Chapter 3
After-School Programs

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Introduction

What did you usually do after school when you were growing up? Did you go home to a waiting parent or guardian? Were you trusted to take care of yourself until an adult came home? Did you stay with a relative, baby sitter, or family friend? Or, did you attend an after-school program, where you might have done anything from playing with your friends to receiving help with your homework? If it was the latter, you were part of a growing national trend. The number of youth in after-school programs has grown steadily over the past two decades. In a 2004 government survey of a representative sample of 35,743 youth, 50% were in some sort of after-school arrangement. Of those youth, 7% participated in after-school activities as a substitution for adult supervision, almost a fifth (19%) were involved in a center- or school-based program, 17% were in the care of a relative, 6% were in nonrelative care, and 13% relied on self-care (Kleiner, Nolin, & Chapman, 2001).

These data are important because it matters where and how youth spend their time outside of normal school hours. For example, when youth engage in activities without adult supervision (e.g., being alone, hanging out with friends), this unsupervised time increases the possibility of a variety of negative outcomes such as academic and behavioral problems, drug use, and other types of risky behavior (Weisman & Gottfredson, 2001). Conversely, evidence is mounting that young people benefit when they spend their after-school time in structured pursuits that offer opportunities for positive interactions with adults and peers, encourage them to contribute and take initiative, and contain challenging and engaging tasks that help them develop and apply new skills and personal talents (American Youth Policy Forum, 2006; Larson & Verma, 1999; National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2002).

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Out-of-School Time and After-School Programs

Out-of-school time refers to any time that does not fall into normal school hours during the typical school year. This time can include summertime programs and camps, extracurricular school-related activities, specific lessons and crafts (e.g., piano, martial arts, dance, and music lessons), involvement in after-school programs, and time spent "hanging out." Youth may engage in a combination of these activities, and there are some differences depending on the community and youth who are surveyed. For example, surveys of Chicago high school students found that although 25% spend some of their time in a structured activity (e.g., an after-school program or extracurricular activity), 70% also spent some time alone, 55% also reported hanging out with friends, and 22% supervised siblings or other youth (George, Chaskin & Guiltinan, 2006). This and other surveys, however, indicate that a sizable number of youth not currently participating do express a wish to become involved in after-school programs (Chaskin & Baker, 2006). Parents often express the wish for more after-school programs in their community, particularly in lower-income areas where options for youth are more limited.

This chapter focuses specifically on after-school programs, which we define as follows. After-school programs refer to formal programs for school-age youth (ages 5 to 18) that operate outside of normal school hours for at least part of the year, are supervised or in some way monitored by adults, and that intentionally seek to promote young people's growth and development by focusing on one or more of the following areas: academic/cognitive, personal/social, cultural, artistic, or civic development. At the very least, after-school programs provide a safe, supportive alternative to a youth being on his or her own. We focus here on those programs that offer much more – from academic assistance to prevention programming and the promotion of positive youth development in multiple ways.

In this chapter, we first present an overview of after-school programs as they exist today across the United States. We also describe a few programs to give the reader a sense of what happens in these programs and how they operate. Later sections summarize the research evidence on program impact and describe the features or program characteristics that have been associated with better outcomes. The final section offers a set of guidelines for conducting an effective program based on the available research evidence and the experiences of several experts in the field.

Who Participates in After-School Programs?

Surveys of demographic characteristics of participants in after-school programs have indicated that socioeconomic status and racial characteristics are related to program participation. For example, one large-scale survey indicated that

youth from higher-income families are more likely to participate in after-school programming than are lower-income families, although the gap has narrowed recently (Wimer et al., 2006). However, youth from lower-income families are more likely to participate in programs that offer academic components (e.g., tutoring or homework assistance) to help those at academic risk. Many programs specifically target minority youth, and African-American youth are often well-represented in these programs (Wimer et al., 2006) In general, however, Latino youth tend to be underrepresented in all types of programs, suggesting that more efforts should be devoted to recruiting and retaining Latino youth in after-school programs.

Weiss, Little, and Bouffard (2005) stress that getting youth in the door is only the first step. These authors summarize research showing there is a link between the level of youths' participation in after-school programming and how much they benefit. However, Weiss et al. (2005) point out that we should be thinking about the "participation equation," that is, that participation equals enrollment, regular attendance, and genuine engagement. "Being there keeps youth safe, but being engaged enables them to grow" (p. 20). Therefore, Weiss et al. (2005) stress that the impact of after-school programming should be related to multiple indicators of participation that assess not only attendance patterns over time, but also the breath and depth of youths' engagement in different activities.

Numerous ecological factors are related to program participation. These factors include personal interest and motivation, parental encouragement, peer group influences, neighborhood factors related to the breath and proximity of programs, and program features such as the program staff and range and type of activities offered.

Public Support and Funding for After-School Programs

There is strong public support for after-school programs. For example, a representative sample of national voters was polled by the Afterschool Alliance (2003) to determine prevailing attitudes surrounding the benefit and need for after-school programs. The results indicated the importance of after-school programming to the general public, with 9 of 10 voters expressing concern over unsupervised and unstructured after-school time for youth. Respondents also agreed that youth need some type of organized activity or a place for them to go to every day. In addition, those polled would like to see governmental input and commitment to after-school programs.

Currently, the federal government funds after-school programs through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program, which is part of the No Child Left Behind legislation. Policy advocates have noted, however, that this funding stream unnecessary limits the amount of money that local programs

can use for program evaluation, capacity building, training, and technical assistance to 3% (American Youth Policy Forum, 2007).

States differ in the amount of money that is earmarked for after-school program funding. Some states, such as Wyoming, North Dakota, and Delaware, allot less than $50,000 a year across the entire state. This is contrasted with states such as California and Texas, which each allocates more than $1,000,000 per year (National Child Care Information Center, 2005). California, in particular, has dramatically increased its allocation for after-schools; Proposition 49 has ensured that more than $550 million will go toward after-school programming at the conclusion of its implementation (Afterschool Alliance, 2007). Thus, it is clear that statewide policy initiatives are an important factor in the number of after-school opportunities that exist in local communities. Regardless of state-level support, funding patterns for individual programs tend to vary widely. A study by Lind, Relave, Deich, Grossman, and Gersick, (2006) acknowledged that researchers and practitioners have yet to agree on a standard and comprehensive way of estimating the full costs of after-school programs. Based on a few programs that provided cost data, Lind et al. (2006) estimated that costs per youth have ranged from $449 to $7,160. These authors suggested that future research should focus on to what extent quality programming is related to costs, and what expenditures are needed to improve existing programs.

What Does a Typical After-School Program Look Like?

Actually, there is no such thing as a "typical" after-school program apart from the general perspective that they operate during non–school hours for at least part of the school year. Current programs vary tremendously in their procedures as well as goals, which, in turn, are strongly affected by available funding and staff, and the nature and needs of the local community. For example, some programs have summertime or weekend components in addition to the regular school week. Some are open for several hours each weekday, whereas others operate for only a few hours on 1 or 2 days. Some offer a wide range of activities that can include tutoring or some other form of academic assistance, social skills training, prevention-related curricula related to drugs and violence, culturally oriented activities, field trips, and recreational pursuits. Others have a narrower focus and concentrate on only one or two of the above issues. Some also offer support and services to family members such as English classes, parenting workshops, and general support groups. Many programs are based in schools, but others operate in community-based facilities. Each of the above factors can affect the specific goals and objectives of a program.

In sum, given the diversity of different programs, a single yardstick cannot be used to measure or describe current programs. In the following section, we offer

descriptions of several different types of programs that vary in their services, goals, participants, location, size, and staffing patterns. This material is designed to give the reader a snapshot of the myriad options present within the after-school programming milieu. The common denominator among the following programs, however, is their general effectiveness. That is, the following programs are examples of successful after-school programs that have been recently reviewed (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). These programs did not necessarily obtain positive results on every outcome they assessed but, nevertheless, were effective in achieving most of their objectives.

Some Program Examples

"Be A Star" (Pierce & Shields, 1998) builds on existing community-based after-school programs and occurs off school grounds within the local community. This program operated in St. Louis, Missouri, and included 783 youth between the ages of 5 and 12 years. The neighborhood community centers involved in the program were situated in areas with high rates of gang activity, high school drop-out, and child abuse, as well as large numbers of low-income families. The goals of the program were to improve cultural awareness, decision-making skills, and interpersonal competencies to increase resistance toward drugs and alcohol and to enhance self esteem. Games and playground activities were used to reinforce positive interactions. A typical session starts with a small group discussion on a specific topic (e.g., stress, peer pressure) followed by a game or craft that helps illustrate the topic. The program was held once a week, for 1.5 hours, throughout a single school year. On average, youth attended about 22 sessions and participated in 33.5 hours during that time (p. 178).

In another programming effort that targeted high-risk youth, Neufeld, Smith, Estes, and Hill, (1995) evaluated a program aimed at youth who were at risk for substance abuse in Santa Barbara, California. 175 high-risk youth from the fifth and sixth grades of 4 schools participated in the program. The youth in the high-risk category were predominately Latino and were nominated by their teachers based on several factors, such as low socioeconomic status, working below grade level, disinterest in school, behavioral problems, and peer difficulties. The program occurred immediately after school on site for 2 hours daily and involved tutoring, an activity program for the youth, and a parent education program. The primary goal of the program was to improve the academic achievement of the students prior to their establishing a pattern of academic failure and withdrawal. The program also focused on the development of prosocial skills, and emphasized for students the importance of successfully negotiating their school, home, and community environments and contributing in a positive fashion to each.

Sometimes, programs are developed at the specific requests of local parents to address a need. The program described by Phillips is a good example. Phillips (1999) reviewed a program aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of a community-based intervention to reduce stress for 180 economically disadvantaged African-American youth (mean age 11.3 years) who had siblings with a developmental disability. Parents had asked for a program that would focus on the issues involved in having a sibling with a developmental disability, and offered input into the components of this program. This was accomplished through discussion and exercises that addressed the youth's feelings and knowledge about disability and stress. In addition, homework assistance and recreational activities were offered. The program met daily from 3 to 5:30 p.m. for 15 weeks and was staffed by six team leaders and seven volunteers. The intent of the program was to create a supportive and rewarding environment for youth, where they were able to interact positively with peers and adults in their community.

Another effort helped along by community members and parent participation was Project EMERGE (Monsaas et al., 1994), an early-morning program designed to increase the learning time and social skills of at-risk students in Crisp Country, Georgia. Program goals were to improve achievement and attendance and to reduce disciplinary referrals by developing social skills, improving attitudes toward school, and enhancing self-esteem. Project EMERGE provided basic skills tutoring and enrichment activities, development of critical thinking skills, conflict-resolution and violence-prevention strategies, and counseling support for students. This program was conducted for students in grades 3, 4, and 5. The project staff was comprised of school-day teachers who volunteered their time to teach before the school day began.

Some after-school programs focus on assisting youth to reach their personal educational and career goals. For example, Maxfield, Schirm, and Rodriguez-Planas (2003) evaluated the Quantum Opportunity Program (QOP), which helped approximately 480 at-risk high school–aged youth graduate from high school and enroll in postsecondary education or training. They followed a single cohort of youth in 5 different sites across the country from ninth grade until the end of high school, 1995–2000. The types of activities presented in the program were supplemental academic education, developmental acti-vities, and community service. There was also a mentoring component and life skills training to promote effective decision-making skills. This program operated year round for 5 years.

In addition, Citizens Schools (Espino, Fabiano, & Pearson, 2004) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1995, which offers after-school and summer services to youth ages 9–14 years, with the long-term goal of improving the quality of their life trajectory. Citizen Schools provides participants with authentic, hands-on learning experiences, supportive relationships with adults, and positive youth development opportunities. This program has 12 Boston, MA campuse. Activities differ by campus, but the core model consists of

apprenticeships, writing and data projects, explorations, team-building activities, and homework time. Citizen Schools offered programming on 81 days during the 2002–2003 school year, for an average of 3.5–4 hours per day.

Finally, TASC (The After school Corporation, 2006) is an example of a large-scale program created based on a review of "best practices" literature that focuses on enhancing the academic achievement of its participants. Implemented in areas in and around New York state, programs are open every school day from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. Although housed in public schools, these programs are operated by staff of local community-based organizations that provide homework help and enrichment activities in areas including literacy, science, math, computer skills, arts, sports, community service, and field trips. Attention is also paid to health and social development, and includes a drug prevention. Component Nutrition is an important part of the program, and students are given nutritious food and time to eat and socialize with adults and peers. Each TASC program has a full-time, year-round program coordinator and a diverse group of staff, where the student–staff ratio is usually around 10 to 1. Parents and families are an important element of TASC programs, and their participation is actively encouraged.

Program evaluations have found many positive effects of TASC. Children in pre-K to eighth grade who participated in TASC programs for at least 2 years and on a regular basis have improved their math scores substantially compared with nonparticipants, and school attendance also increased, especially for students in grades 5–8. High school students were also positively impacted by TASC; these students increased their school attendance and earned more high school credits than did nonparticipants. Principals and parents have expressed strong support for TASC programs (The After School Corporation, 2006).

Are After-School Programs Effective?

The Academic and Social Benefits of After-School Programs

What is known about the impact of after-school programs? Most reviews have concentrated on their academic benefits, and the results have been mixed (Kane, 2003; Scott-Little, Hamann, & Jurs, 2002; Vandell et al., 2004; Zief, Lauver & Maynard, 2004).

However, two extensive reviews offer more encouraging news about whether programs can improve the academic performance of students who are struggling in school. For example, Cooper, Charlton, Valentine, and Muhlenbruck (2000) reported that 54 summer school programs targeting youth with academic problems yielded significant positive effects. These authors reported that youths' reading and math scores improved significantly, that effects occurred for students at all grade levels (elementary, middle, and high school), and that

underachieving students improved the most from summer-school programs. In fact, Cooper et al. (2000) noted that gains from short-term summer programs were comparable with results achieved by educational programs with similar goals that were conducted over the course of an entire regular school year!

Another review of 35 programs that focused on students at academic risk because of such factors as poor grades or low levels of academic achievement reached similar conclusions (Lauer et al., 2006). Participation in after-school programs was associated with significant gains in both reading and math scores, and youth at all grade levels benefited.

Whereas the previous reviews concentrated on the academic benefits of after-school programs, a review conducted by one of the current authors (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007) evaluated the outcomes from programs that sought to improve youths' personal and social skills. Many programs do include such goals in their overall mission, and these skills may include matters related to interpersonal problem-solving, leadership, assertiveness, and appropriate control of behaviors and emotions. One important rationale guiding skills training programs is that more effective skills should help youth in their daily interactions with peers and adults in school, at home, and in their local neighborhoods. Durlak and Weissberg (2007) divided the outcomes obtained from 66 programs into eight different categories. There were two outcome categories that evaluated feelings and attitudes (self-esteem and bonding to school); three categories that assessed behaviors (positive social behaviors such as social skills, problem behaviors such as conduct and delinquency, and drug use), and three outcome categories related to school performance (achievement test scores, grades, and school attendance).

Programs yielded significant positive effects for seven of these eight categories (for all but school attendance), and students at all grade levels benefited (elementary, junior high, and high school). These findings indicate that after-school programs can produce multiple benefits across a range of outcomes that are important to youth development.

In sum, there is evidence that after-school programs can provide academic benefits for youth who are most in need of help, and that programs that focus on personal and social skills can produce multiple benefits that include increased self-esteem and self-confidence, better social behavior, and improved school performance. Current research evidence does not mean that every program has been effective but does suggest that programs *can* be successful and sometimes result in multiple positive benefits for participants.

The positive evaluations that have appeared suggest that after-school programs can be a worthwhile social investment. For example, the Afterschool Alliance (2005) noted the potential cost–benefit effectiveness of after-school programs when they positively impact participants' school performance or reduce behavioral problems, as some programs have been able to do. The Carrera program (Philiber, Kaye, & Herrling, 2001; Philiber, Kaye, Herrling, & West, 2002) has been able to significantly reduce pregnancy rates for teens,

and Isaacs (2007) has indicated that programs that are successful at preventing adolescent pregnancy are one of the most cost-effective uses of public monies. Finally, Durlak and Weissberg (2007) reported that successful after-school programs (i.e., the SAFE programs, see below) produced results on many outcomes that are comparable with or better than those achieved by many other kinds of in-school and out-of-school youth interventions, a clear indication of after-school's value to society and our youth.

What Makes an After-School Program Effective?

Many authors have stressed the need for careful analysis of which programs are more effective because such analyses can help identify the factors that are associated with positive outcomes (Bodilly & Beckett, 2005; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Granger & Kane, 2004; Kane, 2003; Vandell et al. 2004, 2005).

Attempts to identify the factors that are associated with better outcomes have occurred in several ways. Some reviewers have begun to search for commonalities among successful programs in order to provide guidelines for future research and practice. For example, one review identified five features of successful academically oriented programs (Birmingham, Pechman, Russell, & Mielke, 2005). These features consisted of (1) a broad array of enrichment activities, (2) frequent opportunities for skill-building, (3) close interpersonal relationships between staff and youth, (4) strong and experienced program leadership and a well-trained and supervised staff, and (5) sufficient administrative, fiscal, and professional development support from the sponsoring organization.

Durlak and Weissberg (2007) described four characteristics of the skill-training components of the programs they reviewed that were associated with positive results. These characteristics produced the acronym SAFE. Effective programs were (1) sequential (connected their skill-building activities over time to enhance the step-by-step acquisition of skills), (2) active (emphasized role-playing and practicing of targeted skills over discussion and lecture), (3) focused (devoted sufficient time to skill development during the program), and (4) explicit (were specific and clear about what skills they expected the youth to learn). In fact, Durlak and Weissberg divided the programs they reviewed into two groups. In one group they placed the programs that possessed all four SAFE features. The remaining programs that did not contain all four features were put into a second category. Durlak and Weissberg (2007) found that only the SAFE program group obtained positive effects on the seven outcome categories noted earlier. As a group, the program without the four SAFE features did not obtain positive effects on *any* of the outcome categories relating to feelings and attitudes, changes in positive or negative behavior, or school

performance. (More details about this review are available in the full report www.casel.org).

The after-school field is also beginning to develop a consensus about what constitutes quality in ASPs. For example, Yohalem, Wilson-Ahlstrom, Fischer, and Shinn (2007) examined nine independent attempts to assess the quality of youth development programs. All of these efforts emphasized the daily interactions occurring among staff and youth that can be captured through behavioral observations. In other words, researchers emphasized that what makes a high-quality program is based in large part on what happens each day when staff and youth interact

Although there are some differences in emphasis and content, Yohalem et al. (2007) reported that there were six core concepts related to quality that were common across the nine different research groups. These six concepts involved (1) personal relationships, (2) the physical environment, (3) level of youth engagement, (4) social norms operating in the program, (5) skill-building opportunities, and (6) routine and structure.

In brief, a high-quality program is characterized by several features. These features consist of (a) close and supportive personal relationships among staff and youth, (b) a safe physical environment and sufficient space for different types of activities, (c) youth who are actively engaged in the program and given input into activities and scheduling, (d) an interpersonal social atmosphere that emphasizes individual attention, responsibility, and openness, (e) sufficient program time and attention devoted to building skills and having youth practice and use these skills in different ways, and (f) program routines and structure that are attuned to youth needs, abilities, and interests.

At this point, it is not known if some of these features are more important in some settings or for some participants more so than for others. Nevertheless, when groups working independently reach similar conclusions about the value of certain practices, the commonality of their findings is compelling.

From Effective Research to Effective Practice

What implications do research findings have for current practices in the after-school field? The following section will address several salient aspects in planning and implementing a successful after-school program. It is impossible to provide a standardized step-by-step guide, because programs can vary so much in their intent, scope, and specific goals, but several general guidelines can be offered. First, however, the concept of a logic model is presented and explained as a way to conceptualize the process of carefully creating, implementing, and evaluating an after-school program. Then, practical guidelines for building an effective after-school program will be offered.

The Usefulness of a Logic Model

There are many ways to structure an after-school program. Research has suggested (Harvard Family Research Project, 2006) that creating a road map before a program begins can lead to enhanced program cohesion and results. This road map, often referred to as a *logic model*, is a specific summary of a program's key elements, goals, and the methods of measuring goal attainment. In essence, a logic model is a concise, logical explanation of how a program works. In other words, what has to occur for a program to be successful in achieving its specific goals? Creating a clear and convincing road map of how a program can be successful (before the program actually begins) can also be a key factor in gaining and maintaining financial support for one's project. Components of a logic model can include desired results, motivating reasons for starting the program, program strategies and activities, and ways to document results. Three basic components of the logic model (goals, implementation, and evaluation) are discussed below. Additional, user-friendly material on logic models is available from several Web sites (http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/pubs/onlinepubs/rrb/learning.html; http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2007_01_05_RB_LogicModels.pdf; and http://www.cdc.gov/eval/resources.htm).

What are your goals? What does your program hope to accomplish? This is the first question at the center of this stage of the logic model. A successful after-school program should have targets (i.e., which aspect of youths' lives does the program hope to affect, such as the prevention of drug use or the promotion of academic success?) as well as corresponding outcomes to measure the degree to which each goal was successfully attained. Targets and their outcomes can lie in many different areas, such as academic, youth development, and prevention domains.

Implementation: How will you reach your goals? This portion of the logic model lays the central foundation for reaching the goals outlined in the initial planning stage. Several questions should be asked and answered during this stage: How can the objectives best be achieved? How will we help youth reach program goals? What specific activities must be part of the program in order to reach these goals, and why? What materials and/or resources are needed? At this point, it may also be useful to create a realistic timeline for the program to make sure that there is ample time to reach desired objectives.

Evaluation: How will you know if you have been successful? A good evaluation is, in effect, an honest snapshot of program success and, based on this information, can offer suggestions for further modification and improvement of program characteristics where necessary (Harvard Family Research Project, 2006). In addition, a good evaluation can convince the multiple stakeholders involved (e.g., staff, outside funders, parents, and various citizen groups) that the program is worth continued support. A good evaluation helps to ensure that the

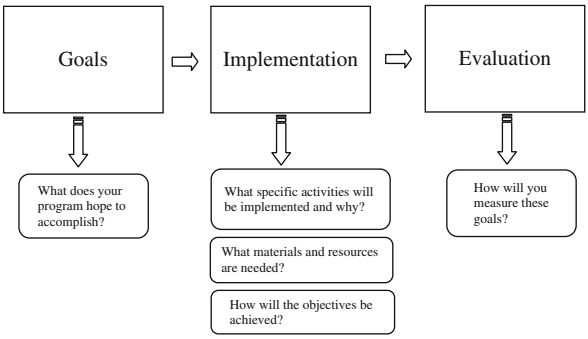

Fig. 3.1 Three important components of a logic model and the questions needing answers within each component

concerns and questions of different stakeholders are addressed and increases the likelihood that multiple groups will continue to support and collaborate with programs. Therefore, it is important to consider how this step will be accomplished within the context of the logic model, before the program has even begun!

Successful evaluations can be accomplished in several different ways, depending on the needs and characteristics of individual programs. Important questions at this stage of the logic model are the following: What data do we need to measure progress toward goals? What and who would provide the most convincing information that the program is on the right track? Who should we collect information from, and how should we collect the information? The most useful evaluations often use multiple methods and multiple sources to obtain an unbiased picture. For example, a program wishing to enhance youths' school performance and their behavioral functioning might examine data from school records combined with parent, teacher, and youth questionnaires and interviews. It is also important to have a control group and to obtain data at the beginning and end of program participation from both controls and program youth. Useful information can also be obtained from nonexperimental evaluations, such as case studies and participatory research accounts (Little, 2002). An illustration of the three major components of the logic model and some of the important questions to answer for each component is contained in Fig. 3.1.

Guidelines for Running an Effective After-School Program

Clearly, there is no "magic potion" to create the ideal after-school program. There are many different types of programs and just as many ways to implement them. However, as we have seen, there are certain characteristics that effective programs share. Table 3.1 summarizes the lessons learned to date about what factors seem to lead to better outcomes in after-school programs. Because we are not yet sure which lessons might be most important and how many need to be followed for the best results, they are not listed in Table 3.1 in any implied

Table 3.1 Ten guidelines for running an effective after-school program

What	How
Involve parents in program planning and activities	Get the word out! Make sure parents know that their input and participation is always welcome. Provide frequent opportunities to get involved.
Assess the needs of program participants	Make sure your materials reflect the ability level of your participants so as to be challenging but not overwhelming.
What resources will be needed?	Make sure that resources are available to achieve your program goals.
Provide adequate staff training and supervision	Make sure staff is trained to conduct effectively the activities such as tutoring or skill building that will help youth reach program goals. Provide ongoing supervision and feedback.
Establish strong, effective leadership	The program director should provide adequate structure while providing support and boosting morale.
Create a balance between structure and choice for participating youth	Provide some structure while also encouraging youth leadership and initiative.
Offer a variety of enrichment activities	Add program components that expand on program goals in different ways.
Effective skill-building is SAFE	Ask youth to learn new behaviors sequentially, employ active forms of learning, devote sufficient time and attention to skill acquisition, and be explicit in what you want them to learn.
Build close interpersonal relationships between staff and youth	Hire and train staff with good listening and communication skills.
Monitor progress toward program goals and adjust accordingly	Get frequent feedback from youth, staff, and stakeholders. Adjust program structure to reflect this information.

order of importance. Rather, the guidelines follow a loose chronological order of when issues might be considered when planning, implementing, and evaluating a program.

Involve Parents in Program Planning and Activities

Parents can be a strong influence on whether or not their children will attend a program, so securing their input about needs and preferences is important. After-school programs are not always able to achieve steady and high rates of participation in program activities, and one way to encourage better attendance is to offer a program that effectively meets the needs of the local community. Our recommendation about balancing structure with choice (see below for discussion) is a way for youth to feel more involved and recognized for their contribution, which, as a result, should also encourage better attendance.

Assess the Needs of Program Participants

Why? Young people learn best when they are effectively challenged by the material. Presenting material at too high a level will discourage youth because they will be unable to enjoy much success. If the material is too easy, however, there will not be enough of a challenge, and youth will lose interest. Assessment is needed for all the goals the program has established. The same youth may be at one level of proficiency in one academic area (math) but not in another (reading) or may need more training in social skills or the arts than in academics.

Secure Adequate Resources to Meet Your Goals

Why? Different types of resources are required depending on the circumstances and include physical facilities and space, money, time, supplies, and support from the local community and families whose youth are attending. It may be necessary to scale back some program goals if available resources cannot be attained. Some initiatives will require fundraising and grant writing before they are begun.

Do Not Underestimate the Importance of Adequate Staff Training and Supervision

Why? Providing a safe haven for youth is important, but good after-school programs offer much more than that. They are places for youth to learn new skills and develop their talents. Staff will need to be trained and well supervised as they help youth establish new behaviors. Moreover, ongoing supervision is just as essential as initial staff training because different interpersonal and technical problems will inevitably appear in the complicated interpersonal world of after-school.

Establish Strong, Effective Leadership

Why? A good leader knows how to motivate their staff, develop a consensus about program tasks and goals, delegate authority and responsibility, recognize the talents of their staff, maintain high morale, and deal with the inevitable stress that is involved in running a youth program. Effective leaders are a central component of a program's success.

Create a Balance Between Structure and Freedom Across Program Activities and Scheduling

Why? Although structure and routine is often helpful for younger youth because it can build a sense of security and safety, eventually youth become most involved if they feel their voices are being heard and they have some choices. Therefore, find frequent ways to encourage youth initiative and leadership. Give youth some input and choice into activities and their scheduling. Recognize personal strengths. In larger programs, youth who are already skilled in some tasks can be used as group coleaders, mentors, or tutors for others. Create leadership positions in the program through youth councils and committees so that youth increasingly come to "own" the program.

Attendance and motivation for some activities, such as academic tutoring and homework assistance, may not be high initially, especially for those who are struggling academically. Youth can become motivated and more involved by offering them choices about how some activities are conducted and when they are offered, by recognizing progress toward goals with wall charts and graphs that are displayed for all to see, and by reinforcing youth frequently for their effort and their behaviors both during sessions and immediately after via more "fun" activities.

Offer a Variety of Enrichment Activities

Why? It is fine to stress one activity if the program only has one central goal, but data indicate that youth can profit in multiple ways from well-run programs. Variety not only lessens boredom, but is also more likely more likely to improve multiple skills.

Effective Skill-Building Is SAFE

Research has suggested that effective skill-building has several common features (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). That is, opportunities for skill-building should be sequential, require active participation by the youth, be a main focus of the program, and be explicit in terms of what youth are expected to learn (i.e., follow the acronym, SAFE).

New skills cannot be acquired immediately. It takes time and effort to develop new behaviors, and often more complicated skills must be broken down into smaller steps and sequentially mastered. Therefore, a coordinated sequence of activities is required to link the learning steps and provide youth with opportunities to connect these steps. Usually, this occurs through lesson plans or program manuals, particularly if programs use or adapt established

curricula, but programs can integrate skills training in novel ways by linking the training to youths' real-life experiences and many practical tasks.

The time allotted for different activities is one indication of the value placed on such activities. Sufficient time and attention must be devoted to any task for learning to occur. Therefore, programs should designate special time in their regular program schedule that is primarily for skill development.

Active forms of learning require youth to act on the material. That is, after youth receive some basic instruction, they should then have the opportunity to practice new behaviors and receive support and feedback on their performance. This is accomplished through role-playing and other types of behavioral rehearsal strategies, and the cycle of practice and feedback should continue until mastery is achieved. These hands-on forms of learning are much preferred over exclusively didactic instruction, or general group discussion, which do not usually produce behavioral change. Finally, clear and specific learning objectives are preferred over general ones. Youth need to know what they are expected to learn. Therefore, programs should not focus on personal and social development in general but identify explicitly what skills in these areas youth are expected to learn (e.g., problem-solving skills, resistance skills, self-control, and so on).

Why are these things important? No one reading this chapter learned mathematics in a few short sessions. They took courses on the subject (explicit and focused), spent an entire semester or two developing mastery (sequential), and learned by doing, not by thinking or merely discussing mathematical concepts (active). Why should it be different for youth learning any new behaviors? Not all program activities need to be focused on direct skill building, but if skills are part of a program's goals, programs that follow all four of the SAFE features are more apt to be successful than are those that do not.

Strive to Build Close Interpersonal Relationship Between Staff and Youth

Why? Youth learn best when they receive consistent encouragement and support from concerned adults. Staff who possess good listening and communication skills can offer the warmth and respect that helps young people thrive. Make sure that your program is staffed by caring individuals who can support the youth in achieving the goals of the program.

Monitor Progress Toward Program Goals Periodically, and Adjust to Improve Program Practices

Why? How can a program function well if it doesn't have good information on the impact of its practices? Regardless of how well a program appears on paper

or "seems to work," each program should be evaluated in as rigorous a manner as possible. Even the best programs might need to change to improve current practices. Moreover, youth are not all alike, and child development is not static. Things can change quickly as youth's competencies and needs change, or as new participants enter the program.

Using a logic model as described in this chapter helps a program monitor how it is doing. On the one hand, do not be afraid to discover something is not working. Would you really want to continue something, if it is not effective? On the other hand, enjoy and savor your successes. Staff will experience more job satisfaction as they realize their efforts are moving the program forward.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we touched upon some important considerations in after-school programming. It is no surprise that after-school programs are growing in popularity and funding, and research is now beginning to demonstrate that they have a potent ability to produce multiple positive changes in the lives of the youth they serve. As we have shown, after-school programs vary widely in

Table 3.2 Helpful online resources for after-school programs

Name of resource	Description	Web site
Afterschool Alliance	Suggests resources and best practices in after-school programming	www.afterschoolalliance.org
The Harvard Family Research Project	Promotes best practices by generating, publishing, and disseminating research	www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp
The After School Corporation (TASC)	Provides grants, training and technical assistance to New York after-school programs	www.tascorp.org
The federal government	Includes information about starting and operating an after-school program as well as outlines resources from a variety of federal agencies, including a searchable database of federal funding sources	www.afterschool.gov
The National After School Association	Lists resources and pertinent articles for those planning and implementing after-school programs	www.naaweb.org
Forum For Youth Investment	Dedicated to fostering positive outcomes for our nation's youth through research, leadership, network development, consultation, and technical assistance	www.forumfyi.org

structure, activities, and goals. Although it is important to remember that no two programs are alike, there are several important guidelines that seem to be associated with more effective programs. These guidelines, discussed in the previous section of this chapter, should help in the development, implementation, and sustenance of quality after-school programs. In closing, we refer readers to Table 3.2, which lists some valuable Web-based resources that contain information on research findings, practice issues, funding and policy initiatives, or other matters related to the burgeoning after-school field.

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