

Afterschool Matters

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Helping Youth Lift as They Climb Together

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Addressing Potential Cultural Bias in a Rater Reliability Exam

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WELCOME

Wellesley College, home of the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, has a significant connection to Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, site of the Parkland, Florida, school shooting. Stoneman Douglas graduated from Wellesley in 1912 as an English major. She was an activist who devoted her life to protecting the Florida Everglades from destruction. In 1977, Stoneman Douglas won Wellesley's Alumnae Achievement Award, the college's highest honor. In 1993, she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

The values of Stoneman Douglas' life—and our field's commitment to the value of the life of every student, in school and out—are reflected in this issue of *Afterschool Matters*.

Our authors remind us that afterschool programs nurture positive peer relationships that in turn foster learning in and out of the classroom. They show us how afterschool programs help young people take on leadership roles to work toward social justice and environmental stewardship. Articles by an Afterschool Matters Fellow and by our own NIOST researchers point toward the critical roles of professional development and quality assessment in reaching our common vision of quality afterschool for all.

These are turbulent times. Our children's lives are at risk. Principles that guide our work—the right of every child to be protected from harm, the vital importance of youth development in building sustainable communities, the value of youth voice—swirl with debates about mental health care, public safety, and federal investments in afterschool programming.

How shall we navigate these turbulent times? Every afterschool practitioner and stakeholder has his or her own answers to this question. One answer we can share is simply to hold true to our values—the values embodied in the work we do every day to lift up the field and change children's lives.



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Critical Friendship

Helping Youth Lift as They Climb Together

Tanya G. Wiggins

Friendship and peer groups are important to youth. However, adults in afterschool programs and other youth-serving community-based organizations often either ignore peer relationships or deem them detrimental to desired youth outcomes. What would it mean to consider young people's friendships in a different light? How can this important element of their experience support positive youth outcomes? One possibility is the cultivation of critical friendships.

The term *critical friendship* has been used in teacher professional learning communities for at least 20 years. Costa and Kallick (1993) define *critical friend* as "a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers a

critique of a person's work as a friend" (p. 50). Critical friendship offers a new perspective on youth relationships. An exploration of how youth participants in a community-based organization developed their own critical friendships can push adults engaged in youth work to create conditions that support positive peer relationships.

Friends and Peer Influence

With Sallee and Tierney (2007), I define *friendships* as informal peer groups or networks formed by young people themselves based on common interests or identity or on sustained interaction. Young people select friends based on common characteristics or on what the networks have to offer (Kiesner, Poulin, & Nicotra, 2003). They may choose a

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network, for example, to offset the impact of another network, affirm an identity, or gain access to resources (Horvat & Lewis, 2003; Sallee & Tierney, 2007; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000).

Research on peer influence among youth casts peers in one of two contrasting roles. In one, peers are generally viewed as negative influences. For example, Dishion, McCord, and Poulin (1999) hypothesized that high-risk adolescents would escalate problem behavior when involved in interventions delivered in groups with other high-risk youth. Their longitudinal study appeared to prove their hypothesis: In some instances, aggregating high-risk youth reinforced problem behavior. Another study found that, over time, young people who were more susceptible to the influence of friends were also more apt to be pressured into risky behaviors and to experience depression (Allen, Porter, & McFarland, 2006). Fordham and Ogbu (1986), in their study of the role of peer networks in African-American students' school success, saw that peer relationships helped to create an oppositional cultural frame of reference that conflicted with academic achievement. A more recent study viewed peer groups as a means of socializing school misconduct, deviancy, and aggression (Ellis & Zarbatany, 2007).

The other role in which research casts peer relationships is a positive one. For example, in a study of high-achieving students, Hébert and Reis (1999) found that students' belief in themselves was reinforced by a network of high-achieving peers. Network members encouraged one another even through periods of academic underachievement, when support served as a buffer against failure. Horvat and Lewis (2003) found that the peer groups of high-achieving African-American female students were diverse; by developing supportive segments of their networks, the young women "managed" their academic success, affirming their academic pursuits and countering any negative influences of other network segments. Another study found that participation in supportive networks acted to balance against conflicting messages from the dominant structure and from other networks (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). Tighter networks can increase the likelihood of goal achievement (Sallee & Tierney, 2007). Darenbourg and Blake (2014) found that

young people who participated in a peer network that provided academic support were more likely than others to view school as useful for their futures.

Social Capital

The concept of social capital serves as a guide in discussing critical friendship. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and James Coleman (1988) present foundational work on social capital and its use. Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as the sum total of actual or potential resources an individual can access as a result of being a member of a group. To develop social capital, Bourdieu says, an individual must build and maintain relationships imbued with a sense of social obligation or presumed rights. Bourdieu considers social capital to be a tool for social reproduction in favor of the dominant class. This position, however, ignores the potential for other uses.

In contrast, Coleman (1988) defines social capital as a bridge between the idea that individual action can be driven by social norms, rules, and obligations and the idea that individual action is driven by independent benefit. Norms strengthen ties among members of a group and reinforce the belief that individuals in the group should work for the collective good. Individual members internalize group norms through rewards or sanctions by the group. The relations among group members create a sense of obligation, which serves as capital that individuals can access. Although he acknowledges that individuals can be linked in more than one context, Coleman views the family as the primary source of the social capital children need for future outcomes. This view presumes that young people do not have the ability to produce social capital of their own, thus placing them in a position of powerlessness. Though research demonstrates that youth must have access to institutional members who provide access to institutional information and resources (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995), critical friendship presents the possibility that youth can themselves generate social capital.

Methods and Analysis

My study of critical friendship took place in ACCESS (a pseudonym), a community-based youth organiza-

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tion that serves over 400 middle school, high school, and college youth in a large city in the northeastern U.S. The population of students is approximately 70 percent African American and 30 percent Latino/a. Nearly 100 percent of ACCESS students graduate from high school, and almost 90 percent of those students graduate from college in six years or less.

At the time of my study, I was an ACCESS staff member working with middle school participants. Many high school students knew me either through their previous experience in the middle school program or through casual contacts during program time. Though my role as a staffer led to “inescapable influence” (Maxwell, 2005) on the research, my insider status also gave students a level of comfort in sharing freely with me and gave me a deep understanding of the context (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994). I was careful to monitor my level of subjectivity to avoid presenting an “authorized statement” of youth experiences (Peshkin, 1988).

The participant pool for this study cut across key ACCESS populations. It consisted of students who had joined ACCESS prior to the year of study and who had just completed their first year of high school or their first year of college. Based on consent and availability, 17 participants with varying lengths of ACCESS membership were selected: nine high school students and eight college students. The high school participants were predominantly female (56 percent) and Latino/a (44 percent); length of membership ranged from one to almost four years. The selected college participants were predominantly female (75 percent) and African American (75 percent). Pseudonyms were created for all study participants. In order to mitigate researcher bias, participants were given the opportunity to respond to and clarify their interview transcripts.

Data were collected using focus groups—two high school groups and one college group—and individual interviews. All focus groups included members who had joined ACCESS at various points during middle school. These varied points of entry allowed for exploration of variations in how students viewed and used their friend networks; it also protected against key informant bias (Maxwell, 2005).

Interview participants were chosen from focus groups based on their availability. I conducted 13 interviews, six with high school students and seven with college students. Interview questions asked about participants’ connection to ACCESS, how they distinguished between close ACCESS friends and other ACCESS peers, and the degree to which they and their friends influenced

one another. Interviewees were also asked to draw a picture of their educational journey that indicated how their ACCESS friends helped or hindered their achievement.

Focus groups and interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed, using both inductive and deductive methods, to address three key research questions:

- How do peer networks developed in a community-based youth organization influence African-American and Latino/a students’ goals of educational achievement?
- How are these networks formed?
- How do students understand the role played by these networks in their educational achievement?

Transcripts were analyzed using deductive methods to identify evidence of friends serving as buffers against failure (Hébert & Reis, 1999), providing affirmation of academic identity (Horvat & Lewis, 2003), or providing access to resources (Sallee & Tierney, 2007). Drawings were analyzed along with transcripts; together they enabled comparison of individuals’ experience with the collective representation provided in focus group data. The data were examined a second time using inductive methods to identify trends related to how participants described friends, what their points of entry to ACCESS were, how they felt their ACCESS friends influenced their goals, and how they used their friend groups.

Findings on ACCESS Critical Friendships

ACCESS friend groups were often formed within grades. Unsurprisingly, high school participants reported that they became friends with people with whom they had common interests or with whom they engaged consistently. For example, Lazar and Sam became friends after Lazar asked Sam for help in an ACCESS class they took together. For Benny and Sam, common interests were the catalyst. They discovered their shared love for music during an ACCESS trip. As Sam recalled in his interview, having other things in common besides their desire to achieve sustained their friendship: “We just went from hip-hop to our love of *capoeira*, and also paired with us liking school and actually wanting to succeed.... That’s why we stay friends, even if during the summers I don’t see him.”

High school participants also talked about the importance of spending time together. For many, time created bonds they described as being more like family ties than friendships. Students who entered ACCESS later than others, however, could encounter challenges in forming friendships. Some expressed frustration with

the difficulty of entering friend groups that were already formed. However, the challenges were not insurmountable. Time was a factor, as Quinn explained: “It’s like adding a new member to the family. They have to slowly catch up until [you] do things together with that new member. Then you feel more comfortable and allow them into the ACCESS family.”

Although college participants talked more about personalities, they shared similar perspectives on how they formed ACCESS friendships. Jewel became friends with Keisha despite having perceived her personality as “aggressive” at first. After their families met at an ACCESS event, Jewel and Keisha participated in a sleepover that helped Jewel to see beyond her initial perception. She came to appreciate how Keisha’s personality balanced out her own.

Jewel also echoed the challenges the high school students cited of making friends in her ACCESS cohort. When she joined in seventh grade, many of Jewel’s ACCESS peers came from the same middle school and had joined ACCESS the year before. Jewel noted: “It was hard to work your way into the group.”

Like the high school students, college participants also described their ACCESS friendships as “family.” As they talked about their connections in the focus group, their playfulness, honesty, and lively debate provided evidence of the closeness of their relationships. Time was a major factor; the college focus group participants averaged six years of ACCESS membership. Their view of their ACCESS group as family was realistic, not idealized. India described how time built strong bonds that could survive through conflict and challenging dynamics: “I think because it’s ACCESS people, because I grew up with them, because I love them to a certain extent, I’m always going to be around.”

More explicitly than the high school group, college participants said that, in addition to time, shared goals shaped ACCESS friendships and distinguished them from other friendships. “We’re all going for the same goals,” Michelle explained. “We want to be successful. We want to have a degree. So we’re very motivated, whereas some other friends, they’re motivated—just for other things.”

Strong relationships and shared goals created critical friendships among ACCESS participants. These criti-

cal friendships had three elements: sharing knowledge and information, affirming one another’s academic identity, and establishing a system of accountability for their outcomes. Taken together, these aspects of the critical friendships point out the power of youth to create their own social capital.

Sharing Knowledge and Information

High school focus group participants particularly emphasized how ACCESS friends studied together, shared information about program opportunities, and exchanged study tips and tricks. Fully half of the high school interviewees explicitly mentioned sharing knowledge or information. Quinn described how he would study for state exams with ACCESS friends and count on them to help reduce his test anxiety. Akilah recalled that an ACCESS friend shared how she organized her binder and suggested that Akilah put more recent notes in the front of her own binder so they would be easier to reference. Lisette had an ACCESS friend recommend a book to help her with a class in which she was having difficulty. These examples show how ACCESS friends shared knowledge to support one another’s academic success.

This sharing was not limited to academic skills or content. Study participants also pointed ACCESS friends to more general resources that could help them achieve their goals. For example, Evelyn, a high school participant, shared that she looked to her ACCESS friends to make her aware of programs and opportunities that could support her desire to go to college. Her drawing of her educational journey showed a big circle labeled “ME” with “college” written in big letters above it. Smaller circles representing friends were connected to the ME circle with arrows going both ways. Evelyn explained:

So...college is my goal, and that’s me, and then my ACCESS friends, and we...share information about certain things.... I give them information; they give me information to help me go to college, or to help me do things that put me on the path to go to college.

Sam expressed a similar view: “I’m going to gain more than just knowledge. I’m going to gain resources, people who can help me later or I can end up helping...

Like the high school students, college participants also described their ACCESS friendships as “family.” As they talked about their connections in the focus group, their playfulness, honesty, and lively debate provided evidence of the closeness of their relationships.

Having friends opens doors.” Like Evelyn, Sam believed that his ACCESS friends offered information or resources that would help him reach his goals. He also saw the relationships as reciprocal, citing his ability to help his friends in return.

College participants discussed sharing information less often than did the high school students. Nevertheless, Pia shared a story about how she and her ACCESS friend Isaac shared resources while in college. In high school, Pia and Isaac were accepted by the same university. When Pia found out that Isaac did not plan to attend an event for accepted students, she made sure he would not miss out by inviting him to join her and her family. Then, after the school year began, Isaac reciprocated by finding course notes for Pia when illness forced her to miss class. “I didn’t even have to ask him,” Pia said. “He knew I wasn’t in class, so he texted me and told me to meet him in the library. He found notes for both of us so that we had something to study from.”

Affirmation of Academic Identity

Both high school and college focus group and interview participants cited the importance of mutual recognition of one another’s academic identities. Being able to live out their intellectual selves with one another affirmed ACCESS friends’ self-identification as students and offered refuge from other spaces and friend groups where their academic identities were not welcome.

Several high school participants in both focus groups talked about their inability to discuss school or education with their friends outside of ACCESS. For example, Benny, an avid skateboarder, explained that his skateboarding friends could not imagine him beyond his skater identity.

When I talk about ACCESS, people are like, “You go to school, after school?” They thought I wasn’t that kind of person. They think I’m a rebel, or a person that doesn’t really care about school. I actually do, and they’re like, “Explain to us what this program is again?”

Though Benny seemed to appreciate his connection with his skateboarding friends, he perceived that they were unable to negotiate who he was as both a skater and a scholar.

Being able to live out their intellectual selves with one another affirmed ACCESS friends’ self-identification as students and offered refuge from other spaces and friend groups where their academic identities were not welcome.

Evelyn similarly shared that she was unable to express her academic identity with school friends: “My friends really aren’t interested in college, or beyond right now. They’re, like, pass Algebra II, pass Spanish, pass Chemistry, that’s it.... They don’t really see beyond that.” To Evelyn, her school friends’ goals seemed shortsighted in comparison to the goals of her ACCESS friends, who, like her, wanted to get into and graduate from college.

College focus group and interview participants also appreciated the capacity of ACCESS friends to affirm their identities as academics and intellectuals. They experienced friendships in which they could talk about what they were learning as both comforting and enriching. Pia shared in the focus group that she could talk about school with ACCESS friends or relate school experiences to ACCESS experiences without conversations being “stiff.” India and Isaac said that they valued intellectual exchanges with their ACCESS friends on a variety of issues. College participants also shared that they affirmed each other’s academic identities in times of doubt. For example, Pia said that she could not complain about her grades with friends outside of ACCESS:

I don’t complain about my schoolwork with regular friends like I do with my ACCESS friends, because nobody understands why I’m complaining that I got a B instead of an A except for my ACCESS friends.... We know if you try hard, you expect something.

Being able to express these frustrations to ACCESS friends provided comfort for Pia, affirming her expectations for herself and strengthening her resolve. Lauren, another college participant, explained this element of critical friendship in this way:

In high school, I felt like the smartest person in the world, and then I got to [college] and it’s “Oh, snap!” I always have [ACCESS friends] there to be like, “Oh, Lauren, you’re a brainiac,” so I have people who know that side of me and can remind me of what I am.

ACCESS friends who, over time, developed a collective identity as intellectuals encouraged Lauren in moments of self-doubt and helped her renew her confidence in her abilities.

System of Accountability

Another aspect of critical friendships that both high school and college study participants discussed was a system of accountability. Accountability was established both through the time participants spent together in ACCESS and through the culture created by structured ACCESS activities and programming. This system of accountability included established norms and expectations, goal setting and management, sources of motivation, and critical feedback.

Established Norms and Expectations

The time ACCESS students spent sharing their goals and dreams helped to establish a set of norms and expectations. Sam, a high school participant, spoke of setting and managing his goals because his ACCESS friends had shared their own goals and dreams:

Having them always telling you about what they want to do, you really start thinking.... It just makes you think they're starting to get their stuff together, so you have to follow suit, which forces you to think differently so you keep up.

College participants, in referring to ACCESS friends as "family" during their focus group and interviews, evoked a strong sense of mutual obligation accompanied by norms and expectations that governed their interactions. Having known one another since middle school, several college participants talked about how they expected to interact with ACCESS friends and what would happen when those expectations were not met. For example, Mike tied his expectations for his ACCESS friends to his recognition of those friends as family. "Because it's family, I hold them to a certain standard.... I know we all have the same vision of success, so certain things I just would not like to hear when it comes to family." He went on to say, "I realize that [this attitude has] worked against me sometimes." Mike recognized that sometimes ACCESS friends were annoyed by his expectations though they might generally appreciate the importance of shared norms.

Goal Setting and Management

High school participants talked about how sharing goals created an implicit expectation of achievement, thereby igniting a process of evaluating the expectations they set for themselves. This process encouraged them to consider multiple pathways for achievement in case they encountered roadblocks. Sam, for example, said that he realized that choosing college as a goal wasn't enough; he had to develop a specific plan for achieving his goal. Sam's case illustrates how sharing goals made participants want to refine their goals in order to align themselves with their ACCESS friends.

College participants echoed Sam's sentiments. When asked how ACCESS friends affected her thinking about her educational goals, Pia answered right away, "I definitely think it raised the bar.... I think, are my goals as high as they should be? Am I aiming too low?" She went on to share that, when she expressed doubt about pursuing educational opportunities, her ACCESS friends would encourage her to take the risk. Regular conversations with them about the future seemed to inspire Pia to reflect on her goals and standards and, when she felt unsure, to aim higher.

College participants, in referring to ACCESS friends as "family" during their focus group and interviews, evoked a strong sense of mutual obligation accompanied by norms and expectations that governed their interactions.

Sources of Motivation

Study participants cited ACCESS events, as well as relationships, as sources of motivation. Events that pushed participants outside their comfort zones reinforced their commitment to their goals by providing evidence of their capabilities. For example, student leadership retreats featured team-building activities that both challenged participants and strengthened their relationships. Quinn, a high school participant, considered the effect of such shared experiences: "[If] I feel like quitting or take it down a notch and not challenge myself, I'll have somebody from ACCESS who would be like, 'Come on, remember when we did this and that, and you're going to quit now?'" Having experienced shared challenges, participants knew not only their own capabilities but also those of their friends. Quinn believed that ACCESS friends armed with such knowledge would not allow one another to attempt anything less than what they were capable of achieving. Similarly, India, a college participant, said:

It's good to have somebody around that's always going to expect greatness from you and know what you're capable of, and they're kind of pushing you.... ACCESS put us in so many situations where we had to show our greatness.... We each know what everybody's talents are.... They push you toward what they know you're good at, what they know you enjoy, because they've been able to see it better than anybody.

Knowledge of one another's talents and abilities served as a source of motivation for ACCESS friends. This part of the accountability system depended both on the time ACCESS friends spent together and on the program opportunities ACCESS provided.

Critical Feedback

Another element of the system of accountability is critical feedback. Critical feedback includes asking thought-provoking questions, giving honest but constructive feedback, and calling members to task when group norms and expectations are not being met. An exchange during the college focus group perfectly illustrates how ACCESS friends held one another accountable. Isaac starts off by comparing his relationship with his ACCESS friend Mike to other relationships:

Isaac: Whenever I deal with Mike it's always something positive, it's always something progressive, it's always something uplifting. Whenever I hang out with him, it's never something, like, "Oh, let's go get drunk." It's never something like, "Let's go run to town and be vandals," you know? [Group laughs]

Pia: What is that? Who you dealing with? [Laughing] Mike, you better get him!

Isaac: But I have friends that I do that with.

India: That's not what your ACCESS friends let you do!

Though they did it in a lighthearted way, the focus group participants called Isaac to task for choices that would run counter to his success. They referred to their shared norms and made it clear that they held Isaac not to his other friends' standards but to ACCESS standards.

Knowledge of one another's talents and abilities served as a source of motivation for ACCESS friends. This part of the accountability system depended both on the time ACCESS friends spent together and on the program opportunities ACCESS provided.

College participant Zara represented elements of critical feedback in her drawing of the role her ACCESS friends played in her journey to college graduation. Zara explained that the emoji-like image she drew with an exclamation point next to it was the "punch in the face" ACCESS friends would deliver to motivate her to get back on track should she fall off course. Zara's analogy of a punch in the face makes it clear that she did not expect this wake-up call to be soothing. Critical feedback includes giving and receiving honest responses to critical friends' choices, especially when those choices stray from intended goals.

Similarly, critical feedback in the ACCESS system of accountability supported India in her college application. In her interview, India admitted to having procrastinated in applying to her first-choice college for fear of being rejected. As the application deadline drew near, her ACCESS friends discovered she

had not yet applied and questioned her until she submitted the application. They refused to allow her to set her sights on lesser goals. In the end, India was accepted and spent her first year at her first-choice college.

What Can Organizations Do?

The critical friendships of ACCESS youth in this study highlight the power of youth to create their own social capital. Providing one another with access to resources, sharing their academic identities, and enforcing their multifaceted system of accountability gave ACCESS participants a kind of power or agency they could not generally experience in other spaces. Young people in programs like ACCESS who develop their own critical friendships can ultimately use their power to circumvent existing power structures that often bar access to resources they need to realize their goals.

Although this study represents a small sample of participants in one urban youth program, it nonetheless provides lessons to youth-serving organizations. When seen through the lens of critical friendships, peer relationships represent an underutilized resource for youth-serving programs. Organizations can consider four tips to promote the development of critical friendships.

Make Time

Study participants overwhelmingly discussed the role time played in the development of their critical friendships. Both high school and college respondents talked about how important it was to have spent extended periods of time together to develop their friendships. To meet this need, youth-serving organizations can create programs that encourage long-term participation, which may be as important as drop-in services that meet specific needs. Long-term participation creates the opportunity for consistent exposure to and interaction with peers, which, in turn, is a vital element in the formation of critical friendships.

Make Memories

In addition to time, critical friendships also need to build on common experiences. Youth-serving organizations can offer shared experiences that both challenge participants and enable them to display their strengths. Study participants described ACCESS retreats as an example. Program activities that are less intense but more frequent could serve the same purpose. Activities that build critical friendships enable participants to gain insight into themselves and their peers and to make connections with those peers.

Make Space

Participants in youth-serving programs often live multi-networked lives. Their networks are sources of agency and power that adult leaders seldom take into account. ACCESS participants willingly shared information, resources, and skills to support one another in reaching their shared goals. They were explicitly conscious of this knowledge sharing as a benefit of their ACCESS relationships. Programs and organizations can empower youth agency by providing time and opportunity for participants to share their knowledge and resources. One option is short, structured activities similar to speed networking panels. Another is simply providing informal spaces where young people can gather to converse.

Set the Tone

In talking in his interview about how his ACCESS friends affirmed his academic identity, Quinn acknowledged the influence of ACCESS: “Not just because ACCESS is an educational environment, and that’s the energy that we have to accept, but I just feel like I can talk to ACCESS friends and it won’t be a problem.” The energy transmitted by the organization helped to support ACCESS participants’ academic identities and aspirations.

Youth-serving organizations transmit clear messages to participants through their physical space, their programs, and especially the interactions they encourage. The ways in which staff work with youth participants and adult colleagues can create a culture that supports the development of critical friendships. Youth workers must engage program participants in a way that assumes they have strengths, talents, knowledge, information, and resources that are valuable and worth sharing. The ways in which staff engage young people set an example for how young people should engage one another. Adult facilitators’ care and concern for all participants serves as a model for participants’ care and concern for each other. Adults can also demonstrate accountability. Programs can explicitly set expectations for interactions through participant orientations, physical reminders in the space, and staff-participant interactions. Modeling respectful and caring interactions will inform the norms and obligations that participants develop as they build critical friendships.

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Youth-Led Participatory Action Research

Promoting Youth Voice and Adult Support in Afterschool Programs

Yolanda Anyon, Heather Kennedy, Rebecca Durbahn, and Jeffrey M. Jenson

Afterschool programs often find it challenging to retain participants as they transition from childhood into early adolescence and enter middle school (Deschenes et al., 2010). During this developmental period, many young people, as they experience a growing need for autonomy, begin to disconnect from pro-social institutions (Eccles et al, 1993; Meece, Anderman, & Anderman, 2006). This is especially true for low-income youth of color, who are more likely than other young people to experience discrimination and disengagement from school and adult authorities (Anyon, Zhang, & Hazel, 2016; Travis & Leech, 2014). These trends pose a significant challenge to out-of-school time (OST) programs that aim to serve disadvantaged youth.

How can afterschool programs engage middle school students of color as they enter their teenage years?

We asked this question while working with the Bridge Project, a drop-in community-based academic enrichment program serving low-income children and adolescents of color living in public housing in Denver, Colorado. Faced with dwindling enrollment among middle school participants, we turned to the research literature for guidance about how to respond to early adolescents'

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increasing desire for independence while also keeping them connected to the program. Studies suggest that two strategies may be key to keeping middle school students engaged: (1) allow young people to have a voice in decision-making and (2) create more egalitarian relationships between adolescents and program staff (Deschenes et al., 2010; Ginwright & James, 2002; Grossman & Bulle, 2006; Hansen & Larson, 2007; Strobel, Kirshner, O'Donoghue, & McLaughlin, 2008). We decided to explore these strategies by increasing opportunities for youth-led research at the Bridge Project.

Youth-led participatory action research (YPAR) is an approach that is designed to support participants' self-determination and increase power-sharing between youth and adults. Very broadly, YPAR involves young people in gathering information about pressing school or community issues and advocating for solutions to these issues (Kirshner, O'Donoghue, & McLaughlin, 2005; Ozer, Ritterman, & Wanis, 2010). There is growing evidence that YPAR creates opportunities for adolescents to engage in programmatic, organizational, and policy-level decision-making (Ozer & Wright, 2012). Studies have documented the unique and developmentally responsive relationships that are built through YPAR as young people renegotiate power dynamics with adults (Kirshner, 2008; Ozer, Newlan, Douglas, & Hubbard, 2013).

Inspired by this literature, we piloted a YPAR program to assess whether middle school participants increased their perceptions of (1) opportunities for voice and choice in the program, such as planning and leading activities or making rules, and (2) supportive relationships with program staff who listen, show respect, and care about their ideas. We surveyed YPAR participants and a comparison group to chart the change they experienced on these two dimensions during nine months of programming. This article shares the results of our study, which has implications for OST programs interested in retaining participants during the transition from childhood to early adolescence.

Youth-led participatory action research (YPAR) is an approach that is designed to support participants' self-determination and increase power-sharing between youth and adults. Very broadly, YPAR involves young people in gathering information about pressing school or community issues and advocating for solutions to these issues.

Youth-Led Participatory Action Research

In YPAR projects, young people identify a problem of concern, gather data about it, and then make recommendations for improvement. For example, participants might select the topic of school violence, survey their peers to assess their experiences, and then present their results and suggested solutions to the local school board.

Principles of YPAR

This process is captured more fully in the stages of YPAR outlined by Ozer and colleagues (2010):

- Young people begin by exploring social justice issues in their school, program, or community. They then choose a topic to explore in depth.
- Once they have selected their problem of interest, they gain hands-on experience in various research methods, such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, or documentary videos.
- As participants collect data from stakeholders to answer their research question, they also think strategically about how to create social change by building alliances with stakeholders.
- After identifying the main findings from their research, youth generate recommendations for change and advocate for their solutions.

Rodriguez and Brown (2009) conceptualized YPAR as being guided by three key principles. YPAR is:

- **Inquiry-based.** Topics of investigation are grounded in young people's life experiences and concerns.
- **Participatory.** Young people share power with adults in making decisions about their project and how to move it forward.
- **Transformative.** The purpose of YPAR is to improve the lives of marginalized youth and their communities.

Impact of YPAR on Youth Voice and Adult Support

Studies suggest great potential for YPAR projects to improve opportunities for youth voice and transform typical relationships between youth and adults. For example, several qualitative investigations indicate that YPAR cre-

ates space for young people to make choices about their learning and give input to decision-makers. Studies of YPAR have also shown that participants regularly made decisions about their daily experiences in the program, along with broader topics like issue selection and action steps (Kohfeldt, Chhun, Grace, & Langhout, 2011; Ozer & Douglas, 2015; Ozer et al., 2013). Finally, scholars have noted the positive impact of involving YPAR participants in school reform and community change movements, where they plan and lead activities that aim to create social change (Berg, Coman, & Schensul, 2009; Livingstone, Celemencki, & Calixte, 2014; Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Serriere, Mitra, & Reed, 2011).

Investigators have found that dynamics between participants and project facilitators in YPAR programs are more egalitarian than those in traditional youth-serving organizations, suggesting that YPAR programs may be more responsive to early adolescents' need for independence (Kirshner, 2008; Mitra, Lewis, & Sanders, 2013; Ozer et al., 2013). Inclusivity, honoring the diverse experiences and perspectives of participants, and stepping back to allow youth to make mistakes were key relational strategies for adults in YPAR programs (Messias, Fore, McLoughlin, & Parra-Medina, 2005; O'Donoghue & Strobel, 2007). Finally, studies indicate that YPAR creates opportunities for youth to speak to decision-makers and feel heard and seen by adults in new ways (Gomez & Ryan, 2016; Ozer & Wright, 2012). These claims are supported by evidence that adults' connections to adolescents are stronger in all types of afterschool programs when their relationships reflect increasing trust in and autonomy of youth participants, shared decision-making power, and partnership in program implementation (Grossman & Bulle, 2006; Jones & Deutsch, 2011).

Social Justice Youth Development

Our belief that involvement in YPAR would lead participants to perceive that they had more voice and choice was guided by the social justice youth development framework (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Ginwright & James, 2002). This framework builds on theories of positive youth development to account for the experiences of low-income youth of color with discrimination, inequality, and negative stereotypes of their communities,

each of which compounds the developmental challenges all young people face (Swanson, Spencer, dell'Angelo, Harpalani, & Spencer, 2002). For example, the literature on positive youth development suggests that supportive relationships and opportunities for choice and voice are key factors in program impact (Hansen & Larson, 2007; National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2002). Social justice youth development posits that such constructs need to be extended and contextualized for low-income youth of color, with an emphasis on power sharing and the promotion of systematic change through collective action (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Ginwright & James, 2002).

Strong evidence confirms that Latino/a and Black adolescents frequently experience discrimination and harassment from public authority figures, such as teachers and police officers, and that they are more likely than other youth to have adult responsibilities like caring for siblings (Anyon et al., 2016; Travis & Leech, 2014). These dynamics may create conditions for general distrust of nonfamilial adults and resistance toward typical power arrangements based on age. Similarly, evidence shows that marginalized youth have few opportunities for leadership and civic engagement (Jacobsen & Linkow, 2012; Littenberg Tobias & Cohen, 2016). Social justice youth development therefore suggests that the foundations of effective OST programs serving youth of color are egalitarian dynamics between youth and adults and opportu-

nities for young people to take leadership roles in influencing their social contexts (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Ginwright & James, 2002; Travis & Leech, 2014). Social justice youth development also suggests that programs will have limited success in cultivating caring relationships and engaging youth in leadership opportunities if they ignore power dynamics and the contexts that shape young people's understanding of agency and leadership. Instead, this framework proposes that youth voice and caring adult relationships in YPAR projects will be stronger because the YPAR approach is more developmentally and culturally responsive than traditional youth development approaches.

Purpose and Method

The following research question guided this pilot study: Does participation in a YPAR program increase opportunities for youth voice and adult support? Drawing on a

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social justice youth development framework, we hypothesized that youth involved in YPAR would report more leadership opportunities and more positive relationships with adults than a comparison group of youth from the same afterschool program.

Setting

This YPAR curriculum was nested in a drop-in academic enrichment program, the Bridge Project, which aims to mitigate the extremely elevated school push-out rates in public housing communities through educational enrichment and social-emotional learning programs (Jenson, Alter, Nicotera, Anthony, & Forrest-Bank, 2013). In a typical year, it serves approximately 500 youth between the ages of 5 and 18 who reflect the diversity of their neighborhoods: 37 percent are Latino/a, 40 percent are African American or African refugees, 9 percent are Asian, 8 percent are multiracial, 5 percent are White, and 1 percent are Native American. Households in all these neighborhoods are classified as “extremely poor,” with average annual incomes of less than \$8,490 for a family of four.

YPAR Curriculum

The YPAR program that is the focus of this study was guided by the Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning (YELL) curriculum, a structured and sequenced approach to implementing YPAR in afterschool contexts developed by the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University (Anyon et al., 2007). This free and publicly available curriculum first focuses on developing young people’s leadership and decision-making skills and then takes participants through a process of gathering information about pressing community issues and making recommendations to an external audience. Young people make decisions both about day-to-day processes, such as norm setting, and about project-level strategies, such as topic selection and data collection methods. The curriculum encourages a youth-adult partnership model in which adults work *with* rather than *for* youth participants (Anyon et al., 2007).

The complete curriculum of 55 lesson plans, ranging from 60 to 120 minutes, was consolidated into 26 sessions to be implemented once a week for 90 minutes with

middle school participants. Lessons included five core components: opening circle, community builder, main activity, debrief, and closing circle. The curriculum uses an eight-step YPAR process that enables participants to:

1. Create a sense of group unity, learn about inequality, and build leadership skills
2. Explore issues in the community and select one topic that will be the focus for the rest of the program year
3. Investigate this topic using the Internet and surveys, photos, interviews, or focus groups
4. Organize and analyze the information collected
5. Explore different ways to create social change
6. Create a product (such as a presentation, video, or brochure) that will highlight research findings and recommendations
7. Take action and share this product with one or more external audiences
8. Reflect on the experience and celebrate successes

Lessons include topics such as team building and communication, understanding the root causes of social problems, research methods, data analysis, developing recommendations, and social action approaches. Studies of YELL in other communities indicate that the program promotes participatory behaviors, socio-political awareness, critical thinking, problem-solving behaviors, and public speaking skills (Anyon & Naughton, 2003; Conner & Strobel, 2007; Harden et al., 2015; Kirshner, 2008; Ozer & Douglas, 2013).

Adult Facilitators and Training

Project facilitators were seven master’s students in social work who were completing their required field placement at the Bridge Project. Four were Latino/a and three were White. All but one were female. To strengthen fidelity to the program

model and social justice youth development principles, facilitators participated in a weekly hour-long program coaching seminar for independent study credit. On average, they spent 22 hours in these coaching sessions, which were facilitated by a doctoral student with support from this study’s principal investigator (a faculty member) and students’ field placement supervisors. Each seminar be-

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gan with a role play, continued with structured reflections and group discussions on implementation struggles and successes, and ended with planning and consultation. Facilitators also submitted weekly fidelity forms, which were used to monitor student progress and identify opportunities to support facilitators when they struggled to implement social justice youth development strategies.

Example Projects

During the year of this study, YELL participants developed projects focused on issues that were salient to their daily lives, including police brutality, discrimination toward the LGBTQ community, self-care for women, and the need for urban gardens. For example, the group focused on police brutality drew on current events around the country related to racial profiling and on group members' own experiences, both positive and negative, with the police in their community. Their research involved analysis of media coverage of police violence and their personal reactions. Advocacy activities included a youth dialogue at the neighborhood police station, followed by a presentation to board members of the city housing authority about the group's concerns and recommendations for changing dynamics between youth and police. Another example of participant research involved eco-mapping community resources by walking the neighborhood and completing field notes about plant life, gardens, and types of food outlets. Through this hands-on research, the young people learned about food deserts, participated in workshops about pollinators, and then used this information to combat food deserts by developing a community garden at their program site.

Sample

A total of 89 middle school students were enrolled in the Bridge Project during the year of the study. Of the 82 youth who completed a pre-participation survey, 65 also completed a post-participation survey and therefore were included in the study sample. Of these, 33 young people were in the program group who participated in YELL, and 32 were in the comparison group who participated in other Bridge Project activities but did not attend YELL sessions. As shown in Table 1, YELL participants were between the ages of 11 and 17, with an average age of 13.1. More than half were female. A high proportion identified as Black or African refugees, followed by Latino/a and then Asian or Pacific Islander. Comparison group members were similar in age and gender but were less likely than YPAR participants to be Black and more likely to be Asian.

Procedures and Data Collection

Informed parental consent and youth assent to participate in the study were obtained during program registration. Participants completed the Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes – Youth Version (SAYO-Y, National Institute on Out of School Time, 2015) at the beginning and end of the program year, in fall 2014 and spring 2015. Graduate research assistants administered the survey with support from program staff. Youth independently completed the survey using paper and pencil; adults were available to answer clarifying questions.

Measures

Two scales from the SAYO-Y were used to measure youth voice and adult support at pretest and posttest. The Re-

Table 1. Participant Demographic Characteristics

	YELL Participants (<i>N</i> = 33)	Comparison Group (<i>N</i> = 32)
Gender		
Male	36.4%	40.6%
Average age	13.1	13.9
Race		
Black	66.7%	25.0% **
Latino	24.2%	37.5%
Asian or Pacific Islander	9.1%	28.1% *
Other	0.0%	9.4%

p* < .05; *p* < .001, based on a two-sample test of proportions. *p* values are indicators of mathematical confidence suggesting that results are not due to chance.

sponsibility and Leadership subscale included five items to assess youth voice:

- “Do you get to help plan activities for the program?”
- “Do you get the chance to lead an activity?”
- “Are you in charge of doing something to help?”
- “Do you get to help make decisions or rules?”
- “Do you get to do things to help people in your community?”

The Supportive Relationships with Staff Members scale included four items assessing young people’s connections to program staff:

- “Is there an adult here who is interested in how you think about things?”
- “Is there an adult here that you can talk to when you are upset?”
- “Is there an adult here who helps you when you are having a problem?”
- “Is there an adult here who you will listen to and respect?”

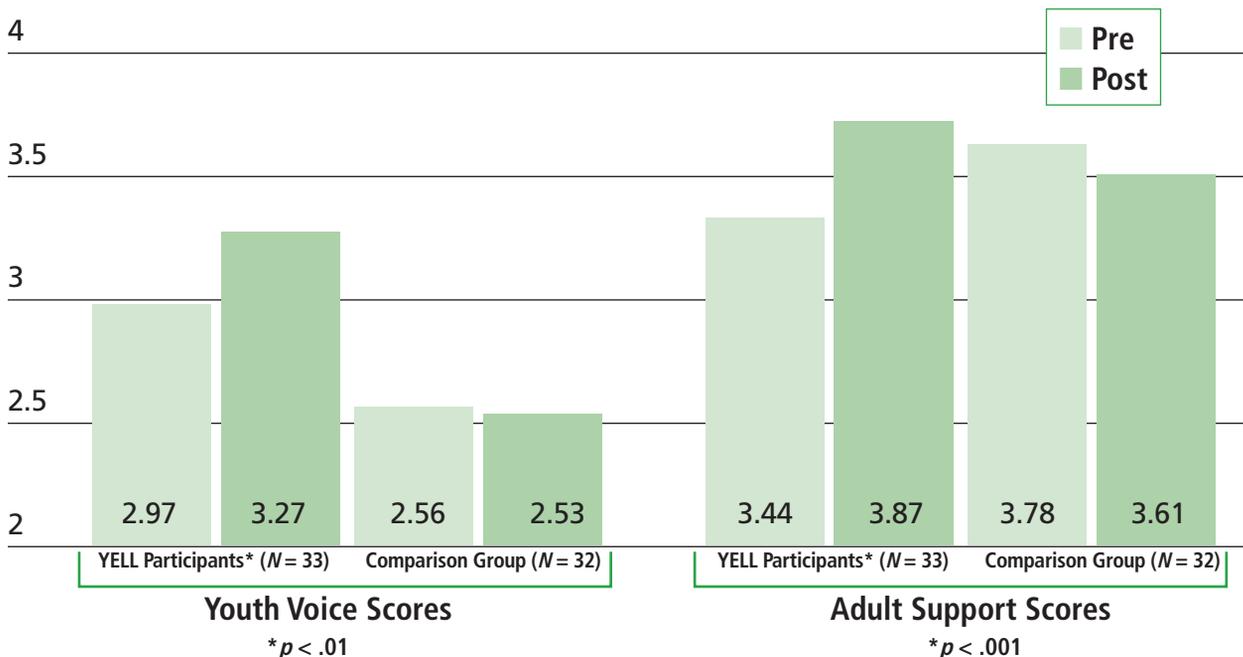
Possible responses to all questions for both scales were yes (4), mostly yes (3), mostly no (2), and no (1). In our sample, tests of reliability resulted in strong evidence of internal consistency ($\alpha = .88$ for Responsibility and Leadership and $\alpha = .81$ for Supportive Adults); this result is consistent with other studies using these measures (National Institute on Out of School Time, 2015; Surr et al., 2012).

Findings

To assess whether YELL participants’ perception of youth voice and adult support improved during the program more than the comparison group’s, we matched students’ survey responses from pretest to posttest and then compared how scores changed. As shown in Figure 1, YELL participants’ scores on both SAYO-Y scales improved between pretest and posttest. The differences were statistically significant; the p values in the figures are indicators of mathematical confidence suggesting that our results are not due to chance. For the survey scale for youth voice, YELL participants reported an initial score of 2.97, which rose 0.30 points to 3.27 by the spring. For adult support, YELL participants reported a score of 3.44 in the fall, which improved 0.43 points to 3.87 in the spring. In contrast, among the comparison group nonparticipants, scores declined slightly for both youth voice (from 2.56 to 2.53) and adult support (from 3.78 to 3.61). This trend was not statistically significant, suggesting that the comparison group’s scores were relatively stable.

Participants’ own words confirm these quantitative findings. In response to an open-ended survey item asking participants to describe what they liked about YELL, one respondent wrote, “It is a program where you get to show leadership [and] do a project where you can help the community.” Another participant observed, “There’s really cool staff” who facilitate YELL. Taken together, these results suggest that the program may have im-

Figure 1. Youth Voice and Adult Support Scores



proved participants' perceptions that they had leadership opportunities and adult support.

Discussion

Findings from this study suggest that YPAR may be a promising approach to increasing opportunities for leadership among low-income youth of color and improving youth-adult relationships in community-based afterschool programs. Youth who participated in a 26-week YPAR curriculum experienced positive and statistically significant changes in perceived youth voice and adult support, in contrast to a lack of change in the comparison group. Our study findings parallel previous qualitative evidence that YPAR creates opportunities for adolescents to take on meaningful leadership roles, engage in programmatic decision-making, and negotiate new relational dynamics with adults (Anyon & Naughton, 2003; Conner & Strobel, 2007; Kirshner, 2008).

Guided by a social justice youth development framework, we propose that these results may reflect the unique opportunities afforded to youth in YPAR projects. For example, the YELL program manual highlights the critical role of adult facilitators in the process of supporting youth voice, directing program staff to take on the roles of "facilitator, mentor, and partner" (Anyon et al., 2007, p. 10). Program activities are intentionally designed to support youth voice and adult relationships. At the start of the curriculum, youth are charged with creating their group norms, whereas in other Bridge Project programs behavioral expectations are often determined by adults. At midyear, participants vote to select a community issue or problem that is important to them to become the focus of their research. At the end of the curriculum, youth work with adult facilitators to create a product of their choosing and share their work with others in the community. These are just some of the ways that YELL, and YPAR projects more broadly, create environments that are culturally and developmentally responsive to the needs, interests, and experiences of low-income early adolescents of color.

Study Limitations

Our pilot study found evidence that supports use of YPAR in community-based OST programs. However, several limitations must be considered. The sample size is small, and the program and comparison group participants were not randomly assigned. Anecdotally, practitioners reported that schedule conflicts were the most common factor contributing to participation in YELL. In addition, the YELL and comparison groups differed

significantly by race, so that selection biases might have influenced perceptions of youth voice and adult support. This concern is tempered by evidence from the literature that Black youth, who were a larger proportion of the YELL group than of the comparison group, experience high rates of marginalization (Travis & Leech, 2014).

Another set of limitations has to do with confounding effects. YELL participants also used other Bridge Project services. For example, they could participate in a science and engineering program on a different day of the week and could access tutoring and homework help in the hour before YELL sessions began. Changes in SAYO-Y measures could be due to participants' involvement in other programming.

Finally, our research included only Bridge Project participants who completed surveys at both the beginning and the end of the program year. As a result, participants who experienced less transience or were generally more engaged in program services than other students were overrepresented in both the treatment and comparison groups. Such sample biases limit the generalizability of our pilot study.

A Promising Approach

Our findings suggest that YPAR is a promising approach to supporting self-determination and developmentally appropriate adolescent-adult relationships for low-income youth of color in community-based afterschool programs. YPAR may therefore be an important strategy for increasing young people's engagement in OST programs, particularly during the transition from childhood to early adolescence. Additional studies of the YELL curriculum and of other YPAR strategies are needed to more fully understand the potential of these approaches and their impact on program participants.

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Seed Balls and the Circle of Courage

A Decolonization Model of Youth Development in an Environmental Stewardship Program

A. R. S. Wenger-Schulman and Lauren Hoffman

"I need to get out more!" one middle school student reacted when she learned about her potential contribution to pollinator health in her home city. This concerned student is part of Middle School 88's Green Team, an afterschool ecology club in Brooklyn, New York. The Green Team provides interested students with a high-quality environmental education beyond the scope of MS 88's normal science curriculum. The Green Team meets twice a week to participate in environmental education activities and learn about issues concerning their environment.

MS 88 serves a community of students often considered at high risk for dropping out of high school and other socially undesirable behaviors (C-J. Joseph-

Guevara, personal communication, May 18, 2017). The population is 89 percent students of color, mostly Latino/a and South American; 27 percent have special emotional or academic needs that have required intervention; and 78 percent qualify for free lunch (NYC Department of Education, 2016).

In this high-need setting, we designed and implemented an environmental education program designed to meet the needs of urban youth of color. The approach we used, a decolonization model called Circle of Courage, is a promising approach other afterschool programs can use to foster belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity while showing students that they can care for

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the environment even in their densely populated urban neighborhoods.

Environmental Stewardship and the Circle of Courage Model

Individuals from racial minority groups are often underrepresented in professions focused on the environment (Armstrong, Berkowitz, Dyer, & Taylor, 2007; Bonta & Jordan, 2007; Fulford & Thompson, 2013; Ralston, 2012). One way to increase minority representation and interest in ecology as a profession is to create programs based on *decolonization* (Fulford & Thompson, 2013). According to the decolonization approach, most current Western teaching models emerged from European pedagogical approaches that uphold imperialistic values; these models fail to teach minority students in a way that resonates with their experience (Pete, Schneider, & O'Reilly, 2013). A decolonization model involves implementing programs based on the cultures of indigenous people and other underrepresented groups to enrich and empower students in marginalized communities; this approach can diminish the academic achievement gap between minority groups and people with social power and privilege (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990; Pete et al., 2013).

The Circle of Courage is one such decolonization model for positive youth development, based on the Lak óta Nation's child-rearing practices. Owned by Starr Commonwealth in Michigan, the Circle of Courage brings the cultural understanding of the Lak óta peoples into a modern educational context (Brendtro et al., 1990), combining the science of education and child development with the values of a child-centered society. According to Brendtro and colleagues (1990), European-based culture emphasizes obedience to authority and individualistic behavior. This culture has contributed to the depersonalization of education and made an authoritarian, vertical teaching style the standard in most schools. By contrast, Native American cultures are more family-based and child-centered (Brendtro et al., 1990). The Circle of Courage model fosters a child-centered education system by emphasizing four core values:

- Belonging
- Mastery
- Independence
- Generosity

The model sees these four values as universal—attributes that all children, and indeed all people, need to be emotionally healthy (Brendtro et al., 1990). When these universal and naturally endowed needs are not met, people can engage in negative, nonconstructive behavior. Rather than using arbitrary rules to encourage positive behavior, the Circle of Courage creates an environment in which belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity can be developed and restored.

The Circle of Courage has been applied successfully by organizations all over the world to address the needs of underrepresented youth (Coetzee, 2005; Espiner & Guild, 2010; Halas, 2002). The model may hold particular relevance in environmental education (Fulford & Thompson, 2013). The four core values of the Circle of Courage align with the goals of many youth environmental education programs. *Belonging* is an ecology-oriented value because it includes all living things, not just humans (Brendtro et al., 1990).

Mastery encourages work, persistence, and achievement, not innate talent, as a path to success in any field. Through inquiry that develops mastery, students in environmental programs can learn motivation by working through setbacks and academic challenges. *Independence* encourages self-actualization as opposed to compliance with authoritarian dictates. The emphasis on an internal locus of control may promote environmentally responsible behavior (Allen & Ferrand, 1999; Kaplan, 2012). The value of *generosity* emphasizes giving, not acquiring, as a sign of personal success. It emphasizes the importance of community contribution while discouraging conspicuous consumption. Through these four values, students may acquire skills and knowledge, internalize the concept of active participation, and develop sensitivity and concern for environmental issues—all of which, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2015), contribute to a successful environmental education program.

A decolonization model involves implementing programs based on the cultures of indigenous people and other underrepresented groups to enrich and empower students in marginalized communities; this approach can diminish the academic achievement gap between minority groups and people with social power and privilege.

It is easy enough to create environmentally focused programming for young people that is engaging and informative. Connecting this knowledge to lasting environmentally responsible behavior is more difficult (Hashimoto-Martell, McNeill, & Hoffman, 2012; Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2013). We believed that the Circle of Courage youth development model would help Green Team participants make this connection due to its emphasis on social values rather than arbitrary rules. We also hoped that this environmental activity would encourage agency in Green Team members to improve their lives and engage with their communities.

To enable students to understand their impact on the environment, learning activities need to be relatable and have a tangible product (Hashimoto-Martell et al., 2012). For urban environmental initiatives, introducing nature as something local, rather than something found only in far-off wild places, has been a challenge (Haluza-Delay, 2001; Kudryavtsev, Stedman, & Krasny, 2012). Furthermore, although educators have long recognized that environmental literacy is essential to a well-rounded education (Fortner, 2001; Ralston, 2012), implementing environmental curricula in academic classes can be challenging in the face of high-stakes testing and inadequate funding for urban schools. These realities also work against using a holistic but nontraditional pedagogical model like the Circle of Courage during school hours. OST programs therefore are prime settings for environmental education and for innovative models like the Circle of Courage.

The Green Team Seed Ball Workshop

This project represented a cooperative venture between a community pollinator garden in Brooklyn and the MS 88 Green Team. These two programs created an environmental workshop to supplement the MS 88 science curriculum in a way that would help a significant contributor to the local (and global) ecosystem: bees. Participants created “seed balls”: small balls of clay, compost, and native wildflower seeds. The balls are designed to be flung into any patch of dirt where a plant might be encouraged to grow, even if it’s behind a chain-link fence.

Sowing flower seeds in otherwise wasted areas helps the environment by giving bees the food they need to pollinate plants, including those humans and animals consume. Made popular by the “guerrilla gardening” movement in New York City during the 1980s and 1990s, seed balls were invented by Masanobu Fukuoka in Japan 50 years earlier (Clarkson, 2004). The clay covering of the seed ball offers the ungerminated seeds protection from animals. As the clay erodes, the seeds can germinate and



MS 88 students and the Green Team adult facilitator display the completed seed balls after Session 1.



In Session 2, Green Team students learn to teach other students how to make seed balls.



A Green Team student facilitator teaches new students to make seed balls in Session 3.

begin to rehabilitate damaged landscapes (Overdyck, Clarkson, Laughlin, & Gemmill, 2013). Although tossing seed balls is not as effective as hand sowing seeds or planting seedlings, it is an inexpensive and useful way of revitalizing large areas of land.

Green Team facilitators reimagined a one-day activity in which participants simply created seed balls to create a multi-day student-centered pollinator workshop that emphasized the values of generosity, mastery, independence, and belonging. We divided the workshop into three sessions, presented on three Green Team days over several weeks. Session 1 gave Green Team students information about pollinators and colony collapse, introduced them to the concept of seed balls, and culminated with the students creating their own seed balls. After this initial session, we invited Green Team members to volunteer to lead a seed-ball activity with peers. Those who demonstrated interest participated in Session 2, in which they reviewed the information they learned during the first session and again made seed balls. Then in Session 3, those Green Team volunteers taught the information about pollinators and the seed-ball activity to students who were unfamiliar with the topic.

As we created this workshop, we determined that the Circle of Courage values would be demonstrated in the behaviors and attitudes outlined below, particularly during the final session.

- **Belonging:** Students understand the topic and the goals. They feel comfortable in the activity and with the group. Students know that they were chosen for this activity because they are interested in environmental issues; they believe that the adult facilitators trust them with the responsibility of leading a workshop.
- **Mastery:** Student leaders run the third session on their own. They feel confident in their ability to teach the activity and can refer back to information presented in previous sessions.
- **Generosity:** Students support one another and share supplies. They contribute productively to their community, pollinators, and the earth without expecting a return.
- **Independence:** Students work autonomously. In the final session, student leaders ask minimal clarifying questions of the adult instructors. Through the workshop, students demonstrate that they can contribute meaningfully to the health of the environment and can lead others to do the same.

We told the Green Team students that this was a new environmental workshop model that emphasized coop-

eration and leadership along with content knowledge, but we did not give them specifics about the Circle of Courage.

Fostering Belonging, Mastery, Generosity, and Independence

Fourteen Green Team members participated in Session 1 of the workshop. At the beginning of the session, we asked the students to name some pollinators and then to discuss what pollinators do, how they benefit humans, and why they are important. Finally, we asked what students thought humans could do to help pollinators. As students made seed balls (see box), adult facilitators led an informal academic discussion on colony collapse, the importance of pollinators to the ecosystem and food web, and what Green Team members could do to help.

Students demonstrated mixed levels of knowledge at the beginning of the first session. As a group, they had a basic awareness of some pollinators, including the wind, bees, butterflies, and other insects. Most knew, generally, what a pollinator was: “It brings seeds, or something, to one flower from another.” One student described the importance of pollinators in maintaining genetic diversity in plant populations, and another student knew about colony collapse. All students were surprised and concerned at the endangered species status of some pollinators, and

SEED BALL RECIPE

Adapted from seed-balls.com (n.d.)

Materials (per student)

- ½ cup of red clay powder (available at seed-balls.com, or use regular clay but with less water)
- ½ cup of dirt or compost (We used Miracle Grow.)
- 2–3 teaspoons of native wildflower seeds (We used black-eyed Susans. Seed-balls.com says to use 2 or 3 seeds per ball, but other recipes recommend more.)
- Water, approximately 1–2 tablespoons



A seed ball after germination

Directions

Each student should mix the red clay powder, dirt or compost, and wildflower seeds. Add water till the mixture is gummy but firm enough to be molded into dime- or nickel-sized balls. Let balls dry for 12 to 24 hours. Throw seed balls wherever there is a need for flowers.

no student thought cities could be healthy ecosystems for pollinators. When asked if they could do anything to help the pollinators, one student said to buy honey.

After completing the seed-ball activity and pollinator discussion, students were able to define *pollinators* as all animals or things that can spread pollen. Students also mentioned the idea or the term *colony collapse*. Many could specify the percentage of human food that is pollinated by bees. Students demonstrated interest in the idea that they, as New Yorkers, could actively help the pollinator population by engaging in community gardening and fostering diverse native plants.

This first session reinforced Circle of Courage values by highlighting the importance of community involvement in environmental protection and the contribution that each student could make to pollinator health and diversity, thus fostering the core values of belonging and independence. However, the students were not able to demonstrate mastery of the material. When asked to name a meaningful place to deposit seed balls, several students named places that had meaning for them but would be inappropriate or impossible: “The top of the Empire State Building!” “Ecuador, where I am from.”

When asked whether they wanted to lead a pollinator workshop as student facilitators, six Green Team members, all female, volunteered. During the second session, then, these six student facilitators reviewed the pollinator health information and practiced making seed balls. They also learned teaching techniques to help them introduce the seed-ball activity to a new group of students.

In this second session, the student facilitators demonstrated all four Circle of Courage core values. For example, they demonstrated belonging during the seed ball activity when they asked one another for help instead of relying on the adult facilitators. They recalled most of the information from the first session, and the quality of their seed balls improved, both signs of mastery. Generosity was demonstrated in their willingness to help one another as they prepared to share their new knowledge with others. Independence emerged when one student began experimenting with the shape of the seed balls, and the group made predictions about how a different shape would affect the growth rate.

Six new students learned from the Green Team student facilitators during the third session of the work-

shop. Each student facilitator was assigned one or two new students and recreated the original seed-ball session with them. The student facilitators accurately presented the workshop information and taught the seed-ball activity. After the session, the new students demonstrated a more nuanced understanding of human reliance on pollinators. Student facilitators kept the new students engaged in the activity, and the new students were excited at the prospect of distributing their seed balls.

Student facilitators demonstrated all four Circle of Courage values in this third workshop session. They expressed belonging in their willingness to work with the Green Team and the community pollinator garden and through their trust in the adults who helped them prepare to lead the final session. They demonstrated mastery not only of the new information about pollinators and the new skill of making seed balls, but also of the pedagogical techniques they needed to teach their new knowledge and skills to others. They demonstrated generosity with their growing desire to help pollinators, not only by participating in an environmentally responsible behavior themselves but also by disseminating the necessary information to peers. They demonstrated independence by presenting the pollinator workshop with limited help from their adult instructors.

The workshop made a lasting impression on the students. In the six months following the third session, the Green Team adult leader heard participants referring to the pollinator information and discussing the seed-ball activity. Use of the Circle of Courage model may have helped with this retention. We hope that it also increased environmentally responsible behavior in these students.

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The Circle of Courage and Environmental Stewardship

We found the Circle of Courage to be useful both in creating the seed-ball workshop and in evaluating the workshop’s success. Although the Circle of Courage was not expressly designed for environmental or OST programs, its core values are congruent with the goals of environmental OST initiatives. The success of this workshop indicates that this model may be appropriate to use in OST environmental education.

Through these seed-ball workshops, students demonstrated the effect they could have on the environment

and inspired their peers to make a difference as well. They shared the Circle of Courage values of belonging, mastery, generosity, and independence. They gained a better understanding of the positive impact they can have on the world; this knowledge may even encourage them to pursue leadership roles in protecting the environment. Other OST programs may have similar results in using a decolonization model of environmental education.

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Positive Change Through a Credential Process

Tinnycua Williams

Studies have demonstrated the significance of afterschool staff development and have attempted to show the impacts of staff training on program quality and youth outcomes (New York State Afterschool Network, 2011). Most research focuses on training for direct service or line staff, but training for directors is also critical. Directors often operate in dual roles, serving as both direct service staff and administrators. Professional development can give them the support and resources they need to operate effectively.

For many directors, the critical issue is time. As the director of a locally funded afterschool program in a homeless shelter, I witnessed and experienced this is-

sue firsthand. Juggling administrative responsibilities, staff meetings, and staff assignments along with effective observation and supervision during program time was challenging. Professional development, though necessary, wasn't always a priority for me, especially if training hours conflicted with my afterschool program schedule. When the program was understaffed, as it often was, I had to either find a sub or fill in myself. Although each decision to put the program first made sense in the short term, in the long term, I missed opportunities to strengthen my skills as a director.

The Denial That Became an Opportunity

In fall 2015, everything shifted. At the beginning of the school year, I applied to the local department of health

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to be approved as the director of my program, as I had done several times before. Every few years I sent in the requisite documentation: background check, references, medical paperwork, and proof of the required 30 hours of training I had taken to become a director. I thought of the process as routine.

This time, my undergraduate college transcript was requested. Though this request was a departure from the norm, I was not concerned. But then, to my surprise and chagrin, I learned that my education did not meet the requirements. After reviewing my transcript, the department of health concluded that none of my undergraduate coursework was in child development, elementary education, physical education, recreation, or a related field, as required for afterschool directors in New York State. My 12 years of work experience aside, I did not meet the education requirements. My application was denied.

To say I was devastated is an understatement. “How could this be?” I questioned. I couldn’t understand why I had been approved so many times before but now things were different. I reviewed the state regulations again. I found that the regulations had not changed, but enforcement was stricter. People who did not hold a degree in a related field had to obtain either the School-Age Care (SAC) credential or the Children’s Program Administrator credential. I chose the SAC credential.

The Program

My supervisors gave approval for me to register for a credential program provided by a state-approved host agency. I wasn’t sure what to expect. It had been a while since I had been in formal school, and I was concerned about balancing the demands of course work with full-time operation of an afterschool program. Ultimately, I dug in for a journey that would take a year to complete.

The first phase involved attending eight full-day sessions totaling 60 hours. The topics included director fundamentals from child safety, health, and nutrition to project-based learning. The sessions were fun, dynamic, and interactive, each one more informative than the one before. I felt I was part of a learning community because the other students were directors like me who faced many of the same struggles. I saw that I was not alone. We shared best practices, and I had time

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and space to reflect on my program—both its challenges and the potential solutions. For a director mired in the day-to-day running of the operation, such reflection was a luxury.

During the next phase of the SAC course, classes became virtual; I met with the other participants once a month using an online meeting platform. These classes focused on the credentialing process, including the creation of a resource file and portfolio. The portfolio was quite extensive, including 42 one-page journal entries, a program summary, an autobiography, parent recommendation letters—the list goes on and on.

Once I had completed half of my portfolio, I was assigned an advisor to coach me through the rest of the process. In New York’s credentialing process, the advisor plays a critical role, conducting three site visits to each candidate’s program to document competencies and to provide guidance. My advisor, Orlando, was a seasoned veteran who ran his own private afterschool program. He was one part coach, one part drill sergeant, and 100 percent supporter. He understood both the value of the credential and the process of obtaining one. He was sensitive to what I was feeling as I tried to navigate the requirements of the credential coursework while balancing my workload.

The Payoff

As the months progressed, I began to see the value of program observation and staff accountability. Before I began the credential program, I was so concerned about my administrative responsibilities that I wasn’t taking time to observe my program in action. I focused on putting out fires rather than on program improvements. The credential program increased my commitment to improving my program. I worked collaboratively with staff to address safety issues in our arrival process and to provide individual support to students with behavior management challenges. We began to incorporate project-based learning in our lesson planning. I found more time to coach and guide my staff in the moment. In short, I became more present to my program and to the needs of staff and participants.

Accomplishing these improvements was not easy. It took many hours of staff meetings, staff professional development, and sheer will on the part of both line staff

and management to make needed changes. What also became clear was that my staff and I were going through an evolutionary shift in the way we approached such areas as behavior management and participant engagement. Our observation process empowered us to meet our students where they were, crafting individualized responses to students exhibiting difficulties instead of seeking to suspend them from the program.

Once my portfolio and resource file were complete, I requested a site visit by an approved endorser. In this final approval step, the endorser reviews the candidate's portfolio and resource file and observes how the candidate functions in the program. Over the course of my career, I have participated in many visits by funders and regulators, but this visit was probably the most nerve wracking of all. My endorser, Janet, tried to put me at ease, but I still felt as if I was taking my driving test for the first time. Failure was not an option! As Janet observed the program and reviewed my portfolio, I could not help but feel pride in the changes we had made. All the behind-the-scenes trials and tribulations were finally paying off.

Every site visit concludes with the endorser telling the candidate whether she or he has exhibited the com-

petencies required to run a high-quality program. When Janet indicated to me that I had indeed shown that competency—that is, that I was approved for the SAC credential—I was so overwhelmed that I cried tears of joy.

Though I was initially intimidated by the process, in retrospect, I feel that the credential process was one of the best things that could have happened to me. I grew as a professional, an administrator, and a youth development professional. The lessons I learned throughout this process will stay with me for a lifetime. If you are wondering whether obtaining a professional credential is for you, my answer is a resounding yes. Though the process can be intense, the benefits far outweigh the sacrifice. In the end, youth professionals are not the only ones to benefit from a professional

credential like SAC. Our participants, their families, and our staff will benefit as well.

Over the course of my career, I have participated in many visits by funders and regulators, but this visit was probably the most nerve wracking of all. My endorser, Janet, tried to put me at ease, but I still felt as if I was taking my driving test for the first time.

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Measuring Program Quality, Part 2

Addressing Potential Cultural Bias in a Rater Reliability Exam

Amanda Richer, Linda Charmaraman, and Ineke Ceder

Like instruments used in afterschool programs to assess children's social and emotional growth or to evaluate staff members' performance, instruments used to evaluate program quality should be free from bias. Practitioners and researchers alike want to know that assessment instruments, whatever their type or intent, treat all people fairly and do not privilege people from certain groups over others.

In the case of observation instruments, concern about bias extends beyond the instrument itself to the people doing the observation: how they apply the instrument's rubrics or standards in specific afterschool settings. A vital subset of concern about possible rater bias is whether any exam used to assess rater reliability itself carries unintended bias toward some groups of people.

This issue is not only a matter of fairness. Culturally biased rater reliability testing can directly affect youth outcomes. For example, an urban youth program in a low-income neighborhood with many people of color could receive negative scores from a rater who was not trained and certified to overcome any implicit biases related to racial and cultural practices different from his

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or her own. When observation ratings affect funder decisions, the problem becomes acute.

Overcoming this possible source of bias is our concern in this article as members of the research and evaluation team for the Assessment of Program Practices Tool (APT). As we conducted studies to establish the scientific validity of APT (described in Tracy, Charmaraman, Ceder, Richer, & Surr, 2016), we uncovered apparent cultural bias in the preliminary results of the APT rater reliability exams: White raters tended to achieve the target rate of agreement with master scores more often than Black raters. This article describes the follow-up study we conducted to address the sources of that apparent bias, with the goal of making the APT rater reliability exam as free from cultural bias as possible. This goal is critical for any educational assessment, though it is often dismissed. During this follow-up study, we addressed practical concerns that have implications for the development of culturally fair program quality assessments across the field.

Rater Reliability and Rater Bias

Inevitably, raters using observation tools are susceptible to their own biases (Hoyt & Kerns, 1999; Lumley & McNamara, 1993; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Hoyt (2000) argued that rater bias occurs when raters have their own personal interpretations of the measurement scale. Rater expectations also can be a source of bias (Rosenbaum, 2002).

Training and practice have been found to help minimize bias and increase rater accuracy (Chamberlain & Taylor, 2011; Hoyt & Kerns, 1999; Lyden et al., 1994; Schanche, Høstmark Nielsen, McCulough, Valen, & Mykletun, 2010; Schlientz, Riley-Tillman, Briesch, Walcott, & Chafouleas, 2009). Practice alone is not enough, but moderate to high dosages of training have been found to reduce rater bias (Hoyt & Kerns, 1999).

One strategy commonly used to achieve consistency and reduce bias is the use of explicit rating *anchors*. In an observation rubric, the anchors are detailed descriptions

Culturally biased rater reliability testing can directly affect youth outcomes. For example, an urban youth program in a low-income neighborhood with many people of color could receive negative scores from a rater who was not trained and certified to overcome any implicit biases related to racial and cultural practices different from his or her own. When observation ratings affect funder decisions, the problem becomes acute.

of what each point on the rating scale looks like, so that raters can clearly see what constitutes a rating of, for example, 1, 2, 3, or 4. Rater training that uses videos with a real-world example of each anchor has been shown to improve rater accuracy (Kishida & Kemp, 2010; Schlientz et al., 2009).

Another strategy to reduce bias is master scoring of video clips to establish a “gold standard” score. In this strategy, highly trained and experienced raters, usually working in groups of two or three, all rate the same videos, compare notes, and discuss until they can agree on a single master score for each video. Use of master-scored video training improves rater accuracy and mitigates rater “drift” (Bell et al., 2012; Hill et al., 2012).

The APT system uses these strategies—explicit anchors and master-scored videos—both in rater training and in the development of the rater reliability exams. When our validation

study uncovered evidence of possible cultural bias in the results of the exams, we suspected that we had come up against an understudied yet crucial source of variance identified by Courtney Bell, senior researcher at Educational Testing Service (personal communication, June 6, 2016): that the master scores themselves had cultural biases that could unfairly privilege some groups of people.

The APT and Previous Validation Studies

The APT was launched by the National Institute on Out-of-School-Time (NIOST) in 2005 as an observation instrument to measure process quality: observable aspects of an out-of-school time (OST) program in action.

Designed to support program self-assessment and improvement, the APT is increasingly being used by external stakeholders across the country to ensure that afterschool programs are implementing quality features and to identify programs in need of improvement.

The APT has gone through three phases of reliability and validity checking (Tracy, Richer, & Charmaraman, 2016). *Reliability* is the extent to which an instrument produces consistent results; *validity* is the extent to which it measures what it is supposed to measure.

ABOUT THE APT

The APT measures process quality in three domains:

- Supportive social environment
- Opportunities for engagement in learning
- Program organization and structure

Each domain has subdomains called *quality areas*. For example, the quality areas for the domain *supportive social environment* are welcoming and inclusive environment, supportive staff-youth relationships, positive peer relationships, and relationships with families.

The items that measure these quality areas are spread throughout the APT, which is organized by program times of day: arrival, transition, homework, activity, informal, and pick-up.

The first APT validation study (APT I), funded by the William T. Grant Foundation and conducted with 25 OST programs in two states, aimed to establish reliability and to minimize measurement error. This study showed that the APT has many strong technical properties and is an appropriate tool for measuring afterschool program quality. However, it also found that rater reliability was somewhat unstable (Tracy, Surr, & Richer, 2012).

The purpose of the second validation study (APT II) in 2013–2015—again funded by the William T. Grant Foundation—was to develop and evaluate a multi-pronged reliability training. The training was designed to improve rater accuracy so that APT could be used for higher-stakes purposes, such as demonstrating program quality to funders. The data came from 39 rater participants from four states who completed reliability training including four online video-based exams. The training was improved from the previous iteration by expansion of the APT Anchors Guide, which explains the meaning of each possible score for each item; by video-based practice with immediate, detailed feedback; and by use of individualized reports that track rater progress in order to identify which video modules to focus on before the next exam. Accuracy scores improved slightly with these enhancements, but the average passing rates were still low, at 51 to 58 percent. The acceptable passing rate for similar tools in the field is 80 percent accuracy (Bell et al., 2012; Hill et al., 2012). The trainees provided valu-

able feedback on how to improve the training protocol, such as clarifying key terms in the anchors document and carefully selecting video clips that are unambiguous.

An unexpected finding was that Black participants had consistently lower accuracy scores than White trainees (see Charmaraman & Tracy, 2016). A follow-up analysis using logistic regression controlled for three aspects of compliance with the study protocol: consistent use of the APT Anchors Guide, the number of practice clips trainees rated, and watching the exam clips to the end. We still found significant differences in accuracy rates between Black and White and between Black and biracial participants, though all fell short of the 80 percent benchmark. This scoring gap between Black and White raters may be partially explained by the fact that Black raters, in qualitative feedback, often questioned the assigned master scores, rationales, and definitions. The feedback also suggested that use of shorter video clips would help raters achieve better accuracy by focusing their attention on specific instances.

The Current Validation Study

The primary goal of APT Validation Study III (2016–2017, funded by the William T. Grant Foundation) was to eliminate differences in accuracy rates between Black and White raters. We set out to identify sources of cultural bias, from the selection and narrative framing of the video clips to the assignment of master scores. The study had three research objectives:

1. To develop APT rater reliability exams in which the average rater score falls within the field benchmark of 80 percent
2. To refine APT rater reliability exams to reduce the potential for cultural bias and to examine whether demographic factors other than race or culture, such as gender, educational background, region of the country, number of years of OST experience, or experience with external program evaluations, are associated with better performance on the exams
3. To determine whether familiarity with the APT Anchors Guide, frequency of APT use, and APT training are positively associated with better performance on the rater reliability exams

Training and Exam Materials

We built on the work of the first two studies to refine the selection of videos to use for training and for the rater reliability exams. We also modified the language in the APT Anchors Guide and set up a process to produce new master scores for the selected videos.

To develop the training and exams for APT II, we had videotaped activities at eight programs in New England. For the current study, we reassessed the library of video clips to reduce confounding factors such as ambiguous elements or extraneous details, including issues with the length or quality of the clip. We selected video clips that focused only on one of the six APT time-of-day sections—the Activity section—and on elementary (grades K–5) programs. Three experts in the development and use of the APT selected 35 clips that met these criteria. The three experts had to agree on which subscales of the APT Activity section (see box) the clips exemplified. One clip might be rated on three to five items within those subscales. The clips varied in length from 1 minute to 8.5 minutes, with most hovering around 3 to 4 minutes. For use in practice sessions and rater reliability exams, each clip was preceded by a short description of what was taking place; whether the clip showed the beginning, middle, or end of the activity; and which subscales from the Activity section the participant would be rating.

We reviewed the APT II version of the APT Anchor Guide for potential ambiguities. To reduce ambiguity in anchor descriptions, whenever possible we added quantities of how much something occurs or how many

APT ACTIVITY SECTION SUBSCALES

- Organization of activity
- Nature of activity
- Staff promote youth engagement and stimulate thinking
- Staff positively guide youth behavior
- Staff build relationships and support individual youth
- Youth relations with adults
- Youth participation in activity time
- Peer relations

people participate. Guided by our analytical results from APT II, we formed a working group comprising the authors of this article and NIOST staff to identify culturally ambiguous items and to reduce ambiguity by producing more descriptive definitions and examples of phrases like “inappropriate behavior” that might have different meanings for different groups of people. In order to reduce variation in how often raters referred to the APT anchors while rating clips, we included the anchors in the practice modules and exams themselves, rather than providing a separate guidebook.

Master scores for APT II were provided by predominantly White raters. For this third study, we recruited four consultants of color to serve on the master scoring team. All had extensive expertise as afterschool directors, as evaluators, or as APT trainers. Two of them had participated as master scorers in APT II. All four consultants were female; three were African American, and one was Latina.

Before they rated the 35 selected video clips, we required the master scorers to review a document to sensitize them to cultural bias. We gave them the revised APT anchors and shared feedback from Black participants in APT II who disagreed with master scores for clips. After reviewing these materials, each consultant rated each video clip. If three of the four agreed on a rating for an item, then that became the master score. If not, then a fifth consultant from the previous APT master scoring committee, a White male, served as “tiebreaker.” If three of the five agreed, then that became the master score. If not, the clip was discussed at a consensus meeting. All five group members then had to agree for the clip to be included in this study. We recorded the reasons these consultants gave for their ratings and used these reasons to develop practice materials.

Pilot and Field Testing

We sent the APT Anchors Guide to a total of 16 pilot participants, 30 percent of whom were non-White, and asked them to get familiar with it. A few days later, we sent them an email with links to three practice clips and three exams. These consisted of short video clips, each followed by the APT Activity subscales, such as *organization of activity* and *youth relations with adults*, on which participants were to rate the clip using the APT anchors. During the pilot tests, participants could share feedback on, for example, whether the clip was connected to the right APT scale, whether it showed enough information to enable them to rate it properly, and whether audio and video were of high enough quality. Feedback enabled us to fine-tune the final version of the three exams. For example, for the ensuing field test, we displayed the specific APT subscales to be rated before showing each video clip so raters would know what they were looking for.

After the pilot tests, we recruited 32 field-test participants, who also completed three online practice sessions and three exams. Participants were instructed to rate the practice clips first, before they began taking the three exams. For the practice clips, they received feedback on the accuracy of their ratings and were shown the reasons the master scorers had given for their ratings. For the exams,

they received only feedback on their accuracy but not the rationales for the master scores. The order in which participants took the practice clips and exams was randomly assigned to prevent any measurement error from the “order effect,” in which the order of the exams can significantly affect the results.

Study Participants

To select participants for APT III, we tapped a database of APT users trained directly or indirectly by NIOST within the last 10 years, inviting 537 individuals to field-test three APT rater reliability exams. The email invitation included a short survey to gather information about demographics and APT experience. Of the 537 candidates, 97 responded by filling out the demographic survey; of those, 48 (49.5 percent) ended up participating in the study.

The 48 participants came from 11 states, and 33 percent were non-White. This sample thus was more diverse in geography and race or ethnicity than those of previous APT validation studies. Table 1 outlines the demographic characteristics of the sample. In terms of experience, a substantial proportion, 87 percent, had experience with K–5 students; many reported working with students through grade 12. Most participants were familiar with the APT anchors (73 percent) and almost half reported using the APT one or two times per year. Asked about APT training, 79 percent reported having received in-person NIOST training, 52 percent online NIOST training, 25 percent training at their own site, and 27 percent training in a previous

APT validation study. Participants could report having received more than one type of training.

Data Analysis

The final analysis sample combined exam data from the pilot tests and field tests with a total of 48 participants.

Item-Level Analysis

Following advice we solicited from expert methodologists, we explored the range of scores for each exam item and compared participants’ ratings to the master scores. The goal of item-level analysis was to create exams that would be practical for use in the field. For most items, a majority of raters exactly matched the master scores. However, a few items on each exam had poor accuracy rates, typically less than 40 percent; also, the variation in scores was more than just one point on the four-point scale. For some conditional items, where raters would need to see a particular condition—for example, children behaving inappropriately—in order to rate the item, many participants considered the condition to have occurred while others did not. For these reasons, a few items were removed from each exam.

Many other items were assigned two accurate ratings. Other observation scales in the field, such as Teachstone’s CLASS instrument (Bell et al., 2012), consider a rating to be accurate when it falls within one point of the master code. The decision to allow two accurate ratings addresses the issue of assigning one “accurate” quantita-

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Characteristic	Percentage of Sample (<i>N</i> = 48)
Female	77%
White	67%
Black	17%
Hispanic	10%
Asian	4%
Native American	2%
Age 20–29	19%
Age 30–39	38%
Age 40+	44%
Work in the Northeast	73%
Work in the South	21%
Work in the West or Midwest	6%

tive score to qualitative observational ratings, which are subject to personal biases. It allows for the possibility that the “true” rating could land in between two scores. For APT rater reliability exams, most items required two accurate scores. The stringent criterion for assigning a single master score to an item—that one consistent best score was assigned by raters across most groups, so that one group was not unfairly privileged over another—was met by 35 percent of the items.

Rater-Level Analysis

To assess rater accuracy, each participant’s score for each item was compared to the master score. A rater accuracy score was calculated for each participant by dividing the total number of items rated correctly by the total number of items in all three exams. Using the rater accuracy score, a percentage correct score was calculated for each participant for each exam. Statistical tests were used to assess group differences in rater accuracy scores.

Findings

We report our results under headings related to the three research objectives: rater reliability, group differences, and the effects of APT experience.

Rater Reliability

The first research objective was to reach average rater accuracy scores that fell within the field benchmark of 80 percent.

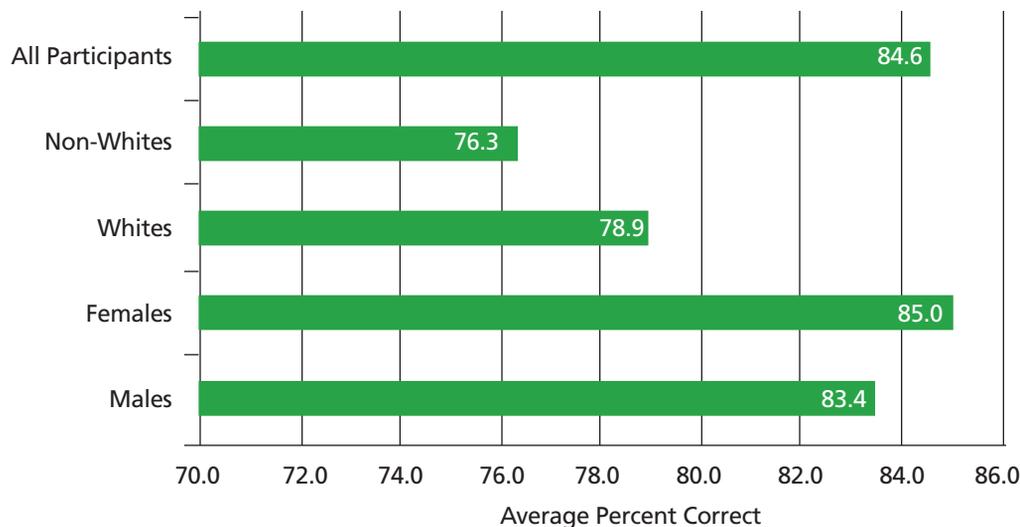
As was the case in APT II, average rater accuracy scores were initially lower than the field benchmark of 80 percent: 58.8 percent for Exam 1, 57.2 percent for Exam 2, and 61.4 percent for Exam 3. When we removed problematic items from the exams and allowed items to have two correct answers, the average rater accuracy scores increased to 82.4 percent for Exam 1, 84.9 percent for Exam 2, and 86.5 percent for Exam 3. The rate at which raters passed the benchmark of 80 percent was also calculated for each exam. The analyses exploring group differences used these rater accuracy scores and benchmark passing rates to test statistically for group differences among raters.

Group Differences

The second research objective was to examine differences in rater accuracy scores to look for group-level biases by demographic categories and by experience in OST programs.

We conducted group difference tests by gender, race, age, region, and education background on the average rater accuracy scores and benchmark passing rates. Figure 1 shows average rater accuracy rates for selected demographic characteristics. No significant differences were found between males and females, White and non-White participants, or people residing in and outside of New England (where the APT was developed and videos were recorded); nor were there differences among age groups. For educational background, we found a significant group difference for one exam only, showing that

Figure 1. Average Rater Accuracy Scores by Gender and Race



participants with a PhD were less accurate compared to those with a bachelor's or master's degree. In relation to these demographic categories overall, we found no significant group-level biases in average rater accuracy scores in relation to benchmark passing rates, indicating that the reliability exams do not favor one type of rater over another.

We also looked for differences based on participants' OST experiences. One variable was experience with different age groups. We looked for differences between participants with K–5 experience and those with none and for differences among participants with K–5 experience only, K–8 experience only, and K–12 experience. We found no differences in average rater accuracy scores in relation to grade-level experience. Nor did we find differences for participants who reported having worked with minority students, with low-income students, with students in urban environments, or in large programs with high student-to-staff ratios, as compared to participants who did not report having these experiences. These results suggest that the exams demonstrate no bias toward raters who have worked with K–5 students (the ones depicted in the videos) or toward those who have or have not worked with vulnerable OST populations.

The Effect of APT Experience

The third research objective was to discover whether familiarity with the APT Anchors Guide, use of APT in the field, or APT training led to better performance on the rater reliability exams.

The only factor that had a significant effect on accuracy was familiarity with the APT anchors. For all three exams, raters who were familiar with the APT anchors were more likely to pass the exam at the 80 percent benchmark than those who were not familiar with the anchors. For two of the three exams, raters familiar with the anchors also had higher total accuracy scores.

For frequency of APT usage, only one exam showed a difference in accuracy between raters who used the APT three to five times per year and those who used it five or more times per year. Similarly, when we looked for differences among raters who had and had not used the APT for external evaluation, we found significant differences in one exam.

For the effect of APT training, results were mixed. Participants reported what type of APT training they had received throughout their experience and how long ago they had received this type of training. We found significant differences by the number of types of training participants had experienced for one of the three exams.

Implications

In this study, the APT rater reliability exams achieved rater accuracy levels meeting the benchmark passing rate of 80 percent. We found no significant group differences in rater accuracy among the three exams, suggesting that they are equivalent. We found no significant differences among raters by race, gender, age, region, or experience with OST populations.

Ample evidence demonstrates that familiarity with the APT anchors is associated with higher rater accuracy. Our findings also suggest that frequency and type of APT use may have some relationship to rater accuracy. This relationship, along with the relationship between APT training and rater accuracy, warrants further investigation. APT training is a prerequisite for knowledge of the APT anchors and for use of the APT anchors. The relationship between training and rater accuracy therefore needs further evaluation with a larger sample. Development and evaluation of specialized APT training focused on improving rating reliability would be the next step.

The finding that familiarity with the APT anchors improves raters' ability to pass the reliability exams is key to our goal of creating exams that treat all groups fairly. A malleable intervention, such as improving familiarity with the APT anchors, may be what drives accuracy levels, rather than any static demographic trait such as race.

Our process and findings suggest practical implications for rater reliability testing in two interrelated areas: use of master scores and steps to reduce cultural bias.

Use of Master Scores

As we conducted this study, we explored the advantages and disadvantages of using master scores, in which a group of expert raters assigns one correct score to each item on a reliability exam. The advantages of master scoring are that it:

- Standardizes ratings and rating accuracy across programs and sites
- Reduces the effect of internal raters' bias stemming from familiarity with the program and its staff
- Improves raters' awareness of the need for objective evidence and descriptive examples to justify ratings

Disadvantages of master scoring to establish one "best" score include the following:

- Inherent problems with the idea that there can be only one "best" score for each item
- The false expectation that a single less experienced rater could arrive at the same score as a group of expert raters
- Inability to allow for two "best" scores when many raters believe an item falls between scores

Extensive discussion with methodologists in the field convinced us that one master score may *not* be the only score that is true and accurate. In real-world observations, raters often find themselves wanting to rate “in the middle” between two ratings—for example, the score is not 2 or 3 but 2.5. Another important consideration is that the expert raters who produced the master scores did not do so in isolation. They often disagreed on ratings for individual items (or wanted to rate them “in between”) and needed the group process of master consensus meetings to reach 100 percent agreement. Individuals taking a rater reliability exam—or rating program quality in the field—do not have access to such a group process. Expecting a single less experienced rater to consistently arrive at the same score as a group of highly experienced raters is simply unrealistic.

These considerations led us to identify items that had strong leanings toward two possible scores. Allowing two scores for a single item helps to compensate for limitations in the video clip itself, such as length, sound quality, or camera viewpoint, that could produce ambiguity. More importantly for the purpose of this article, allowing two scores also accommodates different cultural and contextual interpretations by raters from a wide variety of backgrounds.

Steps to Reduce Cultural Bias

In the process of refining the video-based APT rater reliability exams to reduce the potential of cultural bias, we:

- Selected video clips with as little cultural ambiguity as possible, so that they would be less prone to different interpretations by raters from different cultural backgrounds
- Selected a racially diverse panel of master scorers
- Provided those master scorers with cultural bias training
- Revised the APT Anchors Guide to define key terms that could be read differently by people from different backgrounds

As we worked to eliminate cultural bias in the APT rater reliability exams, we developed a checklist of cat-

egories that are often subject to cultural bias during program quality observation, including socioeconomic status, urbanicity, program size, racial and ethnic backgrounds of students and staff, gender, and what constitutes “appropriate behavior” in different cultures. The people who know best which of these factors are at play in a given program setting are not external observers but program directors and staff. We therefore strongly suggest that program directors and raters—before, during,

and after program quality assessments—become aware of and attempt to address potential biases. For instance, in the cultural bias training, we ask master scorers to pay attention to biases related to socioeconomic status. We ask them to reflect, for example, on whether they are giving higher ratings to programs with high-quality materials and activities that cost more while unintentionally assigning systematically lower ratings to programs with smaller budgets.

Policy Implications

Our study is a contribution to ongoing discussion in the OST field about cultural bias in program quality assessment. In order to make smart decisions about effective educational interventions and resource allocation,

the OST field needs evidence from research. To provide accurate and reliable evidence, researchers must develop—and funders and policymakers must seek and support—assessments that reduce scoring gaps favoring one group over another. Culturally informed test development practices can affect how programs and staff members are supported. When funding decisions depend on the results of program quality assessments, cultural bias in those assessments can have a direct effect on program youth. To be fair to youth, their families, and their communities, the field needs culturally fair assessments of program quality.

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Beyond “Research Into Practice”

Diane Gruber

Penuel, W., & Gallagher, D. (2017). *Creating research-practice partnerships in education*. Cambridge MA: Harvard Education Press.

Though out-of-school time (OST) programs can help youth develop their full potential, the low pay, high staff turnover, and lack of professionalization that are endemic in the field make it difficult for programs to maintain consistency and quality. Similarly, though OST programs are under pressure to improve participants’ academic outcomes, too frequently they lack the time, support, and funding they need to develop research-based interventions that can work in their program settings.

One avenue toward addressing these tensions is collaboration with a research partner, such as a university or similar institution

William Penuel and Daniel Gallagher provide a roadmap in their book *Creating Research-Practice Partnerships in Education*. Penuel, a professor of learning sciences and human development at the University of Colorado Boulder, and Gallagher, the director of career and college readiness at Seattle Public Schools, describe how true research-practice partnerships can enhance the process of educational change. Though the book focuses on partnerships between university researchers and school administrators, research-practice partnerships can also be established between research institutions and afterschool programs. The California Tinkering Afterschool Network, led by the Exploratorium with several afterschool programs in the San Francisco Bay Area, is an example.

DIANE GRUBER, MA, LMHC, is a research associate with the National Institute on Out-of-School Time.

Research-practice partnerships are an emerging way for researchers and practitioners to work together that goes beyond “research into practice” and ordinary collaboration. In a research-practice partnership, Penuel and Gallagher stress, researchers and practitioners work hand in hand; both partners need to have an equal say in identifying and solving problems. Research-practice partnerships require trusting relationships and strong communication skills. Key features of successful partnerships (p. 9) include:

- Focus on problems of practice
- Long-term commitment
- Mutuality in the relationship
- Generation of an original analysis

After defining these basics in Chapter 1, Penuel and Gallagher go on in Chapter 2 to provide strategies for one of the defining features of research-practice partnerships: addressing questions that are of mutual concern to both parties. Chapter 3 discusses the importance of deciding whether a research-practice partnership is the best type of rela-

Research-practice partnerships are an emerging way for researchers and practitioners to work together that goes beyond “research into practice” and ordinary collaboration. In a research-practice partnership, Penuel and Gallagher stress, researchers and practitioners work hand in hand; both partners need to have an equal say in identifying and solving problems.

tionship for the desired outcome. It also outlines how to develop the foundation for a successful partnership. Chapter 4 discusses strategies for supporting the framework: building relationships, expanding the partnership, and adding new partners. In the rest of the book, Penuel and Gallagher provide details on learning adaptability skills throughout the process and suggest techniques for sustaining partnerships and building a future.

Throughout, the authors provide details and examples from their many years of experience with research-practice partnerships, showing why partnerships can be beneficial, what challenges partnerships have faced, and how they have overcome those challenges. This book can thus be used as a guide by anyone interested in

developing a research-practice partnership. This emerging model for a mutual relationship between researchers and practitioners provides an alternative to business as usual and brings hope for real change.

Afterschool Matters

Call for Papers

Afterschool Matters is a peer-reviewed journal dedicated to promoting professionalism, scholarship, and consciousness in afterschool education. Published by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time with legacy support from the Robert Bowne Foundation, *Afterschool Matters* serves practitioners who work with youth in out-of-school time (OST) programs, as well as researchers and policymakers in youth development.

We are seeking articles for future issues of the journal, beginning with Spring 2019. Scholarly or practice-based work on all aspects of OST programming for children and youth, from a variety of disciplines and academic perspectives, will be considered. We welcome submissions that explore practical ideas for working with young people in OST programs. Personal or inspirational narratives and essays are appropriate for our section “Voices from the Field.”

All articles, whether scholarly or practice-based, should connect theory to practice and should be broadly applicable across the field. Articles must be relevant and accessible to both practitioners and academic researchers.

We invite you to discuss possible topics in advance with us. A broad variety of topics will be considered, including the following:

- Innovative program approaches
- OST programs and civic engagement, social and emotional development, arts development, or academic improvement
- Research or best-practice syntheses
- OST program environments and spaces
- Key aspects of program leadership and administration
- OST system-building, such as cross-city and statewide initiatives
- Expanded or extended learning time and the OST hours
- School-community partnerships that support OST programming
- Physical activity and healthy eating
- STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) program delivery or STEM staff professional development
- Special needs youth, immigrant and refugee youth, or other vulnerable populations in OST
- Youth-centered participatory action research projects
- Gender-focused research and policy initiatives related to OST

Submission Guidelines

- For consideration for the Spring 2019 issue, submit your article no later than May 25, 2018, to ASMsubmission@wellesley.edu.
- Submissions should not exceed 5,000 words.
- Submit your article electronically in Microsoft Word or rich text format. Use 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides. Leave the right-hand margin ragged (unjustified), and number pages starting with the first page of text (not the title page, which should be a separate document).
- Include a separate cover sheet with the manuscript title, authors' names and affiliations, and the lead author's phone number and e-mail address.
- The names of the authors should not appear in the text, as submissions are reviewed anonymously by peers.
- Follow the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th Edition (2009)*, for reference style guidelines. Present important information in the text and do not use extensive footnotes.

We welcome inquiries about possible article topics. To discuss your ideas, please contact:

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