The Impact of After-school Programs for Low-income Youth: Discovering Success Factors

A dissertation submitted

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study is to demonstrate the significant impact of after-school programs (ASPs) for low-income youth and the main indicators of success. Although effectiveness studies suggest that ASPs are promising environments for positive youth development across domains, less is known about the critical components necessary for program success (Sloper, 2016). Despite the frequency with which youth development in ASPs is examined in research, evaluation, and practical efforts, this literature is disjointed by diverse conceptualizations of program outcomes and program quality, and the use of dissimilar predictors of program effectiveness.

This study is unique and relevant to the field of Organization Development (OD) in several ways. First, this study reports on an assessment of youth programs specifically designed to provide psychological and social support for lower income youth, similar to Kurt Lewin’s (1939) Iowa Boys’ Club study. This study has particular significance to the field of OD in that Lewin is frequently cited as the father of OD. The Lewin Boys’ Club study is again particularly important because of the social environment in which it was performed – the time of the rise of Nazi Germany. This current study, in a way, has parallel significance to the earlier Lewin study in that it deals with an important current social issue – psychological and social support for low-income youth.
Second, the findings of this study and correlations with “fun” span beyond children and parallel what the new generation of workforce is looking for in the workplace. ASPs, as well as business organizations could potentially be more successful if they used a strength-based approach that focuses on fun and employees’ enjoyment, respectively. Strength-based approaches focus on health and well-being where the goal is to promote the positive, similar to Dr. Cooperrider’s Appreciative Inquiry Theory (2001), and the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them, is explored.

Key terms: After-school programs, strength-based approaches, organizational development
Acknowledgements

I would like to pay special thankfulness, warmth and appreciation to the persons below who made my research successful and assisted me at every point to cherish my goal:

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My husband and our beautiful daughters, Camila and Layla. They are the beat of my heart and my reason to smile every single day. This dissertation is a pure example of how much we can learn from children, and if we take the time to act more like them, and genuinely care, use our imagination, appreciate the little things, look at everyone equally, we may become better humans.

Dr. Allen Parchem, for believing in me and providing me guidance when things were challenging, and most importantly, for always making me look at things from a different perspective.

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“As adults, we feel far removed from the play concerns of children, so we...experience some annoyance when this culturally distinct phenomenon of theirs interferes with the work we must get done in educating them.”

-Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Useless Made Useful* (1975)

**Chapter I: Introduction**

After-school programs (ASPs) are academic, social and emotional, and physical health learning opportunities that take place during out of school hours, and during summer breaks. ASPs provide a variety of enrichment activities, such as homework help, hands-on science and engineering activities, opportunities to participate in performance and fine art, and sports tournaments. The organizations that sponsor these activities range from school to faith-based organizations, community organizations, or city or county-sponsored groups. Typical youth development ASPs strive to enhance positive youth development by maintaining a positive program atmosphere, creating caring and supportive adult-youth relationship and offering diverse developmental activities for competence building (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

Historically, ASPs have sought to cultivate the softer skills (e.g., work ethic, teamwork, and communication) to complement the hard, academic competencies taught during the school day, as well as provide a safe environment during the after-school hours (Bodily & Beckett, 2005). However, the literature on ASP effectiveness is fragmented, partially due to a lack of agreement about what ASPs should target.
Results of education reform in the early 2000’s shifted their focus to emphasize academic achievement. This forced ASPs to increase academic performance for participants by implementing school-day learning (Mahoney, Parente, & Zigler, 2009). As public schools struggle to meet federal achievement standards, ASPs are increasingly viewed as a potential source of academic support for youth at risk of school failure, which includes a large number of economically disadvantaged and ethnic minorities. Since that time, the purpose of ASPs has morphed into a catchall for a range of developmental goals (i.e., academic performance, college readiness, school engagement, and leadership) to supplement other opportunities for development in school and at home (Sloper, 2016).

ASP effectiveness research shows that ASP participation is positively associated with youth development in academic, personal, and social domains. Consistent with the original purpose of ASPs, perhaps positive youth development outcomes in personal and social growth domains are more appropriate short-term outcomes (Durlak et al., 2010). In addition, opportunities for social and emotional learning obtained from activities target student needs not addressed during school hours and provide a unique motivation for sustained youth participation (Lauer et al., 2006; Scott-Little, Hamann, & Jurs, 2002). Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which we learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships and avoid negative behaviors (Elias et al., 1997). These key characteristics need to be
developed for children to be successful, not only in school but in life; those who do not possess these skills are less likely to succeed (Zins, 2004).

**Social-Emotional Learning**

Elias et al. (1997) defined SEL as the process of acquiring core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively. The principal goals of SEL programs are to foster the development of five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies: 1) self-awareness; 2) self-management; 3) social awareness; 4) relationship skills; and 5) responsible decision-making (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2005). These competencies, in turn, should provide a foundation for better adjustment and academic performance as reflected in more positive social behaviors, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved test scores and grades (Greenberg et al., 2003). Over time, mastering SEL competencies results in a developmental progression that leads to a shift from being predominantly controlled by external factors to acting increasingly in accord with internalized beliefs and values, caring and concern for others, making good decisions, and taking responsibility for one’s choices and behaviors (Bear & Watkins, 2006).

There is a general agreement that it is important for schools to foster children’s social-emotional development, but educators often think about this focus in a fragmented matter – either as an important end in itself or as a contribution to
enhancing children’s health (e.g., drug prevention), safety (e.g. violence prevention), or citizenship (e.g. service learning). Although SEL plays important roles in influencing these non-academic outcomes, SEL has a critical role in improving children’s academic performance and lifelong learning.

Within school contexts, SEL programming incorporates two coordinated sets of educational strategies to enhance academic performance and youth development (CASEL, 2005). The first involves instruction in processing, integrating, and selectively applying social and emotional skills in developmentally, contextually, and culturally appropriate ways (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Izard, 2002; Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000). Through systematic instruction, SEL skills may be taught, modeled, practiced, and applied to diverse situations so that students use them as part of their daily repertoire of behaviors (Ladd & Mize, 1983; Weissberg, Caplan, & Sivo, 1989).

Second, SEL programming fosters students’ social-emotional development through establishing safe and caring learning environments involving peer and family initiatives, improved classroom management and teaching practices, and whole-school community-building activities (Cook et al., 1999; Hawkins, Smith, & Catalano, 2004; Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2004). In addition, many SEL programs, including ASPs, help students apply SEL skills in preventing specific problem behaviors such as substance use, interpersonal violence, bullying, and school failure (Zins & Elias, 2006). Quality SEL instruction also provides students with opportunities to contribute to their class, school, and community, and experience the
satisfaction, sense of belonging, and enhanced motivation that comes from such involvement (Hawkins et al., 2004).

Together, these components promote personal and environmental resources so that students feel valued, experience greater intrinsic motivation to achieve, and develop a broadly applicable set of social-emotional competencies that mediate better academic performance, health-promoting behavior, and citizenship (Greenberg et al., 2003). The findings from several individual studies and narrative reviews indicate that SEL programs are associated with positive results such as improved attitudes about the self and others, increased prosocial behavior, lower levels of problem behaviors and emotional distress, and improved academic performance (Catalano et al., 2002; Greenberg et al., 2003; Zins et al., 2004).

In addition, the contextual features common to ASPs are more consistent with opportunities for positive youth development. Experimental learning, challenging and meaningful activities, skill building, opportunities for decision-making and choice, and connections with supportive adults and peers are commonplace in ASPs (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Larson et al., 2004; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). These opportunities are typically present regardless of the program’s content and aims, meaning that positive youth development features are present during both academic and enrichment activities.

Furthermore, some researchers advocate for examining social-emotional indicator of positive youth development as a short-term program outcome versus long-term program outcome (Zief, Lauver, & Maynard, 2006). This perspective
would suggest that academic performance outcomes used in previous studies would be more appropriately conceptualized as a distal program outcome mediated through short-term positive youth development outcomes (Durlak et al., 2010). Why should helping students in the social and emotional realms of their lives enhance their academic learning? If we think back to our school days and remember a teacher we enjoyed, we almost certainly will bring to mind a classroom environment where we enjoyed learning. From the perspective of neuroscience, that optimal learning environment reflects an internal brain state that is well-attuned for learning.

**The Concept of “Learning”**

According to Durlak and colleagues (2010), a key challenge for 21st-century schools involves serving culturally diverse students with varied abilities and motivations for learning (Learning First Alliance, 2001). Unfortunately, many students lack social-emotional competencies and become less connected to school as they progress from elementary to middle to high school, and this lack of connection negatively affects their academic performance, behavior, and health (Blum & Libbey, 2004). In a national sample of 148,189 sixth to twelfth graders, only 29%–45% of surveyed students reported having social competencies such as empathy, decision making, and conflict resolution skills, and only 29% indicated that their school provided a caring and encouraging environment (Benson, 2006). By high school, as many as 40%–60% of students become chronically disengaged from school (Klem & Connell, 2004). Furthermore, approximately 30% of high school students engage in multiple high-risk behaviors (e.g., substance use, sex, violence, depression, and
attempted suicide) that interfere with school performance and jeopardize their potential for life success (Dryfoos, 1997; Eaton et al., 2008).

Many studies have argued that the kind of academic learning that goes on in schools has little to do with one’s emotion or social environment. Now, neuroscience is stating the exact opposite. Intrinsically, schools are social places and learning is a social process. Students do not learn alone, rather in collaboration with their teachers, in the company of their peers, and with the support of their families. Emotions can facilitate or hamper their learning and their ultimate success in school (Zins, 2004). The emotional counters of the brain are intricately interwoven with the neocortical areas involved in cognitive learning. When a child trying to learn is caught up in distressing emotions, the centers of learning are temporarily hampered. The child’s attention becomes preoccupied with whatever may be the source of the trouble. Because attention is a limited capacity, the child has that much less ability to hear, understand, or remember what that teacher or a book is saying.

Figure 1 illustrates the framework of person-centered key SEL competencies and that children need to be aware of themselves and others; that they need to make responsible decisions; that they need to be ethical and respectful to others; and that they need to give consideration to the situation and relevant norms. They also need to manage their emotions and behaviors and possess social-behavioral skills that enable them to carry out solutions effectively with others. As a result, these skills and attitudes can help students feel motivated to succeed, to believe in their success, to communicate well with teachers, to set academic goals, to organize themselves to
achieve those goals, to overcome obstacles, and so forth. In summary, their attachment to school and commitment to academics can be fostered so that they lead to effective school performance (Zins et al., 2004).

**Figure 1. Framework of person-centered key SEL competencies (Zins et al., 2004).**

**Self-Awareness**
- Identifying and recognizing emotions
- Accurate self-perception
- Recognizing strengths, needs, and values
  - Self-efficacy
  - Spirituality

**Social Awareness**
- Perspective taking
- Empathy
- Appreciating diversity
- Respect for others

**Responsible Decision Making**
- Problem identification and situation analysis
- Problem solving
- Evaluation and reflection
- Personal, moral, and ethical responsibility

**Self-Management**
- Impulse control and stress management
- Self-motivation and discipline
- Goal setting and organizational skills

**Relationship Management**
- Communication, social engagement, and building relationships
- Working cooperatively
- Negotiation, refusal, and conflict management
- Help seeking and providing

In short, there is a direct link between emotions and learning. Multiple studies published in *Building Academic Success on Social Emotional Learning* demonstrate
that social and emotional learning programs pave the way for better academic
development learning. They teach children social and emotional skills that are
intimately linked with cognitive development. In the ideal learning environment,
children are focused, fully attentive, motivated, and engaged, and enjoy their work.
Such an environment can be one benefit of SEL. Similarly, caring relationships, and
peers increase students’ desire to learn and help develop students who are more
confident in their abilities to try harder.

The majority of published articles and empirical reviews on ASPs demonstrate
the vast breadth of developmental outcomes examined across studies exploring ASP
effectiveness, incorporating social-emotional, behavioral, academic, and cognitive
domains. Beyond the simple divide between whether programs should target
academic or social-emotional outcomes, there is also a lack of agreement about which
specific constructs should be targeted within each of these domains. As a result, ASPs
effectiveness studies have relied heavily on academic performance data, such as test
scores and grades, to examine program effectiveness regardless of program goals and
content (Leos-Urbel, 2013). This approach is not ideal because academic outcomes
are often misaligned with the everyday activities offered by ASPs, which are typically
g geared towards personal and social development. Selecting outcomes with clear
linkages to the program activities implemented is a hallmark of high-quality
evaluation approach (Weiss, 1977).
Statement of Need

*America After 3PM* began in 2004 due to the absence of reliable data about such topics. That year, the After-school Alliance set out to fill the information gap, conducting what was, at that point, the most in-depth study on how children spend their time after school.

The 2014 *America After 3PM* edition spans a decade of data chronicling how children spend the hours between 3 and 6 p.m. – the hours after school ends and before parents typically return home from work. With its predecessor reports, the 2014 publication serves as a resource for policy makers, educators, parents, and advocates on the trends of ASP participation, demand for ASPs, and the number of children who are alone and unsupervised during after-school hours.

The 2014 report looks at who children participated in ASPs and children missing out on after-school opportunities. It highlights who is in ASPs, the types of activities offered in programs, satisfaction with program quality, and what parents say about the benefits that ASPs provide their children and families. It also provides an overview of children who are unsupervised after school; a projection of analysis for children who would be enrolled in an ASP if one were available to them; and analyzes differences in the demand for ASPs by income, race, and ethnicity to examine the opportunity gaps that persist.

According to *America After 3 PM*, 433,390 children in Illinois are left alone and unsupervised between 3 and 6 p.m. (After-school Alliance, 2014). Currently, only 18% of children in Illinois participate in ASPs. However, 41% of children in Illinois
would participate in an ASP if one were available to them (After-school Alliance, 2014). Young people only spend about 20% of their time in school, and how they spend the other 80% of their time has tremendous implications for their well-being and future (Miller, et al., 2003).

The number of ASPs has spiked in recent years due to the increase of employed mothers, growing concern for academic advancement, and fear of lack of supervision during the high-risk after-school hours (James-Burdumy, Dynarski, & Deke, 2008). Of the 10 million or so children ages 6-13 living in or near poverty (i.e., in families with income less than 150% of the federal poverty threshold), about 6 million lived in families in which both parents or the single parent worked. Children living in these families were seen to face a variety of risks associated with self-care after school, including too much television exposure, too little exercise, feelings of boredom, loneliness, and worry, risks of accidents, stress associated with caring for younger siblings, and, among other children, susceptibility to the influence of problematic peers and to experimentation with drugs, sexual activity, and gangs (Dwyer, Aprill, & Bogduk, 1990; Pettit, 1997).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research study is to explore the impact of ASPs for low-income youth and identify the key factors of success. Specifically, the research question guiding this study is: *What are the key drivers of success in ASPs for low-income youth?* Despite the frequency with which youth development in ASPs are examined in research, evaluation, and practical efforts, this literature is paused by
diverse conceptualization of program outcomes and program quality and the use of
dissimilar predictors of program effectiveness. In addition, the researcher has years of
experience with ASPs and a knowledge of quality work done by many after-school
nonprofit organizations across the country. There was an assumption that the post-
tests would result in a significant increase.

Table 1. Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASP(s)</td>
<td>After-school Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OST</td>
<td>Out-of-School Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEL</td>
<td>Social-Emotional Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Sense of Competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE</td>
<td>Program Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPE</td>
<td>Future Planning and Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIOST</td>
<td>National Institute on Out-of-School Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOST</td>
<td>Making the Most of Out-of-School Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPQA</td>
<td>Youth Program Quality Assessment (PQA)®</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st CCLC</td>
<td>21st Century Community Learning Centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM</td>
<td>Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRME</td>
<td>The Principles for Responsible Management Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter II: Literature Review

History of ASPs

ASP history begins in the later decades of the 19th century, with individual men and women intent on rescuing children from the physical and moral hazards posed by growing up in immigrant neighborhoods. These first sponsors sought to create protected spaces in storefronts or vacant rooms in churches or other buildings, where children can relax, play board games, read, and be provided as much instruction as they would tolerate. Most early programs had modest aims and were intended as a refuge and diversion from the streets; in fact, some called themselves “off the street clubs.” Children could drop in when they wished, expectations were low, and any youngster who refrained from tearing up the place was welcomed (MacLeod, 1983). In 1876, businessman Edward Harriman opened up a boy’s club, with an initial membership of seven, in a building on Tompkins Square in Manhattan. By 1900, the Tompkins Square Boys’ Club had 400 regular members between 6 and 18 years of age.

ASPs sometimes emerged organically. Starting around 1900, after-school provision was spurred by a new social movement, called boy’s work (“girl’s work” was soon to be added, but almost as a kind of afterthought). This movement, fueled by anxiety about the decline of masculinity in American society and worry about unsupervised and under socialized working-class boys, had the support and involvement of politicians and business and civic leaders (Halpern, 2003). When a settlement house established itself in a particular neighborhood, children were usually
the first to show up, mostly out of curiosity, and “boys’ work” by necessity became the first concrete activity. Settlements and boys’ clubs were the two largest sponsors, although the term boys’ club was used in a generic way by many agencies. Boys’ clubs strengthened their visibility and identity by creating a national confederation. In 1905 the superintendents of about 50 local clubs had met in Boston to form a national organization to be called the Boy’s Clubs of America, with Jacob Riss as the first president. By the 1910s, there were 120 boys’ clubs in the national Boys’ Club Federation, in 87 cities.

Churches began sponsoring ASPs by the turn of the century and by 1921, some 75 churches in Chicago were providing these programs (Halpern, 2003). YMCA also played a very small role in the emerging after-school field. YMCA saw their mission as serving the middle-class and not the working-class, against whom they positioned themselves on economic and labor issues (Pence, 1939). Some of the resistance to serving poor children grew from the fact that members paid to use the YMCA facilities and might be unwilling to do so if confronted by socially undesirable children or youth (Zald & Denton, 1963).

In general, ASPs would fill in whatever gaps appeared in children’s lives at particular moments because of strains on family and school. For instance, during World War I, ASPs positioned themselves to meet the special war-related problems of children, especially a purported rise in delinquency attributed to parental neglect. After World War I, providers noted again that many working-class families were in stress and upheaval, affecting their children’s behavior and making the providers’
work crucial to children. Some of this rhetoric was necessary to secure the continued support of financial backers feeling donor fatigue, but it was also rooted in a belief that ASPs had a unique role in children’s lives (Halpern, 2003).

In the period between 1920 and 1950, ASPs and their sponsoring agencies became part of a solidifying the human service system in the United States and established themselves as a child-rearing institution. During these decades, providers faced the task to navigating a turbulent external environment. This environment was marked by rapid cultural change via two major social crisis – the Great Depression and World War II – and growing competition for social welfare resources, in the context of social service system became more treatment and problem oriented. Broad social processes and events affected ideas about what children needed from different child-rearing institutions, exacerbating ASPs’ continuing struggle for identity (Halpern, 2003).

The middle decades of the 20th century was a period of growth, albeit fitful growth, for ASPs. During the 1920s, the number of local programs expanded steadily, as more funding became available through community chests, corporate welfare programs, and private philanthropy. Growth was reversed during the depression on the 1930s, as ASPs scrambled to survive on slashed budgets. It was modestly renewed again during the 1940s, as the neglect of school-aged children became a widespread concern and as ASPs joined other institutions in the mobilization of American society in the war cause. This continued in the 1950’s, amid intensified
concerned about juvenile delinquency and a renewed belief that the children needed respite from the purposes of the world around them (Halpern, 2003).

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, children were harassed by police and pushed off street corners and were unwilling to seek out related recreational resources, which they perceived to belong to the society that was rejecting them. “The majority of inner-city children would remain poor throughout their childhood, and close to a majority would live in families with no or only internment earners, and therefore forced to rely on welfare” (Halpern, 2003, p. 68). A new kind of child appeared in low-income communities; one that was hard to reach, resistant, alienated, and oppositional.

In the 1960s, the federal War on Poverty created a seemingly promising new funding environment, scores of new services initiatives, and a brief moment of optimism about the potential of services to solve social problems. The 1970’s and 1980’s brought new purposes to ASPs. A rapid growth in maternal employment across social classes led to a renewed interest in these programs’ child care function. The growing involvement of the early childhood community in the after-school provision renewed the commitment to the importance of play (Halpern, 2003).

Also, criticism of the schooling provided to low-income children intensified. Low-income children had less opportunities than their more privileged peers to explore, construct, problem solve, and create. Inner-city schools were underfinanced, overcrowded, and dilapidated; lacked textbooks; had less experienced and less qualified teachers; had high teacher turnover; and were thoroughly segregated.
(National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968). Schools tended to ignore and belittle low-income, minority children’s language, culture, and community, and became little more than sorting machines (Halpern, 2003).

On the other hand, after-school providers viewed the specific activities they sponsored, the relationship children developed with staff, and the values inherent in their settings, as combining to provide what Wald (1915) described as “incidental education” and Bellamy (1912) as “teaching by indirection.” Adults had a clear role in guiding and shaping children’s experiences, but it was a hidden one. Thus, children would do useful things in a funny way.

ASPs have a history of many benefits provided to youth and communities. Research suggests that children’s home and community environments and experiences outside of school, were as important as, or more important than, their school experiences in determining educational success (Coleman, 1966). Studies also show that on the whole, students who go to ASPs have better school attendance, grades, standardized test scores, and behavior in school than students who do not participate in ASPs (Durlack & Weissberg, 2010). ASPs also help keep children safe and dissuade them from choosing to involve themselves in crime; studies have found that participants in ASPs are 30% less likely to participate in criminal activities (After School Alliance, 2014).

**Components of Quality ASPs**

ASPs provide a place where youth could be themselves, and this is no small feat. Feeling and being safe – not just physically, but psychologically safe – are
prerequisites for taking risks entailed in learning and trying new activities. When young people become engaged through enrichment activities, volunteer work, or teams and clubs, they grow up to become adults who are committed to the community, which builds strong communities for the long term. ASPs also provide childcare for many working families who have limited, if any, resources to cover the additional childcare expense.

Some observers have viewed the work of ASPs as one expression of a massive effort to control what, where, how, and with whom low-income children played, and as an example of adult appropriation of children’s everyday experiences (Finkelsteinn, 1987; Godman, 1979; Suransky, 1982). At a practical level, ASPs have had to compete with both the peer group and the streets for children’s allegiance. Although some children seek ASPs – for respite from stresses elsewhere, for performing arts, as a place to develop a different “self,” for adult supports, or for access to a gym – many others preferred spaces where they could create and control their activities (Nasaw, 1985). Take dance for instance; dance is the physical expression through movement and rhythm of relationships, feelings and ideas. Nobody “invented” dance. It is deep in the heart of every culture throughout history; dance is part of the pulse of humanity. It embraces multiple genres, styles and traditions and is constantly evolving. Its roles range from recreational to sacred and cover every form of social purpose.

Some people have long understood that dance is an essential part of life and education. In Dance Education around the World: Perspectives on Dance, Young
People and Change, researchers Charlotte Svendler Nielsen and Stephanie Burridge bring together recent studies of the value of dance in all kinds of settings: from Finland to South Africa, from Ghana to Taiwan, and from New Zealand to America. The low status of dance in schools is derived, in part, from the high status of conventional academic work, which associates intelligence mainly with verbal and mathematical reasoning. The studies collected by Nielsen and Burridge explore how a deeper understanding of dance challenges standard conceptions of intelligence and achievement and show the transformative power of movement for people of all ages and backgrounds. Dance can help restore joy and stability in troubled lives and ease the tensions in schools disrupted by violence and bullying (Robison & Aronica, 2018).

Furthermore, research shows that quality ASPs increase positive outcomes for youth (Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007). Quality ASPs provide enrichment activities, opportunities that increase self-esteem and prevent risky behaviors, recreational activities that promote healthy and physical development and team building, and a chance to build on school-day learning by explaining academic concepts through hands-on activities.

It is not enough for communities to merely have access to ASPs. Communities need access to consistent and high-quality programs that benefit youth socially, emotionally, and academically. Positive outcomes for youth are more likely to occur when evidence-based methods are used in ASP planning and implementation (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Quality ASPs and program improvement efforts would become
evaluated by helping program staff think through a guiding philosophy, a sense of purpose, and role. It is important to consider what kind of staff configuration and training is needed and gradually build a climate that balances a range of elements, including deeply engaging projects. In addition, a quality ASP would provide opportunities for children to explore identity, opportunities for self-expression in different symbolic systems, and time away from adult-led activity and development of independence.

**History of ASP Evaluation Efforts**

Presently, there have been only a handful of efforts to test different program improvement strategies, and even fewer to figure out and begin to build an infrastructure of people and organizations to provide the most critical support. For the present study, the evidence-based tools, including the survey used to measure the impact of ASP, was designed by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) initiative. Other examples of evidence-based tools to measure ASP quality and outcomes include the Making the Most of Out-of-School Time (MOST) initiative and Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) by Dr. David Weikart, published by the Center for Youth Program Quality.

NIOST first brought national attention to the importance of Out-of-School Time (OST) programming in the 1970s as a strategy to help mothers both enter and stay in the workforce. Since then, they have focused on how OST programs can build on the work of schools, especially in high-need communities, to improve children’s well-being and life prospects. Much of NIOST’s work encompasses projects of
national scope and influence, several representing firsts for the field. NIOST plays a lead role in building a wide range of OST systems across the country – initiatives that use a multi-level, multi-faceted, collaborative approach, integrating research, evaluation, and promising practices to build staff skills and create stronger, more sustainable, higher quality programs for all children and youth in the community. NIOST’s long record of partnering with different types of organizations and funders lets us draw upon resources strengthened from years of networking and field-building work. NIOST approaches all projects from a team-focused perspective and has relationships with consultants across the country who provide their expertise when needed. NIOST has also consistently worked at the forefront of OST research and evaluation, providing user-friendly evaluation support to OST programs and initiatives around the country. To disseminate the latest knowledge and build the leadership of the field, NIOST produces a wide array of research and technical assistance, papers, publications, and assessment and training tools.

The University of Chicago’s Chapin Hall Center for Children conducted an evaluation of the first phase (1995-1998) of the MOST Initiative of the Wallace-Reader’s Digest Funds. The objectives of this initiative were to contribute to the supply, accessibility, affordability, and quality of ASPs, especially for low-income children, and to strengthen the overall functioning of ASPs as a “system,” in Boston, Chicago, and Seattle. MOST was designed and implemented in recognition of the growing interest in ASPs as one potential solution to current challenges facing children and their families. The evaluation found that MOST efforts yielded not only
a variety of benefits, but hard-won lessons. In addition to concrete accomplishments in supply-building, staff training and development, facilities improvement, and program linkage to external resources, MOST raised the awareness of stakeholders in each city with respect to what an after-school system could be and demonstrated the value of strategic thinking. The initiative helped clarify the resources needed and strategies that might be used in strengthening ASPs as systems. Its general framework has served as an exemplar for other city-level and state-level initiatives.

MOST also highlighted core issues facing the after-school field. For example, the initiative demonstrated that mere supply development is vastly different from assuring that this supply is accessible, equitably distributed, affordable, of decent quality, and sustainable. The work of MOST exposed the quality problems characteristic of this field, and reminded us that strengthening programs requires a patient, long-term, multifaceted, adequately funded, and coordinated approach (Halpern, Spielberger, & Robb, 2001).

The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality empowers education and human service leaders to adapt, implement, and scale best-in-class, research-validated quality improvement systems to advance child and youth development. The YPQA is a validated instrument designed to measure the quality of youth programs and identify staff training needs. It has been used in community organizations, schools, camps, and other places where youth have fun, work, and learn with adults. The YPQA is suitable for youth in grades 4-12. For children in grades K-6, the School-Age PQA is developmentally appropriate.
Both the Youth and School-Age PQAs evaluate the quality of youth experiences as youth attend workshops and classes, complete group projects, and participate in meetings and regular program activities. For staff, the Youth and School-Age PQAs’ self-assessment process is an effective way to identify what is really happening in their programs and to build professional competencies. The Youth and School-Age PQAs assess seven domains, namely: 1) safe environment; 2) supportive environment; 3) interaction; 4) engagement; 5) youth-centered policies and practices; 6) high expectations for youth and staff; and 7) access.

Each domain contains items that focus on specific elements of best practice. In addition, the Youth and School-Age PQAs are evidence-based assessment tools. Evidence is gathered through observation and interview. Program staff or an outside specialist observe program activities, take notes, and then conduct an interview with a program administrator. Notes, observations, and interview data are then used as evidence to score items. Item scores are combined to create an overall program quality profile. The online “Scores Reporter” is a web-based data reporting application for entering scores, producing reports, and storing data over time.

Throughout the majority of the 20th century, ASPs were primarily viewed as a way to protect youth – particular poor youth – from the dangers in their communities (Bodily & Becket, 2005; Halpern, 2003). However, policymakers were increasingly recognizing the potential of ASPs to play a broader role in promoting healthy growth and development for all youth, including those who were economically disadvantaged (Pittman, Ferber, & Irby, 2000). ASPs had always prided themselves on being
institutions in which children could have a broader range of experience from what they had in schools. They had created space and time for developmental needs that schools had ignored or addressed intermittently. They had focused on the “whole child,” accommodating for individual differences in learning style, interests, and capabilities.

There is a high expectation that ASP outcomes should now include an increase in literacy level, gaining knowledge of the world, better grades, higher graduation rates, and development of 21st-century skills to be prepared for a competitive career. ASPs became the “third leg” in child development, and the demands and expectations continue to increase. After-school effectiveness studies have relied heavily on academic performance data, such as test scores and grades, to examine program effectiveness regardless of program goals and content (Leos-Urbel, 2013). However, selecting outcomes with clear linkages to the program activities implemented is a hallmark of high-quality evaluation and research approaches (Weiss, 1997). Test scores easily and objectively quantify academic goals; however, it is unclear how much of a gain is necessary to qualify as evidence of program success. Other academic outcomes have important implications for later success and may be more amenable to change than test scores. “It’s not so much the type of program – the focus, strategies or location – as the environment that is created for youth that makes all the difference” (Miller, 2003, p69).

The current literature indicates that participation in quality ASPs - particularly those that offer both enriching youth development activities and strong academic
component – can lead to small gains in academic outcomes. Research shows that ASPs have been successful in increasing both student academic performance as well as positive social behavior. In order for students to benefit, ASPs should have a social skill-building component. Many programs aim to foster social development by connecting with positive adult role models.

**ASPs as a Conduit to Sound Mentorship**

According to the *Mentoring Effect Study: Young People’s Perspective on the Outcomes and Availability of Mentoring* (2014), more than one in three young people – an estimated 16 million – never had an adult mentor of any kind (structured or naturally occurring) while they were growing up. This population includes an estimated nine million at-risk youth who will reach age 19 without ever having a mentor – and who are, therefore, less likely to graduate high school, go on to college, and lead healthy and productive lives (Bruce and Bridgeland, 2014). Mentoring integrated with holistic approaches, can drive achievement and increase opportunity at school, home, and in the workforce.

In addition to correlations with higher educational aspirations, research shows that mentoring is correlated with positive outcomes, including changing attitudes (e.g., higher self-esteem and stronger relationships with adults), better behavior (e.g., avoiding drugs and alcohol, juvenile justice issues, and bullying), and higher academic performance (e.g., lower truancy, better connection to schools and adults, lower dropout indicators, and higher achievement) (Dubois et al., 2011). ASPs can be critical to enhancing young people’s social-emotional development by providing
youth with mentoring relationships, encouraging their participation in challenging and meaningful activities (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010).

According to Halpern:

“ASPs have never been part of any major public systems, nor governed by any particular public policies, organizations, or standards (although governance mechanisms are beginning to emerge in a handful of cities, and proposed standards beginning to be promulgated). Frontline staff, if not program directors, have always been mostly nonprofessionals, with little or no formal preparation for the work they do with children. ASPs have always been, and remain, inadequately funded, reliant on community chests, United Ways, and local philanthropy” (Halpern, 2003, p 5).

**Funding Sources for ASPs**

Modest public funding has emerged over the past few decades, including 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) in partnership with public schools, as public interest in ASPs has grown. In spite of this, the majority of programs still have limited access to this or any other reliable funding.

The failure to reduce achievement gaps limits the economic mobility of children born into poverty. Additional time on academic tasks is one way to help struggling students master content (Brown & Saks, 1986). Notably, one of the largest federal funding sources for OST programs—the 21st CCLC, which was included in Every Student Succeeds Act (a comprehensive federal education policy replacing No Child Left Behind)—has multiple goals, but the first is to provide activities aimed at
increasing academic achievement. The program also seeks to provide students with a broad array of activities and programs that complement academics and engage families.

Legislation mandates that entities seeking funding include in their proposal “a description of the activities to be funded” and a “description of how such activities are expected to improve student academic achievement as well as overall student success” (Public Law 114-95, Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). The legislation names 14 different programs or activities that qualify as “authorized activities,” including remedial education activities and academic enrichment learning, cultural programs, literacy education programs, well-rounded education activities, technology education programs, programs that support healthy and active lifestyles, parenting skills programs that promote parental involvement and family literacy, and drug and violence prevention programs (Pub.L. 114-95, Section 4205, Local Activities, 2015). Some of these activities, such as remedial education, include formal academic instruction, while others, such as cultural programs, might support academics indirectly by strengthening youth development.

**The Impact of ASPs on Socioeconomic Status into Adulthood**

Research shows that, on average, low-income students trail substantially behind their more-affluent peers in terms of academic achievement on state and national assessments. The achievement gap translates into a later attainment gap – only 70% of students from low-income families graduate from high school, compared with 85% of their more-affluent peers, and only 10% of individuals from lowest-
income quartile families have a bachelor’s degree by age 25, compared with 77% of individuals from families in the highest income quartile (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Further, the unemployment rate among individuals without a high school diploma is 50% higher than among high school graduates and 100% higher than among college graduates, and those that are employed have far lower earnings (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014).

In an economy that is increasingly dependent on postsecondary education, about one in five students still do not graduate high school with his or her peers, and even fewer go on to college (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Education attainment and performance rates lag far behind global counterparts (The Associated Press, 2013). Some children and youth are surrounded by adults who support, guide and shape their journeys into productive adulthood while others are not. Too often, the information of these positive relationships is left to chance – with consequences to youth, their communities, the economy, and our country. Research shows that when young adults (16-24 years old) fail to connect to school or a career, their lifetime earnings diminish. Young adults who are not connected cost society $93 billion annually in lost wages, taxes and social services (Belfield, Levin, & Rosen, 2012). On the other hand, recent data show that every dollar invested in quality youth mentoring programs yields a $3 return in benefits to society (Wilder Research, 2007).

Schools and ASPs have viewed each other as allies in their respective efforts to counter the influence of the streets on children’s development. At the same time, many factors have constrained the potential of schools and ASPs to work together.
School leaders have proved unwilling or unable to re-conceptualize learning in schools, as well as ambivalent about an expanded role for the schools in meeting children’s non-academic needs (Hawes, 1997; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

There is an emerging recognition of the potential for ASPs to promote positive youth development and a renewed focus on program quality and mentorship in both research and policy with the hope to fight poverty and narrow the achievement gap between more and less advantage students. Researchers have shown — and teachers know — that school children exposed to neighborhood violence can have a tougher time learning, experiencing more stress and depression than their peers growing up in safe neighborhoods. Without the presence of protective factors (e.g., positive community climate, and adequate household income), which promote resiliency, families in poverty experience instability and limited access to resources (Nelson et al., 2008). The results of poverty affect children negatively by constraining their ability to thrive academically, socially and emotionally (Nelson et al., 2008).

**ASPs’ Role in the Cycle of Poverty**

According to “The Mentoring Effect: Young People’s Perspectives on the Outcomes and Availability of Mentoring” report, a child born in the United States today is twice as likely to have a parent in jail as compared to a child born just 20 years ago (Urban Institute Justice Policy Center, 2008). Compared to 40 years ago, two and a half times as many children live without the presence of a father at home, which puts more children at risk for having fewer caring adult examples in their lives (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012).
A recent study by Johns Hopkins University sociologists discovered that the consequences of neighborhood violence reach further than previously known, even spilling over to students who come from safe neighborhoods. Using crime and student data from Chicago, Julia Burdick-Will linked exposure to neighborhood violence to a drop-in test scores, an effect that extended to students coming from communities that experienced little or no violence.

Schools are increasingly recognizing trauma as a factor that may be derailing learning, with more districts training educators on how to teach students who may be grappling with traumatizing events. Moreover, it is not just violence that can inflict trauma, unstable family life and natural disasters that upend a student’s life can take their toll as well.

Burdick-Will analyzed data from first-year students in Chicago Public Schools between 2002 and 2010 and examined their test results over time. Considering other factors, she found that classes with higher proportions of students from violent neighborhoods performed worse than classes with fewer such students. She hypothesized that this “peer effect” occurs because students who live in the midst of violence may be more disruptive and less engaged, problems teachers have to address with little assistance from counselors. Burdick-Will emphasizes that those kids are stressed and potentially responding in exaggerated ways or just being upset and traumatized and needing the teacher’s attention, and that affects everybody in the classroom, not just that one child. Those kids really need constant social support. (Balingit, 2018)
Elisabeth Babcock, president and CEO of EMPath, published *Using Brain Science to Design New Pathways Out of Poverty*. The study indicates that finding a way to remove the obstacles that prevent people from escaping poverty today is a much more complicated process than it was in the past. The buying power of the federal minimum wage has been eroded by more than 30 percent since the 1960s. Changes in US public policy have resulted in drastic cuts in public benefits and training programs for the poor. More than 1 in 5 children in the US live in poverty, and the child poverty rate has increased nearly 35 percent since 2000 (Children’s Defense Fund, 2012). The shift from an industrial to a knowledge-based economy has meant that virtually all jobs paying a family-sustaining wage require post-secondary education. New brain science research shows that the most crucial decision-making skills adults draw upon to manage the complex challenges of moving ahead are often compromised by situational and chronic experiences of social bias, persistent poverty, and trauma.

In addition to the pressures of low social status, low-income families experience greater instability in obtaining the basic resources for survival. They move and change jobs more frequently and experience more episodes of hunger, food insecurity, homelessness, and unemployment than their wealthier counterparts. These experiences, in combination with low social status, often cause families to feel they have little control of their lives. They spend much of their time reacting to crises and can feel there is little value in trying to think ahead since their plans never work out. Individuals who feel they are being controlled by external events, rather than by their
own internal decisions, are said to have an “external locus of control,” which has been shown to be passed on to the children in their care (Freed and Tompson, 2011).

In addition, the highly stressful and volatile nature of growing up in poverty reinforces developmental differences in powerful ways. The toll taken by social bias, stress of persistent poverty, exposure to trauma, and violence (all of which are more prevalent in lower-income environments) has impacts far beyond diminution of personal agency, self-awareness, or understanding of others. It causes physiological changes in brain development that deeply affect the ways people react to the world around them. Stress and fear cause the limbic brain to trigger the release of dozens of hormones, such as adrenalin and the glucocorticoids (particularly cortisol), developed to help the mind and body prepare for self-protection. These hormones, in conjunction with activation of the inflammatory response, create the potent effects referred to as the “fight or flight” or “acute stress” response. These effects include rapid acceleration of the heart rate, increased blood flow to the limbs, activation of the immune response, increased blood sugar, and the override of many of the reflective, analytic mental processes that might slow the body’s rapid response to danger. This latter component of the chain reaction is referred to in academic literature as “swamping” or “hijacking” (Babcock, 2014, p. 8).
Although these bodily reactions evolved to be protective, persistent hyperactivation of the stress response can, over time, create significant negative effects, such as increased rates of disease (e.g., heart disease, hypertension, diabetes), due to
overexposure to stress-related hormones and persistently elevated blood sugar and inflammatory chemicals (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2005). Chronic activation of the stress response can also create hypersensitivity to danger that often manifests itself in behaviors in which individuals’ responses appear exaggerated or unwarranted by the circumstances around them. This can include behaviors commonly described as “having a hair-trigger temper,” “reacting first and thinking later,” and “looking for trouble around every corner.” These are all plausible responses when individuals have a history of acute stress or trauma and therefore have learned to keenly anticipate danger and protect themselves. The hyperactivation of the limbic system also affects other mental processes beyond the stress response because, as previously mentioned, the limbic brain works in tandem with the prefrontal cortex to control memory, motivations, and beliefs, which in turn influence how an individual solves problems, sets priorities, and invests attention and resources. Growing up in socially stigmatized, impoverished, and/or violent environments, children experience life as not only full of stress and danger, but also highly unpredictable and lacking in resources and options for improvement. These factors inhibit the prefrontal cortex from optimally developing key decision-making skills known as “executive function (EF) skills” (Babcock, 2014).

Recent research shows that brain development is not just a result of genetic inheritance, but is also strongly affected by environmental risk factors, including exposure to toxins, poor nutrition, prenatal drug use, low social status, stress, and
violence, all of which are more prevalent in low-income households (Hackman, Farah and Meaney, 2010; Sapolsky, 2005).

Babcock’s research shows that “such exposure has a direct impact on the development of the prefrontal cortex and limbic system, which potentiate many of the key problem-solving, decision-making, goal-setting, and goal-attainment skills critically important to achieving social and economic stability. Sometimes referred to as “cognitive skills,” they largely describe the processes by which individuals consciously reflect upon, rather than merely instinctively react to, circumstances and, after reflecting, make reasoned decisions on how to proceed based on prior learning, current conditions, and future objectives” (p. 6).

Furthermore, a recent study part of the Next America: Early Childhood Project, which is supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Heising-Simons Foundation shows a new initiative of fighting poverty by empowering families to understand that they can make a change. EMPath has created the Intergenerational Mobility Project, known as Intergen, which uses three tools – one for adults, one for youth, and one for the family as a whole – to frame how they think about their individual and collective lives. The child and adult tools use a bridge metaphor to illustrate how various domains are all critical for ultimate success – if a single pillar on a bridge is weakened, according to the metaphor, the whole bridge could collapse. The Bridge to Self-Sufficiency for adults, guides parents to consider family stability, well-being, financial management, education and training, and employment and career management. The Child Bridge to a Brighter Future similarly
guides children in thinking about health and well-being, social-emotional
development, self-regulation, preparing for independence, and educational progress.

In families that have participated in the Intergen Project for at least a year, 86% of children demonstrate an increase in EMPath’s externally validated measure of executive functioning, and 86% of families report an increase in household order and alignment based on another externally validated measures of “chaos” in the home, according to the most recent program data from Brueck. “We have people in our programs that have made it all the way out of poverty to a family-sustaining wage,” Babcock said that there are people in the program who had made their way out of poverty to not just a job, but a family-sustaining wage.

Poverty creates barriers to developing this sense of control over one’s own life. Moreover, EMPath is among the minority of agencies helping families break them down by using an understanding of the human brain to effect lasting change (Matthewson, 2017).

**The Opportunity Gap**

ASPs would never “usurp the place of school,” instead, ASP would provide “opportunity for experimentation [with educational methods] not possible in a rigid system” (Wald, 1915, p. 106). Schools have limited time to offer those additional activities and those are usually the first ones to be cut due to lack of funding. Dewey (1915) argued for the importance of “games, handwork, and dramatizations” in education and for regular field trips to observe the real world and visit places that were outside of their neighborhoods and sometimes have first time experience like...
going to the beach, a museum, or a zoo. In general, proponents argued that ASPs would fill in whatever gaps appeared in children’s lives at particular moments because of strains on family or school (Halpern, 2003).

In ASPs, children were free and encouraged to be themselves, and laugh, play, make friends; do things that every child should be allowed to do in a safe environment. Learning in ASPs was hands-on, flexible, creative, and focused on the whole child. In some respects, play, even in its organized form, was perceived as an antithesis of schooling. Since schools were too busy to give much time to play, ASPs would provide that function (Chew, 1913). For example, drama clubs reenacted stories, staged fairy tales, wrote and staged their plays, and did dramatic readings of contemporary and classic plays. Drama was seen to provide a range of functions for children, from cultural enrichment and literacy development, to escape from the drab realities of working-class life to opportunity for children to workout fears (Halpern, 2003). ASPs typically had one or more game rooms, where children dropped in to play board games, read magazines, talk, and hang out; the game room is the heart of every site. This central, welcoming space is a program area where all youth can have fun and play together. The game room typically was the first stop for children newly enrolled in a program (Halpern, 2003) and that was the place they could make friends in a casual environment without the pressure of fitting in.

Opportunity to use the gym and related facilities still represent the main attraction of most ASPs for many youth, although they sometimes discovered other activities once they enrolled. Teens also host games tournaments practicing good
sportsmanship and cooperation, and younger members modify games such as ping pong, billiards, and bumper pool to fit their interests and abilities. The staff strategically use the game room to help members develop life skills.

Open gym is also key to the success of ASPs. When not in use for organized team sports and activities, open gym is a time for youth to be creative and play together no matter their skill level. The gym is especially vital, as few youth have safe outdoor recreation space and many schools do not regularly offer gym class or sports opportunities.

A panel of researchers in kinesiology and pediatrics conducted a massive review of more than 850 studies about the effects of physical activity on school-age children. Most of the studies measured the effects of 30 to 45 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity three to five days a week on many factors: physical factors such as obesity, cardiovascular fitness, blood pressure, and bone density, as well as depression, anxiety, self-concept, and academic performance. Based on strong evidence in a number of these categories, the panel firmly recommended that students should participate in one hour (or more) of moderate to vigorous physical activity a day. Looking specifically at academic performance, the panel found strong evidence to support the conclusion that physical activity has a positive influence on memory, concentration and classroom behavior (Robison & Aronica, 2018).

In a study by Littel and Wynn (1989) comparing inner-city and a suburban community in the Chicago area, authors found that in the low-income community, some available after-school activities for inner-city youth were perceived as
interventions, intended to prevent or address problems; in the suburban community, most activities were designed to be fun and enriching, providing opportunities to explore interests, build skills, and experience success (Halpern, 2003). Ultimately, interventions are unlikely to have much practical utility or gain widespread acceptance unless they are effective under real-world conditions. Thus, SEL programs and exposure to enrichment activities would most likely provide significant outcomes and become more successful if incorporated into routine educational practice delivered by existing ASP staff during regular program activities.

Furthermore, youth access to enrichment activities (e.g., arts, sports, music, theater, or other types of activities not necessarily related to increasing academic performance) is highly dependent upon family income. The highest income families spend almost seven times more on enrichment activities for their children compared to lower-income families (Duncan & Murnane, 2011), and this spending gap creates an opportunity gap. For instance, approximately 59% of school-age children from low-income families participate in sports, compared with 84% of children from wealthier families, namely, those with annual incomes of $75,000 or more (Pew Research Center, 2015).

This opportunity gap exists for private lessons and participation in specialized clubs as well. The gap should not be concerning in terms of access alone; outcomes are also an issue. Enrichment activities help build human and cultural capital and develop and define children’s interests and skills. As noted in the Foundations of Young Adult Success framework, high-quality interactions or developmental
experiences with peers and adults allow youth to foster skills and develop self-management strategies, including self-regulation. By participating in activities otherwise not readily available to them, low-income youth have access to new and enriching experiences that may provide lasting developmental benefits.

Funders and sponsors expect evidence-based, results-oriented ASPs. They ask evaluators to tell them if ASPs “worked”; whether such programs were effective in preventing a range of problems and in strengthening social skills and improving academic achievement and attitudes toward school. Funders want to know what dosage was required to achieve effects, which components of ASPs were most effective, and whether benefits outweighed the cost. These questions further heighten tensions about purpose, identity, and approach. ASPs historically defined their efforts in broad, diffuse terms and had tended to address children’s struggles and support needs without measuring and labeling (Halpern, 2003). There was also underlying tension between the growing policy interest in, and evaluation pressures on, ASP and the marginal conditions under which most programs continued to operate (Halpern, 2003).

In 2006, Robert Halpern conducted research on after-school apprenticeship programs. In this research, he drew on data from a 2-year study of an after-school apprenticeship program in Chicago high schools to illustrate how the effort can serve as a framework for supporting adolescents’ work on developmental tasks. Halpern used the term apprenticeship in its broader sense as a specific kind of teaching-learning experience in a chosen discipline, craft, or art form, deemphasizing its
explicitly vocational dimensions. Apprenticeship is an old institution, deeply rooted in a wide range of societies (Douglas, 1921).

Apprenticeship programs can provide experiences that actualize the new capacities that arrive with adolescence, whether for planning, managing and sustaining the effort, regulating emotional states, developing the skills of judgment, reflecting and self-correcting, or other (Larson, Hansen, & Walker, 2005). In the study, Halpern examined the strengths and limitations of an apprenticeship-like framework as an approach to youth programming. The findings suggest that such a framework provides a vibrant, engaging, and challenging learning and interpersonal environment, thus providing a foundation for work on a variety of developmental tasks. They are introducing youth to, rather than preparing them for, specific trade or discipline. As a conclusion, the study supports the fact that experiences like these offer one means of sharing cultural capital in new ways and are far more equitable than that which occurs through schooling and other prevailing institutions.

*Midwest ASP*

In order to protect the organization and the youth surveyed, for the purpose of this study, the organization will be call Midwest ASP. As a leading provider of after-school expert services for over 100 years, Midwest ASP offers a safe haven where youth may learn and grow during the most vulnerable time of day. Midwest ASP’s sites give children a vital alternative to the rampant dangers of crime, gangs, and drugs they face on a daily basis in neighborhoods lacking in right economic opportunity and development.
Midwest ASP provides a holistic approach to youth empowerment in the context of a safe environment and the presence of caring adult staff and mentors. Youth involved in the project identify themselves through positive behaviors and learn how to manage the challenging negative influences that exist in their communities. This confidence and self-assurance further develop as they matriculate through the enrichment programs and become leaders in their sites, their schools, and their communities.

The youth Midwest ASP serves are 57% African American, 27% Latino, 2% Asian American, 4% Caucasian, and 5% Other including Multiracial and Native American; 84% are from families with incomes below $32,000, and 66% reside in single-parent households. To measure success, Midwest ASP utilizes analytical, data-driven metrics as well as student, parent, and teacher surveys. By tracking daily attendance, program participation, member demographics, as well as school performance and home behavior, they learned that highly engaged youth are more likely to make healthy life choices and enroll and graduate from a 4-year college.

**Midwest ASP Priority Outcomes and Programs**

Studies have indicated that people born into poverty have a 70% likelihood of remaining impoverished throughout their lives and only 4% of those born into poverty reach the top quintile (20%) of the income ladder (Trusts, 2013). Midwest ASP’s services provide a powerful antidote by removing youth from the streets and providing them with environments that model the path towards academic and personal success. Midwest ASP offers programs that are nationally-developed, time-
tested, and outcome-driven. Because Midwest ASP’s staff also know that attending the programs more frequently and over a greater length of time makes young people more likely to achieve positive outcomes. Thus, the staff members pursue strategies to increase attendance, program participation, and member retention by providing fun high-yield activities and fun, targeted programs.

Midwest ASP has identified the following priority outcomes for participating youth: 1) Academic Attainment Programs; 2) Leadership Programs; 3) Health & Wellness Programs; and 4) the Youth Employment Program. These priority outcomes were created to ensure that youth graduate from high school ready for college, trade school, the military, or employment; adopt a healthy diet, practice healthy lifestyle choices, and make a lifelong commitment to fitness; and become involved in their communities as engaged citizens registered to vote and model strong character.

To achieve these outcomes, Midwest ASP offers a multitude of age-appropriate programs across all sites. The content of these programs includes mentorship, academic tutoring, access to technology, financial literacy, health and life skills, physical exercise, nutrition education, arts, and culture. However, the real power of this model is that young people attend these programs in the context of a safe and positive place where they can have fun and experience caring and supportive relationships, new opportunities to grow, and have their achievements celebrated. That type of environment has been proven to help ensure that young people have a healthy transition into adulthood. Below is a brief overview of each priority outcome.
Academic Attainment Programs

According to the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, racial gaps in achievement have steadily increased between the Caucasian student population and African Americans, Hispanics, and all other groups. Also, low-income children, on average, tend to do worse academically than their more privileged contemporaries. Through academic attainment, ASP organizations vigorously address this problem by providing youth with practical help for their school work while also teaching the importance of lifelong learning. Midwest ASP offers several academic enhancement programs designed to improve and develop members’ skills and provide opportunities for students to explore a variety of careers, plan for their future and prepare to join the workforce.

Health & Wellness Programs

Childhood obesity is a reality for many communities. Midwest ASP’s Health & Wellness programs address the risk of negative behaviors and childhood obesity, providing youth with comprehensive prevention and education activities. Midwest ASP’s well-balanced meals include portion-controlled elements of every aspect of the USDA’s MyPlate: fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, and low-fat milk (dairy).

Leadership Programs

Unfortunately, daily gang and street violence is not new to youth and their families of youth participants of the Midwest ASP. To overcome the challenges that youth often face, the leadership programs help these children develop self-confidence while also helping them build the positive values that will allow our youth to resist
negative behaviors. By supporting and engaging young leaders in Leadership Programs, youth develop stronger connections both inside and outside of theirs ASP sites.

Helping these young people develop leadership competencies makes them more capable of solving community problems and enhances their civic participation. It is anticipated that the program will help youth become responsible, caring citizens, and acquire leadership skills and gain opportunities for planning and decision-making. The activities are varied, ensuring that all young people have an opportunity to develop key outcomes including caring adult relationships, basic social skills, decision-making, and constructive use of leisure time. It is anticipated that young leaders also demonstrate higher career aspirations, increased self-esteem, and improved high school completion rates, and that they have a greater understanding of the problems facing other youth, and fresh perspectives for how to address these problems.

**Youth Employment Program**

For over a century, Midwest ASP focused on serving youth ages 6-18; however, a large number of members would turn 18 and not know what to do once they were unable to attend their local ASP. The demand was high, and the ASP staff felt obligated to help those youth and give them guidance in a very crucial time in their lives. Many of the teens would become homeless and saw no hope for a brighter future. For inner-city youth especially, exciting and challenging after-school activities were few and far between. For older youth, the typical work experience hinders
educational progress, fails to strengthen essential skills, and breeds cynicism about work itself (Marsh & Kleitman, 2005).

After many heartbreaking stories, and many good youth that took a wrong turn as adults, the organization added a new age group, 16-24, placing a new focus on teaching the youth at much younger age. They learned trade skills that exposed them to career opportunities and taught them necessary skills, like how to show up to work on time, shake hands, and make eye contact – fundamental skills that were mostly a foreign language to them.

Midwest ASP actualizes its mission by creating a vision in which it removes barriers that prohibit youth from reaching their full potential, such as low-income status, basic skill deficiencies, lack of work experience, high school drop-out status, substance abuse, and pregnancy/parenting. Midwest ASP’s Youth Employment Program is a critical tool in helping transition-age youth create a positive path forward, addressing both employment and education needs. For many of these young people, there is a lack of resources in their communities and schools that can adequately help them start preparing for the future. On top of their often-challenging home circumstances, youth face external stresses and statistics that make their paths to success all the more trying. Without guidance, a constructive environment and opportunities to be involved in positive activities, young people can easily fall into behavior patterns that will negatively affect them for the rest of their lives.

Through Midwest ASP’s Youth Employment Program individualized approach, young people are able to break their long-term plans down into actionable
steps, receive tailored support and encouragement as they work toward their goals, and bring them into a community of employers, educators and peers that are partners in their success.

Additionally, youth receive counseling and direction through their Post-Secondary Education and Training efforts to help them apply, enroll in, and succeed in completing post-secondary education programs. Midwest ASP’s Youth Employment initiative trains participants so they are versed in the soft-skills that will make them a successful employee. Also, youth are placed in a job where they can practice those skills, build work credentials, and begin on a positive employment continuum.

**ASP Roles in Career Decisions**

According to a report from Education Week, every 29 seconds a young person drops out of high school in America. Nearly one-third of all public high school students fail to graduate high school with their class. Also, low-income children, on average, tend to do worse academically than their more privileged contemporaries. Not only do high school dropouts earn about $9,200 less per year and about $1 million less over a lifetime than high school graduates, but dropouts are more than three times more likely than college graduates to be unemployed, twice as likely as high school graduates to slip into poverty, and 3.5 times more likely than graduates to be incarcerated.

Not only do the statistics confirm the consequences of lack of opportunity for those youth, but the table below also shows the career stereotype by youth based on
the types of careers they are exposed to as a result of their parents’ career/culture and neighborhood. It is a crucial component of ASPs to expose and introduce those youth to different career opportunities through enrichment programs and youth employment programs from science to technology and even explain to them the various types of doctor specializations that they can choose from. Below is a table of after-school participants’ answers in the three different sites in response to the question, “What would you like to be when you grow up, if you could be anything you would like?”
Table 2. Participant Responses to the question, “What would you like to be when you grow up, if you could be anything you like?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site A</th>
<th>Site B</th>
<th>Site C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basketball player</td>
<td>Soccer player</td>
<td>NBA player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game designer</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Plastic surgeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mall cop</td>
<td>Goalkeeper</td>
<td>Endocrinologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Chef</td>
<td>Architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move to Hollywood</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>Join the Behavioral Analysis Unit (FBI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance instructor</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Dermatologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair dresser</td>
<td>Vet</td>
<td>Book writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Crisis hotline worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football player</td>
<td></td>
<td>Engineer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the table above, Site A is predominantly attended by African-American participants, Site B is predominantly Hispanic and Latino, and Site C is attended by an extremely diverse population. Their answers are defined by their parents’ occupations and imagery that they are exposed to in school and at home. Midwest ASP’s sites represent many ideals to youth: a safe haven, support from a caring and concerned adult, mentoring, a warm meal, a building full of resources, and a gathering place for fellowship and fun. Perhaps the most telling statistic of all is that 68% of youth reported that belonging to a site saved their life.

Children tend to have better grades, develop social-emotional skills and leadership skills if they are surrounded by an environment that is safe, fun, and where they can count on an adult to guide them and believe in themselves. For example, a suburban family adopts a child who has gone through a very dramatic and traumatic childhood. From day one, the child’s adopted parents show the child love and have high expectations for him because they know he can achieve them. This child is raised in a strength-based environment where he has a great support system that
allows him to believe in himself. Perhaps ASPs would be more successful if they had a strength-based approach, almost like an appreciative inquiry approach where they learn that their voice matters and if they try hard, they may succeed.

ASPs for low-income youth do not need to be an intervention. Support and a strength-based approach in the lives of these young people are necessary to help them achieve academic success and prevent them from taking to wrong turn. Activities such as tutoring and help with homework can make the difference between success and failure. Challenges for basic homework completion for today’s youth include the following:

- Other demands on students’ time. Whether watching television, working at an after-school job or watching younger siblings, students have many activities that compete for the time after school.
- Negative attitude toward homework. Children regularly describe homework as tedious, boring, lonely, and pointless. Peer pressure can also contribute to students' negative attitudes toward completing their homework.
- The absence of support. An absence of nurturing parental support can produce feelings of ambiguity, passivity, negativity, or downright hostility in young learners.

Midwest ASP uses a model that represents five critical elements for positive youth development: 1) a safe, positive environment; 2) fun; 3) supportive relationships; 4) opportunities and expectations; and 5) recognition. This model also incorporates a priority of achieving the regular attendance of youth. Positive youth
development promotes the idea that when given support from caring adults, all youth
can grow up to make positive contributions to their families, schools, and
communities. For many of the children attending these sites, their environment
includes the fear of physical danger, food insecurity, minimal time with positive role
models, and being stereotyped by people in authority. Midwest ASP provides
opportunities to promote physical and emotional well-being and time to build positive
connections – all crucial to breaking the cycle of poverty and risky behavior. In such
an environment, children have a much higher inclination to look toward their future.
Long-term plans have little value when facing the challenges of daily survival.
Chapter III: Methodology

The ASP in this study, Midwest ASP, measures their outcomes and impact by using data evaluation and qualitative storytelling. Nonprofits rely on robust evaluation systems in place to prove their impact in closing the achievement gap, increasing literacy levels, fighting obesity, and many other causes so they can continue to secure funding each year. In the nonprofit sector, storytelling becomes “data with a soul”. A signature story is an intriguing, authentic, involving narrative with a strategic message that clarifies or enhances the brand, the customer relationship, the organization. It is a strategic asset that enables growth, provides inspiration, and offers guidance both internally and externally over an extended period (Berger, 2013). For this study, the researcher selected a quantitative approach that complements the thorough qualitative reports that the organization currently has.

Permission was obtained from the CEO and President of a nonprofit organization that offers ASPs for low-income youth and the researcher was able to use existing data from Midwest ASP, including youth surveys. The survey evaluation used for this research study, Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes (SAYO), as a tool developed by NIOST which has been used in the OST field for over a decade. SAYO can also be used to measure program quality and many of the SEL competencies discussed earlier including: intrinsic motivation (e.g., initiative, persistence, and self-direction); critical thinking skills (e.g., problem-solving, metacognitive skills, reasoning and judgment skills); relational skills (e.g., communication, cooperation, empathy); emotional self-regulation (e.g., impulse
control, stress management, behavior); and self-concept (e.g., knowing one’s strengths and limitations, belief in one’s ability to succeed, believe that competence grows with effort).

The SAYO is currently being used by after-school, extended day, and summer programs across America and in Canada. The SAYO can help ASPs build and demonstrate their contributions to academic and other long-term goals for youth by helping programs stay focused on outcomes that are most appropriate and realistic.

**The Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes: Youth Survey (SAYO-Y)**

The SAYO-Y uses brief pre- and post-youth surveys to assess the youth’s perspective on program quality and their attitudes and beliefs. The SAYO-Y scale was designed to target those areas that can only be measured by asking the youth themselves. The SAYO-Y scales are grouped into three main sections:

1. Program Experiences (PE): Youth’s perception of the social environment and their relationships with adults and peers; opportunities for choice and autonomy and leadership and responsibility; youth’s enjoyment of and engagement in the program; and youth’s sense of challenge.

2. A Sense of Competence (SC): Youth’s beliefs of their competence as readers, writers, in math, in science, socially, and generally as learners.

3. Youth’s Future Planning and Expectations (FPE): Whether youth have talked to an adult about their aspirations regarding secondary education, life, and career goals; youth’s expectations for their academic future; and what
actions youth are currently taking to make sure they will reach their future goals.

Development of the SAYO-Y drew from research in areas related to out-of-school time program quality, sense of competence, academic motivation, and future aspirations, as well as input from youth, ASPs, and school districts. Each of these scales is comprised of three to eight items. These items have been tested and have shown that they work together to measure the underlying construct. A factor analysis was also done to ensure validity of this survey tool (See Appendix B).

Psychometric testing of the SAYO-Y demonstrates that the scales have strong scale structure, internal consistency, and adequate scale distribution; show change over time for sub-sets of youth; and detect differences between sites in responses to measures of program experience for youth in grades 4-12 (Tracy, Surr, & Richer, 2012).

**Data Collection**

Midwest ASP has numerous sites in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods in the Midwest. The standalone sites have, on average, 150 youth daily and offer more robust programs and more extended hours compared to school-based sites. For this research study, there were three sites selected that were located in different communities. The first site, Site A, is located in a predominantly African-American neighborhood. The second site, Site B, is one of the smallest sites serving the majority of Latinos. The third site, Site C is located in a very diverse community serving Latinos, African-American, White, and Asian youth.
The pre-survey was completed in the recommended first 6-8 weeks of the school year (early October), and the post-survey was conducted six months later (end of March; See Appendix A). The average time to take the survey was 26 minutes, although Site A had a 45-minute average due to the participants’ difficulties with computer use and lack of focus. Site B had a Spanish-speaking translator on site that helped the youth in case they did not understand the questions in English. Only one child needed the translator to help her confirm how long she had been part of the program. All of the answers from the survey were exported and cleaned in SPSS (IBM Corp, 2012) (e.g., code missing data, code categorical data). Seventeen sub-themes and three main themes were calculated from the 75 individual survey items. Average scores for the specific test measures (main themes and sub-themes) were calculated for each location, and for each time period (pre/post). Initial analyses included factor analysis and Cronbach’s reliability analysis to investigate and report the reliability of the test instruments. Mean testing, specifically, pre-post tests for significant mean differences were conducted and correlation analysis were conducted to find the key drivers of success in this particular ASP. Data collection processes were approved by the Benedictine University Institutional Review Board.

**Participants**

A total of 153 participants completed the pre-surveys 146 participants completed the post-survey six months into the program.
Chapter IV: Research Findings

Midwest ASP evaluates programs through administrative data, data partners, youth and instructor feedback, and quality assessments, and uses data management software to record, store, analyze, and report program data. Midwest ASP regularly seeks youth and instructor feedback through surveys, interviews and focus groups. Midwest ASP uses the NIOST youth survey to evaluate the social and emotional learning aspects of programing and the key drivers of the organization. Based on the researcher assumption, there was an expectation of a significant increase in scores on PE, SC, and FPE from pre to post surveys. However, the averages did not increase. In fact, most stayed the same and, in some cases, the averages slightly decreased. The most significant decrease was PE2: “Youth enjoy & feel engaged in the teen program” (See Table 3).

### Table 3. Comparison of Mean Scores between Pre and Post Time Periods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison of mean scores between pre and post time period</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PE Program Experience</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE1 Youth perceive supportive social environment-</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE2 Youth enjoy &amp; feel engaged in the teen program</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>-.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE3 Youth have choice &amp; autonomy</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE4 Youth feel challenged</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE5 Youth believe they have a supportive adult</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE6 Youth believe they have opportunities for leadership &amp; responsibility</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC Sense of Competence</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC1 Sense of Competence as a Learner</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC2 Sense of Competence as a Reader</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC3 Sense of Competence as a Writer</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC4 Sense of Competence in Math</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC5 Sense of Competence in Science</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC6 Sense of Competence Socially</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPE1 Future Planning-Talk to an Adult</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPE2 Future Planning-Who have you talked to?</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPE3 Future Expectations</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPE4 Future Planning-My Actions</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>-.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPE5 Future Planning-Have you talked with an adult about college?</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>-.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The teen engagement means were mostly driven by Site A, who were working on a strategy to recruit more teens and were divided by getting the teens there first or developing a program with the hopes the teens would come (recruit or design). It turns out that they decided to focus on recruitment first, and this data is a sign that it was time to design and implement a robust program for teens at that site where they could feel engaged and enjoy the program. Site A created a youth development initiative designed to engage vulnerable youth between the ages of 13-18 with unique, “just-for-them” programing. By supporting and engaging young leaders, providing a safe, nurturing and positive environment for vulnerable teens on weekends and evenings. This program gives teen a stronger connection with Site A and gives them safe alternatives to the streets. It is anticipated that these connections will lead to greater teen attendance and retention thereby preparing youth to avoid risky lifestyle choices and violent alternatives. In addition, Midwest ASP included a new music studio in that site, new basketball program, and flag football to engage more teens.

Figure 2 below provides a better overview of overall pre and post results with all three sites combined.
Table 4 gives a more detailed overview of means which slightly decreased for each site. Looking at Site A and trying to understand what may have caused such a decrease, in addition to teen recruitment strategy, there are a few changes that occurred during that fiscal year. There was another site about 1.5 miles from Site A that had closed for a major renovation for that year. In order to be able to still serve those youth and families, the organization decided to provide transportation via bus for youth from the closed site to Site A for the entire year. Although all of the sites go through the same staff training and provide the same programs, each site has its own
unique culture. It is fascinating to compare sites one mile apart from each other and realize how different the youth from each site are, as well as the culture of each site.

**Table 4. Comparison of Mean Pre- and Post- Test Scores by Site**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison of mean scores between sites</th>
<th>Site A</th>
<th>Site B</th>
<th>Site C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PE 1 Program Experience</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE 2 Youth perceive supportive social environment</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE 3 Future Planning-Who have you talked to?</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE 4 Future Planning-My Actions</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE 5 Future Planning-Talk to an Adult</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC 1 Sense of Competence as a Learner</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC 2 Sense of Competence as a Reader</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC 3 Sense of Competence as a Writer</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC 4 Sense of Competence in Math</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC 5 Sense of Competence in Science</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>2.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC 6 Sense of Competence Socially</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE 1 Future Planning-Talk to an Adult</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE 2 Future Planning-Who have you talked to?</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE 3 Future Expectations</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE 4 Future Planning-My Actions</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE 5 Future Planning-Have you talked with an adult about college?</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schein defines culture as:

“There is no basic assumption that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration – a pattern of assumptions that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 1983, p. 18).

Sometimes people cannot understand where the culture came from, but they know that what they do, and they follow everyone else and the culture of the organization. If a new staff member is introduced, he/she is expected to automatically accept and follow the organization’s culture because that’s just how things are done.

In this particular organization, there was not only the overall organization culture,
Each site had its own culture and its own identity and those two sites culture did not merge successfully. Many leaders who practice evidence-based management have begun to recognize that the odds are against them in undertaking a merger and, as a consequence, resist the urge to merge. However, in this instance, those youth from the facility under renovation had nowhere to go and although the leadership team understood that this merger was not ideal based on two different sites, they knew it was the best solution for the short period of time in order to still be able to serve those youth in a safe environment. In addition, Site A went through a significant staff turnover in that year. Because of limited funding, the majority of the staff are part-time and the compensation is low, and eventually, many staff end up leaving to secure a full-time position elsewhere.

In addition, Site A scored -. 37 in the sense of competence, which includes the following survey questions: 1) It’s very easy for me to get along with other teens; 2) When I meet someone new, I know he or she will like me; 3) I get along with friends as well as other teens my age; and 4) It’s easy for me to join a new group of teens. This certainly shows social insecurities and difficulties in self-regulation among those youth and reflects the culture clash as a result of the two sites merging two different groups of youth. Sense on competence socially of social, emotional, cognitive and behavioral skills needed for successful social adaptation. Social competence also reflects having an ability to take another’s perspective concerning a situation, learn from past experiences, and apply that learning to the changes in social interactions. Social competence is the foundation upon which expectations for future interaction
with others is built, and upon which individuals develop perceptions of their own behavior.

After discussing the results with the site director, the researcher learned that there were youth participants that were more aggressive as they were going through some personal struggles and could not control their emotions. There were also youth with difficulty reading social cues, and youth that had challenges with self-regulation.

The data collection period was also a difficult year for Site A, as they were merging two groups that did not necessarily like each other. Although both sites were only 1.5 miles apart, the small distance was also divided by two gangs where those youth’s family members may belong to and have tremendous aversion towards each other and now their teen members were under the same roof.

The survey results may be negative and reflect conflict among teens; however, a few of those teens from Site A and the merged site, Site D, became friends and that would never have happened under normal circumstances. By the time site D renovations were completed and those teens were allowed to go back to their site, a few of them were sad to be separated and hoped to stay in touch with their new friends. For future research, it would be helpful to conduct the same survey in Site A now and compare the results with the previous year used for this study to analyze the difference in the results once those sites were separated.

Furthermore, there was a new component included in the Midwest ASP curriculum that year, the introduction of SEL skills in some of the programs. Research shows that SEL competencies results in a developmental progression that
leads to a shift from being predominantly controlled by external factors to acting increasingly in accord with internalized beliefs and values, caring and concern for others, making good decisions, and taking responsibility for one’s choice and behaviors (Durlak et al., 2011). This was the first year that evidence-based SEL programs were included in the curriculum, and a learning experience for the organization. The pilot year of SEL curriculum included character and leadership programs were very successful, mostly because they were composed of small groups to ensure youth were comfortable addressing some of their fears and personal challenges. However, as mentioned earlier, SEL curriculum is more effective when implemented as a whole, as the foundation of ASPs, instead of a separate component implemented in a few programs.

The effective implementation of evidence-based social and SEL programs is critical to youth success, and effective implementation requires adequate resourcing, which the organization did not have at the piloting of evidence-based SEL programs. Administrators often think of evidence-based programs as “plug and play” and are surprised by the level of preparation and resources needed to implement these programs in a way that achieves outcomes. However, research has shown that how evidence-based programs are implemented is critically important, and that replications that do not follow the intended design are less likely to achieve the outcomes realized in the original evaluations (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005).
Furthermore, in the era of academic accountability, there is a general agreement that it is important for schools and ASPs to foster children’s social-emotional development and improve school behavior and academic performance, but educators often think about this focus in a fragmented matter. Because SEL has such a critical role in improving children’s academic performance and lifelong learning, ASPs could have better results if SEL skills are implemented wholly, instead of partially, into a program’s curriculum. Figures 3-5 show the pre and post comparisons of means for each individual site.

**Figure 3. Pre and Post Comparison of Means for Site A**
Figure 4. Pre and Post Comparison of Means for Site B
Figure 5. Pre and Post Comparison of Means for Site C

Figure 6 below represents an overall summary of the data collected, comparing all three sites and grade levels. Site A shows the most significant change from pre to post, and as mentioned before, it was also the site going though the most significant changes with staff, hosting youth from a different site, and implementing new teen programs.
Moreover, each of the sites has three different styles of leadership and different types of enrichment activities offered at each site. Site C offers more robust programs, from swimming to science experiments and even Chinese lessons. Their programs were strength-based and focused on providing youth with fun and enrichment activities in order to expose them to different opportunities and even career pathways, rather than serve as intervention programs for low-income youth.

**Figure 6. Overall Comparison Pre and Post Means by Site and Grade Level**

As previously mentioned, completely opposite to the researcher’s expectations, the pre-post did not increase significantly. With Site A in particular, there was a decrease in the means. From a researcher who was very confident in the positive result, this was extremely discouraging. The researcher went back to a topic
raised by Murry S. Davis in an article published in 1971, “That’s Interesting!” Davis argues that although it has long been thought that a theorist is considered great because his theories are true is false; a theorist is considered great, not because his theories are true, but because they are interesting. In fact, the truth of a theory has very little to do with its impact, for a theory can continue to be found interesting even though the truth is disputed – even refuted! (Davis, 1971). The pre and post relationship between the criteria for evaluation and program success were negative and the researcher understood that there was more to the data than those relationships. However, if the relationship resulted in a positive post survey, the researcher may have concluded the study at that point, missing the main findings of this study.

Upon further analysis, the researcher started to understand that the negative pre-post results were actually not necessarily unfavored. It made her consider other factors that could be the actual key drivers of successful programs. Table 5 indicates that having a lot of good friends and having fun were highly correlated with enjoyment of coming to the site. The element of fun was .745, illustrating the importance of having fun while attending programs. The first correlation (Table 5 below) illustrates the positive relationship with “Do you like coming here?” in order to understand why youth came back on regular basis.
Table 5. Response Scores for Survey Item, “Do you like coming here?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PE_q2_2 b. Do you have fun when you’re here?</td>
<td>.745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q2_1 a. Coming here has helped me feel good about myself.</td>
<td>.532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q2_4 d. Can you always find things that you like to do here?</td>
<td>.528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q2_2 b. Coming here has helped me find out what I’m good at doing and what I like to do.</td>
<td>.484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q3_5 Has coming to this teen program helped you get along better with friends?</td>
<td>.473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q1b_1 d. Do you have a lot of good friends here?</td>
<td>.472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q1_2 b. Coming here has helped me to try harder in school.</td>
<td>.436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q4_2 b. Do you feel challenged in a good way?</td>
<td>.413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q2_3 c. Coming here has helped me to make new friends.</td>
<td>.406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q2_3 c. Do you feel bored when you’re here?</td>
<td>-.411</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ASP evaluators articulate that youth vote with their feet, meaning they come back every day because they like it and because they had fun. Therefore, ASPs that allow youth to have fun can have an impact on how those youth become better at reading, math, and can increase high school graduation rates. They are given the opportunity to be a kid and have fun in a safe environment where they can forget about their problems. That should be just as important as graduation rates. Providing youth with a place where they can socially and emotionally grow and learn as all children should have the right to do can have a positive influence on youth development. The researcher correlated test variables with the survey items pertaining to fun in order to understand the strength of the relationship between survey elements and student reported fun (See Table 6).
These correlations provide evidence of the strong relationship fun has with all of the elements (main themes and sub-themes) tested, as well as the individual attributes that are most connected with fun. These attributes could help direct, shape, and market ASP successfully. Table 6 shows that fun is not only correlated to all aspects of program experience, but also shows strong correlations with sense of competence and future planning and expectations. In addition, the factor analysis “do you like coming here” and “do you have fun when you are here” go hand in hand. The data shows that fun relates to various beliefs; there is a pattern that individuals having fun also feel challenged, perceive a supportive social environment, have choice and autonomy, and have a sense of competence as a writer and a reader. If the youth are having fun, they come back more frequently and therefore, enrichment activities and fun can shape their positive youth development and social-emotional skills.
Table 7 shows the specific items ranked correlated with “Do you have fun when you are here?”

**Table 7. Ranked Response Options for Survey Item, “Do you have fun when you are here?”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items ranked</th>
<th>PE_q2_2 b. Do you have fun when you’re here?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PE_q2_1 a. Do you like coming here?</td>
<td>.745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q2_4 d. Can you always find things that you like to do here?</td>
<td>.615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q2_2 b. Coming here has helped me find out what I’m good at doing and what I like</td>
<td>.546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q2_1 a. Coming here has helped me feel good about myself.</td>
<td>.529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q2_3 c. Coming here has helped me to make new friends.</td>
<td>.463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q1_2 b. Coming here has helped me to try harder in school.</td>
<td>.457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q1b_1 d. Do you have a lot of good friends here?</td>
<td>.436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q4_1 a. Do you learn new things?</td>
<td>.435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q5_3 c. Is there an adult here who helps you when you have a problem?</td>
<td>.412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q1_3 c. Coming here has helped me to do better in school.</td>
<td>.406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q5_2 b. Is there an adult here you can talk to when you are upset?</td>
<td>.393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q3_5 Has coming to this teen program helped you get along better with friends?</td>
<td>.391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q4_2 b. Do you feel challenged in a good way?</td>
<td>.380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q4_3 c. Do you get to do things here that you have never done before?</td>
<td>.364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q3_2 Has coming to this teen program helped you to write better?</td>
<td>.356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPE_q5_2 Talked to an adult about college: b. What activities you can do outside of school</td>
<td>.354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q3_3 Has coming to this teen program helped you do better in math?</td>
<td>.353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPE_q4_4 Doing right now to reach future goals: d. I set goals for myself. For instance</td>
<td>.352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q3_2 b. Can you suggest your own ideas for new activities?</td>
<td>.330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q6_5 e. Do you get to do things that help people in your community?</td>
<td>.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPE_q2_2 About future plans with: b. A teacher or staff member from this after-school program</td>
<td>.320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q1a_1 a. Are kids here friendly with each other?</td>
<td>.315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q1b_3 f. Do the other kids here listen to you?</td>
<td>.315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q3_1 a. Do you get to choose how you spend your time?</td>
<td>.312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q3_1 Has coming to this teen program helped you to read more often?</td>
<td>.312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q6_1 a. Do you get help to plan activities for the program?</td>
<td>.311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q5_1 a. Is there an adult here who is interested in what you think about things?</td>
<td>.311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC_q1_1 a. I like to give new things a try, even if they look hard.</td>
<td>.311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPE_q1_4 Talked with an adult about: d. What you can be doing now to make sure you</td>
<td>.310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q1b_2 e. If you were upset, would other kids here try to help you?</td>
<td>.307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC_q4_3 c. I like to do math when I’m at this after-school program.</td>
<td>.296</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7 shows the correlation of fun items and how it is not only strongly correlated with coming here has helped youth find out what they are good at (.546), but also show that attending ASPs makes youth try harder at school (.457). In addition, attending ASPs helps them try harder at school. The adult relationship is also strong at .412, highlighting the importance of mentoring and caring for the youth and listening to them when they have a problem. A majority of the youth served in the programs lack parental support at home or do not have anyone to talk to about life choices or their future.

Furthermore, the post survey retrospective measure data (RM) in Table 8 shows that a very important key success factor of ASPs is that youth that attend the programs feel good about themselves (.529).
For ASP staff, it is clear that attending ASPs make youth feel better about themselves. Participants are happy to be there, they feel loved and positive emotions feel good. “There is a compelling evidence that positive emotions are not just the result of well-being but can also drive success and well-being” (Hazelton, 2014, p. 35). The staff build genuinely relationships with the youth and show that they care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RM_q2_1 a. Coming here has helped me feel good about myself.</td>
<td>.713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q2_2 b. Coming here has helped me find out what I'm good at doing and what I like to do.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q2_3 c. Coming here has helped me to make new friends.</td>
<td>.643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q1_3 c. Coming here has helped me to do better in school.</td>
<td>.590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q1_2 b. Coming here has helped me to try harder in school.</td>
<td>.587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q5_3 c. Is there an adult here who helps you when you have a problem?</td>
<td>.533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q2_1 a. Do you like coming here?</td>
<td>.532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q2_2 b. Do you have fun when you're here?</td>
<td>.529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q3_5 Has coming to this teen program helped you get along better with friends?</td>
<td>.520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q5_2 b. Is there an adult here you can talk to when you are upset?</td>
<td>.509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q2_4 d. Can you always find things that you like to do here?</td>
<td>.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q4_1 a. Do you learn new things?</td>
<td>.498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPE_q4_4 Doing right now to reach future goals: d. I set goals for myself. For instance, things I want to learn or get better at.</td>
<td>.476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC_q6_4 d. It's easy for me to join a new group of kids.</td>
<td>.476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC_q6_1 a. It's very easy for me to get along with other kids.</td>
<td>.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q5_4 d. Is there an adult here who you will listen to and respect?</td>
<td>.462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q3_2 Has coming to this teen program helped you to write better?</td>
<td>.455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPE_q4_5 a. Have you talked with an adult about: d. Have you made sure a new adult life goal?</td>
<td>.453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC_q4_3 c. I like to do math when I'm at this after-school program.</td>
<td>.443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q1_1 a. Coming here has helped me to get my homework done.</td>
<td>.441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC_q6_2 b. When I meet someone new, I know he or she will like me.</td>
<td>.439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q1b_2 e. If you were upset, would other kids here try to help you?</td>
<td>.432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPE_q5_2 b. Talk to an adult about college: b. What activities you can do outside of school to help you prepare for college?</td>
<td>.431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q4_3 c. Do you get to do things here that you have never done before?</td>
<td>.429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q5_1 a. Is there an adult here who is interested in what you think about things?</td>
<td>.425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPE_q1_1 a. Talk to an adult about: a. What would you like to do when you get older?</td>
<td>.424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPE_q4_3 a. When I don't understand my homework, I get help so I can get it done.</td>
<td>.426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC_q1_1 a. I like to give new things a try, even if they look hard.</td>
<td>.419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q6_5 e. Do you get to do things that help people in your community?</td>
<td>.418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPE_q4_1 a. Doing right now to reach future goals: a. I try hard in school.</td>
<td>.418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE_q4_3 b. How do you feel challenged in a good way?</td>
<td>.407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM_q3_3 Has coming to this teen program helped you do better in math?</td>
<td>.401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPE_q4_2 Doing right now to reach future goals: b. I tell myself that doing well in school now will help me later.</td>
<td>.401</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
for them. Youth are addressed by their names when they walk in the door, showing that they are expected to be there and acknowledged when they arrive. A large number of staff members were participants as a kid and understand the importance of having someone that cares for you listens to you, and makes you feel loved.

“While infused with love you see fewer distinctions between you and others. Indeed, your ability to see others – really see them wholeheartedly – springs open. Love can even give you a palpable sense of oneness and connection, a transcendent that makes you feel part of something far larger than yourself” (Fredrickson, 2000, p. 16).

In addition to the quantitative analysis, this research study included open-ended questions to learn more about the youth and their personal feelings about the program. It is really difficult to quantify the impact of nonprofit organizations. In the researcher’s personal experience, she has heard many stories from youth regarding how after-school sites helped them cope with the loss of a parent or a friend, handle a bullying situation at school, improve a lack of confidence, and just having someone to talk to on regular basis. A few of the open-ended questions and examples of responses included:

What other activities do you wish were offered here?

• “I wish they had hot food, not cold food, they also should open more sites, so all kids can learn new things.” (Site C)

• “The site is perfect the way it is.” (Site B)

• “None because we have everything.” (Site B)
What would your dream job be?

- “To be a chef and have my own restaurant so homeless can eat for free.” (Site B)
- “I would love to be an artist, so I can make money, be on TV, and take care of homeless people.” (Site A)

Why did you join this ASP?

- “I joined because everyone at school would talk about how fun it is and how you learn to play different sports.” (Site A)
- “Because I think the site is fun and there are persons who take care and love you.” (Site B)
- “I have a lot of friends. I love coming here; it’s the best place in the world.” (Site C)

In summary, the surprising negative and unanticipated results of pre-post data analysis of this study led to a further evaluation of the data. This review revealed an additional factor which provided consistent positive relationships to program success. Positive youth development outcomes remain the most relevant outcomes for ASPs due to the correspondence between the facets of positive youth development in the personal and social developmental domains and the opportunities presented across programs, regardless of the primary program content (e.g. sports, academic support, and college readiness) (Sloper, 2016). This study suggests that ASPs were never intended to make sure every child graduated from high school or increase their level of literacy. Instead, the programs were designed to provide a safe place where youth
could have fun and feel positive emotions that make them feel good about
themselves. Therefore, the answer to the research question, "What are the key drivers
of success in ASPs for low-income youth?" ASPs is "fun." Fun is considered to be a
critical factor in children deciding to participate (or not) in ASPs. Despite its
importance, few studies have provided in-depth investigations into what children
mean when they claim an activity is fun and the impact of fun in positive youth
development and overall academic achievement.
Chapter V: Discussion

This research study reports on an assessment of youth programs specifically designed to provide psychological and social support for lower income youth. The findings of this study are unique and relevant to the field of OD in several ways. First, it is part of a tradition which may be attributed to Kurt Lewin’s Boys’ Club Study. This study has particular significance to the field of OD in that Lewin is frequently cited as the father of OD. The Lewin Boys’ Club study is again particularly important because of the social environment in which it was performed—a time of the rise of Nazi Germany. The current study in a way has parallel significance to the early Lewin study in that it deals with an important current social issue – psychological and social support for low income youth.

Although the study was evaluated among children, the findings of this study have implications beyond children. The findings in this study are equivalent to what we look for in organizations as adults. It reflects what the generation Z and millennials are searching for in the workforce – fun companies are not just a necessity but a requirement for the next workforce generations. For example, companies like Google, Facebook, and Zappos are trending towards environments that are more fun and flexible and do not reflect the traditional “professional” work environment. This study findings help illustrate the success factors of tomorrow’s workforce.

Lewin’s initial leadership study was conducted in 1938 at Iowa University by Ronald Lippitt, a graduate student. Two groups of 11-year-old children participated
after school in mask-making groups, meeting over a number of weeks. With one group, Lippitt acted as a “democratic” leader while with the other he acted as an “authoritarian” leader. There were observers noting how the children behaved in the various group sessions. Ralph White joined Lippitt to run a second experiment, also under Lewin’s direction. They used the same basic procedure but in a more complex design. This time, there were four groups of boys and four different leaders, as well as a third leadership style – the “laissez-faire” style. Each group experienced more than one leader and more than one leadership style. Lewin, Lippitt and White combined the results from the two experiments. The combined results reflected the three different styles of leadership mentioned below, in particular around decision-making (Lewin, Lippit, and White, 1939).

In the autocratic style, the leader takes decisions without consulting with others. In Lewin’s experiments, he found that this caused the most level of discontent. An autocratic style works when there is no need for input on the decision, where the decision would not change as a result of input, and where the motivation of people to carry out subsequent actions would not be affected whether they were or were not involved in the decision-making.

In the democratic style, the leader involves the people in the decision-making. Democratic decision-making is usually appreciated by the people, especially if they have been used to autocratic decisions with which they disagreed. It can be problematic when there are a wide range of opinions and there is no clear way of reaching an equitable final decision.
Finally, the laissez-faire style is aimed to minimize the leaders involvement in decision-making, and hence allowing people to make their own decisions. Laissez-faire works best when people are capable and motivated in making their own decisions.

In Lewin et al’s experiments, they discovered that the most effective style was democratic. Although these experiments were conducted among groups of children, they were also done in the modern era and were consequently highly influential in the OD field. In fact, Lewin is cited as the father of OD and although this study is not often discussed in corporate America, its results parallel the various styles of leaderships in organizations and how individuals react to each of them.

In addition, this study is both important and unique in that it addresses an issues or topic raised by Murry S. Davis in an article, “That’s Interesting”. This study began as an assessment of youth programs exploring the relation of relatively standard criteria for evaluating these programs. The results indicated constant negative relationships between the criteria for evaluation and program success. These surprising and clearly unanticipated results led to a further evaluation of the data. This further review revealed an additional factor which provided consistent positive relationships to program success. The analysis and implications of this “discovered” factor and its relationship to program and organizational success. The factor “discovered” in this study, similar to Lewin’s results, shows that the key factor of success associated with after-school youth programs are equivalent to key
success factors in today’s and future workforce. The factors “discovered” on this study confirm that children do better when they are having fun.

This research study analyzes how something particularly simple and necessary, such as having fun, plays a significant role on positive youth development. Research has shown the importance of ASPs in which children have fun and participate in enrichment activities. However, for low-income youth, the focus of ASPs becomes an intervention concentrated on trauma and distress caused by poverty. The achievement gap is a direct result of a lack of opportunity for low-income youth to experience fun and enrichment activities. This opportunity gap exists for private lessons and participation in specialized clubs as well. We should not just worry about the gap in terms of access; we should also be concerned about outcomes.

Furthermore, the researcher used the post-survey retrospective measure correlation with results from the item, “Coming here has helped me feel good about myself,” which also demonstrates that youth feel better in an environment that reflects positive emotions. Both factors, fun and positive emotions, are getting more attention from academics and researchers associated with its current impact in the workplace. Academic studies have linked workplace fun with job satisfaction (Karl & Peluchette, 2006) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Fluegge, 2008), while popular press articles have made the link to increased creativity and innovation (Abramis, 1989; Caudron, 1992) and decreased absenteeism and burnout (Mayer, 1999). Evidence suggests that having a positive mental attitude
increases oxygen flow, endorphins and blood flow to the brain, enabling clearer and creative thinking (Urquhart, 2005). Overall, then, workplace fun is growing in acceptance and popularity, having outlived the “fad” life cycle (Fleming, 2005) – an important distinction as fads have been characterized as having symbolic utility but little organizational improvement (Abrahamson, 1991).

**The Importance of Fun**

Despite the critical role that fun plays in children actively participating, it remains a relatively unknown and elusive entity. That is, given how many times children say, “Wow, that was fun!” after participating in an activity, educators do not know precisely what that means, which is a limitation for this study. Does it mean that each child thinks about that activity as being fun in the same way and for the same reasons? Alternatively, if children were to play that same activity in a different setting — for example, in an organized youth activity setting instead of on the playground for recreation — would they still consider the activity to be just as fun? Do factors such as skill level make a difference in whether children view the activity as fun? Moreover, what about when the activity is not enjoyable for children? Questions such as these and others are reminders that increasing understanding of fun in physical activity, from a child’s perspective, is a worthy endeavor (McCarthy & Jones, 2007).

In the workforce, the same concept applies. Despite calls to the importance of context (Griffin, 2007; Rousseau & Fried, 2001), little conceptual or empirical attention identifies boundary conditions or contextual characteristics of when
workplace fun endeavors will have positive implications and when these might actually prove negative. The same questions can be applied to adults in the workforce environment: ‘What is fun at work?’ The dictionary definitions of fun reference elements of enjoyment, amusement, playfulness, and pleasure, and all of these elements may be relevant in modern workplaces. Lamm and Meeks (2009) offer a specific definition of workplace fun as “playful social, interpersonal, recreational, or task activities intended to provide amusement, enjoyment, or pleasure” (p. 614). However, fun has different meanings for different people. These different perceptions of fun are based on demographic differences, hierarchy, role requirements, and diversity among individuals.

Fun is primarily associated with positive outcomes for organizations, such as applicant attraction (Tews, Michel, & Bartlett, 2012), job satisfaction (Karl & Peluchette, 2006), work engagement, task performance, and OCB (Fluegge, 2008). Indeed, these positive benefits of fun are a key reason why it is an emergent focus for research. In the research study by Plester and colleagues (2015), they categorize the complex notion of the workplace in three clear categories: 1) organic, which emerge from employees; 2) managed, which stems from managers; and 3) task, a new category introduced in the study, which results from an interaction of employees with the task they are assigned.

Plester’s study offers exploratory findings that suggest specific connections between the concepts of fun and engagement. Empirical connections between these concepts are not currently apparent in either engagement or fun
research, yet the data suggest firm associations between them. The exploratory findings suggest that certain forms of workplace fun offer individual employees a refreshing break, which creates positive affect. Participants perceive that such affect results in greater workplace and task engagement. Additionally, the data show that some people experience their work tasks as a form of fun and the authors link this to a specific form of engagement known as “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Moneta, 2010). Plester and colleagues (2015) suggest an organizational-level effect, where workplace fun creates enjoyment which stimulates greater overall engagement with the team, unit or organization itself. Conversely the data also suggest that for some people managed or organic fun creates distraction, disharmony or dissonance that disrupts their flow and can foster disengagement (Plester, Cooper-Thomas, & Winquist, 2015).

In addition to the fun paradox (Plester, Cooper-Thomas, & Winquist, 2015), fun and its consequences may be influenced by generational different perspectives. A number of recent studies have sought to map workplace fun as a construct. Ford et al. (2003) conducted a study of 572 human resource managers and suggested that an environment is considered fun when it “intentionally encourages, initiates, and supports a variety of enjoyable and pleasurable activities that positively impact the attitude and productivity of individuals and groups” (p. 22). Further, they argued that fun goes beyond job satisfaction to involve activities that convey a sense of “pleasantness, happiness, and positive well-being that makes working not only satisfying but also fun” (Ford, McLaughlin, & Newstrom, 2003, p. 23). Seeking to
validate the fun-at-work construct and scales in a doctoral dissertation, McDowell defined fun at work as “engaging in activities not specifically related to the job that are enjoyable, amusing, or playful” (McDowell, 2004, p. 9).

More recently, Lamm and Meeks (2018) define workplace fun as playful social, interpersonal, recreational, or task activities intended to provide amusement, enjoyment, or pleasure. It is also important to acknowledge that workplace fun is likely to have personal and social consequences. The lack of recognition and integration of these construct dimensions and outcomes represent a fundamental weakness of the mainstream literature on workplace fun (Lamm & Meeks, 2018).

In addition, according to their research study entitles, *Workplace Fun: Generational Differences*, generational theory maintains that as cohorts of individuals are born into a particular political and social moment, they will develop unique values, belief systems, and peer personalities (MacManus, 1997; Strauss & Howe, 1991), resulting in patterns “strong enough to support a measure of predictability” (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 2). Events can include major political events or threats, socio-economic transitions, industry trends, unemployment rates, and feelings of scarcity or security (Macky, Gardner, & Forsyth, 2008). Baby Boomers, born between 1941 and 1960, are by far the most competitive of any generation; they were told to be anything they wanted to be, to work well with others, to live up to expectations, and make the world a better place (Twenge, 2006; Raines, 2003). Boomers are accustomed to challenge, pressure, and performance (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000). Their workaholic, strong-willed nature and their concerns about
work content and material gain (Kupperschmidt, 2000) contradict the notion of workplace fun.

Generation Xers are those born between 1961 and 1980. Xers were neglected by their busy parents and represent the first generation whose parents took birth control pills to prevent procreation (Raines, 2003). Xers value fun, informality, and creativity (Zemke et al., 2000), and view work as a difficult challenge, and as a result, use leisure and recreation as an escape. They believe in working smarter rather than harder (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002), and feel with smart work, recreation and fun can provide balance (Zemke et al., 2000).

Millennials, also known also as Generation Y, Nexters, and Echo Boomers, were born between 1981 and 2000. They have witnessed formative events such as the birth of the internet, the historic and tragic Columbine shooting, and 9/11, and are characterized by a notion that they are destined to accomplish great things and to make a difference in the world (Martin & Tulgan, 2001). Millennials are flexible, fun, and team-oriented (Hill, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2000). They loathe cynicism, sarcasm, unfairness, condescension, and boredom (Raines, 2003). Unlike Boomers, who may oppose workplace fun, and Xers, who may be indifferent to workplace fun, Millennials are likely to regard fun in the workplace not as a benefit, but a requirement.

Generation Z (not included in Lamm & Meeks study), born between 2000 and 2010, also known as Post-Millennials, the iGeneration, or the Homeland Generation. Despite the technological proficiency they possess, members of Generation Z actually
prefer person to person contact as opposed to online interaction. As a result of the social media and technology they are accustomed to, Generation Z is well prepared for a global business environment. This generation grew up in an era of school shootings, the Great Recession, the Occupy movement, protests over police brutality, and the legalization of gay marriage – all streamed on their devices and follow through hashtags on social media – making today’s students worried about money, anxious about the future, and more inclusive of differences of identity (Selingo, 2018). Another important note is that Generation Z no longer wants just a job; they seek more than that. They want a feeling of fulfillment and excitement in their job that helps move the world forward (Henderson, 2013). Generation Z is eager to be involved in their community and their futures. Before college, Generation Z is already out in their world searching how to take advantage of relevant professional opportunities that will give them experience for the future (Dorsey, 2015).

In addition, an institution’s academic reputation has long been one of the most attractive qualities for prospective students, but for Generation Z, reputation for social and extracurricular activities is also proving to be of high importance. That now ranks in the top three factors students weigh in making their decisions, according to an annual survey of freshmen by Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles. In the recent past, that factor wasn’t in the top five. The cost of a particular institution, whether interpreted as the sticker price of the final bill, is as influential as financial aid. Their views on personal finance have been shaped
not only by the Great Recession but also seeing their millennial counterparts take on student debt and struggle in the job market (Selingo, 2018).

It is also important to note that rates of depression and anxiety among teenagers and young adults have shot up in recent years. One-third of college students report having felt so depressed within the last year that it was difficult to function, according to the National College Health Assessment. More than half report feeling overwhelming anxiety, and incoming students are struggling as much if not more. The shares of high school students who experience persistent feelings of sadness and hopeless (32%) and have seriously considered attempting suicide (17%) have risen steadily over the last decade.

In *The Chronicle of Higher Education* article: *The New Generation of Studies: How colleges can recruit, teach, and serve Gen Z* by Jeffrey J. Selingo, he shares that defining a generation, particularly its boundaries, is not an exact science. For instance, the millennial and baby boomer generations are often described as spanning nearly 20 years, and Generation X only 14. Bounds sometimes shift as a generation ages to reflect perspectives shaped by major developments or events. Figures 7 and 8 from the study show where Generation Z fits in both the American population and in higher education.
Figure 7. Total US Population by Age and Generation

![Graph showing total US population by age and generation]

- Baby Boomers (75.5M)
- Silent Generation (26.3M)
- Greatest Generation (37.0M)

The arrival of the baby boomers on campuses coincided with an expanded federal role in financing a college degree. Those new dollars led to a flurry of activity, including growing enrollment, new construction, and the transformation of state teachers’ colleges into regional universities. Student protests rolled the nation.

A generation embittered between two more prominent ones, these people continued to expand access to higher education, and a series of court decisions began to integrate colleges, opening up opportunities for women and African-Americans. The space race boosted interest in engineering, math, and science.

This generation came to define the modern idea of “college access” as veterans of World War II flocked to higher education on the GI Bill. American campuses started to transform from bastions of the elite to institutions that served a broader swath of the population with a wide-ranging selection of academic opportunities.

Figure 8. Position of Generation Z, Millennials, and Generation X in the Workforce

![Graph showing position of Generation Z, Millennials, and Generation X in the workforce]

- Generation Z (13.0M)
- Millennials (79.4M)
- Generation X (65.7M)

The leading edge of this cohort was defined by the Great Recession, and as a result, is worried about financial security. Considering college, Gen Zers are focused on value, seek a relevant education they can apply, and favor support services over campus amenities.

Millennials and their hovering “helicopter parents” brought a consumer mentality to higher education. A building boom introduced new amenities on many campuses, from suite-style residence halls to swanky rec centers.

Known as the “ latchkey generation,” this cohort was used to being independent and expected freedom from the campus rules and regulations of the past. Colleges expanded coed dorms, loosened conduct policies, and gave students greater influence over campus life.
In *Workplace Fun: The Moderating Effects of Generational Difference*, Lamm and Meeks (2009) use three diverse individual outcome variables previously used to measure workplace fun (Karl & Peluchette, 2006; Fluegge, 2008): 1) job satisfaction; 2) task performance; and 3) OCB. Job satisfaction is a global indicator of worker satisfaction (Fields, 2002) and represents “an employee’s affective response to his or her job” (O’Brien & Allen, 2008, p. 66). Karl and Peluchette (2006) found a positive relationship between experienced fun and job satisfaction. Task performance contributes to the organization’s technical core (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997) and represents non-discretionary formal requirements an employee is expected to meet (Carmeli & Josman, 2006). Fluegge’s (2008) dissertation found indirect support for workplace fun on task performance. OCBs represent actions that enhance organizational effectiveness but are unaccounted for in traditional job performance assessments (Dimitriades, 2007) and can be directed either at individuals or at the organization. Biswas and Varma (2007), acknowledging evidence of extra-role performance (OCB) on organizational efficiency, noted that while in-role performance (task performance) has received substantially more attention in the literature, ignoring extra-role performance represents a very narrow view of employee performance. Fluegge (2008) found direct support for the relationship between workplace fun and OCB.

Their study drew attention to the risk in organizational leaders believing that emulating “fun-at-work” cultures, Google for example, will unleash the creative potential and resulting windfall for their companies, too. For our thesis, is that we do
not fully understand the relationship between workplace fun and organizational outcomes and such an understanding cannot emerge without consideration of key moderating variables such as culture, gender, and that which they have emphasized in the study (i.e., generational cohort) (Lamm & Meeks, 2009).

**Positive Emotions**

In addition, this research study shows that children do better and feel good about themselves in an environment that reflects positive emotions. As mentioned earlier, “there is compelling evidence that positive emotions are not just the result of well-being but can also drive success of well-being.” Within the relative safety of the office environment, when stress is triggered, our options narrow to fight or freeze. These were useful responses to physical challenges to our well-being but are less useful in the office. Negative emotions are those of fear, stress, anxiety and panic, whereas positive emotions are of joy and contentment (Hazelton, 2014). According to the “Positive Emotions Boost Employee Engagement” study by Suzanne Hazelton, these emotions have been shown to drive positive business results and individual well-being. Among the benefits associated with positive emotions are:

- **Physical health.** In one research study, people who experienced higher levels of positive emotions were found to experience fewer influenza symptoms than those with less positive emotions.

- **Mental health.** People who typically experience more than three positive emotions to each negative emotion experience “superior mental health and adjustment”, according to Barbara L. Frederickson, a leading scholar in social
psychology, affective science and positive psychology. This has been demonstrated across a range of areas, from marital relationships and friendships to creativity in the workplace.

- **Creativity.** Positive emotions have a broadening effect on our thinking. This enables us to see more connections and opportunities, which are clearly important to business in today’s fast-pace world.

- **Resilience.** Barbara Frederickson’s research from the field of positive emotions found evidence for positive emotions building ‘‘personal resources’’ in a range of areas, from physical and intellectual to social and psychological. Personal resources are the mental equivalent of physical stamina.

- **Moods are contagious.** Moods can spread throughout teams and organizations.

- **Positive memories.** Culture is often defined as ‘‘the way we do things around here’’. It is made up of shared stories and experiences. A strong culture is one way that successful companies transmit successes about how things are done to newcomers. Tony Hsieh, chief executive of successful on-line retailer Zappos, has been praised for his ability to create a great company culture that embraces exceptional customer service. As negative events have more impact than positive ones, there will need to be three times as many positive moments as negative for these cultural experiences to be effective.

- **Good relationships.** Polling organization Gallup suggested that engaged employees have a ‘‘best friend at work’’ and that it is a key factor in
identifying talented work groups. Positive emotions have been found to be essential to building and maintaining successful relationships. Her research shows that flourishing is the opposite of both mental illness and languishing, which are described as living a life that feels hollow. Engaged employees do not feel empty, and thus there is a correlation between flourishing individuals and engaged employees. Very similar to this study and the correlation between having fun in ASPs and feeling good about yourself. There is a range of reasons that we do not actively pursue positive emotions. In recession it can be counter-cultural to be up-beat. It is also too easy to sacrifice fun for working longer, especially when we are fearful. This is true especially when people do not realize the important role that fun and positive emotions have on our ability to flourish (Hazelton, 2014).

Furthermore, Fredrickson & Joiner propose that “positive emotions not only feel good in the present, but also increase the likelihood that one will feel good in the future. That is, we suggest that positive emotions trigger upward spirals toward enhanced emotional well-being” (p. 172). The key to this proposal is that “positive emotions trigger upward spirals” is the proposition that positive emotions broaden attention and cognition. Evidence supporting this claim comes from studies that use global-local visual processing paradigms to assess biases in attentional focus. Negative states – like anxiety, depression, and failures – predict local biases consistence with narrowed attention, whereas positive states – like subjective well-being, optimism and success – predict global biases consistent with broadened
attention (Basso, Schefft, Ris, & Dember, 1996; Derryberry & Tucker, 1994). Other experiments have shown that positive emotions produce patterns of thought that are notably unusual, flexible, creative, and receptive (Isen, 1987). In general terms, positive emotions “enlarge” the cognitive context (Isen, 1987), an effect linked to increases in brain dopamine (Ashby, Isen, & Turken, 1999).

If positive emotions broaden attention and cognition, enabling flexible and creative thinking, they should also facilitate coping with stress and adversity (Aspinwall, 2001). Indeed, people who experience positive emotions during bereavement tend to develop long-term plans and goals. Together with positive emotions, plans and goals predict greater well-being 12 months post-bereavement (Stein, Folkman, Trabasso, & Richards, 1997). People experience positive emotions in the face of adversity by finding positive meaning in ordinary events and within the adversity itself (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Fredrickson, 2000). Finding positive meaning also predicts increases in well-being and health (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998). The relation between positive meaning and positive emotions is considered reciprocal; not only does finding positive meaning trigger positive emotion, but also positive emotions – because they broaden thinking – increase the likelihood of finding positive meaning in subsequent events (Fredrickson, 2000). Fredrickson & Joiner’s findings illustrate that the psychological broadening sparked by one positive emotion increases the odds that an individual will find positive meaning in subsequent events and experience additional positive emotions. This
upward spiral can, over time, build psychological resources and optimize people’s lives.

Therefore, the researcher suggests that not only youth in ASPs, but the next generation of workforce could strongly benefit from a strength-based approach focused on fun and strengthening the strength, such as AI.

**Appreciative Inquiry**

AI is described as a “strength-based approach to transforming human systems toward a shared image of their most positive potential by discovering the very best in their shared experience” (Ludema & Fry 2011, p. 281).

> “Appreciative Inquiry is about the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives “life” to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. Appreciative Inquiry involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential” (Cooperrider, Sorensen, Yaeger, & Whitney, 2005, p. 11).

To have a better understanding of Appreciative Inquiry, it is helpful to start with the definition of both words:

- **Appreciative**: 1. valuing; the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to
perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems. 2. To increase in value, e.g., the economy has appreciated in value.

**Inquire:** 1. The act of exploration and discovery. 2. To ask questions; to be open to seeing new potential and possibilities.

David Cooperrider explains that the important issue is the call to create a generative human science and theory that opens the world to new possibilities, while deconstructing the dominant language of deficits and problems. As a result, he believes that the field’s deficit-based assumptions were holding back its generative capacity. In positive psychology there is a tendency to talk about the positive as if it is a thing. But what Dr. Cooperrider is talking about is that it is the search for the positive and the discovery into the positive that holds the greatest potential to open up the generative mind. One aim of positive change theory and strength-based theory is to reverse that 80/20 rule and to remind us that excellence is not created by fixing problems but by amplifying strengths. Strengths do not take care of themselves. We should nurture them in the organizational development field and with our underprivileged youth.

The applied power of AI as a life-centric or strength-based (vs. deficit-based) OD process and approach to change management was very quickly adapted all over the world (Fry, 2014), and somewhat overshadowed generative theory building efforts. In that applied capacity, and often expressed in terms of its “4-D” learning cycle (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999), AI invites system stakeholders into a collaborative and rigorous inquiry/search into each other’s stories about what is
already giving life (“Discovery”) to their organizing efforts when they are at their best. The joint discovery of high commonality among strength-based stories then forms a new foundation from which stakeholders co-envision new possibilities to enact that future (“Dream”). Stakeholders then construct, for them, the most attractive possibilities through crafting provocative propositions, scenarios or concrete prototypes (“Design”), and launch self-directed initiatives to realize the design solutions (“Destiny”) they themselves have co-created, continuing the dynamic learning cycle into the future (e.g., Barrett & Fry, 2005; Bushe, 2013; Cooperrider, 2012).

The model assumes that the questions we ask will focus our attention in a particular direction; and that organizations evolve in the direction of the questions that they most persistently and passionately ask (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). In the mid-1980’s, most methods of assessing and evaluating a situation and then proposing solutions were based on a deficiency model, predominantly asking questions such as “What are the problems?”, “What's wrong?”, or “What needs to be fixed?” Instead of asking “What's the problem?,” others couched the question in terms of “challenges”, which still focused on deficiency and on what needed to be fixed or solved. AI was the first serious managerial method to refocus attention on what works, the positive core, and on what people really care about. Today, these ways of approaching organizational change are common (Bushe & Marhsak, 2015). According to Bushe, the five principles of AI are:
1. The *constructionist principle* proposes that what we believe to be true determines what we do and think, and actions emerge from relationships. Through the language and discourse of day to day interactions, people co-construct the organizations they inhabit. The purpose of inquiry is to stimulate new ideas, stories and images that generate new possibilities for action.

2. The *principle of simultaneity* proposes that as we inquire into human systems, we change and the things that people think and talk about, what they discover and learn, and are implicit in the very first questions asked. Questions are never neutral, they are fateful, and social systems move in the direction of the questions they most persistently and passionately discuss.

3. The *poetic principle* proposes that organizational life is expressed in the stories people tell each other every day, and the story of the organization is constantly being co-authored. The words and topics chosen for inquiry have an impact far beyond just the words themselves. They invoke sentiments, understandings, and worlds of meaning. In all phases of the inquiry, effort is put into using words that point to, enliven and inspire the best in people.

4. The *anticipatory principle* posits that what we do today is guided by our image of the future. Human systems are forever projecting ahead of themselves a horizon of expectation that brings the future powerfully into the present as a mobilizing agent. Appreciative inquiry uses artful creation of positive imagery on a collective basis to refashion anticipatory reality.
5. The *positive principle* proposes that momentum and sustainable change requires positive affect and social bonding. Sentiments like hope, excitement, inspiration, camaraderie, and joy increase creativity, openness to new ideas and people, and cognitive flexibility. They also promote the strong connections and relationships between people, particularly between groups in conflict, required for collective inquiry and change.

**Figure 9. Schematic of AI**

What if the strength-based concept of AI is applied to ASPs and more organizations? What if the effort was in ways to empower underserved youth and introduce them to enrichment fun activities that they are lacking in public schools? What would happen to our change practices if we began all of our work with the positive presumption – that organizations as centers of human relatedness, are “alive”
with infinite constructive capacity? What would happen to us, let’s say, as leaders or catalysis of change if we approached the question of change only after we have connected with people and organizations through systematic study of their already “perfect” form? (Cooperrider et al., 2005).

AI has introduced this new approach to educational change that could be also introduced to ASPs. Most state and federal initiatives for educational change grow out of a deficit model of what is wrong with schools and what is needed to fix them. Implementation of new reforms has historically been mandated by administrators with little impact. The emphasis of AI is upon what is right with the organization and forms the basis for new initiatives and further change. This model proposes a cycle of inquiry used by leaders who distribute leadership across their constituents. Organizational learning is a process of individual and collective inquiry that modifies or constructs organizational theories-in-use and changes practice. Using AI as a process to implement the Common Core State Standards, embraces a distributed leadership structure, produces organizational learning opportunities, and creates the conditions for a more impactful implementation of the next reform.

AI will undoubtedly continue to be a generative force in the world because it invites us continually to reach for what is better in ourselves and our systems. As David Cooperrider wrote in the fourth volume of Advances in AI (2013):

“AI is not a thing or a static concept, but an ongoing co-construction of reality; it’s the result of many voices, time and circumstance, planned and unplanned experiments, new discoveries and designs, narratives and cases,
and unlimited imagination. All I am certain of right now is this: AI, as long as it is constructed upon, practiced or inspired by the sense of the mystery and miracle of life on this planet, will never become inert or lifeless” (p. 6).

Therefore, when dealing with youth who have been traumatized and live in hopeless conditions of poverty, words like “empowerment”, “innovation”, “commitment”, “integrity”, and “pride” should be used to make them look at things from a positive lens and show them their tremendous potential. The conditions that they were born into should not define who they will become. The media reminds us every day of the cruelty in the world, from nuclear weapons threats to refugees dying on borders risking their lives for an opportunity of hope. Society needs to pay more attention to the impact of nonprofits in the world and how consultants and practitioners can help them survive the funding cuts and government changes. We need a better strategy to assist society in returning to the days we cared for one another, either by using Cooperrider’s AI methods to focus on the positive, implement Dr. Fredrickson broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, by harnessing Schein’s humble consulting practices to make changes that are not just based on data and money. In other words, we need to start rethinking Freedman’s theories of maximizing profit as the final goal and focus on what the mission really is in order to create a positive impact on our society not only in the nonprofit sector but in the world, as a whole.
Chapter VI: Conclusions

We turn on the news every day and see the heartbreaking headlines; stabbings, shootings, muggings, and worse. For those of us on the outside, it is a far-removed tragedy; for the at-risk youth served by Midwest ASP, it is a harsh reality they live with every single day. Midwest ASP’s sites represent many things to youth: a safe haven, support from a caring and concerned adult, mentoring, a warm meal, a building full of resources, and a gathering place for fellowship and fun. Perhaps the most telling statistic of all: 68% of youth reported that belonging to a Midwest ASP saved their life.

The opportunity gap between youth from low-income and higher-income families is substantial and likely contributes to the attainment gap that manifests in high school and college graduation rates, as well as in future employment. ASPs can help close the opportunity gap by providing youth with opportunities that they might not otherwise experience (e.g., arts, theater, sports, and STEM). Also, it may be that we need a different, longitudinal approach to investigating and understanding ASPs’ contribution to youth development. It might be that a combination of experiences over a course of years contributes more to youth development, academic attainment, and life success than does one individual program.

Study Strengths and Contributions

Results from this study illustrate the impact of ASPs on low-income youth. Also, the findings of this study illustrate the importance of fun and an environment of positive emotions not only among children participating in ASPs, but the next
generation in the workplace. Fun should be an important component of organizational culture. Lewin’s 1930’s findings that were never associated with corporate America, Cooperrider’s study outcomes from “Child as an Agent of Inquiry,” and this particular study demonstrate that we have a lot to learn from children. The “street corner societies” are uncommon in the OD field, despite its importance and correlation with workforce generations. Perhaps “street corner” studies have provided evidence of helping larger populations in a more effective way if focused on the social level.

Organizations want empowerment, engagement, and energy from their employees. These qualities come from harnessing emotions. Research shows that fun is strongly correlated with success not only in ASPs, but also in the workforce. It benefits all involved, helps retain employees, makes them feel better about their work, and helps them feel engaged at work. This is what Generation Z is looking for in the workplace and perhaps what the next generation will search for as well. Therefore, it is useful to understand more about emotions, particularly the benefits of positive emotions and how we can connect with them, for greater personal and professional success (Hazelton, 2014). In addition, it is important to note that negative events have more impact than positive ones; there will need to be three times as many positive moments as negative for these cultural experiences to be effective (Hazelton, 2014).

This study examined youth experiences in three different sites focused on program experience, sense of competence, and future aspirations and expectations.
There was an assumption that groups of youth across these categories would report developmental differences in their experiences and positive youth development outcomes that would indicate differing developmental needs to be fulfilled during each ASP site and age group. However, since some of this data can only be collected by surveying youth, it is difficult to evaluate their understanding of issues like safety. Also, one of the sites took twice as long as the other to complete the survey, and the youth had a difficult time reading and answering the open-ended questions since their ability to type and use the computers was limited.

Furthermore, future research on ASPs would benefit from examining the influences of program quality and youth engagement as critical mechanisms for promoting positive youth development. This study is preliminary research findings about the significant role of fun and positive emotion activities offered at ASPs showed a strong correlation in all three categories examined for this study, not just program experience. The trend in most US school districts is to cut psychological-education and similar programs in favor of increasing time for math, science and English. These measures have simply not improved achievement as so many policy makers assumed they would, and youth and individuals deserve to be in a place that is joyful and fun. In the workforce, fun can be confused with lack of responsibility and seriousness in the task, however, fun has a direct connection with OD and this is a new topic in the field that has not yet been introduced.

As Bob Morrison, founder and director of Quadrant Research, states that it would not be okay to have millions of students without access to math or language
arts. However, arts is just as important to all, not only the gifted and talented, regardless of their vocational pathway. He makes a strong comparison between arts and math. For example, we do not necessarily teach math with the solely purpose to create mathematicians, the same holds true for the arts. We teach math, language, arts, to create well-rounded citizens who can apply the skills, knowledge and experience from being involved in the arts to their careers and lives. Also, it is not just about arts, but the achievement gap is a direct result of a lack of opportunity for low-income youth to experience fun and enrichment activities. This opportunity gap exists for private lessons and participation in specialized clubs as well.

We should not just worry about the gap in terms of access; we should also be concerned about outcomes. Enrichment activities help build human and cultural capital and develop and define children’s interests and skills. By participating in activities otherwise not readily available to them, low-income youth have access to new and enriching experiences that may provide lasting developmental benefits. In addition, while most ASPs and schools remain highly concerned about the social and emotional development of the children and the need for safe, supportive places that educate socially and emotionally competent children, they often are hesitant to engage in any activities for which they cannot predict clear, discernable benefits to students’ academic progress as reflected in their test scores.

Therefore, in the era of academic accountability, receptivity for SEL programing will be even greater if a strong empirical case is made connecting the enhancement of social and emotional influences to improved school behavior and
academic performance. To that end, a number of analyses of school-based prevention programs conducted in recent years provide general agreement that some of these programs are effective in reducing maladaptive behaviors, including those related to school success (e.g., Durlak, 1995; Gottfredson, 2001; Institute of Medicine, 1994), a conclusion that was not strongly supported in the past. Indeed, this level of support and the recognized need for SEL is greater than at any time in recent decades, thereby presenting an opportunity to which educators and policy makers must give serious consideration (Zins, 2004).

Likely the most influential meta-analyses discussed above, Durlak, Weissberg and Pachan (2010) examined features of program implementation and disaggregated outcome findings by these features. Their study demonstrated that effective programs implemented “SAFE features” or activities that were sequenced, active, focused, and explicit. In their review of 75 studies of elementary and middle school programs, the frequency of SAFE features was a significant moderator of program effectiveness demonstrating practically significant gains in program outcomes (i.e., self-confidence, self-esteem, school bonding, positive social behaviors, school grades, achievement test scores, reduced problem behaviors and drug use). This small body of evidence demonstrates an emerging empirical consensus about the link between program quality and program outcomes (Sloper, 2016). Perhaps it would be interesting to compare all three sites on this study including the SAFE features to compare the link between program quality and program outcomes.
**Practical Implications**

Moreover, a small but developing body of research demonstrates the unique role of youth reported reason for joining ASP in positive youth development. Decisions about enrollment and continued participation are that ASPs should construct developmental experiences that allow youth to showcase growing developmental abilities across cognitive, behavioral, and social domains, and tailor those experiences to participants’ life stage.

Changing development needs (i.e., social, cognitive, and emotional growth) requires dynamic approaches to ASP best practices because the most crucial components of ASP quality and student engagement are likely to vary by child age (Pierce, Bolt, & Vandell, 2010). Thus, empirical studies of youth development in ASPs should disaggregate findings about program experiences and outcomes by participant age (or grade-level) and identify the most important features of program quality and engagement for those unique sub-populations (Sloper, 2016). Despite the influence of these developmental changes, few studies of ASPs have investigated the role of age on the relationship between developmental opportunities to program outcomes (Riggs & Greenberg, 2004).

**Future Recommendations**

Overall, this study suggests a need to add greater complexity to our knowledge about how positive youth development takes place after-school and how a strength-based approach focused on fun and positivity can impact the overall outcome, not only among children but with the next generation of the workforce. It is
important to also learn more about the influences of a relationships between the quality of program practices, the implementation of SEL and “having fun”, and how these relationships impact youth participants in ASPs. This enhanced specificity will help to translate those findings into actionable and relevant recommendations for continues quality improvement after-school. These recommendations can be employed to improved quality ASP practices and help narrow the opportunity and achievement gap among low-income youth. New research studies on the impact of fun in the workforce can also make a significant contribution to the field of OD.
References


Public Law 114-95, Every Student Succeeds Act, December 10, 2015. 13


# Appendix A: Survey Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sections</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Program Experience:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of Competence:</td>
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<td>Future Planning and Execution:</td>
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### Survey Data

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response Options</th>
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<tr>
<td>q3054_0001</td>
<td>a. Are teens having trouble with each other?</td>
<td>Youth perceive supportive social environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>q3054_0002</td>
<td>b. Does a lot of vandalism keep going on here?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>q3054_0003</td>
<td>c. Do teens here treat each other with respect?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q3055_0001</td>
<td>d. Do you have a lot of good friends here?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q3055_0002</td>
<td>e. If you were upset, would other teens here try to help you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q3055_0003</td>
<td>f. Do the other teens here listen to you?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>q3056_0001</td>
<td>a. Do you like coming here?</td>
<td>Youth enjoy &amp; feel engaged in the teen program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q3056_0002</td>
<td>b. Do you have fun when you’re here?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q3056_0003</td>
<td>c. Do you feel bored when you’re here?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>q3056_0004</td>
<td>d. Can you always find things that you like to do here?</td>
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<tr>
<td>q3057_0001</td>
<td>a. Do you get to choose how you spend your time?</td>
<td>Youth have choice &amp; autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q3057_0002</td>
<td>b. Can you suggest your own ideas for new activities?</td>
<td>Program Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q3058_0001</td>
<td>c. Can you spend time by yourself when you want to?</td>
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<tr>
<td>q3058_0002</td>
<td>d. Are you allowed to finish what you are doing even if it is time for the next activity?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>q3058_0003</td>
<td>e. Do you get to choose which teens you spend your time with here?</td>
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<tr>
<td>q3058_0004</td>
<td>f. Do you get to choose which activities you do?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>q3101_0001</td>
<td>a. Do you learn new things?</td>
<td>Youth feel challenged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q3101_0002</td>
<td>b. Do you feel challenged in a good way?</td>
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<td>q3101_0003</td>
<td>c. Do you get to do things here that you have never done before?</td>
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<tr>
<td>q3102_0001</td>
<td>a. Is there an adult here who is interested in what you think about things?</td>
<td>Youth believe they have a supportive adult</td>
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<tr>
<td>q3102_0002</td>
<td>b. Is there an adult here you can talk to when you are upset?</td>
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<td>q3102_0003</td>
<td>c. Is there an adult here who helps you when you have a problem?</td>
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<tr>
<td>q3102_0004</td>
<td>d. Is there an adult here who you will listen to and respect?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>q3102_0005</td>
<td>a. Do you get help to plan activities for the program?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>q3102_0006</td>
<td>b. Do you get the chance to lead an activity?</td>
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<tr>
<td>q3103_0001</td>
<td>c. Are you in charge of doing something to help the program?</td>
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<tr>
<td>q3103_0002</td>
<td>d. Do you get to help make decisions or rules for the program?</td>
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<tr>
<td>q3103_0003</td>
<td>e. Do you get to do things that help people in your community?</td>
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</table>


| q0014_0001 | a. I like to give new things a try, even if they look hard. |
| q0014_0002 | b. In school, I'm as good as other teens. |
| q0014_0003 | c. I'm good at solving problems. |
| q0014_0004 | d. I'm as good as other teens my age at learning new things. |
| q0014_0005 | e. When I can't learn something right away, I keep trying until I get it. |
| q0017_0001 | a. I like to read at home during my free time. |
| q0017_0002 | b. I enjoy reading when I'm at school. |
| q0017_0003 | c. I enjoy reading when I'm at this teen program. |
| q0017_0004 | d. I'm good at reading. |
| q0017_0005 | e. I like to give new books a try, even if they look hard. |
| q0018_0001 | a. I enjoy writing in my free time, just for fun. (For example: stories, a journal). |
| q0018_0002 | b. I enjoy writing when I'm at school. |
| q0018_0003 | c. I enjoy writing when I'm at this teen program. |
| q0018_0004 | d. I'm a good writer. |
| q0018_0005 | e. I like to try new writing projects, even when they look hard. |
| q0019_0001 | a. I like to learn new things in math. |
| q0019_0002 | b. I like to do math when I'm at school. |
| q0019_0003 | c. I like to do math when I'm at this teen program. |
| q0019_0004 | d. Math is something I'm good at. |
| q0019_0005 | e. I'm interested in math. |
| q0019_0006 | f. I like to give new math problems a try, even when they look hard. |
| q0020_0001 | a. I like to learn about new things in science. |
| q0020_0002 | b. I like doing science at school. |
| q0020_0003 | c. I like doing science when I'm at this teen program. |
| q0020_0004 | d. Science is something I am good at. |
| q0020_0005 | e. I'm interested in science. |
| q0020_0006 | f. I like to try new things in science, even when they look hard. |
| q0021_0001 | a. It's very easy for me to get along with other teens. |
| q0021_0002 | b. When I meet someone new, I know he or she will like me. |
| q0021_0003 | c. I get along with friends as well as other teens my age. |
| q0021_0004 | d. It's easy for me to join a new group of teens. |
| q0024_0001 | a. What you would like to do when you get older? |
| q0024_0002 | b. Whether you should go to college? |
| q0024_0003 | c. Your special interests and talents (what things you are good at)? |
| q0024_0004 | d. What you can be doing now to make sure you reach your life goals? |
| q0025_0001 | a. A parent or guardian |
| q0025_0002 | b. A teacher or staff member from this teen program |
| q0025_0003 | c. A teacher or guidance counselor from school |
| q0026_0001 | a. Be as successful in high school as you had hoped? |
| q0026_0002 | b. Graduate from high school? |
| q0026_0003 | c. Go to college? |
| q0027_0001 | a. I try hard in school. |
| q0027_0002 | b. I fail myself that doing well in school will help me later. |
| q0027_0003 | c. When I don't understand my homework, I get help so I can get it done. |
| q0027_0004 | d. I set goals for myself. For instance, things I want to learn or get better at |
| q0028_0001 | a. Which high school courses you should be taking to prepare for college? |
| q0028_0002 | b. What activities you can do outside of school to help you prepare for college? |
| q0028_0003 | c. What financial aid might be available to help you pay for college? |
| q0028_0004 | d. How can you increase your chances of getting into a good college? |
### Rotated Component Matrix

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</table>

**FPE_q3_3 Thinking of the future, what do you think will happen:**
- a. Go to college?
- b. Be successful in high school?
- c. Which high school courses you should be taking to prepare for college?
- d. What you can be doing now to make sure you reach your life goals?

**FPE_q1_4 Talked with an adult about:**
- a. Whether you should go to college?
- b. Whether you should go to college?
- c. Whether you should go to college?
- d. Whether you should go to college?

**SC_q4_2 b. I like to do math when I'm at school.**
- a. I enjoy writing when I'm at school.
- b. I enjoy reading when I'm at school.
- c. I enjoy writing when I'm at school.
- d. I'm a good writer.

**SC_q6_3 c. I get along with friends as well as other kids my age.**
- a. In school, I'm as good as other kids.
- b. When I meet someone new, I know he or she will like me.
- c. I get along with friends as well as other kids my age.
- d. I'm as good as other kids my age at learning new things.
## Appendix C: Independent Samples T-Test Results

### Independent Samples Test

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<tr>
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<th>Total</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Little Village</th>
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<th>Grades 4-8</th>
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<td></td>
<td>$t$</td>
<td>Sg. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>$t$</td>
<td>Sg. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>$t$</td>
<td>Sg. (2-tailed)</td>
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<td>PE Program Experience</td>
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<td>PE1 Youth perceive supportive social environment</td>
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<td>.475</td>
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<td>PE2 Youth enjoy &amp; feel engaged in the teen program</td>
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<td>PE3 Youth have choice &amp; autonomy</td>
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<td>PE4 Youth feel challenged</td>
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<td>PE5 Youth believe they have a supportive adult</td>
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<td>PE6 Youth believe they have opportunities for leadership &amp; responsibility</td>
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<td>SC Sense of Competence</td>
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<td>SC3 Sense of Competence as a Writer</td>
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<td>SC4 Sense of Competence in Math</td>
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