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# LITERACY IN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

## *Literature Review*



Developed by the



NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

For the

NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR  
QUALITY AFTERSCHOOL LEARNING

at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory



NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY



# LITERATURE REVIEW

## LITERACY IN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS *Literature Review*

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the goals of the National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning (Partnership) is to build local capacity to provide rich academic content through engaging and challenging activities, defined for our purposes as academic enrichment. It is our belief that afterschool programs should not simply duplicate or extend the school day, but offer high-interest alternatives that supplement school-day learning in a variety of ways. To do this successfully, afterschool programs must first consider the range of factors that contribute to providing effective academic enrichment to participants.

While this literature review focuses on literacy practices and outcomes within the afterschool context, some general issues must be considered before the topic of literacy in afterschool programs can be addressed. Afterschool programs cannot deliver high-quality literacy enrichment to participants in isolation from other factors.

As the afterschool field expands, the debate on the role of academics continues. Some believe that afterschool programs should be entirely different from school, without any academic activities. Others believe that an afterschool program is an ideal opportunity to help struggling students improve academically. Not surprisingly, there is a growing consensus in the field toward striking an appropriate balance between these two viewpoints.

In *Afterschool Education: Approaches to an Emerging Field*, Gil Noam, director of the Program in Afterschool, Education, and Research, and his colleagues discuss bridging afterschool and the school day, but emphasize the importance of protecting the unique afterschool environment from becoming too much like school (Noam, Biancarosa, & Dechausay, 2003). The authors make the distinction between extended learning and enriched learning, the former tightly aligned with the school day in the form of tutoring and/or homework help, and the latter possibly (but not necessarily) aligned with the school day and taking many forms, including project-based learning and hands-on activities.

Afterschool programs can support student learning indirectly, as well. Research conducted by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) and Forum for Youth Investment addresses ways afterschool programs can support academic achievement through positive youth development programming (Hall, Yohalem, Tolman, & Wilson, 2002). The report, *Promoting Positive Youth Development as a Support to Academic Achievement*, discusses the critical elements that need to be in place for



afterschool programs to achieve academic goals and the correspondence between positive youth development and academic learning.

According to the researchers, afterschool programs indirectly support academic achievement by:

- Supporting the development of a range of non-academic competencies and characteristics that, in turn, support young people's academic learning
- Ensuring that young people have critical developmental inputs that foster academic success and are fully prepared and engaged
- Creating a rich alternative to the learning experiences that students experience in schools
- Helping to eliminate the consistent barriers to learning faced by young people

Another report, *Critical Hours*, summarized research findings relating out-of-school time and positive youth development, especially in regard to learning (Miller, 2003). The report suggests that afterschool programs can make a difference for youth, including helping to build the prerequisites to learning, in terms of both academic achievement and long-term competence and success. Based on the research reviewed, the report suggests that youth benefit from consistent participation in high-quality afterschool programs and that these programs can increase engagement in learning, educational equity, and the key skills necessary for success in today's economy.

Miller (2003) states that positive outcomes depend on the program, however, and certain characteristics have been found to be critical, including:

- Physical and psychological safety
- Supportive relationships
- Opportunities to belong
- Positive social norms
- Support for efficacy and mattering (feeling of importance)
- Opportunities for skill building
- Integration of family, school, and community



The report also states that programs should be less formal than school, finding ways to expose youth to new experiences and raise their expectations of themselves and their ability to improve their lives and their communities.

In addition to these studies, there is a growing body of knowledge about literacy and afterschool learning. Highlights include reports from the Chapin Hall Center for Children, Boston's Afterschool for All Partnership, and Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL). The first two discuss how and to what degree some afterschool programs are implementing literacy practices, including recommendations for the field. The third is a research synthesis that provides a look into the effectiveness of afterschool programs in helping low-achieving students in reading and mathematics.

The Chapin Hall study (Spielberger & Halpern, 2002) investigated literacy practices and environment in urban out-of-school time programs by surveying 200 programs (located in Chicago and Seattle), and conducting 16 case studies of programs located in New York, Chicago, and Seattle, which included repeated observations and interviews. This study serves as a foundation for understanding what a sample of afterschool programs are offering in terms of literacy practices and environment.

The majority of the programs included in the study provided some material foundation for literacy, including at least a modest selection of fiction (97% of those surveyed) and non-fiction books (88%), writing materials and tools (98%), dictionaries (92%), language-rich board games (94%), and literacy props for dramatic play (72%). Almost all programs also report having display areas for children's artwork and writing (although the quantity and quality varied) and some programs have language-rich environments (printed schedules, bulletin boards, snack menus). However, planned time for literacy activities (other than homework) was usually limited.

Many program directors reported that they had access to few outside resources to help them think specifically about literacy activities for their programs. The most common literacy activities were homework and independent reading. Children also read to other children and adults. Literacy activities tended to be social (e.g., games, book discussions, project work) and there was a wide range of group reading practices across programs.

The study found common elements among what they authors describe as exemplary programs. In the programs, using literacy for personal, social, and cultural purposes was common and fostering literacy was an important program objective. The programs provided physical and social environments that made reading and writing activities inviting. Shared reading and book discussions took place among students. Deliberate



attention to language and vocabulary was common across a range of activities and program staff were playful (and intentional) about words and language.

The authors make two conclusions that are relevant to the Partnership's work. First, afterschool programs should have the potential for nurturing children's literacy development. Second, the role of such programs should not be to duplicate what happens during the school day, but to serve a complementary role and provide additional experiences and purposes for engaging in literacy than those that exist during the school day.

*Enhancing Literacy Support in After-School Programs*, published by Boston's After-school for All Partnership, focuses on ways afterschool programs in the Boston area are providing literacy instruction, highlighting four particular programs (Ryan, Foster, & Cohen, 2002). Each program uses different curricula and methods to deliver literacy instruction, but several cross-cutting factors affected each program's ability to improve students' literacy skills. These include staff quality and training opportunities, access to information about students' reading and writing performance, and the quality and nature of the literacy curriculum used in the program.

The authors discuss the importance of providing creative activities in afterschool programs that support students' literacy development but also maintain the relaxed environment of afterschool. Reading aloud and readers' theatre are cited as appropriate strategies for this context. These practices offer students a way to recognize and appreciate the relevance of literacy skills to their everyday lives and reading aloud, in particular, can be done well with minimal staff training.

McREL conducted an extensive review of the literature related to the effectiveness of out-of-school-time programs showing positive outcomes for low-achieving students in reading and mathematics (Lauer et al., 2004). The authors searched the literature from 1984 to the present that related to out-of-school time (OST) strategies assisting low-achieving students in reading or mathematics. After taking into account the rigor of the studies, 56 were included in the synthesis that used comparison/control groups to measure student achievement in reading and/or mathematics.

Overall, the research relating to reading showed the following:

- OST strategies can have positive effects on the reading achievement of low-achieving or at-risk students
- Students in early elementary grades are more likely than older students to benefit from OST strategies for improving reading



- OST strategies need not focus solely on academic activities to have positive effects on student achievement
- OST strategies that provide one-on-one tutoring for low-achieving or at-risk students have strong positive effects on student achievement in reading

The research synthesis was comprehensive and rigorous, taking into account the quality of studies and including almost 30 years of research. The findings suggest that out-of-school-time programs can have a positive impact on low-performing students' reading achievement, but are limited to that population and cannot be generalized to other groups of students. (Selected research studies from McREL's synthesis deemed relevant to the current literature review are included.)

The NWREL literature review attempts to summarize the field of literacy in afterschool programs, focusing on research that relates to literacy practices and outcomes. However, because this body of research is small, the authors emphasize the importance of considering the review in the context of the body of work described above.

Due to the limited body of research on literacy in afterschool, it is also important to consider research relating to literacy practices, outside the afterschool context. NWREL considered the research on three specific literacy practices that are included in the Interim Materials: reading aloud, dramatization, and book discussion. These practices were selected on the basis of their existence at multiple Partnership sites, their inclusion in the research on literacy and afterschool, and their appropriateness for afterschool programs.

Following the literature review is a brief discussion of relevant research relating to these specific literacy practices. This discussion is not a comprehensive literature review, but rather a summary of some of the most relevant research and key reports that support inclusion of these practices in the Interim Materials as well as in afterschool programs at large.





## METHODOLOGY

NWREL conducted an extensive review of the research for this literature review, beginning in spring 2004 and continuing until June 2005. This process included the following:

- NWREL Information Center staff conducted a search using the keywords “literacy” and “afterschool” and associated terms (e.g., reading, out-of-school time, etc.)
- NWREL Information Center staff also conducted a search using the keywords “read aloud” and “afterschool,” “dramatization” and “afterschool,” and “book discussion” and “afterschool,” and associated terms (e.g., reader’s theatre, drama, literature circles, etc.)
- NWREL staff reviewed Harvard Family Research Project’s out-of-school time evaluation database for studies relating to literacy
- Bank Street College of Education staff searched existing databases for studies relating to the literacy practices (i.e., read aloud, dramatization, book discussion)
- NWREL staff consulted the “afterschool and reading” references cited in McREL’s research synthesis (Lauer et al., 2004)

### Selection of Studies

There is a very limited selection of studies addressing literacy in afterschool. Due to the limited research base, we broadened our search to include literature that relates to the practices outlined in the interim materials, even though there is not always a direct connection to the afterschool context. However, the literature base on each practice (i.e., reading aloud) is quite significant and not entirely pertinent to the current project, so only a selection of these studies was included to support the practices identified in the interim materials. These studies are discussed separately from the main literature review, which includes only the studies relating to literacy and afterschool.

After the extensive review process, a total of 20 studies that relate to literacy and afterschool were included in the literature review. In addition to the 20 studies included, 41 other studies were reviewed in the process. Articles/papers/books were chosen for review based on relevance to the current project. For example, an article that defines literacy as being knowledgeable in a particular subject or field, such as cultural literacy,



was not relevant to this work and was excluded from the review. Articles/papers/books that were programmatic in nature instead of research-oriented were retained for later review, given that this information may prove useful in interim materials development.

Although the focus of the literature review and related toolkit development work is academic enrichment, studies were included that analyzed tutoring and/or homework help, as these activities are also within the scope of Partnership work and the findings seemed relevant. Due to the limited research available on this specific topic, we did not reject studies solely on the basis of research design.

## **Limitation of Studies**

The primary limitation is in the scope of literature that actually exists related to literacy and afterschool. Many of the articles/books/papers that were reviewed based on the search were programmatic (e.g., how to run an afterschool program with a literacy component) and practitioner-directed (e.g., an example of an effective read-aloud activity) rather than research-oriented. Of the studies included, research design was often a limiting factor. The majority of studies included used a quasi-experimental design, but even these studies sometimes had a small sample size or lacked a control group. Also, a limited number of studies showed statistically significant results.

## **Staff Involved in Literature Review**

Various internal and external staff contributed to the literature review, including the following groups:

**LEARNS project staff:** LEARNS is a partnership of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and the Bank Street College of Education. LEARNS is funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service to provide training and technical assistance to projects engaged in literacy, tutoring, out-of-school time, and mentoring. The LEARNS partners have a long history of supporting a range of literacy-focused projects and creating research-based tools and resources for practitioners.

**Language and Literacy team project staff:** The Language and Literacy Team is one of five teams funded by the Institute of Educational Sciences at NWREL. To assist schools in becoming high performing learning communities, L&L has developed resources and strategies that address the following areas: oral language, connecting reading and writing, literacy and emotional development, culturally responsive learning environments, comprehension strategies, and curriculum inquiry.



National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning staff: Partnership staff at NWREL conduct site visits to afterschool programs, design and deliver regional and national training, and are in the process of developing tools to assist afterschool practitioners implement high-quality literacy enrichment activities in their programs.

National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning Content Advisory Team: In addition to members from the Partnership staff, this group includes two external literacy content experts, Marie Mancuso and Dr. Scott Paris. Ms. Mancuso is the Deputy Associate Superintendent of the Arizona Department of Education and Dr. Paris is a Professor and Graduate Studies Chair in the Psychology Department at the University of Michigan.

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# LITERATURE REVIEW OF LITERACY AND AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

After the extensive review process (described in detail in *Methods* section), a total of 20 studies were included in the literature review of literacy and afterschool (see Appendix A for annotated bibliographies). Eighteen of these studies showed positive outcomes for participants relating to literacy and two studies showed no improvement for participants relating to literacy. Of the 18 studies that showed positive outcomes, seven were statistically significant; 13 included practices categorized as academic enrichment (e.g., reading aloud, writing stories), and five focused on practices categorized as tutoring and/or homework help. The academic enrichment studies may also include tutoring and/or homework help, but are not limited to these practices.

The 20 studies are divided into three groups for the purposes of the literature review. The first group includes the two studies that did not show positive outcomes for participants. The second group includes the studies that showed positive outcomes related to tutoring and/or homework help. The third and most substantial group includes the studies that showed positive outcomes related to academic enrichment. The first two groups of studies are briefly summarized. The academic enrichment studies, being the largest and most relevant group of studies, are discussed in the context of research design, literacy practices, and literacy-related outcomes. Conclusions based on all the studies are also presented.

## Studies That Showed No Results

Two of the studies reviewed concluded that the afterschool literacy activities examined had no impact on student achievement. Both of these were quasi-experimental control group studies. Gentilcore (2002) examined the effect of an afterschool Academic Intervention Service (AIS) on student achievement on the New York State eighth-grade English Language Arts Assessment. The AIS included direct instruction geared to the statewide assessment as well as skill-specific instruction delivered by certified teachers. Even after adjusting for a range of variables, the author found no significant differences between the sample and the control group, which comprised students with comparable pre-test data who did not participate in the intervention.

The final Mathematica report (James-Burdumy et al., 2005) included elementary students in its quasi-experimental study. The researchers utilized a randomized controlled field trial in which students were assigned to either a 21st CCLC or to a control group. Control group students were allowed to attend other afterschool programs, but no 21st CCLC



programs. The 21st CCLC programs included in the study represented great diversity in programming, but 86 percent reported providing reading and writing instruction. Other activities included homework help, direct instruction, educational technology practices, practice drills, worksheets and games, preparation for standardized tests, and enrichment activities. The evaluation found no impacts of the program on reading test scores.

Both of these studies lacked detailed descriptions of daily afterschool literacy practices, but it was evident that neither focused entirely on literacy enrichment activities and their impact on student achievement. The program examined in the Gentilcore study focused on test-preparation and skill/drill approaches. The Mathematica study looked at achievement across a broad range of programs; while some of these may have focused on literacy and offered academic enrichment activities, others may not have, making it difficult to assess program outcomes related to literacy improvement. These studies do not provide sufficient data to draw generalizable conclusions regarding literacy enrichment activities and their impact on academic achievement.

## **Studies Focused on Tutoring and Homework Help**

Five studies examined afterschool programs that focused on tutoring and homework help (rather than enrichment). All these studies showed positive impacts on students' reading achievement although only two yielded statistically significant results. One of these (Morris, Shaw, & Perney, 1990) utilized a strong experimental design with a true control group, and the other (Leslie, 1998) utilized a quasi-experimental design comparing program participants with non-participants; in both cases, the sample size was quite small, focusing on a single elementary tutoring program in one case ( $n = 30$ ), and a single middle school in another ( $n = 39$ ). In both cases, students received tutoring for one to one-and-a-half hours twice a week and researchers found significant improvements in the treatment groups on reading achievement measures utilized.

Three additional studies found positive effects from afterschool tutoring and homework help that were not statistically significant. In 2002, Jefferson County Public Schools (Kentucky) published the results of their quasi-experimental evaluation of the Tutorial Assistance Grant (TAG) Program, which provided before- and afterschool tutoring to second- and third-graders. The study compared participants ( $n = 442$ ) with a comparison group matched on grade level, free and reduced-price lunch status, and baseline Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test scores. While both groups improved, program participants demonstrated greater gains than the comparison group in comprehension, vocabulary, and total battery.



The other two studies examined afterschool homework help/tutorial programs funded through California's After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program. An evaluation conducted by the University of California at Irvine (2001) used a non-experimental design to analyze data from 12 school districts implementing the program across the state. Participants' scores on the Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT-9) were compared with students statewide. Program students showed an increase of 5.8 percentage points versus an increase of 3 percentage points statewide. In addition, higher-dosage participants and high-risk (including limited English proficiency) participants experienced higher gains than other participants. In a quasi-experimental study using a matched-pair comparison group, Prenovost (2001) analyzed students participating in the program in four sites ( $n = 620$ ) in the Santa Ana Unified School District in Southern California. In this study, the comparison group included students not participating in the program, but who had background characteristics similar to participants and shared teachers during the school day, also using SAT-9 scores as an achievement measure. Although no statistically significant difference was found, program participation was found to be related to improvement in SAT-9 reading scores for both high- and low-dosage participants. Once again, participants with limited English proficiency scored higher than their matches in reading.

While these studies do not address literacy-based academic enrichment activities, the focus of the National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning Interim Materials, they do indicate that tutoring and homework help components in afterschool settings, particularly those focused on literacy skills, can have a positive impact on students' reading scores. While the data from these studies are limited, NWREL staff felt that the positive implications were promising, and therefore included one-on-one and small-group literacy tutoring as a practice in the Interim Materials.

## **Academic Enrichment Studies**

The 13 studies that are categorized as academic enrichment include a variety of research designs, literacy practices and related outcomes. Five of the studies showed positive outcomes that were statistically significant and eight of the studies showed positive outcomes that were not statistically significant.

### **Research design**

Ten of the 13 studies used a quasi-experimental design and three studies used a non-experimental design. All the studies that showed statistically significant results were quasi-experimental. Seven of the quasi-experimental studies included a control or comparison group and three used a pre- and posttest design with just the treatment group.



One of the non-experimental studies included a comparison group, but the other two non-experimental studies did not.

The majority of these studies focused on elementary students, although one study included only kindergartners (Bergin, Hudson, Chryst, & Resetar, 1992) and four studies included middle school students in addition to elementary students (Bitz, 2003; Hoffman, 2001; Johnson, Zorn, Williams, & Smith, 1999; Reisner, White, Russell, & Birmingham, 2004). The sample size in the studies ranged from 24 students (Bergin et al.) to more than 100,000 students (Reisner et al.). Two of the studies included very large sample sizes, drawing from large urban areas in which many students participate in citywide after-school initiatives and the comparison group included students from the same districts who did not participate in the programs (TASC, LA's BEST). Most of the studies fell in between these two extremes with sample sizes ranging from more than 100 to almost 800 students.

The studies utilized various forms of reading and language arts assessments. Standardized tests included the CAT-5 (California Achievement Test, Fifth Edition) (Klein & Bolus, 2002); the SAT-9 (Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition) (Hoffman, 2001; Huang, Gribbons, Kim, Lee, & Baker, 2000); and the CTBS (Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills) (Huang & McClanahan, 2000). Other assessments included the IRI (Informal Reading Inventory) (Hangle & McClanahan, 2002); MRT (Metropolitan Readiness Test) and MAT (Metropolitan Achievement Test) (Bergin et al., 1992), and three individual state assessments (from Ohio, New York, and Tennessee) (Johnson et al., 1999; Reisner et al., 2004; Ross, Lewis, Smith, & Sterbin, 1996). One study used a comprehension assessment (cloze procedure) that has since been discredited by other researchers (Blanton, Menendez, Moorman, & Pacifici, 2003) and two studies did not provide the name of the assessment used (Developmental Studies Center, 2003; Foley & Eddins, 2001). One study assessed student work based on rubrics that aligned with the state standards (Bitz, 2003), and one study relied on self-report (Schinke, Cole, & Poulin, 2000).

The quality of research design varied among the studies. A few studies had particularly weak designs, not including a comparison group of any kind, using a comparison group that significantly differed from the treatment group, or using a very narrow assessment that has been discredited by others. One study used a very small sample (24 students) but most others had samples sizes that were adequate. The strongest designs utilized quasi-experimental designs with control groups. One of the strongest studies, with a very robust design, was conducted by an external evaluator of the Foundations, Inc. program and used a matched control group of non-participants ( $n = 646$ ), which was compared to the



treatment group ( $n = 406$ ) on pre- and post-standardized reading assessments (Klein & Bolus, 2002).

### **Literacy practices**

The studies reviewed describe the particular literacy components used in the afterschool programs with varying degrees of specificity. In some cases (i.e., Foundations, Inc., LA's BEST, and KidzLit) NWREL staff have additional familiarity with program components through site visits and other collaborations related to Partnership work.

Based on the information available, the literacy enrichment activities described fall into two general categories: literature-based curricula and "scripted" curricula that combine direct instruction (often phonics-based) and limited student-directed activities.

Among the five studies that showed statistically significant results, two were literature-based (Foundations, Inc. and 5th Dimension), two combined literature-based and scripted curricula (LA's BEST and Memphis City Schools), and one did not provide enough information to make a determination (6 to 6).

Foundations, Inc. (Klein & Bolus, 2002) utilizes a program-generated literature-based curriculum that includes reading high-quality literature with a variety of extension activities and aligns with national standards. Students learn through reading, listening to read-alouds, writing, reasoning, and hands-on activities. 5th Dimension (Blanton et al., 2003) focuses primarily on multimedia activities, including educational software, computer games, and activities for searching the Internet, as well as some jigsaw puzzles and board games; for each activity, students engage in reflection that includes writing to others, writing in a personal journal, creating a "hints book," making a video, or creating artwork representing the strategies used and knowledge gained from the activity.

LA's BEST (Huang et al., 2000) combined the literature-based KidzLit curriculum with the phonics-based Literacy Loop. KidzLit (also addressed in a separate evaluation) engages children in high-quality literature through read-alouds, independent reading, and extension activities that include role-playing, writing, and creating music and art. Literacy Loop engages cross-age tutors to complement Open Court, the dominant phonics-based reading and writing curriculum favored by LAUSD in the regular school day. Memphis City Schools (Ross et al., 1996) also employed a scripted program based on the Success For All curriculum that includes Story Telling and Retelling (STaR), listening comprehension, reading and follow-up activities with trade books, writing, book club, computer skills, and test-taking strategies.





Among those studies with positive but not statistically significant results, three (Foley & Eddins, 2001; Johnson et al., 1999; Reisner et al., 2004) provided limited descriptions of program components, making it impossible to analyze this aspect of the studies. Of the five remaining studies, four employed some type of literature-based components. One study was an internal evaluation of the KidzLit program, described above. Others included the Comic Book Project (Bitz, 2003), in which fourth- through eighth-grade students practiced literacy skills through the creation of original comic books; Youth Education for Tomorrow (YET) Centers (Hangley & McClanahan, 2002), which employed a curriculum created by Public/Private Ventures including oral language/vocabulary activities, read-alouds conducted by teachers, student reading, and student writing; and a Boys and Girls Club program (Schinke et al., 2000), whose curriculum included discussion, creative writing, leisure reading, and homework completion. The final study (Bergin et al., 1992) examined the Hilltop Emergent Literacy Project (HELP), which employed Sing, Spell, Read & Write, a scripted, phonics-based direct instruction model.

### **Literacy-related outcomes**

The studies all showed positive results, but with varying degrees of confidence. As mentioned previously, five of the studies showed statistically significant results and eight showed positive trends, but were not statistically significant.

The five statistically significant studies obviously have stronger outcomes than the others, but they still need to be interpreted with caution. For example, the evaluation of San Diego's 6 to 6 program (Hoffman, 2001) did not include a comparison group. It is clear that 57 percent of participants increased their SAT-9 reading scores over a year while involved with the program. However, without a comparison group, it is not known if these increases were greater than those of other students not involved in the program. The study of the 5th Dimension program (Blanton et al., 2003), while showing positive gains for participants compared to non-participants, used an assessment that is not credible, according to other researchers, and is so specifically focused (comprehension of written directions) that it is difficult to interpret the findings very broadly or with much confidence.

Two of the studies in this group only had significant results for certain students included in the study. The Memphis County Schools evaluation results were only significant for third-grade students, and were strongest for students who had at least 80 percent attendance in the program (Ross et al., 1996). The LA's BEST evaluation (Huang et al., 2000) showed similar results with language redesignation rates being significant only for sixth- and eighth-grade students. This evaluation study also found that students with high



program attendance significantly improved in reading and language arts (as measured by standardized tests) over students with low program attendance.

The evaluation of Foundations, Inc. showed very strong results, with participants significantly improving in reading scores from pre- to posttest and significantly improving overall compared with a non-participant comparison group (Klein & Bolus, 2002). It is interesting to note that younger students (first and second grade) showed larger improvements than older students (third–fifth grade).

The eight studies that showed positive trends but were not statistically significant also vary in terms of strength of design and confidence with which the results can be interpreted. A few of the studies are primarily descriptive in nature, lacking a comparison group. For example, the Comic Book Project (Bitz, 2003) seemed to have an impact on participants in a variety of ways relating to literacy (increased vocabulary, spend more time reading for fun, like to write own stories), but without a comparison group it is difficult to extend the interpretation of the findings beyond the program. Also, the YET evaluation (Hangley & McClanahan, 2002) used no control group and focused on implementation rather than outcomes. However, a reading assessment was used and participants who consistently attended showed improvement, with students who attended longer showing greater gains.

A few studies had mixed results. For example, the KidzLit Evaluation showed gains in participants' overall amount of reading and reading efficacy, but did not show gains in vocabulary development and also lacked a comparison group (Developmental Studies Center, 2003). The TASC evaluation, using an extensive treatment and control group, found gains in reading and language arts only at some of the sites involved in the study (Reisner et al., 2004). The Urban School Initiative School Age Child Care Project evaluation included kindergarten to eighth grade participants, but only fourth- and sixth-graders exceeded the statewide percentages of students meeting proficiency standards in reading and writing (Johnson et al., 1999).

The Boys and Girls Clubs evaluation relied primarily on self-report measures, which are limiting (Schinke et al., 2000). The study included three participation groups (participants receiving educational enhancements, participants not receiving educational enhancements, and non-participants) and found modest improvements for participants receiving the educational enhancements. A 30-month follow-up was conducted, however, which adds credibility to the findings. The HELP program used a control group, but with a sample size of only 24 students, the findings are difficult to apply outside the particular program. Participants scored higher on standardized tests after participation than non-



participants and, as with the Boys and Girls Club study, a follow-up conducted at 16 months reinforced the positive results (Bergin et al., 1992).

The Virtual Y evaluation (Foley & Eddins, 2001) used a control group that was significantly different from the participant group before the program, therefore limiting the confidence in the results. Regression studies did show that the program contributed to improved reading skills, but these data were only available for fourth-grade students. Means comparisons showed that post-program differences in reading skill were not statistically significant between the two groups.

Overall, this group of studies showed positive results for participating students, but due to design weaknesses and mixed results, it is difficult to make overarching conclusions about the effect of these programs on students' literacy development. However, it is clear that these programs are benefiting students in some way, even if participants are not being compared to non-participants or if the results are not statistically significant.

## **Summary and Interpretation**

The literature review conducted by the NWREL staff underscores the fact that the research base on literacy enrichment in afterschool programs is still quite limited. Further, the studies that do exist, included in this review, have limitations that make it difficult to draw very strong conclusions from them. For example, some of the studies with strong designs and statistically significant findings (Morris et al., 1990) had very small sample sizes. Others (Bitz, 2003; Developmental Studies Center, 2003; Hangley & McClanahan, 2002; Hoffman, 2001; Johnson et al., 1999; Reisner et al., 2004) showed positive results but lacked a comparison group.

In addition, all the programs and curricula studied approach literacy differently and use different measures to determine impact on students. The scope of the studies varied greatly, with some focused on the entire nation (James-Burdumy et al., 2005) or a statewide initiative (University of California, Irvine, 2001), and others on a single-site program (Bergin et al., 1992; Morris et al., 1990). Programs studied also ranged in size from very large programs in major metropolitan regions (Hoffman, 2001; Huang et al., 2000; Klein & Bolus, 2002) to a program in a single rural middle school (Leslie, 1998).

Overall, however, the extant body of research provides enough positive findings to indicate that afterschool literacy enrichment does have benefits for participants' reading achievement. Some studies, in particular, demonstrated stronger gains for struggling students (Leslie, 1998; Prenovost, 2001; University of California, Irvine, 2001) and those



who attended afterschool programming at higher rates (Hangley & McClanahan, 2002; Huang et al., 2000; Prenovost, 2001; University of California, Irvine, 2001).

While the practices included in NWREL's literacy interim materials—reading aloud, book clubs and discussion, dramatic play, writing, and one-on-one and small group tutoring—are all in evidence in these studies, none of the studies makes strong causal links between specific activities and the positive outcomes they found for children and youth. The site visits conducted by the National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning provide further illumination, confirming that these practices are widely used in programs shown by the data to be effectively achieving academic results for children and youth. It would, however, be beneficial to the field if further research in this area—conducted by the Partnership and others in the field—focused more specifically on literacy enrichment practices and their direct impact on academic achievement.



## RELEVANT RESEARCH ON LITERACY PRACTICES

A significant body of research does exist in the field of literacy instruction in general and relating to the literacy practices included in the Interim Materials. Due to the limitation of research linking specific literacy practices to outcomes in afterschool programs, NWREL has consulted research in the general field of literacy for guidance. Specific literacy practices included in the Interim Materials have been found to benefit student learning and acquisition of literacy skills. As a result, we have included a brief discussion here of three of these practices: reading aloud, dramatization, and book discussion.

Initially, research studies were included in this discussion that relate to the specific practices and show outcomes, such as a study that shows the effect of participation in a drama program on students' reading comprehension (Rose, Parks, & Androes, 2000). Other key research and reports in the field were added that relate to the practices and add value to the discussion. For example, *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read* (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001), is considered an important document in the field, summarizing the findings of the National Reading Panel.

As mentioned previously, the discussion that follows on reading aloud, dramatization, and book discussion is not a comprehensive literature review, but rather a summary of some of the most relevant research and key reports that enhance our understanding of these practices and support their use in afterschool programs.

### Reading Aloud

Reading aloud models fluent expressive reading; provides exposure to new concepts and different types of literature; and enhances students' listening, comprehension, and critical thinking skills.

Research indicates that reading aloud is the foundation for literacy development. The joint position statement adopted by the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000) cites research revealing that in the preschool years, "the single most important activity for ... reading success appears to be *reading aloud to children*" (p. 6, emphasis in original). It recommends that children be read to on a daily basis throughout the primary grades.

Reading aloud provides children with a demonstration of phrased, fluent reading, reveals the rewards of reading, and develops the listener's interest in books and desire to be a reader (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Calkins, 1997; Fountas & Pinnell,



1996). It exposes less able readers to the same rich and engaging books that fluent readers read on their own, and entices them to become better readers.

A report based on the findings of the National Reading Panel, *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read* (Armbruster et al., 2001), asserts:

Hearing a model of fluent reading is not the only benefit of reading aloud to children. Reading to children also increases their knowledge of the world, their vocabulary, their familiarity with written language (“book language”), and their interest in reading. (p. 19)

The report also points out the relationship between reading aloud and vocabulary growth, stating:

Children learn word meanings from listening to adults read to them. Reading aloud is particularly helpful when the reader pauses during reading to define an unfamiliar word and, after reading, engages the child in a conversation about the book. Conversations about books help children to learn new words and concepts and to relate them to their prior knowledge and experience. (Armbruster et al., p. 25)

The Home-School Study of Language and Literacy Development found that reading books aloud offers particularly rich opportunities for vocabulary growth “because there are two sources of words: the words in the text of the book and the words spoken by the mother [teacher] in discussing the book with her child” (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). Including some level of child-involved analytical talk during the read-aloud was highly correlated with vocabulary development (Dickinson & Smith, 1994). Dickinson and Smith also make some conclusions about the role of book choice. They found that read-aloud approaches that relied on books with limited vocabulary and plot did not show the same strong correlation to vocabulary development as the other approaches. They noted that “a steady diet of books with predictable text may not be optimal.”

Also pointing to the value of conversation, Morrow (1990) asserts that “the act of reading to children is valuable, but of equal importance are the methods, environmental influences, attitudes, and interactive behaviors that occur during reading which could be crucial to the actual enhancement of literacy development” (p. 2).

Morrow investigated the effect of small-group story readings on kindergarten children. The children were from six classrooms in one urban school, identified as from lower



middle to lower socioeconomic levels, with 60 percent belonging to minority groups. They were randomly selected into the experimental and control groups.

The children were divided into groups of three and a research assistant read one story to them each week for 11 weeks. The research assistants were instructed to use three types of interactive behaviors designed to elicit student responses: managing, prompting, and supporting and informing. Children in the control group also met with a research assistant in groups of three but instruction was focused on teaching prescribed lessons from the teacher's manual.

Children in the experimental group asked more questions, made more comments, and responded to what other children said. They made significantly more responses that dealt with meaning (particularly in the areas of detail, interpretation, drawing from one's experience, prediction, and narration), story structure, print, and illustrations than students in the control group. Children in the experimental group also scored higher on a probed recall test of comprehension. Morrow concludes that reading to children in small groups increases their verbal participation, comprehension, and the complexity of verbal interchange. According to Morrow, the findings imply:

- Storybook reading in small groups provides a cooperative, social atmosphere in which adults and children interact with and learn from each other. It seems to encourage respect for what others have to say, and diversity of responses apparently leads to additional learning. (p. 13)
- Noting the children's capability for interpretive responses, Morrow suggests that teachers need to lead discussions on interpretive levels, "a departure from typical early reading activities which tend to stress the mechanics of reading more than the meaning, or which concentrate on meaning only at a literal level" (p. 14).

In an experimental study, Feitelson, Kita, and Goldstein (1986) investigated how reading a series-format story with many volumes to disadvantaged first-graders affected their decoding and comprehension abilities. Five classrooms in one school in Haifa, Israel, were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. Teachers in the three experimental classes were to read for at least 20 minutes a day, five times a week, for six months. Teachers in the two control classes were asked not to read aloud any more than usual.

The read-alouds were well-received by the students, and the teachers noticed that students developed more interest in reading. For example, many students persuaded their parents to buy them books from the series: In the end, 31 students in the experimental



class owned 45 books from the series, compared to nine books owned by 57 students in the control classes. Despite the students' interest, two of the experimental classes eventually had to drop out of the study because the teachers felt the time spent on read-alouds was interfering with the regular curriculum. In addition, control teachers increased their amount of reading to children, although not every day.

Although the experimental groups had scored significantly lower than the control groups on the vocabulary pretest, they significantly outperformed them on measures of decoding and reading comprehension in the posttests. When accounting for pretest differences, gains for the experimental groups were significantly greater than for the controls on active use of language measures (causality, story structure, accuracy, different words, and sentence length). The researchers conclude that listening to mediated reading of action stories had a positive effect on a range of interrelated comprehension skills, decoding ability, and active use of language measures. Specifically, they suggest that listening to stories read aloud contributes to students' ability to build an overall story schema.

## **Story and Literature Dramatizations**

Story and literature dramatizations give students an opportunity to bring a piece of literature to life. Acting out characters' parts engages students while building memorization, fluency, and comprehension skills.

From very early ages, children have enjoyed and used dramatic play as a bridge to the world of literacy. Rowe (1998) observes that book-related dramatic play is an important part of the literacy-learning process for two- and three-year-old children and suggests the possibility that children may use dramatic play as a means of exploring the content of books. Stone and Christie (1996) note that primary-age children engage in substantial amounts of literacy activity together during sociodramatic play. They suggest that literacy-enriched play environments for mixed-age learners can facilitate literacy activity and cooperative helping behaviors.

For younger children, both spontaneous story acting and teacher-guided story acting help children connect literacy with drama. Acting out stories, both child- and adult-authored:

- Brings stories to life—enhancing story recall, imagination, and emergent story reading
- Encourages the creative use of language
- Gives children the opportunity to sort out problems and concerns





- Helps children make the transition from oral to written language (Berk & Winsler, 1995)

As one way to dramatize stories, readers' theatre provides an authentic opportunity for students to reread text and practice fluency. The report, based on findings of the National Reading Panel, *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read*, asserts that to help students become fluent readers, they should repeatedly read passages aloud with guidance. Fluency is important because it frees students to comprehend what they read. The report states:

In readers' theatre, students rehearse and perform a play for peers or others. They read from scripts that have been derived from books that are rich in dialogue. Students play characters who speak lines or a narrator who shares necessary background information. Readers' theatre provides readers with a legitimate reason to reread text and to practice fluency. Readers' theatre also promotes cooperative interaction with peers and makes the reading task appealing. (Armbruster et al., 2001, p. 21)

Readers' theatre has been shown to engage struggling readers. Rinehart (1999) conducted an action research study to examine whether readers' theatre would enhance reading abilities when used "as a literacy activity within an integrated approach aiming to increase real reading opportunities for children at risk and also to enhance these children's interest and confidence" (p. 72).

Rinehart studied a summer reading tutorial in which 22 graduate students in a master's reading program worked with 22 mainly first- and second-graders identified as having moderate to profound reading problems. Children and tutors worked together for 16–20 sessions during a five-week period. Each session included an individual tutorial as well as group time, which was open to read-alouds and readers' theatre. The graduate students made many of the instructional decisions with input from their professor and instruction was "geared to individual needs, starting with what a child knows." They followed J.D. Cooper's guidelines for readers' theatre, which direct the teacher and student to choose literature together; read, reread, and discuss the story; and prepare, practice, and rehearse until the student is fluent.

Feedback from tutors and children revealed that many enjoyed the group time spent listening to other tutors and children perform readers' theatre, as well as opportunities to perform themselves. Students who hadn't thought of themselves as readers were able to experience fluent reading that built their confidence as readers. Rinehart notes that "one of the unique contributions of reader's theater ... is that it offers an integrated language



event with an authentic communication purpose ... students were excited about reading their scripts because they could and because someone wanted to listen” (p. 87).

A causal link between classroom drama (enacting texts) and a variety of verbal areas was found in a meta-analysis by Harvard University’s Project Zero’s Reviewing Education and the Arts Project (REAP). The meta-analysis included 80 reports that compared students who enacted texts with those who read the same texts but did not enact them. Medium effect sizes were found between classroom drama and oral understanding/recall of stories, reading readiness, reading achievement, oral language, and writing. A large effect size was found with written understanding/recall of stories. And a small link was found with vocabulary, though the small effect size means that the link cannot be generalized to new studies. The authors conclude:

Drama not only helped children’s verbal skills with respect to the texts enacted; it also helped children’s verbal skills when applied to new, non-enacted texts. Thus, drama helps to build verbal skills that transfer to new materials. Such an effect has great value for education: verbal skill is highly valued, adding such drama techniques costs little in terms of effort or expense, and a high proportion of children are influenced by such curricular changes. (Winner & Hetland, 2000, p. 4)

Rose, Parks, and Androes (2000) studied an approach that used drama as a vehicle to instruct reading. The participants for the study were drawn from four Chicago-area public elementary schools that previously worked with Whirlwind, a nonprofit arts education organization that developed the reading program under study—Reading Comprehension Through Drama (RCD). The schools were large and served populations that were primarily African American or Hispanic, in low-income neighborhoods.

Four fourth-grade classrooms were randomly chosen and randomly assigned to either the experimental or control group. For 10 weeks, the experimental group was taught reading using the RCD program, while the control group used traditional text-based methods. Comparisons were based on pre- and posttests using the reading comprehension score from the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS).

The treatment consisted of two, one-hour sessions each week of in-class work with a performing artist. The students’ primary work was to dramatize a piece of narrative text in short skits. The RCD program was divided into four stages: story, sequence, perception, and evaluation. Breaking stories into their various elements allowed students to better understand the different pieces, or propositional elements, of the story. The first stage of the program required the students to read a text, create symbols to illustrate the



various story elements (e.g., what, who, where) and then retell the story to another student using the symbols. In the second stage, students were asked to identify the beginning, middle, and end of the story, and then represent that in a three-panel illustration. In the third stage, students had to act out a scene using their five senses to illustrate possible sensations experienced by the story characters. Finally, students explored ideas of interpretation, critique, and opinion, and were interviewed as if they were characters from the story.

After controlling for differences in pre-test ITBS scores, reading grade equivalent scores for the experimental group increased significantly more than for the control group. On the factual comprehension subscale of the ITBS, the experimental group improved significantly more than the control group. On the inferential comprehension subscale, no significant differences were found between the two groups. The researchers concluded that drama-based reading instruction can improve reading skills more than traditional approaches.

## **Book Discussion Groups and Literature Circles**

Book discussion groups—sometimes called literature circles—engage students in conversations about their reading. This helps them extend their reading skills, learn to analyze different kinds of literature, develop opinions about literature, and find evidence from the text to support their opinions.

As informal book groups for adults have become increasingly popular, so have book discussion groups and literature circles in school and afterschool programs. In 1996, the national Standards for the English Language Arts, issued by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association, endorsed literature-based, collaborative classrooms where students take increasing responsibility for choosing, reading, and discussing books (and other texts). Literature circles were cited as an example of exemplary instruction, giving another boost to their popularity.

Book discussions and literature circles were among the practices found in Spielberg and Halpern's (2002) case studies of 16 afterschool programs identified as having exemplary or innovative approaches. In afterschool programs, literature circles provide a chance for students to engage in extended discussion about the books they read. Students can also reflect on and respond to the connections between those books and others they have read, their own personal experiences, and the world around them. However, the authors comment that book discussion groups and literature circles may be difficult for afterschool staff to implement without experience and skills in leading discussions.



A literature review by Gambrell (1996) suggests that small-group discussion promotes deeper understanding of text, higher level thinking, and improved communication skills among students. Gambrell concludes:

The research on small group discussion in elementary classrooms supports the notion that such interaction engages students in the co-construction of knowledge, advances student learning, and provides opportunities for students to learn important interpersonal skills while conversing, interpreting, and negotiating in active and constructive ways. There is no one method or approach for implementing the ideal discussion; instead, research suggests that teachers have important choices to make. (p. 35)

Indicating the effectiveness of discussion in promoting readers' deeper understanding of text, Palinscar (1987) and Palinscar and Brown (1984) (cited in Gambrell, 1996) have found that students in reciprocal teaching groups outperform comparison groups on reading comprehension. Morrow and Smith (1990, cited in Gambrell, 1996) also found that kindergartners who engaged in small- group discussions of stories that were read aloud had superior story recall compared to students who discussed the story one-to-one with the teacher or who worked in larger groups.

In their quasi-experimental study designed to increase students' critical thinking skills, Hudgins and Edelman (1986) found that 60 fourth- and fifth-graders in 10 classrooms who participated in small-group discussions in which they were encouraged to take responsibility for thinking and talking provided more supporting evidence for conclusions than did a control group. Studies by Almasi (1995), Villaume and Hopkins (1995), and Green and Wallet (1981) (all cited in Gambrell, 1996) show further evidence that student-led discussions encourage higher level thinking and problem solving.

Research by Almasi (1995, cited in Gambrell, 1996) indicates that students' communication skills improve as they become more experienced in small-group discussions. In addition, Eeds and Wells's (1989) findings support the belief that through book study groups, students can participate in enriching conversations that foster their understanding of literature, even when discussion groups only meet twice a week for 30 minutes and where the teacher-leader is a novice with no teaching experience.

In their non-experimental study, Eeds and Wells investigated four literature study groups of fifth- and sixth-grade students. Of particular interest is that the study groups were led by undergraduate education students who had no prior experience working with children. The study group leaders were encouraged to participate "as group members working with the children to construct meaning rather than acting as all-knowing interpreters of the



text.” Teacher-leaders were discouraged from preparing a set of explicit comprehension questions, letting the meaning emerge from group discussion; however, they were encouraged to capitalize on a teachable moment if they noticed one.

The study groups, comprising children of varying reading levels and abilities, met twice a week for 30 minutes. Audiotapes of individual study groups were collected during a four- to five-week period. An analysis of tape transcripts revealed that children practiced what has traditionally been called reading comprehension skills, even though teachers made no efforts to pose traditional comprehension questions. The researchers noted that the study groups participated in four different kinds of talk about the literature: constructing simple meaning; sharing personal stories; sharing in active inquiry (interpreting, hypothesizing, predicting, and verifying); and evaluating. Also noted were particular instances where children who did not understand the reading at the beginning of a discussion, improved their comprehension after the discussion with their peers and teacher.

Dickinson and Smith (1994) suggest that book discussions can affect vocabulary development. They followed 25 children who met the income requirements of Head Start and who were either enrolled in Head Start or a similar subsidized program for low-income children. The children were four years old at the beginning of the study and took a battery of language/literacy development tests at the age of five.

Based on classroom observations, the researchers found that teachers’ oral book reading styles could be grouped into three approaches: co-constructive, didactic-interactive, and performance-oriented. Each approach is characterized by different types and amounts of talk before, during, and after the book reading session.

The co-constructive approach is characterized by substantial talk during book reading and limited talk before and after. Teachers and students using this approach view book reading as enjoyable with discussion being integral to that enjoyment. The didactic-interactive approach is described as having “limited talk, group recall of familiar or highly predictable text, recall of recently read text, and a high proportion of talk dealing with organizational matters.” The performance-oriented approach is one in which book reading is to be enjoyed as a performance with limited interruption. Most talk occurs before and after the reading. The researchers note that “teachers adopting this style showed no special skill reading in an expressive fashion suggest[ing] that it is the teacher’s interpretation of the nature of the event rather than her performance skills that determine if she will use this approach.”

The researchers found that “variation in how teachers in typical early childhood classrooms discuss books with four-year-olds in full-group settings is strongly related to



long-term growth in vocabulary development and story comprehension skills.” In particular, they found a high correlation between child-involved analytical talk and vocabulary development. “Apparently, to engage fully in the type of analytical thought that is most beneficial, children need to become part of a teacher-student dialogue by actively contributing or by attending to the responses of others,” they reported. Dickinson and Smith also note that this finding could suggest that several overall approaches to reading books may support children’s literacy growth, provided that they include at least some child-involved analytical talk.

A wide range of research showing the effectiveness of cooperative learning also provides support for using book discussions. A quasi-experimental study by Klingner, Vaughn, and Schumm (1998) looked at the effectiveness of a cooperative learning approach designed to foster strategic reading in three fourth-grade classrooms. In an 11-day experimental condition, researchers taught students to apply reading comprehension strategies while reading social studies texts. The students spent seven of these 45-minute class sessions in student-led groups. Results from a standardized reading test indicated that students in the experimental group made significantly greater gains in reading comprehension than students who received traditional teacher-led instruction.

Most important, book discussion groups are student-centered: they encourage students to choose what they read and to lead their own discussions for maximum engagement. A report by the RAND Reading Study Group states, “Social interaction in homes and classrooms as well as the larger sociocultural context influence motivation and participation in literate communities and help construct students’ identities as readers, thus influencing their access to text.” Reading motivation is highly correlated with reading proficiency (Snow, 2002). According to Biancarosa and Snow (2004), “A lack of incentive and engagement also explains why even skilled readers and writers often do not progress in reading and academic achievement in middle and high schools. The proportion of students who are not engaged or motivated by their school experiences grows at every grade level and reaches epidemic proportions in high school” (p. 9).

Several of these studies comment on the influence of text type. Dickinson and Smith (1994) found that a book with limited vocabulary and plot, which was observed in use with the didactic-interactional approach, did not show the same strong correlation to vocabulary development as the other two approaches. They note that “a steady diet of books with predictable text may not be optimal.” Eeds and Wells (1989) also wonder if the exceptional quality of a text may lead students to higher levels of dialogue and richer insights and generalizations. A study by Leal (1992, cited in Gambrell, 1996) found that informational storybooks enhanced discussion more than narrative or expository texts.



## CONCLUSION

The research on these literacy practices—reading aloud, dramatization, and book discussion—provides strong support for their inclusion in afterschool programs. Although the available research on literacy practices in the afterschool context does not provide obvious results regarding their benefit in that context, their general benefits are well established.

In addition to helping students to acquire literacy skills, these practices are also transferable to the afterschool context. As discussed in the introduction of this document, when designing academic enrichment programs in afterschool, other factors must be considered in addition to the academic element. For example, activities in afterschool programs must be engaging for students and not duplicate what is happening during the school day. Afterschool activities must also address the needs of youth and expand on their learning in ways that are relevant to them. These literacy practices offer the opportunity to accomplish all these tasks, while simultaneously strengthening students' literacy skills.

As research continues in the field of academic enrichment in afterschool, it is necessary to continue to consider the nature of the afterschool context. Literacy instruction and skill development in afterschool programs can not truly be understood without considering other critical factors such as engagement, relevancy, and not duplicating the experience of the school day for participating students. The quality of program implementation and staff are also critical factors to consider. Given the understanding of the afterschool context, research and practice suggest there is great potential for afterschool programs to provide a supportive role in the development of students' literacy skills.



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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Annotated Bibliographies of Studies Included in Literature Review**

**Bergin, D.A., Hudson, L.M., Chryst, C.F., & Resetar, M. (1992). An afterschool intervention program for educationally disadvantaged young children. *The Urban Review*, 24( 3) 203–217.**

The Hilltop Emergent Literacy Project (HELP) is a research and demonstration project initiated by University of Toledo faculty members in collaboration with the local public school to test the assertion that educationally disadvantaged children benefit from increased instructional time, cultural compatibility, and perceptions of control. This voluntary afterschool program served poor, mostly African American, kindergarten to third-graders who reside in a subsidized apartment complex near the university. The program used the Sing, Spell, Read & Write curriculum, a phonics-based direct instruction model that includes “child-centered, culturally sensitive teaching methods and models.” Literacy activities included writing stories from scratch (from interesting pictures or prose prompts), playing games that require reading, and practicing handwriting. Additionally, HELP staff read aloud to the group, and form children into small groups for activities.

The study used a quasi-experimental design. The treatment group subjects were 12 kindergartners who lived in the apartment complex and attended HELP, and the control group subjects were 12 kindergartners who attended the same elementary school and who lived in a similar subsidized housing complex. All subjects were in two classes in the same school, equally distributed between two teachers, with about equal numbers of control and experimental subjects in each classroom. Data were collected from the MRT (Metropolitan Readiness Test) administered in early spring of kindergarten, the MAT (Metropolitan Achievement Test) administered in early spring of first grade, and school report card data, including grades; ratings on study skills and general development were also analyzed.

After four months of the program, HELP participants had higher standardized test scores than the control group for the content taught in the program, though both the treatment and control groups’ scores were still below the national average. After 16 months, HELP students were doing better than the control group and were at or above national norms for the content taught (language and reading). Field interviews indicated a perception of positive changes in pride, self-worth, and social responsibility.



While these findings are positive, the study is limited by the small size of the treatment group.

**Bitz, M.D. (2003). *The Comic Book Project: Pilot assessment report*. New York, NY: Center for Educational Pathways.**

The Comic Book Project (CBP) focuses on reinforcing urban youth's literacy skills through students' development of original comic books. Seven hundred thirty-three fourth- through eighth-graders in 33 afterschool sites in New York City participated between October and December of 2002. The sites identified most children as low-performing and more than half as English language learners.

This non-experimental study relied on document review, interviews, focus groups, observation, and surveys to assess the effectiveness of CBP. In addition, three independent consultants assessed students' work in light of New York State Learning Standards in English language arts, creating testing procedures and rubrics that closely align with mandated statewide achievement tests.

While students' scores are reported, the lack of a control group or general comparison with statewide averages limits the meaningfulness of these results. In addition, the research was conducted by the program founder. In surveys, however, both participating students and staff reported the following increases: The young people knew more words, liked to read, became better readers, spent more time reading for fun, needed less help with reading, liked to read out loud, liked to write their own stories, spent more time writing for fun, liked to write, and needed less help with writing. Though non-experimental, this study supports the belief that student-directed writing and artistic expression can support the development of literacy skills.

**Blanton, W.E., Menendez, R., Moorman, G.B., & Pacifici, L.C. (2003). Learning to comprehend written directions through participation in a mixed activity system. *Early Education & Development, 14*(3), 313–333.**

The 5th Dimension program operates in 40 sites throughout the world and is based on theoretical principles derived from the work of Vygotsky. Children participate in a number of multimedia activities using educational software, computer games, activities for searching the Internet, and tools for computer-mediated and video-mediated conferencing, as well as some non-computer activities such as jigsaw puzzles and board games. Children develop goals for engaging in the activities and are supported by adults, university undergraduates, and their peers as they select activities and work at their own



pace. The completion of each activity requires reflection and includes writing to others, writing in a personal journal, putting information in a hints book, making a video, or creating artwork representing the strategies used and knowledge gained in the activity. An essential skill for participation in the program is the ability to interpret and follow instructions.

This study explored the effects of participation in 5th Dimension on children's ability to comprehend written directions. The participants were 63 middle-class white children between eight and 10 years of age who participated in 5th Dimension sites located in six elementary schools in a school district in a Southeastern state. Participants were put into one of three groups—extensive participation, minimal participation, and non-participation—based on the number of sessions they had attended, and matched by grade level, homeroom, gender, and reading instructional level.

The researchers used the cloze procedure to develop a pre- and posttest of four paragraphs selected from the directions for a computer game that participants had not played before. The tests were administered immediately before and after playing the game. Analysis of pretest scores revealed no significant difference among the three groups. Analysis of variance of the posttest scores showed significance ( $p < .005$ ), with the extensive participation group performing significantly better than the minimal and non-participation groups.

According to the authors, one implication of this study is that children can master school-based literacy skills, such as comprehending written directions, through participation in informal afterschool learning environments where there is no explicit skill-oriented instruction. However, the use of the cloze test as a measure of comprehension is problematic, and has been discredited by some researchers (Shanahan, Kamil, & Tobin, 1983). Another limitation of this non-experimental study was the voluntary nature of program participation, meaning that children who participated extensively may have differed from other children on a number of variables.

**Developmental Studies Center. (2003). *AfterSchool KidzLit evaluation*. Oakland, CA: Author.**

AfterSchool KidzLit is an academic enrichment program for grades K–8 designed to develop reading motivation, capacity to read, thinking skills and prosocial development. Activities include reading aloud, discussion, writing, role-playing, and games.



The internal evaluation used a quasi-experimental design, comparing pre- and posttest data for second- and fourth-graders in eight afterschool sites operated by LA's BEST that employ the KidzLit curriculum. Reading-related attitudes and behaviors, vocabulary development, and social attitudes and behaviors were measured.

Findings point to increases in the overall amount of reading and reading efficacy (students' feelings about their reading ability). While there were no measurable increases in vocabulary development, students at one site that had high-quality implementation experienced significant vocabulary gains, pointing to the importance of implementation and professional development for afterschool staff. Youth workers at the sites reported that students exhibited a greater ability to think critically and express ideas verbally.

The study's limitations include the lack of a control group for comparison and the fact that the evaluation was conducted by the curriculum's creators, the Developmental Studies Center.

**Foley, E.M., & Eddins, G. (2001). Preliminary analysis of Virtual Y after-school program participants' patterns of school attendance and academic performance, Final evaluation report, program year 1999–2000. New York, NY: Fordham University, National Center for Schools and Communities.**

The third in a series of evaluations of Virtual Y, this evaluation's purpose is to examine the effect of the Virtual Y program on participants' academic progress. Virtual Y is an initiative that brings the YMCA together with public elementary schools to provide youth with safe, fun-filled, and challenging activities between the hours of 3 and 6 pm. It offers support for classroom learning by extending the school day and helping children achieve reading proficiency through literacy-based activities.

This evaluation has a quasi-experimental design. Virtual Y students were compared with non-participants in the same grade levels at the same schools. Only Virtual Y participants who attended the program for at least 49 days, who had not been left back the prior year, and who were not in Project Read (a supplemental reading program) were included in the program group. Comparison group students were also not enrolled in Project Read. Data collected included student attendance records and standardized reading and math test scores.

Appropriate data on reading were available only for fourth-grade students. Means comparisons, taking into account students' demographic features, prior reading skill, and school attendance, showed that post-program differences in reading skill between children in the two groups were not statistically significant. Improved student outcomes





in reading that did exist were associated by the evaluators with two factors: hiring staff with four-year degrees and maintaining 10:1 student-to-staff ratios.

This study is of limited relevance to our purposes, as the primary indicators measured focused on programmatic and staffing/training aspects, rather than literacy-related activities. Additionally, the evaluators stated that the analysis may have underestimated the impact of afterschool programming, as students in the comparison group were likely to have been involved in alternative afterschool programs.

**Gentilcore, J. C. (2002). The effect of an after-school academic intervention service on a New York State eighth grade English language arts assessment: A case study (Doctoral dissertation, Hofstra University, 2002). Dissertation Abstracts International, 63(06), 2059.**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between participation in an English language arts Academic Intervention Services (AIS) program and eighth-grade student performance on the New York State English Language Arts Assessment. The quasi-experimental, control-treatment post-intervention study was conducted over two years. Participants were eighth-grade students enrolled in a Long Island middle school in 1999–2000 and 2000–2001 ( $n = 114$ ).

The first-year students were identified for the program based on a pretest that included reading passages with multiple-choice questions, reading and listening passages with written responses, and independent writing samples. The second-year students were identified through pretest data as “very strongly recommended” ( $n = 24$ ), “strongly recommended” ( $n = 23$ ), and “recommended” ( $n = 20$ ). Only the “very strongly recommended” participated; the other two groups served as the control group ( $n = 43$ ) for both years of the study.

In 1999–2000, Academic Intervention Services were administered after school. Students were assigned to one of four groups of approximately 25 students, each meeting twice a week for five weeks. A certified teacher worked with each group, concentrating on the main areas of the ELA Assessment and some additional skill development in reading comprehension and writing, using a textbook that was also used in the school day. In 2000–2001, AIS were administered to one group of 19 students four days a week for two weeks using similar content and materials.

The quasi-experimental design incorporated the following variables: ELA Achievement scores; AIS participation; Cognitive Skills Index (CSI); California Achievement Test (CAT) scores; sex; and socioeconomic status. Overall, the study revealed no significant



differences between control and treatment groups, indicating that limited duration afterschool “classes” similar in format and content to the school day are not effective in improving student achievement.

**Hangley, B., Jr., & McClanahan, W.S. (2002). *Mustering the armies of compassion in Philadelphia*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.**

In March 2000 Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) developed an out-of-school-time literacy model, Youth Education for Tomorrow (YET) Centers, to complement in-school reading instruction. YET centers operate in churches and faith-based institutions in Philadelphia with support from P/PV. Approximately 1,000 children were served in the period examined by this study. They participated in four literacy activities, offered four days a week: oral language/vocabulary activity; teacher reading aloud to students; student reading; student writing.

This quasi-experimental and non-experimental study relied on interviews/focus groups, observation, secondary source/data review, and detailed teacher assessments of student progress. Students were administered the Informal Reading Inventory (IRI), a standardized reading test measuring decoding and comprehension skills initially to set a baseline and again 90 days later.

While the purpose of the study was to measure the effectiveness of faith-based organizations in implementing the YET model, one of the categories examined—student results—is most relevant. (Others were recruitment, retention, and requirements.) In terms of academic outcomes, students who consistently attended YET improved an average of 1.4 grade levels between their first and second IRI tests. The longer students attended, the greater the gains. Centers with an average attendance of more than 100 days had larger gains (1.9 grade levels on average). The effect of attendance remained important even after individual characteristics, such as race, gender, age, and low-income status were considered.

These results reinforce the assumption that regular afterschool attendance and engagement in activities such as reading aloud, oral language activities, and writing lead to improved literacy skills for participants.

**Hoffman, J. (2001). *San Diego After School Regional Consortium: Academic indicator report, 1999–2000*. San Diego, CA: Hoffman, Clark.**



San Diego's "6 to 6" Extended School Day Program is designed to provide access to high-quality, affordable enrichment programs before and after school to elementary and middle school students in the city of San Diego, California. The city operates 196 sites through contracts with 15 community-based organizations. In the 2000–2001 school year, approximately 25,000 students were served.

The academic component includes tutoring and mentoring, homework assistance, academic games, and performing arts, music, and drama. Students also engage in sports, recreation, and arts and crafts. Across all sites, the average time spent on each activity is homework (60 minutes); recreation (45 minutes); arts and games (35 minutes); tutoring and literacy (30 minutes).

The quasi-experimental study examined data from a random sample of program participants ( $n = 187$ ) collected prior to the program year (1999, baseline) and after the program year (2000). The final sample included 142 students in grades 4–8. Data collected included school attendance data and Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT-9) reading and math scores.

Fifty-seven percent of sampled students increased their SAT-9 reading score during the year and 54 percent increased SAT-9 math scores. In addition to statistically significant increases in SAT-9 reading scores, 64.3 percent of participants were above the 25th percentile in 1999 and 2000, a 9.8 percent increase.

This study shows promising results for participants' reading achievement. However, a primary limitation in interpreting the results is the lack of a comparison group. Although the participants experienced improvement in reading scores, it is not known how their reading scores compared to non-participants' reading scores and if their increases were greater than those of non-participants. Also, it is unclear what is included in the literacy piece of the program.

**Huang, D., Gribbons, B., Kim, K.S., Lee, C., & Baker, E.L. (2000). A decade of results: The impact of the LA's Best After School Enrichment Initiative on subsequent student achievement and performance. Los Angeles, CA: University of California, Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation.**

LA's BEST is a community-based afterschool enrichment program that has been operating in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) since 1988. LA's BEST offers a balance of education, enrichment, and recreation programming to K–5 students in schools with the highest educational needs.



This program evaluation focused on student achievement, utilizing a quasi-experimental design. LA's BEST participants in second through fifth grade in 1993–1994 were followed through the 1997–1998 school year along with a comparison group of LAUSD students who did not participate in the program. The participants were also grouped according to level of participation: high (75 percent days present), medium (26–74 percent days present), and low (less than 25 percent days present).

Students were assessed with the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) and the SAT-9. For students with long-term involvement in the program (at least 4 years), higher participation was significantly related to positive achievement on standardized tests of reading and language arts (and to attendance). Language redesignation rates also favored LA's BEST students when compared with non-LA's BEST students for the cohort analyzed.

These findings show that participation levels in afterschool programs can have a significant impact on program outcomes. Students who participated at higher levels over time experienced higher reading and language arts achievement as well as higher rates of school attendance. It may not be possible for students who participate at low levels or for short periods to experience similar outcomes, especially relating to academic achievement. These findings also support that engaging in afterschool activities that include an educational enrichment component can help raise students' achievement levels in reading and language arts.

**James-Burdumy, S., Dynarski, M., Moore, M., Deke, J., Mansfield, W., & Pistorino, C. (2005). *When schools stay open late: The national evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program: Final report*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.**

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) program is a federally-funded program providing afterschool programs for students who need them the most, targeting low-income and low-performing school districts across the nation.

The final report of the national evaluation of the program focused on elementary school students at a sample of 21st CCLC programs. (A previous report also included middle school students in the sample.) The evaluation utilized a randomized controlled field trial in which students were assigned to either a 21st CCLC ( $n = 1,258$ ) or to a control group ( $n = 1,050$ ). The control group students were allowed to attend other afterschool programs, but not 21st CCLC programs.



A majority of programs included in the study (86 percent) reported providing reading and writing instruction and 100 percent reported providing homework help. In addition to homework help, academic activities included direct instruction, educational technology practices, practice drills, worksheets and games, preparation for standardized tests, and enrichment activities with an academic focus. A majority of center directors also reported that improving academic performance was a goal of the program.

The evaluation found no impacts of the program on reading test scores or course grades in English. In the second year, however, students with lower test scores at the beginning of the program showed significantly greater gains than students with higher scores at the beginning.

The Mathematica evaluation of the 21st CCLC program has been scrutinized by many in the field. For our purposes, there are two main limitations to the study. Students who were not participating in the 21st CCLC program may have been involved in other afterschool programs or engaged in a variety of afterschool activities that could have promoted the outcomes looked at in this study. Also, the evaluation looks at achievement across the realm of programs, not necessarily by program focus. For example, some of the programs included in the study may focus on literacy, while others do not, potentially skewing outcomes related to academic performance in reading and English.

**Jefferson County Public Schools. (2002). *Tutorial Assistance Grant Program: 2001–2000*. Louisville, KY: Author.**

The Tutorial Assistance Grant Program is a tutoring program implemented in seven elementary schools and one community site during the 2001–2002 school year as part of the Reading Excellence Act grant. The program offered before and afterschool tutoring, Saturday Reading Camps, and Summer Reading Camps to 442 second- and third-grade students, selected on the basis of low performance on standardized reading tests.

Implementation of the tutoring program varied by site, but in general students received two hours of tutoring per week. Program components included word work, guided reading, community conversation, and writing activities. The program focused on student achievement in reading and aligned with the Reading Excellence Act grant.

The evaluation design was quasi-experimental, using a comparison group that was matched on grade level, free and reduced-price lunch status and baseline Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test total battery scores. Program students improved in all areas of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (comprehension, phonetics, vocabulary, and total battery). Program students demonstrated greater gains than the comparison group in



comprehension, vocabulary, and total battery. The highest gains for participants were made in the area of comprehension.

Although participants improved more than comparison group students in three of the four assessed areas, the difference was not significant. Comparison group students' reading scores also improved during the year. The program was targeted to low-performing students, however, so it is encouraging that these students are making gains in reading achievement. It is unclear how much of the improvement may be the result of the additional tutoring time, however. Overall, this program is more of a tutoring intervention program than an afterschool enrichment program.

**Johnson, L.J., Zorn, D., Williams, J., & Smith J. (1999). *Urban School Initiative School Age Child Care expansion: 1998–99 school-year program evaluation*. Cincinnati, OH: University of Cincinnati, College of Education, Evaluation Services Center.**

The Urban School Initiative School Age Child Care (SACC) Project provides resources to 125 centers in 17 Ohio urban school districts to develop and implement school-age child-care programs. Serving children in kindergarten through eighth grade, programs include innovative educational activities supporting or expanding on the school-day curriculum, daily homework help and tutoring, and an emphasis on academic enrichment in reading and other areas. Students have a choice of experiences each day and access to many educational/enrichment materials and supplies.

The 1998–1999 program evaluation focused on the differences SACC projects made in students, families, and communities, as well as whether indicators of quality were present in the programs. The data collected included school records on school attendance, grades, suspensions, promotions, expulsions, and standardized test scores. The evaluation used a non-experimental design, selecting 10 SACC sites based on their programmatic diversity.

The evaluation found that SACC fourth-graders and sixth-graders exceeded the statewide percentages of students meeting proficiency standards in reading and writing as measured by Ohio Proficiency Tests. Participating students had fewer school absences and tardies. For example, first-graders who had not been in SACC during kindergarten reduced the number of school days missed from an average of eight days during their kindergarten year to an average of three days during their first grade year. Eighth-graders who had not been in SACC during seventh grade reduced the average number of school days missed from 18 to 5. SACC students also received fewer suspensions and expulsions when



compared to the prior school year. Teachers and parents reported positive impacts on homework completed/turned in and classroom grades.

This evaluation supports the belief that students who participate in programs that emphasize academic enrichment, support/expand on the school day curriculum, include time for homework help and tutoring, and give students control over what experiences they participate in can have positive academic outcomes, such as meeting reading proficiency standards and improved school attendance. A major limitation of the study is that it cannot be determined if the many program components affected the outcomes differently.

**Klein, S.P., & Bolus, R. (2002). Improvements in math and reading scores of students who did and did not participate in the Foundations After School Enrichment Program during the 2001–2002 school year. Santa Monica, CA: Gansk & Associates.**

The Foundations, Inc. program has developed afterschool curricula that are literature-based and include study of high-quality texts and a variety of extension activities. Students learn by reading, writing, listening, and reasoning, and through hands-on activities. The curriculum is also aligned with national standards. The student-to-adult ratio in the program is approximately 10 to 1. Staff have prior experience working with children and teachers and program coordinators have associate's, bachelor's, or master's degrees in education or a related field.

The 2001–2002 program evaluation focused on student achievement on standardized tests among first- through fifth-grade students participating in Foundations, Inc. afterschool programs at 19 elementary schools in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Florida. The evaluation used a quasi-experimental design, comparing program participants ( $n = 406$ ) to students at seven of the 19 schools with comparable skills and background characteristics who were not in a Foundations program ( $n = 646$ ).

All students were administered the CTB/McGraw-Hill Cat-5 Reading Comprehension test in fall 2001 and spring 2002. Program participants experienced statistically significant improvements in reading scores between pretest and posttest ( $p < .001$ ). Foundations students also showed significantly greater overall average improvement in scale scores between the pretest and posttest than the non-Foundations comparison group ( $p < .001$ ). Younger children, especially those in first and second grades, tended to show larger improvements than older students.



This evaluation supports the belief that afterschool programs can help students strengthen reading skills with a curriculum that is literature-based and engaging as well as standards-based. The evaluation design was very strong, with the limitation of the control and treatment group not being randomly assigned.

**Leslie, A.V.L. (1998). The effects of an after-school tutorial program on the reading and mathematics achievement, failure rate, and discipline referral rate of students in a rural middle school (Doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia, 1998). Dissertation Abstracts International, 59(06), 1853.**

This study analyzed an afterschool tutoring program in a rural Georgia middle school (grades 6–8). Of 394 students in grades 6–8, 43 had been retained in their grade the year before this study began. Ninety percent of the student population qualified for the free/reduced-cost lunch program, and 99 percent were African American. The afterschool project ran for nine months from September to May (56 sessions total). Tutorial sessions were 1-1/2 hours long and offered twice a week. Students brought their own work to the sessions, with the first 30 minutes devoted to homework help, and the rest of the time spent on drill and practice of reading and math principles taught during the day.

The quasi-experimental study sought to determine what effects an afterschool program can have on reading and mathematics achievement (as measured by scores on the ITBS); the failure rate (as measured by scores of 69 or below on coursework at the end of a grading period); and the rate of discipline referrals (as measured by reports on unacceptable behavior).

One hundred sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students were identified as at risk based on measures (i.e., ITBS scores, poor achievement, failure in grade, and disciplinary problems) by the Board of Education and the local school system. Seventy-five of these students volunteered (with parental permission) for the tutorial program, and 39 of these students who attended regularly (50 or more sessions) served as the treatment group. Comparisons were made between the 39 regular attendees and the 25 students who were identified to participate, but did not.

Results indicated a significant increase in mean scores in reading on the ITBS and a lower failure rate for the 39 program participants compared to the 25 non-participants. Math scores and discipline referrals showed no significant difference between these two groups. The researcher concludes that an afterschool tutorial program can be an effective strategy to improve academic achievement, if implemented properly; provide individualized instruction that low-achieving students need; be a positive reinforcement





for classroom work; and frame the basis for a 21st Century Community Learning Center Program.

Limitations include the small sample size ( $n = 39$ ) and the fact that academic achievement measures were limited to ITBS scores and discipline referrals were limited to the 39 participants in the tutoring program.

**Morris, D., Shaw, B., & Perney, J. (1990). Helping low readers in Grades 2 and 3: An after-school volunteer tutoring program. *Elementary School Journal*, 91(2), 133–150.**

The Howard Street Tutoring Program was founded in 1979 to provide one-on-one tutoring to second- and third-graders identified as low readers. Each student is paired with a volunteer tutor for one hour twice a week. During the tutoring session, students engage in contextual reading, word study, and writing, and the tutor reads aloud to the student.

The evaluation used an experimental design and took place during the 1986–1987 and 1987–1988 school years. Students were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups and both groups were pretested and posttested on the same reading and spelling assessment. There were 17 students in each group the first year and 13 students in each group the second year.

On all achievement measures during both school years, including timed word recognition, untimed word recognition, basal word recognition, basal passages, and two measures of spelling, the treatment group had greater gains from the pretest to the posttest than the control group. Significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) emerged between the treatment and control group on all measures except for timed and untimed word recognition.

The evaluation noted that a critical component of the program was the quality of the tutor supervisor. The supervisor must possess the following: theoretical knowledge of the beginning reading process; experience in teaching beginners how to read; confidence that almost all children can learn to read and write; and an ability to work constructively with adults in a mentor/apprentice relationship. Tutored children experienced learning gains as a result of the program, but researchers emphasized that learning gains only occurred after 50 hours of “well-planned, closely supervised one-to-one tutoring.”

The evaluation utilized a strong experimental design, although the sample size was small. The inclusion of a true control group increases the confidence in the positive results, but



should not be generalized beyond the one-on-one tutoring design and the population of second- and third-grade low-achieving readers. The results, however, do have positive implications for an intensive one-on-one tutoring design to help struggling readers improve, at least at this grade level.

**Prenovost, J.K.E. (2001). A first-year evaluation of after-school learning programs in four urban middle schools in the Santa Ana Unified School District (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 2001). Dissertation Abstracts International, 62(03), 884.**

In the 1999–2000 school year, Santa Ana Unified School District received renewable three-year funding through California’s After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program to implement afterschool programs at four middle schools. Urban youth in Santa Ana are among the poorest in the state and are consistently low-performing academically.

Participating students were predominantly Latino with limited English language proficiency and from high-poverty backgrounds. A typical afterschool program schedule included a 20-minute snack; one-hour homework period; one-hour arts or life-skills component; and one-hour sports component. Academic enrichment lessons were offered to students after they finished homework or other activities. The study does not provide descriptions of these activities.

This quasi-experimental study used a rigorous matched-pair comparison group to examine first-year differences in outcomes between participants ( $n = 620$ ) and non-participant matches at the four middle school afterschool programs in the areas of student achievement, attendance, and feelings of safety. The comparison group included students not participating in the program, but who had background characteristics similar to participants and similar teachers during the school day. Participants in the study were divided into high-dosage (39–181 days) and low-dosage (1–38 days) samples.

Academic achievement was measured through spring 2000 SAT-9 scores in reading and math and a post-program student self-assessment asking whether or not they had studied hard in the past 30 days. No statistically significant difference was found among treatment groups. However, program participation was related to improvement in SAT-9 reading scores (although not a statistically significant improvement) for both high- and low-dosage participants. Additionally, participants with limited English proficiency (both high- and low-dosage) scored higher than matches in reading.



**Reisner, E.R., White, R.N., Russell, C.A., & Birmingham, J. (2004). *Building quality, scale, and effectiveness in after-school programs* [Summary rep.]. New York, NY: After-School Corporation.**

The After-School Corporation (TASC) works with public and private partners to provide school-based afterschool services for public elementary and secondary schools in New York City and New York state. Academic development activities include homework help, organized reading, recreational reading, math games, word games, organized writing, problem solving, group instruction, tutoring, computer training, study skills, and field trips. Other activities focus on social and civic development, artistic development, and sports and recreation.

The external evaluation was framed by the program's theory of change, using a non-experimental design that included data collection through surveys, site visits (interviews, observations, and focus groups), and review of administrative records. Evaluators also relied on a student tracking system, developed by TASC and Policy Studies Associates, yielding attendance data and allowing for cross-referencing with NYC Department of Education student data. The student sample included students who participated in TASC programming at sites funded during the first two years of programming ( $n = 52,355$ ) and students in the same schools who did not participate in TASC services ( $n = 90,806$ ). The evaluation sought to answer three questions: Are TASC services meeting high expectations for quality? Do students benefit from participation in TASC projects? What practices are associated with the greatest benefits for students?

Findings indicate that TASC programs successfully recruit and retain students, employ well-qualified site coordinators, and align activities with the school day. The evaluators concluded that students improved in both academic performance (mathematics) and school attendance based on school data and Regents exam scores as compared with non-participating students.

While the evaluators did not find academic improvement in reading and language arts comparable to that in mathematics, participants in some projects consistently outgained non-participants in reading and language arts. While the study does not outline specific literacy and language arts activities that led to gains, activities include literature-based curricula, such as KidzLit and Foundations, Inc. Literacy, and activities leading to a culminating product or performance.



**Ross, S.M., Lewis, T., Smith, L., & Sterbin, A. (1996). *Evaluation of the extended-day tutoring program in Memphis City Schools: Final report to CRESPAR*. Memphis, TN: University of Memphis, Center for Research in Educational Policy.**

During the 1995–1996 school year, Memphis City Schools implemented an extended-day tutoring program modeled on strategies used in the Success For All (SFA) curriculum. Six hundred fifty-six students in grades 1–4 from 13 Title 1 schools participated. The program was offered three hours a week for one hour a day. Components included Story Telling and Retelling (STaR), listening comprehension, reading and follow-up activities with tradebooks, writing, book club, computer skills, and test-taking strategies.

The evaluation study employed a quasi-experimental design. Data sources included teacher survey, classroom observations, and an experimental control group comparison of TCAP (Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program) scores. The study only included students in grades 2–4, as first-graders are not part of TCAP testing. The sample was further limited based on attendance, with one series of analyses conducted on a sample with 80 percent attendance ( $n = 165$ ) and one with 50 percent attendance ( $n = 225$ ).

Results indicate that participants showed gains in reading achievement compared to a matched control group, but gains were only statistically significant at the third-grade level. The effect was strongest, approximating 8.5–11 points, when the sample included only 80 percent or higher attendees. Differences in grade 2 directionally favored the tutoring group, but were not significant. In grade 4, the differences were close to zero or slightly higher for the control group.

While not statistically significant for all groups, the findings indicate that afterschool tutoring, including components such as read-aloud, writing, book club, and other extension activities, can have a positive impact on student achievement.

**Schinke, S.T., Cole, K.C., & Poulin, S.R. (2000). *Enhancing the educational achievement of at-risk youth*. *Prevention Science*, 1(1), 51–60.**

This effectiveness study examined an educational enhancement program offered by the Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGC) targeting early adolescents living in public subsidized housing. The program's aim was to improve school performance through exercises and instruction. The curriculum was designed for afterschool activities within local BGCs and included (per week): 4–5 hours discussion with knowledgeable adults, 1–2 hours creative writing, 4–5 hours leisure reading, 5–6 hours homework completion, 2–3 hours helping other youth, and 4–5 hours board games and other recreational pursuits that draw on skills transferable to school lessons. Parents were encouraged to participate with



their children. Some sites offered tutoring and homework help, but staff were not specifically trained in providing educational services.

Five geographically diverse sites were chosen for study, and there were three comparison groups ( $n = 283$ ). The program group consisted of youth participating in a BGC program with educational enhancements. The comparison group participated in BGC programs that did not include educational enhancements. The control group consisted of youth participating in non-BGC programs and with no educational enhancements. All groups were comparable in age, gender, and ethnic/racial background. According to staff records, attendance and participation rates were similar and uniformly high.

Trained data collectors administered youth self-reports at two intervals approximately two weeks apart. Responses to questions addressing enjoyment of reading, writing, and studying were answered on a 10-point Likert scale. Assistants interviewed teachers on items paralleling student self-reports, also using Likert scales. Assistants also gathered data from schools including grades, attendance information, and frequency of behavioral incidents.

Results indicate modest support for the value of educational programs in non-school settings for high-risk youth. Thirty-month follow-ups indicated improvements for BGC program youth receiving the enhancements relative to those BGC youth not receiving the enhancements and youth participating in non-BGC programs.

While the five sites were geographically diverse, they can't necessarily be considered representative of the country, making generalizations ill advised. It's not ascertainable that every program youth received the same educational enhancement or that every comparison or control youth received none (from any source). Also, self-reports may lack validity.

University of California at Irvine, Department of Education. (2001). *Evaluation of California's After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program, 1999–2000. Final report*. Irvine, CA: Author, & Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education, Healthy Start and After School Partnerships Office.

The After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program was established by the California state legislature to fund partnerships with school districts, cities, counties, and community organizations throughout the state to provide afterschool programs for students in grades K–9. The program aims to improve students' academic performance, social behavior, and attendance during the regular school day.



The program includes an academic component (homework help and tutoring) as well as an enrichment component (art, community service learning, etc.) and operates from 9 to 15 hours per week, depending on the location. Staff meet minimum school district qualifications for instructional aides and site supervisors must be approved by the site school principals.

The evaluation report covers the 1999–2000 school year. The evaluation used a non-experimental design, collecting data from 12 school districts across the state. Participant data were compared with students statewide. SAT-9 reading scores of participants increased more than scores of students statewide (increase of 5.8 percentage points versus 3 percentage points). In addition, higher-dosage participants—those who attended for 150 days or more—showed the largest increases in SAT-9 reading scores.

This evaluation lacks a true comparison group, but participants' achievement levels were compared to all students statewide. It is beneficial to compare among participants and to learn that higher-dosage participants were more likely to benefit from the program. It is not clear how the homework help and tutoring were delivered, but the academic component seems to be having an effect. It is also not clear if there is an academic enrichment component or if these two strategies are considered separately.

