, including those that involve resolving conflicts. Organizations and their staff members can be found negligent if four conditions are met (van der Smissen, 2007):

- Deviation from the **duty** of the supervisor
- An **act** that is not in accordance with the **standard of care**
- **Proximate cause**, or a connection between damage or injury and the failure to act properly
- **Injury or damages** that result from the failure to act properly

Understanding these four elements of negligence is the beginning of minimizing risks in an afterschool program.

Staff members of afterschool programs have a legal *duty* (van der Smissen, 2007) to supervise students in their care; they and the programs are liable for injuries and damages that occur in the absence of adequate supervision. The primary duty of the staff member in the example above is to supervise the children who are outdoors.

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The *act* refers to actions of the afterschool worker. In our example, the question would be whether the staff member who stayed indoors to prepare for the next activity was negligent. Negligent conduct may occur because of the manner in which the leader acted or failed to act (van der Smissen, 1990). Another example of an act that is not in accordance with the standard of care has to do with the design of program spaces. In a handful of situations, we have seen unlocked storage units in afterschool classrooms, where children had unsupervised access to cleaning supplies, chemicals, and sharp objects. Such programs may need to consider their obligation to provide a safe physical environment for children.

In discussion of negligence, the supervisor's *standard of care* is the standard that a reasonable and prudent professional maintains (van der Smissen, 1990). The legal system determines the standard of care required of afterschool programs. This standard is usually based on the recognized practice of local and state programs. Organizations such as the National Afterschool Association (2009) have developed standards for quality school-age care that provide guidance on how to act as a school-age care professional.

Proximate cause refers to the actual cause of the damage or injury (van der Smissen, 2007). For negligence to occur, it must be proven that the damage or injury was the direct result of the action of the supervisor. For example, if a child was injured because, when an afterschool worker left the classroom, other participants pushed the child into a storage unit and knocked it over, lack of supervision may be considered the proximate cause of the injury.

The fourth element of negligence is actual *injury* to a person or *damage* to property. Dougherty, Auxter, Goldberger, and Heinzmann (1994) reviewed numerous law cases involving injuries that required medical attention. These injuries occurred while young people were involved in activities that might be included in an afterschool program, such as playing basketball, football, softball, baseball, and soccer, as well as roller and in-line skating and exercising with equipment or weights. In each case, the question arose whether lack of proper supervision was the reason for injury. The courts examined the actions and behaviors of the leaders and programs (Dougherty, Auxter, Goldberger, & Heinzmann, 1994).

This emphasizes the importance of supervision in minimizing injury in afterschool programs.

Practical Techniques

A critical ingredient for quality youth-serving programs is that supervisors be trained to interact with program youth. The actions and behaviors of managers and staff are vital to program success and sustainability. Research in the sports and leisure literature concludes that supervision goes beyond simply watching youth; it encompasses several common components (Appenzeller, 2005; Hronek, Spengler, & Baker, 2007; Kaiser, 1986; van der Smissen, 2007). Kaiser (1986) has suggested that supervision duties include:

• Inspecting the facility
• Planning for an activity
• Providing adequate and proper equipment
• Evaluating participants' abilities and skills
• Warning participants of inherent dangers in an activity
• Instruction on proper techniques
• Closely controlling the conduct of activity
• Providing first aid and access to medical facilities

Afterschool leaders protect youth from unreasonable risks of harm by assessing the program area for safety, deciding on age-appropriate activities, interacting with youth, instructing proper techniques and skills, and closely monitoring conduct during the activity. Too often, once youth become engaged in an activity, supervisors become stationary.

Afterschool programs can be creative in designing and implementing multiple activities that can occur simultaneously in a variety of environments. Although each program component or activity has its unique setting, a standard of supervision must apply. For instance, in programs that have small spaces, the room may be designed so that all children can fully participate and enjoy the experience. Creative planning among staff may aid in rearrangement of the room to offer enjoyment and a safe environment.
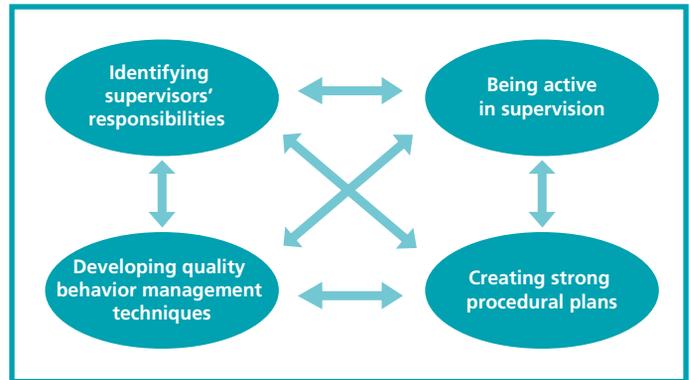
Based on our review of the literature, we suggest four practical components that can result in quality supervision in afterschool programs:

• Identifying supervisors' responsibilities
• Being active in supervision
• Developing quality behavior management techniques
• Creating strong procedural plans

Rather than being hierarchical, these four components interact with one another, as shown in Figure 1, to result in appropriate supervision. For example, a super-visor who is actively monitoring children but does not know what to do in an emergency can be held responsible for resulting injury or loss. Afterschool administrators should take an active role in their programs' supervision practices and train staff members to properly observe and guide program youth.

Figure 1. Framework for appropriate supervision

Identifying Supervisors' Responsibilities

The first component of quality supervision is the supervisors' awareness of their responsibilities. According to van der Smissen (1990), there are three types of supervision in which leaders may need to engage: *general, transitional,* and *specific* supervision.

General supervision includes overseeing a group of youth involved in an activity. General supervision occurs when a supervisor manages the behavior of youth engaging in an activity in a specific area (van der Smissen, 1990). Disagreements and arguments do arise among participants in afterschool programs. Supervisors who oversee large-group activities need to facilitate positive and appropriate behavior. For instance, a supervisor who catches a student using inappropriate language should pull the student aside and remind him or her about better choices of words. Such preventative techniques during general supervision can prevent inappropriate behavior from escalating.

Transitional supervision includes observing and overseeing youth as they move between activities (van der Smissen, 1990). The supervisor's level of involvement in transitional supervision will vary depending on the interaction among youth between activities, the amount of movement by groups of youth in the facility, and the resources needed for the activities. For instance, after spending 30 minutes in the gymnasium (using general supervision techniques), supervisors conduct transitional supervision when guiding youth to put away equipment and helping them move to the next activity.

Specific supervision includes constant and continuous monitoring of youth, either in a one-on-one relationship or in a small group. This type of supervision is common when the supervisor is giving instructions to the youth, the activity performed is high risk, or there is a potential for serious injury (van der Smissen, 1990). Specific supervision would be appropriate if a program adopted a beginning inline skating activity or if a science experiment included Bunsen burners or electrical wiring. Administrators must ensure that staff understand specific supervision and employ it when supervising participants who are trying a new activity or skill for the first time (Tillman, Voltmer, Esslinger, & McCue, 1996).

Being Active in Supervision

The second component for successful supervision is to remain active. Supervisors should constantly be moving when observing children: looking up and down, right and left, over and under, inspecting and viewing all aspects of the equipment, the facilities, and the activities (Bruya, Hudson, Olsen, Thompson, & Bruya, 2002). Edginton, Hudson, and Scholl (2005) define *supervision* as more than simply being present. They explain that supervisors need to actively monitor participants by changing directions frequently and making random passes throughout the area. Supervisors cannot fully observe participants if they stay rooted in one place.

Another aspect of being active during supervision is understanding the layout of the environment. The area must be organized so that supervisors can view what children are doing at all times. The American Red Cross (2007) defines the importance of active supervision at aquatics facilities. Lifeguards are trained to maintain open lines of sight so they can view the entire area with no blind spots. In afterschool settings, staff should ensure that all parts of the activity area are visible. They should practice good scanning techniques to maintain oversight while moving throughout the area.

Developing Quality Behavior Management Techniques

The third component includes using proper behavior management techniques. Jordan (2007) identifies three kinds of behavior management techniques: *unobtrusive, discernible,* and *obtrusive.*

> Supervisors should constantly be moving when observing children: looking up and down, right and left, over and under, inspecting and viewing all aspects of the equipment, the facilities, and the activities.

Unobtrusive techniques include methods that gently remind children of the program's expectations. Examples of unobtrusive techniques include eye contact ("the look"), redirecting a child into another activity, or complimenting a child who does something positive.

When unobtrusive techniques fail, supervisors turn to *discernable* techniques, which model appropriate behaviors. For example, in order to set clear and appropriate expectations, an afterschool worker might demonstrate how to work with others when resources are limited. Positive discipline, outlining reasons for existing rules and standards, positive phrasing of directives related to safety, and positive reinforcement emphasize appropriate behavior in a manner that is effective and long lasting.

Obtrusive techniques, which are visible to all the children, are appropriate only when the supervisor has exhausted both unobtrusive and discernable techniques. The supervisor, seeing an inappropriate or unsafe behavior, wants the child to correct the behavior immediately so that all participants see the importance of appropriate behavior. An example of an obtrusive technique is having a child go to a quiet zone or take a time-out.

For behavior management techniques to be successful, children should be involved in their planning and implementation. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009), America's leading advocacy organization focused on infusing 21st-century skills into education, suggests that youth need to build life and career skills. Afterschool programs can prepare youth to make meaningful contributions to their own safety and development. Afterschool supervisors have daily opportunities to guide youth towards positive decision-making, helping them to understand potentially unsafe situations and showing them how to resolve conflicts. Children will remember and be able to explain the expectations associated with safe and appropriate behaviors if they take part in developing the rules. Safety can be enhanced when all participating youth are empowered to address unsafe behaviors.

Creating Strong Procedural Plans

The fourth component of quality supervision involves creating a procedural plan to regulate daily program

operations. A procedural plan includes organizational routines for participants and program staff. For example, tools such as a sign-in/out sheet or check-in area help ensure the safety of youth during arrival and departure times.

What do you do when you and a participant wait 45 minutes after the program has ended and no guardian shows up to take the child home? If you asked this question of 10 afterschool professionals, you would get different answers. Scenarios like this are common in afterschool programs, and what may be "common sense" for one person is not "common sense" for another. Therefore, afterschool programs need to develop procedural plans to help create consistency among staff, participants, and guardians.

Creating a strong procedural plan may begin with stakeholders coming together to form a leadership team that will spearhead staff training in supervision techniques. As part of such a leadership team, program leaders can bring together key stakeholders, including administrators, staff, support staff, parents and guardians, and participants. The roles of these stakeholders in building a strong procedural plan are outlined below.

Administrators, including directors, risk managers, board members, and site coordinators, manage the afterschool program. Their support is critical to the implementation of staff development on supervision. They have the ability to allocate funds to initiate or expand trainings. They are responsible for keeping children safe and are concerned with potential liability.

Staff, including front-line workers and site coordinators, know the activities, behaviors, and events that happen during the afterschool program. They are some of the most important stakeholders because they are the ones actually supervising the children. They will have good ideas on how to improve safety and supervisory behaviors as well as on professional development.

Support staff, including maintenance workers, consultants, or school-day staff, may not work directly in the program, but they do play a part. Maintenance staff are essential to the supervision committee because they can make physical changes to the program environment. Consultants are likely to have a good understanding of supervision problems and inconsistency among programs; some may be responsible for examining injuries and lawsuits. If the afterschool program operates at a school, it is important to have a school representative on the supervision training program. The school representative can inform the group of the policies and procedures of the school.

Parents and guardians are an invaluable resource because they are invested in their children's safety and education. Some parents may bring financial resources that allow supervisors to carry first-aid supplies, a whistle, or bathroom and drink supplies.

Participants can also be involved in developing the supervision procedural plan for a program. Edginton, Kowalski, and Randall (2005) point out that adolescents can take an active role in constructing safety procedures and building awareness. As young people mature, self-regulation of their own behavior is a long-term goal. With guidance from staff, such self-regulation may be incorporated into a supervisory plan. Younger children may not have reached a level of cognitive development that would allow them to self-regulate (Montessori, 1967), but it never hurts to begin introducing self-regulation techniques so that children can get used to them.

Developing supervision procedural plans takes a great deal of time and effort on the part of administrators, program leaders, and front-line personnel. To start a discussion of appropriate supervision, the program director may develop a list of situations that have actually occurred in the program. The resulting training would allow all program staff to be consistent.

A supervision procedural plan includes a number of key components, including a well-rounded staff of individuals who are aware of their responsibilities when supervising youth. Supervision procedural plans are necessary for every afterschool program so that every staff member understands program responsibilities and expectations. Based on the literature, we suggest that afterschool programs consider including the following components of a supervision procedural plan:
- Staff training
- Emergency procedures
- Annual evaluation

Staff Training
Effectively designed afterschool programs include training in supervision in order to ensure consistency in staff interactions with children and their caregivers. Supervision training should focus on accountability, alertness, flexibility, and attitude (Thompson, Hudson, & Olsen, 2007).
- **Accountability.** If program goals include helping children develop into responsible adults, supervisors need to hold youth accountable for their actions, behaviors, and words. All participants should be in tune with the program's expectations, respect both people and property, and engage in activities during the scheduled time.

- **Alertness.** Supervisors who are constantly alert may prevent unsafe behaviors by staying one step ahead of the children.
- **Flexibility.** Well-trained supervisors know how to make adjustments to children's needs. For example, a child who does not want to play a game might keep score, be a "referee," or engage in drawing in the same general area where the other children are playing.
- **Attitude.** Positive attitudes in program leaders can inspire youth to achieve their dreams.

These four elements should be discussed in supervision training programs.

Supervision training should also include discussion of the activities and behaviors that are and are not appropriate for staff to use when working with children. Staff training could include a discussion surrounding expectations for general, transitional, and specific supervision, as well as the rules for and expectations of the youth. Afterschool workers need to develop rules for activities, games, free play, and outdoor play; staff should also learn to facilitate discussions with youth to empower them to develop rules and standards for safety. Rules should be consistent among all staff members and should be communicated clearly to youth and caregivers.

Other supervision topics that are discussed at training should be determined by the program. Gaskin and Batista (2007) recommend that programs keep files on supervision training that outline the training date, content covered, and names of participants who attended.

Emergency Procedures

Unfortunately, emergencies do happen. Afterschool professionals have to be prepared. An effective emergency plan, which includes how to handle emergencies and to document inappropriate behaviors and injuries, can be tailored to specific afterschool programs. Participants can also be involved in developing emergency procedures. For instance, youth can be directly involved in practicing fire and tornado drills and in planning how to deal with the presence of an unknown adult.

An emergency plan is a crucial component in program risk management, as it helps to prevent negligence. The emergency plan should be shared with administrators, staff, parents and caregivers, and participants. Training also helps staff focus on the important aspects of care by providing a basic plan of action that can be used in an emergency (American Red Cross, 2007). All staff and participants need to know what to do in an emergency. Taking immediate action can save lives, prevent injury, and minimize property damage.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2007), emergency plans should address both natural and human hazards. Schools and communities are encouraged to have a plan in place for natural disasters (earthquake, tornado, hurricane, flood), severe weather, fires, chemical or hazardous spills or smells, bus crashes, shootings or weapons in the program, bomb threats, medical emergencies, student or staff deaths, acts of terror or war, and outbreaks of disease or infections.

Emergency plans should be regularly reviewed and updated. As in fire, tornado, or hurricane drills, staff and participants need to know what to do in case the situation arises. Practicing with staff and children on how to deal with emergencies enables everyone to assist in working through unsafe situations.

Even under the best circumstances, injuries and inappropriate behavior do occur. Supervisors need a system for reporting and documenting injuries and inappropriate behaviors in order to prevent further liability, to help communicate with administrators and caretakers, and to record the actions that were carried out after the incident. Injury report forms should include not only the types of injuries and procedures, but also the exact location where the situation occurred, who was involved, the staff present, and procedures carried through after the incident. The courts, as well as administrators and guardians, will want to review accurately maintained documentation of any situation. Staff must be trained to follow these procedures.

Annual Evaluation

The purpose of evaluation is to determine whether or not supervision practices are enhancing the program. We recommend that program administrators evaluate staff supervisory practices at least once a year. Annual evaluations should be conducted by site coordinators or administrators who are familiar with the program and are aware of the site's supervision policies and procedures. Evaluations should examine the incidence of injuries or inappropriate behaviors, the accuracy of documentation forms, and the consistency of supervision duties. Evaluations should also investigate concerns of front-line personnel, asking staff how they feel the program is doing in regard to supervision practices.

> An emergency plan is a crucial component in program risk management, as it helps to prevent negligence.

Annual evaluations can strengthen staff morale; they can also allow staff to share their successes and failures, address issues, and settle conflicts with administrators and program partners. There is no universal step-by-step approach for conducting annual evaluations, since each program has its own way of doing business. Evaluations need to be tailored to meet the needs of the program and its administrators, staff, parents and guardians, and youth. Fortunately, developing an evaluation procedure can be one way to strengthen supervision practices.

Why Supervision Matters

Youth workers have a great responsibility in providing care and bringing about positive experiences for youth. All can play a role in providing quality afterschool programs through supervision. Program leaders are encouraged to provide supervision training opportunities so that staff members are confident and competent in their supervision activities. Staff members can support one another in their daily supervision actions and behaviors. They must engage in understanding supervision responsibilities, being active, incorporating behavior management techniques, and adopting to the program's procedural plans. Program participants must also be supported in learning appropriate and safe behaviors.

Afterschool supervisors play a key role in providing a safe, high-quality environment for children. Developing a supervision procedural plan, including staff supervision training, is well worth the investment for afterschool programs.

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Afterschool Matters

Call for Papers
Spring 2011 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 2011 issue. Published by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time with support from the Robert Bowne Foundation, the journal serves those involved in developing and running programs for youth during the out-of-school time 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 Spring 2011 issue. We invite you to discuss possible topics in advance with us. 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 July 19, 2010, for the Spring 2011 issue of Afterschool Matters.
- 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, 6th Edition (July 2009), for reference style guidelines. Present important information in the text and do not use extensive footnotes.

Inquiries about possible articles or topics are welcome.
To inquire or to submit articles, contact:

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