The Role of After-School Programs in Children's Literacy Development

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Fostering children's literacy is an increasingly common interest of after-school programs serving low-income children. As they work with children day-in and day-out, after-school providers observe (especially during homework time) that a good number of low-income children are not acquiring solid literacy skills in school. Many children who have adequate basic skills do not grasp the meaning of what they read, write creatively, or enjoy reading or writing. These perceptions have prompted many after-school providers to wish to do more to foster literacy.

Complementing and reinforcing the desires of providers to support literacy development are the interests of parents, policy makers and funders. Many parents are eager for their children to have time in after-school programs to get a head start on their homework for the next day. Policy makers and funders, concerned about the academic performance and test scores of children in public schools, also view the after-school hours as available for addressing the issue of children's literacy.

Because the need to help children acquire literacy is so pressing, and because the after-school hours are available and open to a variety of creative and enriching uses, it makes sense for after-school programs to focus some time and effort on literacy activity. The question is what a focus on literacy in after-school programs could and should be about.

Although important, the goals of parents, schools, and funders with regard to children's literacy and academic skills are not always compatible with the purposes and structures of after-school programs. After-school providers sense this, but as a field have had no alternative purposes for, or vision of, literacy activity to articulate. A number of aspects of after-school programs make focusing on literacy complicated. These include the importance of other goals for children's development, the limits of available time and space, staffing and other resources, general quality problems in the field, and children's own activity preferences after a day at school.

In response to this combination of potential, pressures, and questions, we undertook a study designed to provide a basic picture of the after-school field in relation to fostering low-income children's literacy. Because it was the first study of its kind, it was by necessity exploratory. The idea was to provide a foundation for debate about the appropriate role of after-school programs in this important domain and explore ways to improve educational opportunities and experiences for school-age youth, particularly in low-income communities.

The study had two main components: a survey of the literacy practices and environments of more than 200 after-school programs in two distinct urban areas, Chicago and Seattle, and case studies of sixteen after-school programs with exemplary or innovative approaches to children's literacy in Chicago, New York City, and Seattle. The case study sites included a number of programs that are doing interesting work with school-age children in the area of literacy, the arts, and/or cultural enrichment. All of them serve predominantly low-income children, many who speak English as a second language. The study also included key informant interviews with selected agency directors, foundation representatives, trainers, and literacy specialists.

Findings

Material Literacy Environments

After-school programs vary widely in their physical and material resources, but most are providing some material foundation for literacy. The majority of programs we studied provide access to writing tools and materials and at least a modest selection of fiction and nonfiction books. Almost half of the programs surveyed offer some kind of lending library of books for children and/or their families, journals or notebooks for children to write in, or computers with word processing capabilities. Many programs provide language-rich board games, literacy props for dramatic play, and academic resources–encyclopedias, dictionaries, reference books and textbooks.

Most after-school programs provide display areas for children's art work and writing— for example, creative poems, rules or instructions composed by children, home-made books, and book reports—although the quantity and quality of these display areas vary enormously from one program to another. We observed several programs that provide enriching language environments with printed schedules, job charts, snack menus, posters, signs, labels for materials and interest areas, and thematic bulletin boards.

Most programs provide separate areas for reading books, and about half of the programs in the study pay attention to how books are displayed in these areas. On the other hand, less than half help children choose books to read or use the public library as a resource for books.

Nearly all of the programs we studied scheduled time for children to do homework on a daily basis. Planned time for other literacy activities varied across programs, but, apart from homework time, was usually limited. A majority of programs make time in their schedules for children to read on their own daily or weekly, but are less likely to schedule time for writing.

Many program directors said that there are few outside resources to help them to think specifically about literacy activities for their programs. A few programs have developed or adapted their own curricula that foster literacy through creative reading, writing, and arts experiences.

Literacy Activities

The most common literacy activities in after-school programs are homework and independent reading. (Writing, as a planned activity, is less common than reading.) Children also spend time reading to other children or adults. Independent reading is variable and not usually a planned activity. Some children choose to read during unstructured moments, sometimes by themselves but more often with a friend or two. Others are directed by staff to read with variable results in terms of the level of children's interest and engagement.

Literacy activities in after-school programs are often social. These include book discussion or work together on a particular project; traditional board games that require reading like Bingo, Boggle, Monopoly, Scattergories, and Scrabble; familiar activities like Hangman and "Mad Libs;" and other word play activities created by staff. Children also help each other write, try to help each other with a difficult word in a book, comment on each other's work,

take turns reading, or simply talk while writing. Across programs, we found a wide range of group reading practices, depending on staff goals, their ability to follow scheduled group story times, their interest in reading, and, perhaps, their own reading skills.

Book discussion and literature circles are an increasingly common element in after-school programs, but can be difficult to put into practice. Staff sometimes lack experience and skills in leading discussions—from asking questions to maintaining children's interest. There is likely to be a wide range of language skills, reading abilities, and interests within a group of children.

Homework

Although homework is a regular activity in almost all of the after-school programs we studied, programs differ in their policies about whether it is optional or required. Programs with an academic orientation are more likely to expect children to complete their homework at a designated time, while others base homework policies on children's age and grade level and, in some programs, on parental preferences. At least a third of the surveyed programs reported assigning homework if a child has none, while others require children to read quietly if they have no homework.

The overall climate, staff behavior, and children's responses to homework time varied widely. In the majority of programs, the climate was purposeful, more or less orderly, and relaxed. Yet a strict, school-like climate was not uncommon, nor, occasionally, a noisy and chaotic one. In most programs, staff and volunteers were very focused and engaged, sitting at the table with children, patiently explaining, asking questions, prodding, hinting, and otherwise helping children to stay on task. In a few, staff did not interact with children, except to ask them to be quiet, using this time to plan, do paperwork, or talk among each other. More often than not, staff checked children's work (usually to see that it had been done, not whether it had been done correctly).

There appears to be ambivalence among staff about the time spent on homework and their own roles in relation to it. On one hand, staff recognize that parents often do not have time and, sometimes skills, to assist their children with homework. Homework time in an after-school program can provide social literacy experiences, as children help each other, or a time for staff to talk with children about school itself—about their experiences and how to make sense of them, what it takes to do well. On the other hand, homework often takes up too much time, crowding out other activities and projects, and reducing time to relax and play, to sit and have conversations.

Exemplary Approaches to Literacy in After-School Programs

Though very diverse in approach, exemplary programs shared certain features. Directors and front-line staff were able to articulate clear goals for children's development, which include literacy and often children's social and personal identities. Program practices were based on certain philosophical assumptions or principles about how children learn and the role of after-school activities in their development. Using literacy for personal, social, and cultural purposes was common, for example, to help children explore issues "close to home" and out in society. We observed reading and writing used to share experience at home or in school, to explore

prevalent feelings, and to maintain a sense of self in the face of external pressures. We also saw literature and writing used to discover what it means to be tough, a nerd, on the edge of the group, or poor (versus rich), or to talk about friendship or safety concerns when home alone.

Fostering literacy was not the organizing purpose of most of these programs. Rather, it was an important objective, pursued in the course of a range of activities. There was plenty of reading and writing, as well as staff encouragement of children's efforts to read and write. Yet programs frequently infused reading and writing in other types of activity, or indirectly "taught" the structure of literacy using the structure of other symbol systems. They created physical and social environments that made reading and writing activity inviting. In several programs, we saw child-directed reading activities in cozy book corners or reading lofts, sometimes individually but more often in small groups.

A number of exemplary programs had shared reading and book discussions. Typically, staff brought children together in book groups to read aloud, discuss, draw, write about, and act out stories. Discussions and other activities assisted children in comprehension of what they have read, and in linking the story to their own lives. Regular story times—held at the same time in the same place each day—in which books were read by able and enthusiastic readers helped to create an interest in reading and accustomed children to sitting and listening in a group.

Deliberate attention to language and vocabulary was common across a range of activities, from bulletin boards with riddles and word puzzles to commercial board games. Book discussion activities sometimes involved developing thematically organized word lists, or lists of words to define. A number of staff were playful (as well as intentional) about words and language, pointing out and talking about particular words with, children, comparing words in different languages, making fun of words, creating silly rhymes, and so forth.

The case study programs afforded numerous examples of activities that involved the use of multiple symbol systems or extended learning in one mode to another mode. A few programs purposely use the arts—dance and movement, photography, video, instrumental music, musical notation, song writing, drawing, mural making, cartooning, comic book illustration—as a pathway to and foundation for literacy.

Staff in the case study programs also planned and created opportunities for children to exhibit their skills and interests in a variety of ways. Creating opportunities for children to read and perform their writing helps parents and the broader community see that their children are capable, creative writers, who have something valuable to say, and allows children to see connections between reading and writing activity and oral performance.

The case studies yielded a number of general principles useful to after-school programs' efforts to nurture literacy in children. These principles point to the importance of the following:

- Providing a supportive but active adult role—one that not only affirms the value of children's interpretations of text, of what children think and have to say, but frames

questions, illustrates how to approach reading and text interpretation, writing and revising, and one that communicates the value of and models excitement about literacy activity;

- Respecting children's choice of reading material and the connections children make in their reading in order to nurture children's commitment to literacy; and
- Balancing seriousness and playfulness in literacy activities and remind us that children love to "play" with language, vocabulary, and words. They point as well to the importance of the proper climate for literacy activity (comfortable, quiet, intimate), and for sustained time for children to engage in reading and writing.

Challenges to Implementing Literacy Activities

Although we found interesting and innovative literacy practices in a handful of after-school programs, we also found a variety of systemic challenges to such activities in the field as a whole. These included

- Time, space, and material resource constraints;
- Lack of staff skill and experience in fostering literacy;
- The wide range of literacy support needs and interests among children;
- Parental expectations; and
- Lack of support for program directors and staff in thinking through and implementing a coherent approach to literacy activity.

In addition to these challenges, many after-school programs are struggling to find an appropriate stance in relation to schools, and to respond to pressure—from funders, parents and other stakeholders—to become more school-like and help address school-related agendas.

After-school programs tend to have less total time, and particularly less functional time, than might seem to be available for sustained literacy activity. Time constraints on literacy activity also are related to children's need for physical activity and time to unwind and "re-group" psychologically after-school after a day at school. By the time children have arrived, settled in, done homework, had snacks, had some free time, there is simply not enough after-school day left.

Limitations related to staffing create a major obstacle to after-school programs' capacity to provide enriching literacy experiences. Beyond the problems posed by frequent staff turnover, most frontline staff and the majority of supervisory staff have no specific training in the area of children's literacy development. Many after-school staff seem uncomfortable about their own identity and skills as readers and writers. Staff who do not see themselves as readers and writers cannot model an interest in literacy, help build children's confidence as readers and writers, or even arrange space and time for literacy activity.

Also complicating the literacy work of after-school programs is the fact that some children in the programs in our study have limited experience in reading and writing outside the school context. They do not see themselves as readers and writers. Some do not understand that if they like one book by a particular author, for example, there may be others by that author to try out. Many children do not know their reading interests or tastes; many have never read a book for sheer enjoyment, or have never been read to by an adult. Many children are reluctant

to write, and lack of voice and conviction in writing. Both problems become more acute as children grow older.

Reported challenges in relationships with parents centered around two issues: tensions between program staff and parents about expectations regarding homework; and program staff perceptions that parents are not supporting their children's efforts. These tensions can be exacerbated in programs serving linguistically and ethnically diverse communities.

Given the range of other constraints facing after-school programs, lack of an internally generated framework for literacy activity was particularly constraining. Although many directors expressed interest in "reconstructing" their programs to include more literacy-fostering activity, they typically did not know how or where to begin to act on that interest. After-school programs often struggle in isolation in their efforts, whether modest or significant, to foster literacy. And most program directors are either unaware or lack the time and energy to pursue external literacy resources that might be drawn on.

Conclusions

After-school programs provide a potentially strong base for nurturing children's literacy development and providing a variety of types of literacy experiences. The role of after-school programs should be to provide complementary and perhaps very different kinds of literacy purposes and experiences than those provided by school. Within the after-school field as whole, much work needs to be done if they are to fulfill their distinctive potential.

Good after-school programs approach literacy and work to support children's literacy development in different ways. In other words, literacy activities naturally fit differently into different programs, and they tend to work best when they reflect the character of, and are integrated into, the daily life of a program.   There are, nonetheless, purposes and principles for supporting children's literacy development that appear to hold across settings.

A number of attributes of after-school programs (at their best) make them particularly distinctive as nurturing environments for literacy. These include their *psychological/social climate, their motivational structure, their temporal structure, and adult roles*. Children typically see after-school programs as a safe, relaxed context, with a relatively modest adult agenda. After-school programs are places designed for children to feel successful. Children do not feel pressure to master new learning challenges quickly.

The goals and uses of reading and writing in after-school programs, especially as articulated and implemented in the exemplary programs, appear to be strongly motivating for children: reading and writing to explore who one is and might become, to express private feelings that are hard to talk about, to seek people to identify with. Children's motivation to write is fueled when they feel they've written something that gets a positive response from important adults, another characteristic of the exemplary programs in our study.

After-school programs are particularly well suited to fostering the *social dimensions* of literacy, with children sharing ideas, collaborating, helping each other, responding to and critiquing each other, and solving reading and writing problems together. They are also well suited to addressing the *cultural dimensions* of literacy, in particular to helping children explore

the particular literacy traditions of their families and communities, and serving as a bridge for children between those traditions and the literacy demanded in school.

If after-school programs represent a potentially rich and supportive base for children's literacy activity, they are by and large not yet achieving that potential. Only a handful of programs have thought intentionally about literacy. A very small group of programs seem genuinely "literacy infused," with literacy activity present throughout the formal and informal life of the program. A slightly larger but still small group can be described as "literacy rich," with clear goals and a variety of regular activities related to literacy. But in the majority of programs, literacy is barely present; at best it is a catch-as-catch-can phenomenon. Beyond time spent doing homework, children in most after-school programs are spending relatively little time on literacy activity. (There actually may be more literacy activity during the summer than during the year in some programs.)

Although it was not hard to find interesting practices and approaches, it was hard for many, perhaps most, programs to create and sustain the right conditions for implementing these practices and approaches. In some respects, the challenges of strengthening literacy activity in after-school programs are similar to those entailed in strengthening program quality generally. These point to the need to address serious resource limitations in the field such as space constraints and staff qualifications; develop mechanisms for linking programs to external resources such as public libraries, museums, and arts organizations, and support programs in using those resources effectively; and provide programs long-term technical assistance in such critical areas as planning, staff development, and curriculum.

It makes sense to find ways of bringing the enormous body of literature, expertise, and experience in the field of children's literacy development to after-school programs in usable forms, as just a few intermediary organizations in the field are attempting to do. This ranges from simple insights such as how to help children select "just right" books, or how to get the most out of journaling, to more complex challenges, such as structuring book discussions and assessing children's literacy development progress.

Just as organizations now exist to link young visual and performing artists to after-school programs, it also is logical to organize efforts to link young writers—of both fiction and non-fiction (e.g., journalists)—to after-school programs. Compared to reading, writing activity continues to receive relatively little attention in after-school programs, and yet for many children, can be a rewarding path to literacy.

At the same time, we urge a reconsideration of the central role that homework time has come to play as a literacy activity in after-school settings. Homework time benefits children whose parents cannot help them because of language difficulties, sometimes allows for extended one-to-one interaction with an adult or older child, and offers after-school staff a window into the academic skills of participating children. Yet, more often than not, homework time typically means less time for other, potentially more enriching activities. As our case study sites make clear, there are many ways that after-school programs can support children's literacy development and school success, without mirroring what happens in school. There also needs to be a balance between addressing children's academic needs and supporting other areas of development.

INTRODUCTION

Fostering children's literacy is an increasingly common interest, if not actual goal, of after-school programs serving low-income children. Both internal and external factors drive this interest. As they work with children day-in and day-out, after-school providers have observed first-hand (especially during homework time) that a good number of low-income children are not acquiring solid literacy skills in school. Moreover, many of the children who have adequate basic skills (for example, decoding and word recognition) do not grasp the meaning of what they read or bring their own ideas to a text. Nor do they write creatively, enjoy reading or writing, or see themselves as readers and writers.

These perceptions have prompted after-school providers to wish to do more to foster literacy. Complementing and reinforcing providers' desires to address literacy are the interests of policy makers and funders who are concerned about the academic performance and test scores of children in public schools. Attuned to the fact that children's literacy development has again become a national issue, and viewing the after-school hours as available for addressing this issue, they also are encouraging or requiring after-school programs to focus on literacy.[1, 2]

Because the need to help children acquire literacy is so pressing, and because the after-school hours are available and open to a variety of creative and enriching uses, it makes sense for after-school programs to focus some time and effort on literacy activity. The question is what a focus on literacy in after-school programs could and should be about. Many (though by no means all) parents are eager for their children to have time in after-school programs to get a head start on their homework for the next day. Many (though by no means all) policy makers and funders are pushing after-school programs to focus their literacy efforts on the goals of making up academic deficits and helping children improve standardized test scores. There also appears to be a growing movement to directly link after-school activities to school learning standards. For example, under a new school district policy in Seattle, community-based organizations running after-school programs in school buildings will receive free space if they can demonstrate that the experiences they provide align with the learning standards of the public schools.[3]

Although important, the goals of parents, schools, and funders for children's literacy and academic skills are not always compatible with the purposes and structures of after-school programs. After-school providers sense this, but as a field have had no alternative purposes for, or vision of, literacy activity to articulate. A number of attributes of after-school programs may complicate a focus on literacy. These include the importance of other interests and goals for children's development, the limits of available time and space (the same arguments made for literacy activity can be made for physical activity, artistic pursuits, simple fun, and so forth), staffing and other resources, general quality problems in the field, and children's own activity preferences after a day at school.

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[1] For example, According to the 2000 National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 32 percent of fourth graders across the United States read at the "proficient" or "advanced" level for their grade.

[2] Witness, for example, the September 2001 issue of *Making After School Count*, the Mott Foundation's monthly newsletter, which is entitled "Literacy and afterschool: A perfect fit" (Warren, 2001).

[3] "Schools and day care, a useful collaboration," *The Seattle Times*, September 17, 2001.

It was in the spirit of this combination of potential, pressures, and questions that the authors undertook a study designed to provide a basic picture of the after-school field in relation to fostering low-income children's literacy. Because it was the first study of its kind, it was, by necessity, exploratory. The idea was to provide a foundation for debate about the appropriate role of after-school programs in this important domain and explore ways to improve educational opportunities and experiences for school-age youth, particularly in low-income communities.

Research Goals and Methods

The purpose of the present study was to increase our understanding of current practices and the most appropriate roles for after-school programs in fostering low-income children's literacy in order to provide a foundation for improved policy and practice. Towards that end, the goals of the study were to:

- Describe the current context for literacy development in after-school programs serving low-income children
- Identify and describe interesting literacy-related approaches, practices, and activities and their underlying principles and assumptions, and reflect on why they appear to work
- Specify the factors that shape current goals and practices in relation to literacy development, and identify challenges faced by after-school programs around literacy
- Reflect on the appropriate role and expectations of after-school programs in supporting low-income children's emerging literacy, given the realities of after-school program resources and the roles of other developmental settings

The study comprised several components. Our primary data were a survey of the literacy practices and environments of more than 200 after-school programs in two distinct urban areas, Chicago and Seattle, and case studies involving repeated observations and interviews of sixteen after-school programs in Chicago, New York City and Seattle. The survey sample represented the major community-based organizations serving low-income children, including a sizeable proportion of second-language children, after school. It was composed largely of programs run by not-for-profit child care centers, social service agencies, youth-serving organizations, and parks and recreation departments. A majority of the programs provide subsidized care to at least half of their enrolled children, and a sizable percentage (40%) provides subsidies to all, or nearly all, of their participants.

The case study sites were the following:

- Chicago: Chicago Commons Guadalupano Center, Chicago Commons NIA Center, Chinese American Service League, Erie Neighborhood House, LaSalle Street Cycle, and Street Level Youth Media
- New York: Coalition for Hispanic Family Services (Arts & Literacy Program), East Harlem Tutorial, Forrest Hills Neighborhood House, Hartley House, Interfaith Neighbors, and Riverdale Neighborhood House

- Seattle: Chinese Information Service Center, El Centro de la Raza, Refugee Women's Alliance, and the YMCA Enrichment Program at Bailey Gatzert.

These case studies represented traditional, well-established after-school programs run by youth-serving organizations and social service agencies as well as programs that are doing interesting work with school-age children in the area of literacy, the arts, and/or cultural enrichment. All of them serve predominantly low-income children, many of whom speak English as a second language.

In addition, we conducted key informant interviews with selected agency directors, foundation representatives, trainers, and literacy specialists (see Appendix D), and reviewed a variety of documents, including reports describing other programs and literacy initiatives, the research literature on literacy development, and literacy-related curricular resources for after-school programs. (A full description of the study methods, the survey sample, and the case study sites can be found in Appendices A - D.)

Overview of the Report

Before discussing the results of the study, in Chapter II, we briefly describe how children develop literacy skills and motivations and speculate on a role for after-school programs in that development. Chapter III characterizes the physical settings, material resources, and activities typically found in after-school programs, and Chapter IV highlights interesting approaches and practices that appear to enhance both children's interest in reading and writing and their literacy skills. Chapter V discusses challenges to implementing literacy activities in after-school programs, including issues of staffing, facilities, and time. We conclude in Chapter VI by discussing the policy and practice implications for after-school programs in supporting low-income children's literacy development.

PERSPECTIVES ON LITERACY AND
CHILDREN'S LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Defining Literacy

The term "literacy" is used and understood in widely varying ways—as a process, an activity, a skill, an outcome, a euphemism for academic success. All definitions include reading and writing, but some also include verbal language ability, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, the general ability to absorb and interpret information, and the somewhat abstract ability to "manipulate culture." Some definitions include the full range of symbol systems—for example, drawing and painting, music and dance—that are use to create and communicate meaning. Other definitions connect literacy to personal identity and social change. In our view, literacy activities are not limited to reading and writing, but also include talk and narratives about the production and interpretation of print (Garton and Pratt, 1998; Heath, 1983; Venezky, 1993). The form and use of literacy depends on the context in which it is used (Gee, 1999, 2001; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978).

In the present study, we focus primarily on activities that directly involve reading and writing but also examine activities such as the arts that provide opportunities for using and developing literacy skills. Although we take a somewhat narrow view of literacy activity, we take a broad view of the goals or outcomes of such activity. Literacy is not simply about the ability to read and write; it is also the interest in and practice of using reading and writing for a variety of personally meaningful and socially valued purposes. For example, children use reading and writing to organize and make sense of their life experiences, to represent and describe experience to themselves and others, to give a name to their fears, to explore who they are and where they fit, and to understand larger issues in the world around them.

Literacy Development

In developing literacy, children are acquiring both skills and dispositions; that is, they are learning the skills of reading and writing, making a habit of reading and writing, and developing motives and purposes for engaging in literacy. Indirectly, they also develop an understanding of what—and who—literacy is for and come to associate specific types of literacy activities with particular settings.

Learning to read and write begins early in life at home with behaviors and ideas about literacy (McLane & McNamee, 1990; Rogoff, 1990; Teale & Sulzby, 1991). Children learn what it *means* to read and write before they learn *how* to read and write by watching and participating in literacy events in their everyday world. In a sense they are "apprentices" to the tasks of literacy (Greenleaf, et al., 2001; Rogoff, 1990). Part of literacy development is becoming socialized into a particular culture of behaviors surrounding the uses of reading and writing. Children are exposed to the practices and skills of literacy as they interact with other people in daily events such as telling family stories, reading books, writing shopping lists, reading signs and labels, scribbling, drawing, etc.

All of the settings in which children spend time influence literacy development. In children's families and communities they have access to reading and writing resources, or

perhaps do not have access; they observe important adults reading and writing for specific purposes, and perhaps not reading and writing for other purposes. The forms and functions of reading and writing in their families and communities, therefore, affect the early literacy development of children. Children are read to—or not read to—by their parents. As children grow older, teachers' guidance and feedback obviously play an increasingly important role in their literacy development. Nonetheless, exposure to literacy events and experiences outside of school continue to be important.

The physical environment impacts children's behavior and activities. Access to books and other printed materials is critical to early literacy development. There is wide disparity between poorer and wealthier neighborhoods in the amount of print in children's environments (Neuman, personal communication, 2000). However, it is not enough to just have materials available; children also need guidance and appropriate instruction from adults (Neuman, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). Research with young children shows that when play environments are enriched with literacy materials and when adults become involved in children's play with literacy artifacts, children are more likely to engage in reading and writing activities (Morrow, 1990; Neuman and Roskos, 1993; Roskos and Christie, 2000, edited volume; Schrader, 1991).

Beyond differences in exposure to literacy in their environments, children respond in their own ways to their literacy experiences. Being a reader and/or writer is naturally more a part of some children's identity than of others'. For some children, reading is an adventure, for others it is a chore.[4] So with writing. Many more children have the ability to read and write than have the habit of reading and writing, beyond what they are required to do in school. Wilhelm (1997) suggests that perhaps 50 percent of children do not regard themselves as readers, that is, do not choose to read and see reading primarily as a necessary life skill or school activity. In a study of the out-of-school activities of fifth grade students over a two to six month period, Anderson, Wilson and Fielding (1988) found that on most days children did little or no book reading outside of school. The amount of reading, which was linked to proficiency on standardized reading tests, was varied by gender (girls read more than boys) and skills. "Children who were good readers in the second grade did more reading in the fifth grade (Anderson, et al., 1988, p. 294)." Furthermore, children who spent more time reading in school were more likely to read after school, suggesting that teachers have an important influence on the amount of time children read.

Children also read with different amounts of mental activity and degrees of closeness, at different depths, for different individual purposes. Some children are active readers, engaging the text, others are more passive—"just tell me what it means." Some are more interested in individual characters, some in the flow of action or events, some in the story landscape (Wilhelm, 1997). In their talk and writing about books they read or have read to them, they may focus on language and words (sound, meaning, etc.), on illustrations, on the narrative, characters, and setting; or on what the story or characters remind them of (outside the story

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[4] For example, in the course of observations for an evaluation of the MOST ("Making the Most of Out of School Time") Initiative (Halpern, Spielberger, & Robb, 2001), we met a seventh-grade boy at the Casa Central after-school program in Chicago. While coloring, he began telling us that he was reading *Romeo and Juliette;* that he enjoyed reading the parts of the different characters; and that sometimes he read to his father. He had been exposed to Shakespeare by a repertory theater group that performed at local schools, and become attracted by a performance of Macbeth.

itself). They may internalize the story, and incorporate elements of it into their play; they may "become the story," taking on one of the characters as a temporary identity.

Children have been noted to be more natural writers than readers. Most children want to share their experiences and internal worlds with others, and most love to experiment with writing in the same way they love to experiment with drawing -- as forms of self-expression, ways of representing experience, their culture, feelings, even questions. When children begin to write they build on what they know, making knowledge of a few symbols or words go a long way (Clay, 1999)." As they learn to write they "draw upon their rich resources as users of other symbolic media—not only talk but also drawing and dramatic play (Dyson, 1993, pp. 11-12)."

Activities That Shape Literacy Development

The literature points to a wide range of practices and activities that support children's literacy development and, by implication, to the importance of providing children with a variety of literacy experiences to foster both skill-building and motivation (e.g., Gambrell, Morrow, Neuman, and Pressley, 2000; Holdaway, 1979; Smith and Elley, 1998). Literacy development benefits from opportunities to observe literacy behaviors, to engage in independent reading and writing, to share literacy experiences with peers, and to collaborate with skilled and supportive adults in literacy activities. Specific activities that have been found to play crucial roles in children's literacy development include reading activities such as guided reading, sustained silent reading, reading aloud to children in groups and individually, talking about books, and dramatic reading and story dramatization; and writing activities such as story dictation, journaling, newsletter-writing, creative writing (stories, plays, poetry), and talking about writing. There also is growing evidence that beyond these commonly accepted literacy activities, experiences in the arts and dramatic play can on also contribute to literacy development.

Reading Experiences

Reading to children. The literature is virtually unanimous on the benefits of reading to children. One of the most fundamental activities that influence children's language development and preparation for school literacy activities is the experience of being read to as preschoolers (e.g., Heath, 1982; Hertzog, 2001; National Reading Council, 1998; Sulzby and Teale, 1987). Once children begin reading on their own, they still enjoy and benefit from listening to others read. The benefits of reading to children include developing a love of books; strengthening attachment to the book-reader/caregiver; learning to distinguish types of language; developing an understanding of story structure and narrative; improving vocabulary; improving listening comprehension (Sipe, 2000). For many children, being read to aloud and fluently gives them a sense of experiencing a whole story, and helps them see the deeper meaning in words, or in the story as a whole. Children might not get these benefits when they read themselves because they are working too hard. Children who are read to gradually "appropriate" the reading act for themselves (Resnick, 1990).

Because children's oral understanding and listening comprehension is at a higher level than their print understanding, reading aloud to children can be used to introduce them to higher level books than they could read on their own, exposing them to perhaps more

interesting and challenging material. Storybook reading has many variations. For example, children can follow along with their own books, and if appropriate take turns doing some of the reading, or a group of children can read a "big book," based on Holdaway's (1979) concept of shared book experiences, which let both reader and audience see and follow the printed words of a story.

Sustained silent reading. Although it would seem obvious that there is no substitute for reading itself in learning to read and in making reading part of one's life, what is sometimes called "sustained silent reading" is often neglected in the settings in which children spend time every day. Sustained silent reading provides a good opportunity to read for pleasure, which Resnick defines as the freedom to pick up or put down a book at will, with "no need to prove to others that one has read (1990, p. 182)." As Calkins (2001) puts it, "children benefit from daily opportunities to read books they choose for themselves for their own purposes and pleasures (p. 8)."

Book discussions. Text can be a stimulus for discussion and creative expression. Discussions about books can emerge from a story read to a group of children or silent reading of the same text. Talking about what has been read or heard allows children to connect text to other texts and to personal experiences. Calkins writes: "We teach children to think with and between and against texts by helping them say aloud, in conversation with us and others, the thoughts they will eventually be able to develop without the interaction of conversation (2001, p. 226)." There is some debate about how much to structure book discussions with children. Some argue that children do well with free or open discussion, usually finding their way to key elements of the narrative, to literacy themes, especially if they have knowledge of key concepts, and the group leader helps with direction by asking key questions. Calkins (2001) notes that children are often silenced by questions about a text, because they have learned at school that the questioner only has one answer in mind, which might not be their answer.

Story dramatization and readers' theater: Like reading, dramatizing stories, with children assuming different parts, contributes to literacy development in a variety of ways. Acting out a story gives children a greater sense of character, plot, and narrative structure, and provides an opportunity for deeper understanding of the events in a story. The link between drama and reading in elementary school children has been the topic of a number of research studies, although questions have been raised about the quality of this work (Rose, Parks, and Androes, 2000). In an experimental study of Whirlwind's structured Reading Comprehension through Drama program in inner-city fourth-grade classrooms in Chicago, Rose et al. (2000) found that students in the drama group improved their scores on tests of reading comprehension significantly more than students receiving traditional reading instruction over a 10-week period.

Developing purposes for reading. Connecting books to field trips, art and other activities, like making applesauce or apple crisp after reading a book about Johnny Appleseed or making origami birds after reading *A Thousand Cranes*, is another common way to extend learning and foster interest in reading. It also is important for children to have opportunity for different kinds of reading experiences and reasons to read. Reading to acquire information is often neglected. Children have to learn to read for information differently than they read stories, sometimes scanning and reading selectively. They also have to learn how to read different kinds of documents, including diagrams, maps, graphs, tables, photographs and other "visual" texts (Moline, 1995). Children's understanding of literacy expands through

experiences such as reading a schedule to see what activities are happening, instructions to play a game, and directions in a cooking recipe.

Writing Experiences

Just as with reading, a range of writing activities has been found to support and nurture writing development. Moreover, writing is sometimes overlooked as a means of strengthening reading as well as writing skills. A variety of writing experiences for different purposes, both guided by adults and unguided, encourages attention to language and helps children develop understanding of word sounds, sound-spelling relationships, and meanings (Calkins, 1994, 1997; Graves and Stuart, 1986; National Reading Council, 2000). Calkins (1997) points out that reading is often regarded as being about first learning to sound out and blend words, when, in fact, phonemic awareness is a *consequence* of being able to read. She believes that it is more productive to work on phonics instruction when children are writing than when reading.

Open-ended and creative writing activities foster interest in literacy as well as skills. Journal writing encourages children to express their ideas, concerns, and experiences in their own way, without fear of censure by an adult. Dialogue journals provide an opportunity for children to record responses to an experience or something they have reading, share it with a teacher or another adult who responds in writing. Collaborative writing groups, for example writing a play, allow children to stimulate and help each other. Putting reading and writing in the service of some other end—say, learning about elephants, or planning a group construction project—is also a helpful literacy development activity, because children are not self-consciously focused on learning how to read or write, but are using them as tools to think and learn something new of interest to them.

Non-Literacy Activities that Support Literacy Development

The arts. Children express themselves in many ways—drawing, writing, role playing, dancing, singing, oral language—that all reflect growing cognitive capacities to use symbols to think and communicate (Gallas, 1994; Gardner, 1985; Dyson, 1986, 1991). The arts—drama, movement, photography, video, music, song writing, drawing, mural making, cartooning and comic book illustration—provide another pathway to and starting point for literacy. Education in the arts helps to develop habits of mind (Fowler, 1996) and expand horizons, teaching new ways of thinking, feeling and perceiving (Jackson, 1998). The arts reveal unrecognized abilities in children, which can be a base for strengthening literacy, allowing children to lead from strength. Some children express themselves better through other symbol systems than they do through writing and, so doing, learn they have something to say. Some children's verbal imagination is sparked by their visual imagination; expressing something first in pictures, then moving into words. Indeed, Leland and Harste (1994) suggest that part of literacy is the ability to use a variety of symbol systems, not only reading and writing, in ways that are appropriate to the contexts in which they find themselves. In their view, "a truly literate person is one who can mediate his or her world through multiple sign systems—not just language."

Some children have difficulty ordering and "expressing" the ideas in their heads in words, and might be able to practice that process using other art forms. In other words, arts activities may allow children to work simultaneously across different symbol systems—words, pictures,

music, movement—with the idea that working effectively in one symbol system can be a springboard to others. Crossing back and forth between different media—for example, acting out a poem through movement—also can lead to deeper understanding and insight. Sometimes activity in one art form stimulates activity in another—a book or story stimulates a child to paint or draw something, or act something out. Since each art form has its own vocabulary and grammar, children also can be challenged to make connections between creative expression and language, learn correspondences between movement and sentences, or jazz notation and writing, and understand narrative structure. The arts help children understand the link between creativity and discipline. Although the arts may be unconventional and unpredictable, they still require discipline and mentorship (Cushman and Emmons, 2002).

Davidson and Koppenhaver (1993) report on a federally funded program called Learning to Read through the Arts, that originated in New York City. The program, directed at elementary-school children who are behind their peers in reading, provides enjoyable reading-oriented arts experiences two days a week during school hours. The art experiences include dance, drawing, film making, painting, photography, and sculpture, among others. Children "must listen carefully to instructions, talk about what they are going to do, and record information, directions, and descriptive paragraphs about each project in their individual journals (Davidson and Koppenhaver, 1993, p. 215)." In so doing, they learn to translate—talk and write about—concrete experiences into abstract concepts. They also begin to experience positive rather than negative feelings about learning and literacy.

Symbolic or pretend play. Activities such as pretend play, drawing, and being read to can nurture and influence children's understanding of what the system of written language is all about. Studies of preschool children have found links between pretend play and increased capacities for problem solving, perspective taking, story comprehension, communication skills, memory, and abstract thought (Galda and Pellegrini, 1993; Johnson, 1990; Simon and Smith, 1985). Acting out stories and dramatic play foster children's use of explicit language—defining play roles, evoking imaginary people, objects and events, and using complex noun and verb phrases—which is the kind of language often expected of children in school. Although little study has been done on the connection between spontaneous play and literacy for older children, school-age children continue to engage in pretend activities, use play to express ideas and issues, and become more deeply engaged in learning when a playful approach is taken (Alexander, 2000; Dyson, 1990; Owocki, 2001; Temple, 2000). The link between drama and reading mentioned earlier also suggests the value of pretend play as context for exploring the tools and purposes of literacy and practicing newfound literacy skills.

The Role of Adults in Literacy Development

> The middle childhood years are a time when children are eager to emulate the adults they admire.
>
> ~Lucy Calkins, *Raising Lifelong Learners*, 1997

Adults obviously have an important and multifaceted role in supporting children's literacy development. Beyond necessary instruction and guidance in basic skills, that role includes motivating children to include literacy activity in their daily lives by making it enjoyable and a part of their identities. One of the hardest tasks in supporting children's literacy development is making literacy experiences intrinsically rewarding and convincing children to strive for a high

level of literacy. Adults can help by reading to children, connecting particular literacy activities to children's lives, modeling excitement about reading and writing in relation to particular books, and stimulating informal conversation about books. Children "are influenced by adults who appear to enjoy what they do." If significant adults enjoy reading, the child will "take it for granted that reading is worthwhile (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 133)."

Other roles for adults include creating a comfortable environment for reading; and helping children choose books to read that match their interests, preoccupations, and abilities; talking about reading and writing; and responding affirmatively to children's writing and reading. Dyson (1993) argues that exploratory and dramatic play with print can support emerging literacy, but without adult mediation, cannot lead children to an understanding of how to manipulate letters and words and use them communicatively. And McLane (1990) notes, even if writing "to pursue their own interests and purposes, children need adult support, from adults with particular conceptions about writing (p. 315)." Similarly, in reflecting on the experiences of after-school programs in New York City participating in a Bowne Foundation literacy initiative, Ellowitch and colleagues (1991) found that "you can't just hand a child a book, or invite them to choose a book, and expect it to work. The children had no background in reading; they hadn't been introduced to children's literature. They had no notion of reading more than one book by the same author, or even of what they liked to read about."

School Influences

Adults impact children's learning in a variety of family, school and community settings. Although the influences of home and family remain, as children grow, school becomes increasingly influential in their literacy development. Nevertheless, much of the literature on schools is critical of them. Low-income children tend to fall steadily more behind in reading between first and fourth grade, regardless of initial reading skills (Gee, 1999). Some who do maintain with reading skills—decoding, word recognition, basic comprehension—still do not learn how to "read to learn" (Gee, 1999, p. 365). It is not uncommon for children who like or even love to read in elementary school to come to dislike or even hate reading by middle school; but it is not really reading itself, it is the tests, measures, evaluations attached to it (e.g., Bettelheim and Zelan, 1982; Shannon, 1998). A belief that children have to master basic skills before they can be successful writers can diminish children's eagerness to write (Silberman, 1989).

A major criticism of reading in schools is the poor content of, and lack of choice for children in, reading matter. Stories in basal readers and other commercial textbooks, the principal source of reading material, are constructed based on readability formulas using controlled vocabulary. Commercial textbooks are criticized as "commodities", whose purpose is profit for publishers, and are therefore designed to contain knowledge "acceptable to the widest possible audience" (Shannon, 1990, p. 151). The content of texts typically avoids difficult issues and conflict, and is often unconnected, and even alien, to children's lives, past experiences, and interests (Resnick, 1990). Text contents are chosen "in conformity with the theoretical orientation of curriculum designers, not because they relate to students' interests, goals or abilities" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 135). When schools rely on commercial texts, much of the lesson planning is done far from the classroom, with the result that there is no knowledge of the particular group of children and what they bring to the learning experience.

Even when teachers are not using basals, their language arts lessons tend to reflect the structure of basal lessons (Shannon, 1998, p. 152).

Schools, especially those that serve low-income children, often have a narrow view of literacy, focusing almost exclusively on building skills, rather than fostering a sense of literacy as a tool for self-expression, exploration of the world, exercise of the imagination, and so forth. Some of the decline in children's literacy skills and motivations reflect external pressures on schools to spend more time on test preparation in an effort to boost achievement scores. Especially in schools serving low-income children, which already rely heavily on commercial textbooks and pre-packaged curricula, this means further reductions in already limited time for interesting and creative activities like reading and discussing good literature, and writing stories and poetry. It also means fewer choices and individualized assignments, and an emphasis on children's deficits rather than the strengths they bring to literacy activities. All told, prevailing school practices tend silence low-income children's own "voice" in literacy activity and undermine their desire to be readers and writers (Ellowitch, et al., 1991; Greenleaf et al, 2001).

In addition, schools tend not to be sensitive to or accommodating of the home and community literacy culture from which their children come. Indeed, for some time researchers and educators have voiced concern about discontinuities between home and school in the way young children are socialized to literacy, particularly low-income children and those from ethnic and/or linguistic minority communities (e.g., Delpit, 1988; Edwards, et al., 2001; Heath, 1983; Reyes, 1992; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Although many agree that there is a discrepancy between home and/or community and school, there is less agreement on the implications for educational practice—in particular about where responsibility lies for bridging this gap and the best ways to do so. Both of these issues— schools' narrow view of literacy and the chasm between the literacy cultures of home and school—suggest possible roles for after-school programs: first, to give children's exposure to broader forms and uses of literacy and opportunity to learn to use literacy for their own ends; second, to play a bridging role between the culture of literacy of home or community and that of school.

Implications for a Role for After-School Programs

Resnick (1990) argues for the importance of "other institutions" in children's literacy development. These can "function jointly with the schools in the best circumstances or independently when necessary." It is critical for these other institutions not to mimic school, but to provide "truly alternative occasions for literacy practice." That includes giving children access to different kinds of reading and writing experiences, and where necessary striving to redefine children's relationship to reading and writing. While Resnick was not referring to after-school programs in particular, it turns out that after-school programs may be well-suited in some respects to provide a very different base for literacy practice. The adult agenda in after-school programs is, or at least has been, more modest. The external pressures are lower than in formal educational settings. And, children generally feel comfortable in after-school programs.

There are a variety of possible purposes and roles for after-school programs in children's literacy development. These include giving children access to different kinds of reading and writing experiences, and where necessary striving to redefine children's

relationship to reading and writing. In turn, these purposes and roles suggest a somewhat different role for adults in the after-school setting. Adults are still critical to such tasks as helping children choose books, providing guidance and frames for discussions of literature, responding to children's writing. But, the adult role after school is essentially more supportive than directive—instructive but not prescriptive.

One can find literacy issues and activities—book clubs, newsletters, journal-writing, play-writing, oral reading to children, etc.—mentioned in the small body of research literature on after-school programs (see, e.g., Baird, 2000; Marx, 1989; Halpern, 1990, 2000; Hynes, O'Connor & Chung, 1999; McLane, 1990). However, outside of the attention paid to helping children with homework, literacy has not been a topic of significant interest to the general after-school program community, though that is beginning to change in a few cities and in some of the large youth-serving organizations like the YMCA (Taylor, personal communication, 2000) and the Boys & Girls Clubs (Jaye, personal communication, 2001).

After-school programs all over the country are struggling to figure out what role they can and should play in supporting children's academic progress. In interviews with administrators of school-age programs and staff trainers during our research on the MOST ("Making the Most of Out of School Time") Initiative (Halpern, Spielberger, and Robb, 2001), we found a clear interest in promoting children's literacy. At the same time, observations of selected programs in low-income neighborhoods showed, for the most part, slight attention to creating "literacy-rich" environments and a generally low level of interesting, engaging literacy activity. Many viewed literacy as a specific activity or area of the room (e.g., a book shelf), rather than as an underlying element of all or many program activities, or something potentially present in all areas of the classroom. Most programs had limited material and human resources for facilitating and broadening children's literacy skills. Program directors tended to feel a good deal of pressure to focus on homework, yet were frustrated that homework was their primary literacy activity.

LITERACY IN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS:
THE CURRENT CONTEXT

One of the primary goals of the study was to understand the current context for literacy development in after-school programs serving low-income children. We were particularly interested in program goals and structure, staffing, funding, perceptions of children served, parental expectations, approach to and types of literacy activities, literacy-related in-service training, staff knowledge and perspectives on literacy, and challenges to implementing literacy activities. Information came from several sources: a survey of 212 after-school programs in Chicago and Seattle, observations of more than two dozen selected programs, primarily in Chicago, New York and Seattle, and interviews with agency and program directors, front-line staff, literacy specialists, and technical assistance providers.

The after-school programs in the study included not-for-profit child care centers, social service agencies, youth-serving organizations such as YMCAs and Boys and Girls Clubs, and parks and recreation departments. The average number of school-age children served on a daily basis ranged from a low of three to a high of 225, with a median between 40 and 50 children. Most programs have about five or six staff members, on average, typically one or two full-time staff and three or four part-time. Educational levels of directors, program coordinators and lead staff ranged from having only a high school diploma (or GED) to having a graduate degree. Among the survey respondents, two-thirds (67%) of directors and program coordinators have college degrees, but less than a third (28%) of lead staff and only 12 percent of assistant staff have college degrees. (Additional information about the survey sample can be found in Appendix B.)

The goals and purposes of after-school programs range widely and vary from one program to another, depending on the needs of children and providers' beliefs about their role in children's development. Most see themselves as providing child care as well as supplementary activities. When survey respondents were asked to indicate the principal purpose of their after-school program, they selected child care most often (44%), followed by academic support (23%), enrichment (19%), and recreation (15%). This suggests that "child care" remains the leading function of after-school programs in the survey, even though they expressed an interest in academic support and enrichment. This view also was reflected in comments of some of the staff we interviewed who expressed vague or broad goals such as "academic enrichment," "help with homework," the development of "critical thinking" skills, or, for the director of a program serving an immigrant community, helping children "succeed in school and the mainstream society," while providing "a safe place for children to develop physically, emotionally, and academically."

In this chapter, we report on what typically is happening in the area of literacy in after-school programs—sometimes intentionally and sometimes by chance—based both on what providers told us in the mail survey but also on our interviews and program observations.

Literacy Environments: Materials, Space, and Time

Children's interests and behaviors are affected by their physical surroundings, and the availability and variety of printed materials makes a difference in their literacy development. One of the first steps after-school programs can take towards supporting children's literacy

development is to provide a variety of literacy materials, create comfortable spaces for literacy activity, and make time available for children to read and write.

Materials

Although after-school programs vary widely in their physical and material resources, study results suggest that most are providing a material foundation for literacy. Observations and survey findings both indicate that most programs provide easy access to writing tools and materials along with at least a modest selection of fiction and nonfiction books (which are sometimes available for lending). A majority of programs have money budgeted to purchase books (although we do not know how much), and about half of the programs we surveyed or observed rely on the public library as a source of books. Most often (83% of the survey sample), books are donated by individuals, businesses, or small not-for-profit training and resource organizations like Hug-a-Book in Chicago.[5] Almost half of the programs responding to the survey reported offering some kind of lending library of books for children and/or their families to borrow, individual or group journals, and computers with word processing capabilities. Only a third or fewer provide books on audiotapes, books in languages other than English, and computer access to the Internet. (See Table 10, Appendix C.)

> **Box 3.1. Providing space and materials for literacy**
>
> The walls and halls are bursting with the work of kids and counselors, including children's writings (e.g., "Inner Voices"), pictures, posters, lists of "cool words," signs giving the "Rights of the Author and Audience," and the daily and weekly schedules. Each room has ample space and materials for writing and drawing.
>
> *~Observation field notes, Interfaith Neighbors, New York*

In addition (as we also found in our program observations), many programs provide language-rich board games (Boggle, Password, Scrabble, among others) and academic resources–encyclopedias, dictionaries, reference books and textbooks. Props for dramatic play, which can provide a context or stimulus for children to explore and play with literacy tools and ideas, also can be found in a number of after-school programs (72% of those in the survey). Less common, but available in a number of programs, are materials such as crossword puzzles and other word games, puppets, educational computer software, children's magazines, worksheets, and tape recorders.

Differences in material resources among programs likely reflect differences in goals and purposes as well as budgets. Providers of recreation-oriented programs who responded to the survey reported less often that they supply items such as multicultural books, children's magazines, non-English language books, and educational computer software than respondents representing other types of programs. Academically oriented programs are more likely than other programs to use worksheets and own a set of encyclopedias, but less likely to provide dramatic play materials, puppets, and tape recorders.

Space and Time

Along with providing language-rich displays—such as the one described in Box 3.2 below—and other printed materials in after-school settings, an important way to recognize and support

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[5] Hug-a-Book donates a collection of high-quality children's literature to inner-city child care programs (preschool and school-age) and provides training to staff and parents on how to use the books and set up a lending library for families.

children's literacy is to provide space for showing their own work. Most after-school programs provide display areas for children's art work, and many also display children's writing, although our observations indicate that the quantity and quality of these display areas vary enormously from one program to another. We observed several programs that provide enriching language environments with printed schedules, job charts, snack menus, posters, signs, labels for materials and interest areas, and thematic bulletin boards.

Box 3.2. Expanding horizons with a display of maps and postcards

A new display in the room posts letters from a traveling staff person. The wall is covered with a world map and a sign that says that the staff person is travelling through Europe. Her travels are marked with yarn on the map and there are enlarged copies of each postcard sent to the group. The first one, sent as she heads to Paris, tells the group that she plans to arrive in Paris on June 13. It states:

"If I send you a postcard on June 13th how long do you think it will take to get to you? Guess and then count the days."

Later, when she arrives in Paris, the postcard reads:

"The most important things [sic] to know in Paris is the language or some phrases. Here are some for you to practice – *Bonjour* is hello, *S'il vous plait* is please."

~Observation notes, YMCA at Bailey Gatzert, Seattle

Reading and writing areas. Most of the programs we surveyed or observed provide separate areas for reading books. In some programs, this was a small table and a couple of chairs next to a bookshelf; in others, it was a large comfortable couch or floor pillows. Some programs have created quiet, protected spots to sit with a book, for instance, a loft, enclosed or "walled off" area, or "reading circle" with cozy chairs. One program director described a "literacy area" where children can sit on "colorful rugs [or] beanbag chairs" and read. A number of programs also have designated areas for writing activities with chairs, tables, and containers of writing tools and paper, which in some cases are incorporated into dramatic play areas.

Book displays. Beyond making literature available, the arrangement and presentation of book and other reading materials is elemental to gaining children's attention and keeping them excited about reading. Most of our case study programs pay attention to how books are displayed, for example, by rotating highlighted titles, labeling books for degree of difficulty, or using book cards for quick reviews of books. Yet, only about half of the survey sample reported paying attention to how books are displayed. For those programs that do so, most exhibit books and other reading materials on shelves, and in a few cases on tables. Some programs, rather than placing all books in a central location, provide small collections of books in several different areas of the room and rotate books periodically.

Only a few survey responses described a novel or systematic approach to showing books, indicating a general lack of recognition of the importance of presentation as an initial motivation for children to pick up reading material. Innovative manners of presentation that were reported included the use of low moving shelves for children's easy reach or books about frogs on the science table near the frog tank to capture their interest. Other programs separate reading materials according to such characteristics as reading level (beginner, intermediate or advanced), type of literature (fiction, nonfiction, newspaper, magazine), or subject. Some respondents incorporate a special monthly theme into books on display (holidays, conflict resolution, science and art, among others).

Space for literacy activity. Lack of dedicated space in many after-school programs affects literacy-related arrangements just as it does other aspects of programs. Having to share space or set up and put away furniture and materials can hamper the creation of a language-rich physical environment, attractive arrangements of books and enrichment materials, quiet and comfortable areas for reading, or the display of children's art and writing. A number of programs, for instance, are forced to create "libraries" in space that is also used for other purposes. In one New York City settlement, a newly refurbished library with a significant number and variety of books was also used as a staff room and meeting room. In another, located in a large public housing development, the after-school program shares space with programs for teenagers, senior citizens, and the larger community. In a third, we noted that the room in which children were listening to a story had a hard wood floor and was uncomfortable (yet they managed to be quiet and still long enough to get into the plot of the story).

> **Box 3.3. The challenge of space**
>
> "Space is the major concern at our multi-purpose facility. Quiet space is rare and is a must in an environment conducive to reading or just to relax."
> *~Survey respondent*

Time for literacy activity. Nearly all of the programs we surveyed or observed had scheduled time for children to do homework. A majority of programs (two-thirds of those responding to the mail survey) appear to make time in their schedules for children to read on their own on either a daily or weekly basis, although the amount of time varies from program to program. They are less likely to set aside time for writing, with only about half of the survey respondents reporting a specific writing time at least once a week. (See Table 4, Appendix C.) Most respondents who did not regularly schedule a separate time for reading or writing explained that, given the limited time available during the after-school hours, children who have been in school all day need a chance to engage in other activities. Some programs did not see a need to institute a special reading or writing time because it would not be compatible with the goals of the program. Others place the responsibility of reading and writing on the children, themselves. For a number of respondents, how children use program time is their own choice. Materials for reading and writing are always available and children do pick up books and write on their own without prodding from the program staff.

Our study findings suggest that although after-school programs have a good deal of flexibility in structuring time, time is also at a premium. Managing program time seems particularly difficult in after-school programs that serve children arriving at different times of day from a number of schools. (For programs not located in school buildings, this often means that staff must spend a good portion of their time picking up children.) Programs that provide space and time for literacy activities often do so in the context of homework labs or homework times, in which children read or write quietly if they are not doing homework. From time to time (especially in Seattle programs), we observed designated times (as in a "sustained silent reading" period) for children to read on their own—the effects of a school requirement that children read 5 to 30 minutes a day outside of school and of parents who maintain that they are unable to manage

> **Box 3.4. The challenge of time**
>
> "Time is a challenge. There are a number of activities such as snack, homework, sports, etc. that we have to implement in three or four hours' time."
>
> "Some kids arrive at 2:30 p.m., some not until 4 p.m.; it makes scheduling our afternoons a challenge."
> *~Two survey respondents*

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this task at home. A handful of staff and even an occasional child raised questions about the value of a planned time) for individual reading (as opposed to a designated group reading time). The director of an after-school program at a shelter in Seattle recalled that when she came to the program, children were being "forced to sit and read books" for about 15 minutes a day. She instituted reading aloud instead and found that "the kids really enjoyed it." A 10-year-old child told us, "What I don't like about SSR [sustained silent reading] at school is sometimes I don't feel like reading or can't find a book I like. And then if I like a book, it's hard when I have to stop in the middle of the story."

Literacy Activities

It is not always easy to define an activity as literacy or, alternatively, not-literacy. As we noted in the previous chapter, many activities that go on in after-school programs can involve reading and writing coincidentally. For instance, literacy can be incorporated into pretend play and art activities. Talking about the creation or interpretation of print can be a literacy activity. Other examples are the use of reading and writing to prepare for a speech, an art performance, a field trip, or a scientific experiment; or the use of reading and writing to reinforce, extend, and reflect on these and other kinds of experiences. Box 3.6 illustrates the use of literacy to prepare for and reflect on a field trip experience. Thus, in our survey and program observations, we examined the frequency with which activities such as discussions and conversations, performances, and story telling occur in after-school program as well as formal reading and writing activity.

Box 3.5. Using discussion and writing to plan and reflect on experiences

Before leaving on a recent field trip to a science museum, one of the staff elicited from the children their ideas about what is science and what is not science. Their ideas were written down and are now displayed in one section of a bulletin board. Another section shows what the children have written about some of their experiences; which also were categorized according to science and non-science activities. The program coordinator reports that they also tried to get the children to think about and verbalize what they would see before they went, and then when they returned, they wrote something about what they did see.

~Observation notes, Chinese Information Service Center, Seattle

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The most common literacy activities in after-school programs, according to both our survey and observations, are doing homework and independent reading. In general, writing was less common than reading. We also saw evidence of school-like activity in a number of programs, most commonly worksheets, although these often were enjoyable activities for children. For example, in a New York program, staff taped worksheets in which children had to find hidden objects inside their journals. Three-fourths of the survey respondents reported that children read independently and 68 percent, that adults read to children on a regular basis. In about half of the surveyed programs, children also spend time reading to other children or adults. Only a third of the survey respondents indicated that children write stories, songs, plays or poetry. Even smaller percentages reported children spend time acting out stories and plays, writing about their experiences, or using books or the Internet to research new topics. (See Tables 18 and 19, Appendix C.)

Although many after-school programs seem to recognize the importance of scheduling time for group discussions and story reading, our observations suggest that program staff do not always follow through on these scheduled opportunities. We observed few instances of story telling or other kinds of oral performances by children or adults in our program visits.

It is important to note that although the traditional view is that reading and writing are solitary or individual activities, many of the literacy activities we observed were strongly social. Some activity, such as book discussion or work together on a particular project, was deliberately so. For instance, on one occasion we observed children take turns reading aloud a story called "Summer Wheels," as part of a structured book discussion project. Children helped, and corrected, each other (at one point compelling the staff member to remind them to let one girl, who was struggling with the text, try to sound out words herself). On another occasion we observed a group of first graders talking into a tape recorder about attributes of dinosaurs. These were later to be typed out by a staff member to share with the children. Most activity, though, was informally social. Children helped each other write, sought help with a difficult word in a book, commented on each other's work, offered suggestions, took turns reading, or simply talked while working on a piece of writing.

Box 3.6. Frequency of literacy activity in surveyed after-school programs*	
Activity	**Percentage**
Children read for their own pleasure	75%
Adults read to children	68%
Adults tutor children	66%
Adults listen to children read	62%
Adults read children's writing	58%
Children read to others	51%
Adults tell stories to children	49%
Children talk about books they read	46%
Adults help children choose books	42%
Children write stories, plays or poetry	33%
Children act out stories or plays	25%
Children write about their experiences	21%

P*Percentage of programs reporting activity occurs frequently as opposed to occasionally or not at all

Reading Activities

Despite the fact that the survey findings indicate that children reading independently for pleasure and staff reading to children are fairly common activities, we sensed from observing programs that they do not occur uniformly across programs, among children within a program, or with great frequency. Only some children choose to read on their own, and planned story times do not occur as regularly as schedules would suggest. Our observations suggested that reading and reading-related activities are sometimes formally defined, sometimes "embedded" in other activities, and sometimes catch-as-catch-can (for example, children picking up a book to read during unstructured moments). Although 52 percent of survey respondents reported that they provide a specific time during which children are required to read, it may be no more than once a week. Program observations suggest that independent reading is variable and not usually a planned activity. Some children choose to read during unstructured moments, sometimes by themselves but more often with a friend or two. Others are directed by staff to read with variable results in terms of the level of children's interest and engagement.

Staff reading to children. If our interviews and survey results are a general indication of the field, a majority of after-school providers believe in the value of reading aloud to children, even at an age when children are developing the skills to read independently. The director of the Refugee Women's Alliance school-age program in Seattle said that she tries to recruit enough volunteers—high school students, college students, and retired adults—to have

one-to-one adult-child reading time (although she often has to settle for one adult to five children). For her, reading to children is a priority. "If you're read to it changes how you think about [reading]."

In our program visits, we found a wide range of group reading practices, depending on staff' goals, their ability to conform to scheduled large group story times, their interest in reading, and, perhaps, their own reading skills.[6] For example, at a program in Chicago, a new and inexperienced staff member seemed overwhelmed by her group of 5- to 7-year-olds. She announced at 4:00 that "we're going to read in a few minutes," but fifteen minutes later, the children were still engaged in free play and she was telling a child she would read to her "in one minute." At 4:30, she directed the group to clean up for a story, and by 4:40 she began to read. However, as Box 3.8 describes, she chose a simple picture book of animal pictures and labels without a story line, which did not hold the children's attention:

Box 3.7. When a formal story-time does not work

The group leader points to pictures (e.g., cocker spaniel, Irish setter) and asks "Who knows what this is?" The children have difficulty seeing the pictures and do not seem attentive. The leader frequently pauses to tell them to be quiet, and at one point, tells a girl, "Shut up, close your mouth." The girl casts her eyes down for a moment, looking ashamed, then seems to recover. A moment later, she taps the leader to tell her that when everyone else is talking she can't hear. "Just shut up," the leader tells the group, and then singles out one of the boys and tells him "Okay, you got one more chance, I'm going to put you out of here." About 4:50, the "story time" is disrupted again when another staff person comes to ask if she plans to use the gym today. Next a mother arrives to pick up her son, greeting him warmly and giving him a hug. Two girls are given permission to go to the bathroom, and a third girl is told she has to wait till the others came back. The boy who was disciplined earlier is sent to the director's office for talking again. Some children begin looking at books on their own, while a few others leave to go to other areas of the room.

~Observation notes, Chicago after-school program

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[6] The education coordinator for a multi-site service agency in Chicago recalled that when she presented literacy activities in staff training, she thought that reading to children would be the most basic and easiest activity to implement in programs. However, she discovered that some of the staff members had trouble reading. "It wasn't that they couldn't read each word, but they were reading the way a slow reader does, and they would lose the kids because it was painful to listen to them."

In contrast, the next observation describes a story-reading experience with a more positive outcome, reflecting staff and children who value reading and hearing a good story. It also illustrates a staff's attempt to encourage children to read out loud, perhaps to give them practice and increase their comfort in reading orally (an activity still often expected in classrooms).

Box 3.8. Encouraging children's interest in reading informally

Two 8-year-old boys play together with hand puppets, one a bumblebee, the other a ladybug. They approach the teacher, D., with their puppets, and I hear her respond to something one said, "The ladybug has homework? What kind of homework does a ladybug have?" Within a few minutes, she suggests they read Eric Carle's *The Grouchy Ladybug.* A few more second-grade boys and one girl join the group. Donna sits on a chair, puts the ladybug puppet on her hand, and holds the book up high to show the children the pictures as she reads. She tries to involve them in the reading by asking "Do you want to turn the page?" or "Do you want to read it?" but the children just seem to want to listen. After she finishes, she asks the three boys to pick up blocks in the block area. Then she asks the girl, "Want to read to me?" "No," she replies. "Do you want to tell me the story in your own words?" "No." The staff persists, "I want a story read to me. One of the boys comes from the block area and takes the book to read. The staff person offers the hand puppet to the girl who takes it and puts it on her hand. The boy reads a page, and then another boy comes and asks to read, too: "I want to read it." "You can take turns," she replies. The third boy, after knocking over the block structure with a loud crash, also comes: "I want to read." All cluster around her again, and, forgetting about the blocks, the three boys each take a turn reading a page.

~Observation notes, Valentine Boys and Girls Club, Chicago

Children reading on their own.
Beyond group story times, we observed a range of both individual and social reading activities. Sometimes this was child-initiated, and sometimes it was staff-initiated. Much of the reading (and writing) we observed was done in the context of homework time. This meant reading to complete an assignment, or reading because, along with writing and drawing, it was one of the few quiet activities permitted during homework time. As the director of a program in Seattle explained, "[Homework] is a choice but if you're not doing homework, you have to do some of the other choices, like quiet arts or read a book. They can't do the blocks or the physical activity; that's at a different time of the day."

We saw children picking up books spontaneously during unscheduled activity

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Box 3.9. Staff-initiated reading time

Four boys at the corner table finish their homework, and a staff tells them to get books to read. Three read at the table, while the fourth goes to the couch. One of the boys at the table reads Roald Dahl's *Boy* with apparent interest. The other two chat about school and sports. After several minutes, the boy on the couch asks,"Can I stop reading? It's been 5 minutes." "You've got 15 more minutes," she responds. "Fifteen more minutes? You said only 5," he complains. "Did you finish it?" "No." He resumes reading, then is soon joined by another boy with a popular children's book, *Ticki Ticki Tembo.* They look at it together, chanting the rhymes in the character's long Chinese name ("Ticki Ticki Tembo No Sa Rembo…."). The staff comes to see what the noise is about and asks, "Where did you get that?" "In the book box," the boys answer, "It's a good book."

~Observation notes, El Centro de la Raza, Seattle

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times and reading alone or to another child—sometimes late in the day when the room was quieter. Occasionally, within these experiences, children used puppets to act out what they were reading or played with the language in books. We also observed staff directing children to read when they have finished homework whether they want to or not or to "choose a book" as a means of discipline. (See Boxes 3.10 and 3.11.)

Although there is no guarantee that these strategies help children enjoy reading, they do convey the point that reading is important. And sometimes the outcomes are unforeseen—as in Box 3.10, when children introduce a staff member to a popular children's book, or in Box 3.11 when a staff encourages a child to stick with a "hard" book and then builds on a child's interest in a photograph he happens to see in the book.

Box 3.10. Encouraging reading and extending learning from books

Late in the afternoon, a 10-year-old boy begins tumbling and bouncing on the beanbag chairs and cushions in a corner of the room and is soon joined by the two other boys. After several minutes of roughhousing, the teacher goes to the boys and quietly discusses with them what can and cannot be done on the beanbags. She leaves the area, as each boy goes to get a book from the shelf and brings it back to the area and sits down. The boys soon resume throwing cushions at one another, and she tells again them to stop. This time she stays on the cushions with them, and they begin to look at books together. Simultaneously each boy tries to show her and read aloud from the book he has—a picture book called *Amazing Grace*, an advanced geography book, and a short chapter book on Martin Luther King. The boy with the MLK book holds it up and says, "Look, June 15, 1929," reading the date King was born. Then he puts it down, complaining, "This book is too hard." The teacher replies, "There are stories in there." He pages through the book half-heartedly, then discovers photographs in the book. He shows one of the March on Washington, exclaiming, "My grandma saw this on TV!" "Yes, it was a big march," she answers, adding "In Washington, D.C….Do you know where that is?" "Los Angeles?" one of the boys asks. They all look at a map of the United States posted on one of the walls in the area. They locate Los Angeles, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. The boys excitedly find other familiar states—"Look! North Carolina, South Carolina."

~*Observation notes, Valentine Boys & Girls Club, Chicago*

Children reading to play games. Other reading (sometimes writing) experiences can be found in games, including traditional board games that require reading like Bingo, Boggle, Monopoly, Scattergories and Scrabble, familiar activities like Hangman and "Mad Libs," and other word play activities created by enterprising staff. A majority of programs in the survey reported that they furnish materials like board games and word puzzles. In a few programs, we saw bulletin boards with words to unjumble, brainteasers, and riddles to solve and learned about word scavenger hunts and "Reading Detective" (Box 3.12.) At the Chinese Information and Service Center school-age program in Seattle, VISTA volunteers post new word riddles daily on a board labeled "Brain Teasers"—for example, a list of long words from which children have to select the one that has all of its letters in alphabetical order. Children may write their answer and pin it to the board with a thumbtack that has their name on it. They receive prizes for attempting to solve the question. Some providers also report that they cook or do simple food preparation activities that involve children reading printed recipes. (Recipes are sometimes sent home to reinforce and extend the experience or shared with families during special program events to encourage whole family reading.)

Box 3.11. Playing "Reading Detective"

"If everyone has his or her homework done, then [some days] it's Reading Detective. When the children come in, they're already looking for clues. The clues are like everyday things, like the clue that's on the board today, 'What's red and white and travels the speed of light?' So they first have to find it. I put it in an obvious place today. They have to find the clue, solve the clue, let one of the staff know, write it down, or write it down in their journal. Any way they put the clue is okay. You can tell a staff member, you can write it in your journal, or at the end of the day, you can share it with the group. They like to share with the group. They love to share the hunt!"

~*Seattle program director*

Writing Activities

Although writing is an important part of literacy, it generally does not receive the same attention as reading. The same is true in after-school programs. According to our survey, writing—at least as a distinct activity—is less common than reading. About a third of programs report that children write at least occasionally, most commonly in journals, but also poetry, assigned pieces in response to trips or other activities. Staff or volunteers read children's writing (including homework) in 58 percent of programs and write responses to children's writing in 20 percent of programs, although the survey does not reveal the regularity of these activities, or the percentage of kids who participate.

In most of the programs we observed, we saw products of children's drawing and writing activities on display. These ranged from open-ended activities like creative poems and sets of rules or instructions composed by children to home-made books to structured activities like book reports and writing assignments on particular topics; for example, "What I want to be when I grow up" or "Complete the story: 'When it is snowing, I _____.'" In a number of programs, we saw displays of children's photographs along with their written descriptions of themselves: "My name is_____ …my favorite food/color/movie/season is," etc. At two programs, the Coalition for Hispanic Services Arts and Literacy Program in New York and the Refugee Women's Alliance school-age program in Seattle, we observed children in a number of different staff-guided creative writing experiences. In one instance, children were given a framework for developing and writing stories that included setting, character, and action; in another, they were asked to make a list of characters and objects that would be included in the story. In both activities, children also drew pictures to accompany their stories and had opportunities to share their stories with the group. Yet another activity involved children in cutting comic strips out of newspapers and writing their own story lines to go with the pictures.

Writing for a variety of purposes. We also witnessed an interesting variety of activities that involved writing, playful and purposeful, sometimes initiated by children and sometimes facilitated by staff. For example, as will be described in Chapter 4, at the after-school program at the Chicago Commons Guadalupano Center in Chicago, bilingual (Spanish-English) children exchanged letters and drawings with children at a school in Nicaragua. Asian immigrant children in an after-school program in Seattle used writing to help them obtain a new Ping-Pong table and to establish rules for using the table.

One afternoon at a Boys & Girls Club in Chicago, we observed children engaged in a range of self-selected writing activities. These included a 10-year-old girl and staff person playing a game of "Hangman" on a chalkboard, an 8-year-old girl figuring out with a volunteer's help how to write "I love you" on a hand-made valentine card, and a sixth-grade boy typing a letter to parents about an upcoming bake sale. In the last case, the boy was typing at a computer console, copying a letter that one of the staff had written earlier in the week. The staff's letter asked parents to donate baked goods for a sale to raise money to purchase supplies for their fish tank. The child wanted to write a similar letter to raise money for a pizza party for the program's Newspaper Club. However, changing the content of the original letter meant changing the sentence structure as well. For about 20 minutes, he persisted at this task, which

involved many re-writes and only a little bit of staff help, until he produced a letter that was grammatically correct.

In some programs, we also saw message boards, sometimes with individual sections or envelopes for each child in the program. Children and staff would write short personal messages to one another whenever they felt like it. One staff recalled the first message a very shy child received from another child the previous year that seemed to open the child up:

Box 3.12. Reaching a child through personal writing

"One of the beautiful things about the message board is there was a youth during the summer that was very hard to reach, hard to talk to, just had a hard personality, one that we were at our wit's end about how we were going to reach this child. The kids were passing notes back and forth, and how the board works is, you put it in a little envelope. No one can read an envelope label to someone else; you can just read your own. So this child finally got a note—it took awhile to get a note—and was excited! Was running around telling everybody, saying what was in the note, and passed a note to another child that was a poem. The child was at home reading and no one would ever have thought that this child was interested in poetry. The child ended up reciting the poem at our play that we had at the end of the summer."

~Seattle program director

Journal writing. Journal writing can foster an interest in writing because it gives children an opportunity to express their ideas, concerns, and experiences in their own way, without worrying about criticism by an adult. Although journaling appeared to be a fairly common activity in a number of our case studies, it was not a common activity reported by program directors responding to the survey. Nearly half (47%) of the survey respondents reported that they provide journals or notebooks for children to write in, but only 21 percent of the survey respondents mentioned that children write in their own journals on a regular basis. Directors frequently mentioned journal writing as an activity they advocated. Some additionally reported that staff members also write responses to children's journal writing. In one program we observed, staff insert activities to strengthen areas they perceived a child needing help in, for example, multiplication. We often spotted journals containing writing and/or drawing—some were hand-made by children themselves, others were commercial books—in children's cubbies or in a designated area of the room, giving evidence that they were available and used, and occasionally, saw children actually writing in journals. (One structured time we saw journal writing was during the KidzLit reading-discussion-writing activity.)

Box 3.13. Giving children choices in reading and writing

"Everyone here has a journal. Sometimes you may not want to read. So you can write in your journal, you can talk about what happened at school. Our [literacy approach] is not just one function; that's hard to do when you're dealing with so many different kinds of children. So we made it open; everything that you consider literacy is okay, as long as you're doing one of those kind of functions, and not disturbing someone. 'Cause some children just love to read here, so you have to do whatever you're doing in a way that's respectful to everybody. But the journals, you're only required to write in it once a week, but you can write in it everyday."

~Seattle program director

Dramatic Play

Reading and writing also happen spontaneously, sometimes without much forethought on the part of staff except to make materials available, and sometimes with considerable staff planning. From time to time, especially in visits to well-established and well-equipped after-school programs, we found children engaging in reading or writing as part of their pretend play. In a YMCA program in Seattle, a group of girls set up a pretend school in a dramatic play area, and several children were busily completing assignments given by the "teacher." In a Boys & Girls program in Chicago, first- and second-grade children made animal puppets come alive corresponding to a story they had just heard (see Box 3.11). In yet another program, we saw children playing "doctor" and writing prescriptions and appointment times on pads of paper.

At two programs in Chicago, we observed the use of realistically themed play areas to foster children's interest in reading and writing. One was a play post office (see Box 4.3 in the next chapter) at the Erie Neighborhood House, and the other, at the Chinese American Service League, was a real lending library run by children. Although staff established these special literacy areas within their program space, children were "in charge." They understood the rules and procedures, used the space and materials independently, and most important, clearly were engaged in their reading and writing activities. At no time during our observations did an adult step in to direct the children's activities, which had elements of both play and serious business.

Box 3.14. Reading and writing in the context of play and work in the library

Several children cluster near the library area and ask who the librarian is for the day. After a bit of confusion, Vivian* announces that she is in charge. She enters the library and begins sorting books, while four boys look for something to read. After about 10 minutes, three make their selection. They wait in line to check them out. There is a pad of paper in the library area set up like a real library card check out. The child has to write his name, the title of the book, the date he checked it out and the call number of the book. There is also a column for the return date of the book. The pad becomes filled with numerous checkouts. One of the boys approaches me and tells me about his selection, a book called *Help! I'm Trapped in the President's Body*... Meanwhile, the acting librarian is cleaning up a mess that other boys and girls left after searching for the perfect reading material. Vivian seems very focused on her job, and proud of her work and organization skills. She tells one of her peers, who haphazardly throws a pen on the desk, to "Please pick up your pen and put it where it belongs, near to [sic] check out pad." He grimaces, but follows her orders. The other kids seem to respect the library and her authority, and seem excited to do some reading.

~Observation notes, Chinese American Service League, Chicago

*Children's names are pseudonyms.

Homework

Box 3.15. The dilemma of homework in after-school programs

"Homework can be an issue because there's a lot of components to it—what the parent feels you should do as staff, what you feel you should do as staff. Should the homework be completed before they leave here? How well is the child doing at school? How much time do I have to spend with one child? And math was an issue for our lead teacher. That homework intimidated her, and that brought pressure and tension."

Homework is a regular activity in almost all of the programs surveyed, and most after school programs as a minimum encourage children to do their homework. For most children, the after school program may be the only time in which to finish homework. As a Chicago director, stressing the importance of homework time in his program, explained, "We have encyclopedias here, dictionaries, rulers, everything you need to deal with your homework, plus a quiet place to do it." However, after-school

programs differ in their policies about whether it is optional or required. In almost all of the surveyed programs, children spend some time on homework, but it is reported to be a choice somewhat more often than a requirement. In some cases, after school programs provide what is labeled "free choice time" within the schedule, which is designated for "homework, reading or quiet games." Not surprisingly, homework policies differ according to the goals of programs. For example, according to our survey, children are much more likely to be required to complete their homework at a designated time in programs with an academic orientation as opposed to other program types.

Box 3.17. Negotiating a homework policy

"Our parents were adamant about getting the homework done. I was also a strong promoter of homework because most of the parents were single parents. They leave home at 7 in the morning or earlier, and get back at 6. And…when they get home with those kids, having worked all day, and they still have to do dinner, these kids are not going to be prepared the next day. At one point, we decided to do [homework] all at once, but that didn't work. So we have a library now, and they go in at various times—one group is in the gym, one group is over here doing this, while another group is over in the library doing their homework. And so then they move out, and then the next group goes in. And we also have an elementary school teacher on staff, which helps with that. We provide it as an activity, and they go in and do their homework—at least part of it, get started with it."

~Chicago agency director

Homework policies are contingent upon the child's age and grade level; less is required of kindergartners than of sixth graders. Survey responses indicate that a majority of 5- of to 7-year-olds spend less than a half hour doing homework in the program, while most 8- to 13-year-olds spend between half an hour to an hour on homework. A small proportion (13%) of older children, 11 to 13 years of age, spend longer than an hour on homework. In a number of programs, homework policies are also based on whether the child or the child's parents feel it necessary. "We have a set homework time," according to a director, "And each parent chooses whether the child must participate." Another wrote, "Parents enroll their children in [an optional] homework club. It is also offered to all children at any time." Yet another program requires parent's consent at the beginning of the program year on a preference survey or sign up sheet to enroll their child in an optional "homework club or homework zone" provided by the after school program. Although a few parents prefer to finish homework with their children at home, time and sometimes language constraints lead most children and parents to rely on the after school realm to do homework.

At least a third of the surveyed programs reported assigning homework if a child has none. In our observations, children were either assigned work sheets, asked to work in textbooks, or required to read quietly if they had no homework. We found that the overall

climate, staff behavior, and children's responses to homework time varied enormously. In the majority of programs, the climate was purposeful, more or less orderly, and relaxed. Yet a strict, school-like climate was not uncommon, nor, occasionally, was a noisy and chaotic one.

Children approached homework time in varied ways. Some preferred to sit down and get homework over with; others appeared reluctant or restless; and a few appeared frustrated. On one occasion, we actually observed a fourth-grade girl crying because of the difficulty (for her) of a particular writing assignment. During our program observations, we regularly saw children helping each other, explaining steps, asking questions in such a way as to clarify a confusing task, helping each other solve math problems. Although such mutual help was generally constructive, once in awhile it included copying answers, perhaps undermining the learning experience.

Survey findings and program observations indicate that staff behavior during homework time varies considerably. Staff members generally assume responsibility for supervising homework time and assisting children with homework if they ask for help. Some staff give children incentives (Pokemon pencils and erasers in one program) for doing their homework regularly, and some also provide additional homework activities for children without school assignments. In most of the programs we observed, staff and volunteers were very focused and engaged, sitting at the table with children, patiently explaining, asking questions, prodding, hinting, and otherwise helping children to stay on task. In a few, staff did not interact with children, except to ask them to be quiet, using this time to do paperwork, talk among each other, or plan for later activities. More often than not in the programs we observed, staff checked children's work—sometimes in response to a child's request—but this check was usually to see that it had been done—not whether it had been done correctly.

> **Box 3.18. Homework time running smoothly**
>
> By 3:15, the children are settled in their sections throughout the cafeteria with their homework out. In the 9- to10-year-old group, the counselor's assistant is absent, so she has 15 kids, but seems to be doing very well helping everyone individually as best she can. Because all the kids attend the same elementary school, they have similar homework assignments and are able to help each other out. They are completely cooperative during this time and work at their homework diligently; when they need help, they patiently have their hand raised. J. helps a student sound out and spell the word 'culture,' while those that don't have homework or have finished it may pick out a few books and quietly read until this time is over. The counselors are discipline-oriented and insist that the kids do homework quietly and efficiently or read a book. This seems highly productive time because the kids know the expectations. The counselors have rules, structure, and skills to make this homework time work.
>
> *~Observation notes, Coalition for Hispanic Services Arts & Literacy Program, New York*

Box 3.19. Homework in an academic support program for Asian refugee and immigrant children

Although work-oriented, the atmosphere is comfortable and not too quiet; the staff and volunteers seem to be very engaged with the children. Although most of the children work throughout the hour-long homework period, several finished early and chose other activities -- working on the computer, playing Scrabble, or reading silently. In the larger of the two rooms, Tina [pseudonym] sits with a group of four girls at a long table and, as they settle down to their homework, she talks with them about arrangements for coming to the center on Saturday to practice native dances she is teaching them for a public performance in January. Tina then compliments a first grade girl on the quality of her homework, then says "I'm going to do the attendance," and begins to check off names on a paper. "I forgot my journal at home," a girl tells her; another says she forget her "song sheets" but "I'll try to remember next time." A volunteer comes into the room to ask if anyone needed help, and Tina suggests she work with a particular girl who is having difficulty. Then she turned to read a Richard Scary book with another young girl. The girls talk among themselves as they work; it doesn't seem particularly noisy, but at one point Tina politely asks "Can you guys write quietly, please?"

~Immigrant Community Center Literacy Program, Seattle

Providers we interviewed and surveyed generally agreed that although children usually need adult assistance with their homework, after-school programs should not have the primary responsibility for ensuring that children do their homework. At the same time, they recognized that although parents should spend more time helping their children with homework, they often do not have time and, sometimes skills, to assist their children. A majority of directors and staff complained that there was not enough time during program hours to interact and talk with individual children. This suggests that providers feel both that they do not have enough time to adequately help children who need help and that they do not have time to interact with children in other kinds of activities.

Box 3.20. Struggling with math homework

The adult leader has been unable to help Maria [a pseudonym], a seventh-grader, with a math assignment that involves figuring percentages of dollar amounts. Maria calls across the room to an adult volunteer, "Jeff [a pseudonym], how do you do this?" He comes to her table, and she shows him the problem. He works on it himself before trying to explain it to her. (While waiting, she tells a a friend that the movie, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame,* "is much too dramatic for younger children.") Jeff queries her about the math problem. She says she thought she understood it when the teacher went over it in school, but now cannot remember how to do the problem. "But I'm really good at math," she assures him. "I got a B." "That's good," Jeff replies. Then he asks about her math book, a thin notebook of materials. "This is your math text book?" "We don't have a textbook," she explains. "That's my notebook." Jeff expresses disbelief that she has no textbook, then tries to help her with the problem: He writes 30/100 = .3, then .3 X on a piece of paper, then puts it aside. He begins again by asking "$30 is 100%, right?… What's 20% of $30?… 20% would be $6… No, it would be $5…. 50% is 15; half is 15." *[Jeff may be trying to get her to estimate. I can't tell if he has figured it out himself, but he approaches it logically.]* He continues to work the problem and tries another one. Maria, watching, tells him, "I forgot how to do this; it's really simple." Jeff asks again, "Don't you have a textbook?" "No, we don't…. My teacher explained it but I forgot." "I don't understand why they wouldn't have a book," he responds, sounding frustrated.

~Observation field notes, El Centro de la Raza, Seattle

The survey findings along with our observations of homework time and discussions with staff left us with mixed feelings. Many children do need help with homework. As several directors and staff informed us, many low-income parents, particularly immigrant families, have come to depend on and expect after-school programs to be responsible for homework. After-school programs sometimes see homework services they provide as the reason they are valued by the community. Yet spending a lot of time on homework is a mixed story. Children

might at least get some one-on-one assistance that might not be available at home. Good "social literacy" experiences can occur during homework time. In a few programs we observed staff talking to and with children about school itself—about their experiences and how to make sense of them, what it takes to do well (e.g. the daily discipline and routine, interpreting assignments, seeking help from teachers)—which can be helpful. On the other hand, homework often takes up too much time, crowding out other activities and projects, and reducing time to relax and play, to sit and have conversations.[7] Homework time also may indirectly intensify parents' detachment from their children's schooling and the sense that they are not responsible for their children's success in school.

Tutoring. A number of the programs we studied use volunteers to help with academic work. One program, East Harlem Tutorial (EHT) is largely a tutoring program, with other activities added on. Tutors who work in after-school programs are extraordinarily diverse in age, background and experience, which can be both a strength and a challenge. This diversity gives children opportunity to come to know people from different backgrounds. Yet it also contributes to variability in tutors' skill and approach; as one staff member at EHT told us, "there are different results from different tutors." High school youth are particularly variable as tutors. We observed instances in which they were excellent—patient, persistent, good at explaining concepts—and other instances in which they showed little skill. The staff member in charge of homework help at East Harlem Tutorial told us that some high school tutors had trouble reading deeply for comprehension themselves, and so could not really help younger children learn to read more deeply.

Tutoring overlaps with, and is sometimes indistinguishable from, volunteer homework help.[8] Unlike most homework help, which is informal and catch-as-catch-can, tutoring typically has a formal structure. It usually occurs on a regular schedule, once (or at most twice) a week for an hour or two, with a particular tutor and child intended to work together for at least a whole program year. Tutoring invariably has an academic agenda and increasingly includes test-taking practice, tips, and strategies. Yet tutors were also observed to bring games and plan activities simply for fun; on one occasion, we observed a tutor bring a dinosaur building set for a child to work on. In a handful of programs in which tutoring was an important element, program staff worked with children and tutors to create individualized goals and plans, and provided structured means for tutors to record progress. At the Chinese Information and Service Center school-age program in Seattle, two VISTA volunteers who had received training in literacy support told us that they felt the strategies they learned were more academic and remedial than was appropriate for this group of children. They were in the process of creating new games and activities that they felt would be more fun for the children.

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[7] Some of the after-school staff we interviewed were not only ambivalent about the time homework consumes, but skeptical of the value of homework itself, especially the mindless kind too often assigned by school. (One literacy specialist who works in schools went so far to say that homework time is an extension of a failed system into after-school programs.)

[8] Nearly two-thirds (65%) of the survey respondents reported having some volunteer help in their programs, usually high school or college students and parents, but also local business employees, senior citizen, and participants in public service organizations such as VISTA, AmeriCorps and America Reads. (Undergraduate and graduate work-study students can be an economical, but variable, source of enrichment experiences like art and drama as well as academic support.) Volunteers assist with a variety of program activities, but most frequently with recreational activities, homework help, reading to children, and tutoring and mentoring activities.

The great strength of tutoring appears to be the opportunity for a child to develop a close relationship with an adult who has no other agenda than that created by the child's distinct support needs and interests. One tutor at East Harlem Tutorial (EHT) spent a year simply encouraging the girl she tutored to, first, read at all, and, second, begin to enjoy reading. One book provided a turning point -- Rosa Guy's *Friends*, about the clash between African American and Caribbean blacks. The tutor noted that in reading this book, the child "realized that books could be familiar and exciting." For another young man at EHT, a ninth grader, tutoring focused on basic writing skills. This young man could not write a sentence at the outset. In our observations, tutors and children generally talked about a range of personal issues in a comfortable way, with tutors talking about their own lives and experiences, as well as about the child's.

Relationships with Parents and Schools

Another way to support children's literacy, in addition to providing literacy-oriented activities and helping with homework, is to communicate with parents and teachers. If our survey is an indication, however, there is no guarantee that typical after-school programs have contact with children's teachers—although it is not always for lack of trying on the part of program staff. And, more often than not, after-school providers do not track children's school progress. Half of the survey sample (52%) reported that they have "some contact" with children's teachers, but only 18 percent said they get in touch with teachers if a child seems to be having difficulty with schoolwork, and only 10 percent have regular meetings with teachers. Just a few survey respondents reported that their staff visit classroom teachers or participate in parent-teacher conferences. Less than half (43%) indicated that they look at children's report cards, and only a fifth that they maintain copies of report cards or other written information about children's school achievements on file. (See Table 9, Appendix C.) In all of these aspects, there were variations in programs depending on their goals and purposes. Academically focused programs were much more likely than other types of programs to look at children's report cards and/or keep copies of them and other records of school progress.

> **Box 3.21. When program-school communication does not work**
>
> "We initiated communication with the school in order to assist with homework. The school has chosen not to follow through. Perhaps our biggest frustration is the school's attitude toward our program, tat it is a 'free-for-all' and that we are babysitters."
> *~Survey respondent*

Developing relationships with schools and teachers remains an ongoing challenge for many after-school programs, particularly ones not situated in school buildings.[9] There seems to be no consensus on the responsibility of after-school programs for communicating with teachers. Although many respondents felt that staff/teacher communication was important, they did not have any formal means of communication set up. For some, talking to teachers goes beyond what should be required of an after-school program; this is a role for parents. Others firmly believe that it is the responsibility of the program to try to relate to the school because both are trying to support the same children. Apart from these opinions, however, it is clear

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[9]This was a recurring issue raised in interviews conducted for the MOST evaluation as well. Because so many more schools are now collaborating with community organizations to provide after-school care in school buildings, a question to ask in future research would be whether these collaborations result in improved communication between teachers and program staff.

that interactions between programs and schools do not happen as a matter of course. Whereas some programs do not feel a responsibility to build partnerships with schools; others want to connect with schools but face barriers such as the lack of accessibility to the teachers, lack of time or, practically, lack of staff. Overall, it appears as though communication (what there is) is based more on the after-school staff reaching out to the schools rather than the schools reaching out to the after-school programs (even when the after-school program is attached to the school). One program we surveyed mails quarterly evaluations to teachers, while another sends a quarterly feedback form referring to academics and other functioning. Staff at some of the programs we visited mentioned that they send newsletters to local schools and invite teachers to attend open houses, although the response is variable.

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Box 3.22. When program-school communication works

"Being in the same facility as the school makes for a nice cohesive relationship between the program and the school. With issues [about] academics or behavior, we are able to sit down with the teacher, or the teacher will come down to me and say 'well, so and so is having this particular problem in class,' or that he gets this homework assignment, and it's really helpful because the teachers appreciate us. What they're trying to do is…allow this child to be successful, and in working with us we try to promote that even more. So we're interacting and we're communicating back and forth. The teachers here really appreciate that! And it helps [when] we' re able to communicate certain things to the parents."

~Program director, Bailey Gatzert
YMCA Enrichment Program, Seattle

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Communication with parents occurs more frequently, of course, although only 71 percent of those surveyed report that they have "regular" communication with parents. Most often, staff talk with parents when they pick up their children. About a third of the survey sample reported that they do such things as write notes to parents on a regular basis or call parents if children seem to be having difficulty with school. In a fifth (21%) of the programs, parents ask staff to talk to teachers about issues concerning their children's schoolwork, although there were differences between the two cities with respect to this finding. Staff of Seattle programs are somewhat more likely to have some contact with teachers than Chicago program staff. This is not surprising, given that many of the Seattle programs we surveyed, although run by community-based organizations, are located in school buildings—in contrast to Chicago programs. At the same time, staff of Chicago programs were more likely to report that parents ask them to speak to teachers on behalf of their children—suggesting that parents also do not find it easy to communicate with their children's teachers.

With regard to staff/parent communication around school issues, many providers believe that it is parents' responsibility to seek help from program staff if needed rather than their role to initiate communication. Others appear willing to initiate contact on an "as-needed" basis if they sense it would be helpful to children. On the other hand, behavioral problems that occur within the program are issues that the staff would communicate to the parents in order to make them aware of the child's developmental functioning. As one provider explained, "Staff communicates frequently with school and parents, but not about academics unless it is affecting emotional or social development." Another stated, "We only contact teachers if a child repeatedly brings homework that they don't understand or have no directions for." In just a few reported cases, we found that program staff attend parent meetings in school, write monthly progress notes to parents in reference to schoolwork, and/or hold conferences with parent to address program goals for their child. At the same time, as illustrated in Box 3.24, many staff do attempt to involve parents in program activities or plan special events—open

houses, potluck dinners, children's performances, and family book reading—to foster their engagement.

Box 3.23. Creating a literacy event to engage families

"We had 100 percent family participation in reading the first Harry Potter book. I have a love of reading that came from my mother, so if I could pass it on to anyone, it's one of my gifts to give. The way we set that up was the children would read here. And then they would go home and discuss what they read with their parents and invite their parents to read to them. They could sign the book out here and take it home if they didn't have a copy at home. We found that some parents had reading issues, and so those parents would still feel comfortable, we invited the parents to listen to it on tape . . . And for the families that it wasn't an issue, the parents were invited to read to their child. Because to me, that's a gift that's lost in America where someone reads to the child, and especially your parents. . . And they weren't required to read any certain amount of time. You didn't have to read a chapter, you didn't have to read 40 minutes, just spend some time with the book and your child. And the stories we got back were just lovely. The children came back talking about stories being told that I don't know if they would have gotten from their parents [without] that time to sit still and read. Like the children were saying the father was telling of adventures he had, or the mother talked about how she wished she was a witch to clean the house, just little things that create memories for the children, that excite them about the book, that also excited parents... At the end we had a [Harry Potter] party."

~Program director, Delridge Youth Center, Seattle

Conclusions

The survey, along with our observations and interviews, clearly indicated that there is activity going on in the area of literacy in after-school programs. Nearly all programs provide basic resources like books, writing supplies, and board games for literacy activities and make time for children to do homework after school. Many designate a specific time for reading at least once a week and some also provide a particular time for writing. However, despite the interest in and material basis for literacy, only a small number of community-based programs appears to be actually implementing other kinds of literacy activities. Less than a fourth of the survey sample, for example, reported that children spend time acting out stories they read, writing in journals, or using books or the Internet to research new topics.

Despite the attention accorded to homework in after-school programs, there appears to be ambivalence among staff about the amount of time spent on homework and their own roles and responsibilities in relation to it. More often than not, staff do not have contact with children's teachers or maintain information about children's school progress. They recognize that children usually need adult assistance with their homework and that parents do not always have time or skills to help their children, yet they also believe that parents should be more involved and less dependent on after-school programs for ensuring that children do their homework. Homework time could further the broader, more interesting literacy-related possibilities of after-school programs, but it rarely does. Our results suggest that providers are not necessarily aware of other ways to support children's literacy development and general school progress. If they had knowledge of other activities they could be doing, perhaps they would begrudge some of the time devoted to homework.

At the same time, a small number of after-school programs that have thought intentionally about children's literacy, appear to be implementing interesting literacy activities, and are able to articulate goals for children's growth as readers and writers. For instance, the director of school-age programs at Erie House in Chicago told us that he wanted children to see

that "reading has important functions in real life." The program, which uses a traditional "club" format for organizing activities, "embeds the necessity to read into each club's focus and activities." Children must read instructions before playing a game or using a piece of photographic equipment, and interpret written rules, regulations, and techniques for playing flag football. The director of a school-age program at the Seattle Emergency Housing Shelter, who also tries to "put literacy just about into everything," explained that her goals are to help children enjoy reading and become less afraid of reading out loud. In the next chapter, we discuss these and other selected after-school programs that illuminate interesting approaches and practices to fostering children's literacy development.

EXEMPLARY APPROACHES TO LITERACY ACTIVITY
IN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

A central goal of our study was to identify interesting and/or innovative approaches to fostering literacy in after-school programs, describe them, and reflect on what makes them interesting. We were concerned with both programs thought to be innovative as a whole, and specific practices that were particularly engaging, creative, or exemplary. We used an informal "election" process to identify programs thought to be doing interesting work; we talked to staff in resource organizations and foundations, analyzed reports and miscellaneous documents, and talked to program directors. In total, we studied sixteen programs in depth, six each in Chicago and New York, and four in Seattle, and conducted interviews and observations in ten additional programs in several cities. Our sample included traditional school-age programs and less conventional programs reputed to be doing innovative work in the area of literacy, the arts, and/or cultural enrichment. All of them serve mostly or all low-income children, many of whom come from immigrant families. (A list of our case study sites and detailed descriptions of five of them can be found in Appendix D.)

Though very diverse in approach, all of the programs are thoughtfully implementing activities that support literacy development. Directors and front-line staff are able to articulate clear goals for children's development, which include literacy but often children's social and personal identities as well. And, program practices are based on certain philosophical assumptions or principles about how children learn and the role of after-school activities in their development. With regard to literacy, our case study programs collectively reflect the following purposes and goals:

- Helping children see how and why reading and writing might be useful, intrinsically rewarding, relevant to their lives: reading and writing are not just things one does at school, but can be used for self-discovery, self-definition, to find a voice, to explore where one fits, to examine what the world is like, or simply to describe, observe, and reflect
- Strengthening children's sense of themselves as readers, writers, communicators; their sense of what it means to read and write with commitment
- Encouraging children to "own" literacy activity, play with writing, and play with language
- Helping children come to believe that what they have to think and say is important, and that their own histories and experiences are worth communicating and pondering
- Using reading and writing for children to reflect on their family and culture and explore links between their personal experiences and heritage and those of other people
- Assisting children in seeing connections between different symbolic systems
- Creating a "community" of readers and writers

The programs in our study formed a continuum in relation to literacy specifically and to program quality generally. Almost all reflected a mixture of strengths and limitations. While based on some common assumptions, principles or goals, their approaches were also different from each other. In general, fostering literacy was not the organizing purpose of these programs. Rather, it was an important objective, pursued in the course of a range of both literacy and other activities. There was plenty of reading and/or writing, as well as staff encouragement of children's efforts to read and write. Yet these programs frequently infused reading and writing (as well as deliberate attention to language) in other types of activity, or indirectly "taught" the structure of literacy using the structure of other symbol systems. From

our perspective, the usefulness of the programs we studied is not so much as models to be replicated indiscriminately—each came to be what it is through a unique combination of people and circumstances—but as settings whose assumptions, principles and approaches can help other programs think about and revise their own work.

Program Approaches and Practices

Providing Physically Rich Literacy Environments

Literacy development is fostered through interactions with adults and peers in reading and writing activities and settings that provide access to books and other print materials. Probably the most straight-forward approach an after-school program can take to supporting children's literacy is to create "print-rich" environments; that is, to make materials, time, and space available for reading and writing—particularly programs in low-income communities where access to print may be limited. If time and space limitations preclude flexibility in scheduling activities, programs can still offer choices within scheduled time periods. At the Chinese Information and Service Center after-school program in Seattle, an hour is set aside for homework each day. But, children who finish early are offered a number of quiet literacy-oriented "activity stations," including educational board games, books on tape, Brain Quest question and answer cards, math activities, and Chinese calligraphy.

> **Box 4.1. Documenting children's projects In programs influenced by Reggio Emilia ideas**
>
> Displays of children's artwork include drawings and photographs of children with written or typed descriptions or children's quotes about a project or activity. At a bilingual site, descriptions appear in two languages (e.g., *Exploring with Paper* and *Explorando con Papel*). A hallway display presents school-age children's drawings of city buildings and photos of their activities in studying the city. Another display describes a project in which the children visited the Sears Tower and later made drawings and 3-D representations of the building. Typed words in English and Spanish next to the drawings and photos explains their meaning for the viewer. This documentation, inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach of Italy, includes both a description of the content of the activity and the process, e.g., the materials the children used for their study and the fact that they worked together in a group.
> *~Observation notes, Chicago Commons NIA and Guadalupano Centers*

All of the programs we observed supply basic literacy resources like books, writing supplies, and board games, and provide space for reading and displaying books, and most go beyond the basics. Almost all of our case study sites post written schedules of daily activities and, often, rules of behavior (sometimes developed and written by children), and carefully arrange and label interest areas and materials. In a number of programs, we also saw printed job charts, sheets on which children sign in and choose activities when they arrive, snack

> **Box 4.2. Making literacy materials accessible and inviting**
>
> The rooms are furnished with new comfy colorful chairs, couches, bean bags and rugs. Each room has its own bookshelves with tons of books, a supply closet filled with glitter, crayons, pencils, pens, markers, glue, paper, scissors, etc., and its own group of board games, ranging from Monopoly to Scrabble to Candyland. The program has its own library with a beautiful new rug, green couch, table and chairs and book shelves of kids' books arranged into mysteries, sports, biographies etc.
> *~Observation notes, Riverdale Settlement House, New York*

menus, and message boards in which children can write and post private personal notes to one another.

Nearly all of the programs we observed have bulletin boards that show the products of children's art and literacy (including books they have made) or where children can display school work they like or are proud of for any reason. In selected programs, we saw literacy artifacts in dramatic play areas, signs of all kinds (including ones that proclaim "Reading is fun!"), signs in languages other than English, and printed instructions for projects and activities. We also saw a variety of maps—maps of the United States and the word, maps of "imaginary" places depicted in books, and maps drawn by children of their neighborhoods—as well as word puzzles, concept webs, and thematic bulletin boards.

Our case study programs provide children with an interesting variety of carefully selected reading materials appropriate for different age levels. They include picture storybooks for younger readers and chapter books for older ones, and nonfiction books on topics of history, geography, sports, current events, health, math, and science. Some also provide an assortment of children's magazines or other things to read such as a collection of baseball cards or sets of question and answer cards. In most cases, materials are easy for children to access on their own and attractively arranged so the fronts of books are visible. Most programs rotate their book selections periodically, and some organize or label books by topic or degree of difficulty. Some are able to provide multiple copies of popular books, or books used in group reading activities. Believing that "too many books is over saturation" the director of the Erie Neighborhood House prefers to locate small collections of books in several different areas of the room, on book carts, in crates, on shelves, or on tables. Staff rotate books monthly, with children helping to select what is displayed. We also observed programs that use book cards for quick reviews of books, writing about them in a program newsletter, or exhibit book jackets on bulletin boards, sometimes along with a staff- or child-written book review. A number of programs, in addition to providing libraries for use at the program, also allow children to check out books to take home.

Computers, another potential literacy tool, were more or less present in the programs we observed. At Street Level Youth Media's Neutral Ground drop-in program in Chicago, computers are a central part of all activities. In several other programs, computers were regularly used for creative writing and, sometimes, for reading electronic books or playing word and math games. Several programs we visited (for example, El Centro de la Raza in Seattle, Erie Neighborhood House in Chicago, Hartley House in New York, and the LA's BEST program at the Esperanza School's in Los Angeles) had separate computer labs with scheduled times for children to use computers for writing. At Hartley House, each child has a disc on which to save his or her work at the end of the time period. According to the staff, the kids enjoy the computers and generally like educational games like Reading Blaster and Math Blaster and typing games where one has to type a word before the computer does it. Others maintained one or two computers in program rooms for children to sign up for a turn to use during free times. One of the learning laboratories at the Cycle Wiz Factory in Chicago

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Box 4.3. Providing culturally relevant materials

Bookshelves are filled with games and books, organized by genre and labeled in Chinese and English. Care has been taken to select games that involve critical thinking and challenge. One game, "Guess Who," has been altered to be more relevant to the children. Staff replaced the cartoon drawings of characters with photographs of adults and children connected to the center and the community, all of them Asian.

~Observation notes, Chinese Information and Service Center. Seattle

provides direct instruction to children of all ages on how to use a computer, starting with the basics of using a mouse and opening and closing files.

The goal of showing children that literacy can be both useful and fun is one we discovered at the heart of many of the activities we observed. At the Erie Neighborhood House in Chicago, making pizza means creating a recipe book as well as something to eat and playing a sport means doing research on the computer to learn more about that sport. Members of the Girls' Flag Football Club read the rules, regulations and techniques for the game, and members of the Photography Club read printed procedures for using a particular piece of photographic equipment. Other programs use bulletin boards and chalkboards to write lists of activities, either to inform children about what is available or to let them select one for the day (e.g., Box 4.3).

Box 4.4 Using writing to decide what game to play

As the group meeting comes to a close, a boy raises his hand and asks, "Can we go to the gym?" "We need to vote on it," R. responds. Another child calls out that he wants to play kickball, and someone else suggests a game called Wizards and Geflings. The children became quite noisy talking about the possibilities, and R. quiets them, saying "We're not going to be able to vote, you're so noisy.'" He calls on one of the girls and motions for her to come to the front. She goes up and stands next to a large chalkboard. She starts to write some of the game possibilities on the board, but then has trouble spelling so C. assists her. Finally, the names of four games are written on the chalkboard—Kickball, Treasure Island, Wizards and Geflings, and Four Corners Freeze—for the children to vote on. (Before they vote, a boy suggests, "For those who want to play kickball, they can go outside." A girl interjects, "But that area's not big enough," and R. chides her for interrupting.) The final vote is 19 in favor of Wizards and Geflings, and four for Kickball.

~Observation notes, YMCA at Bailey Gatzert, Seattle

"We've figured out how to put literacy just about into everything!" the director of the school-age program at the Seattle Emergency Housing Service enthusiastically reported. The program serves a number of immigrant families. Despite the transient nature of the school-age population, the director has envisioned and implemented a number of large-scale projects to foster children's interest in literacy. She believes that children realize the fun of literacy when they use reading to read a map, use computers, make their own books, and find items in a scavenger hunt. Literacy is even incorporated into musical experiences as well, for example, staff use written songs and explore and use sign language with the children. During a summer program we observed, children were studying different countries and the continent of Africa (the countries of origin for many of them) and learning phrases in Spanish and other languages. Children made their own books about a country of interest, and colored and labeled maps and flags. As the director told us, "You have to read to know how to color the flags of different countries." A bulletin board entitled "Everyone A Star" displayed some of these hand-made books. Children also kept journals, which were a mix of writing and drawing. On the floor was a large puzzle that was being drawn by the children. Each child had chosen words and pictures to describe some aspect of the program meaningful to him or her on one of the puzzle pieces.

This program is one that has benefited from training provided by a comprehensive approach to fostering children's interest and pleasure in literacy throughout their after-school environments and activities called Reading is Cool! in Seattle. Unlike structured curricula,

Reading is Cool! is a flexible recreational approach to literacy that can be adapted to a wide variety of settings with a range of staff skills and interests. Reading is Cool! trainers work with staff at all levels of education to help them see what they already are doing to support literacy and to explore ways to add literacy to their ongoing activities. A curriculum guide provides general ideas and strategies to help providers think more intentionally about literacy. One director told us, "We were doing literacy kinds of things before we were introduced to Reading is Cool! and didn't recognize that we were doing them!" For the administrator at the YMCA of Greater Seattle quoted in Box 4.4, the Reading is Cool! approach has assisted them in showing staff how they can "in a fun way support children's learning" in all areas. From our observations, an important by-product of the Reading is Cool! approach is the understanding and enthusiasm for literacy it has generated among staff as well as children.

   Making space and time for child-directed literacy activities. A rich literacy environment offers not only materials but opportunities for children to use them in their own ways. As the survey suggested, after-school providers often feel they cannot provide literacy activities because of time and space constraints. They do not believe that there is time for children to play independently or are not aware of how they can incorporate literacy into other activities—whether it is playing a game of football, making a Valentine card for a parent, cooking, or pretending in the dramatic play area—or they feel that adults need to direct literacy activities. One example of children reading and writing independently described in Chapter 3 was the child-run library in Box 3.16. Below is another case of a staff-planned play area to encourage children to explore and use literacy materials independently. Adults were very much in the background, but children were fully engaged in their reading and writing activities, which had elements of both play and serious business.

Box 4.5. Reading, writing and pretending in a play post office

Staff members have constructed a miniature post office in a prominent area of the younger children's room, using actual United States Postal signage and express mail packaging. Dramatic play at the post office is now the context for reading and writing activities. Elements worth noting:
- The first initial of each child's name was carefully written on a manila folder, from which they are to obtain incoming mail, that is, their own postal boxes.
- The mail clerk's book is equipped with fanciful and realistic stamps and stickers that children can buy to put on letters they write and want to mail. One child, a girl of about 5 who is the clerk, is carefully making out the working on a stamp before using in an another child's letter. Two or three other children are busily writing letters and decorating the mail envelopes. "This one is for my momma, when she comes to pick me up!" one said. Another nods and says something about needing more stamps.
- A well-organized box holds photocopied and cut to size forms for every possible mailing task: registered letters, priority mail, return receipts. Children look at the forms carefully before selecting one to write on. They can identify both address and name lines, a feat for kindergartners who struggle to write small enough to fill in the blanks. Completed forms and letters are presented to the postal clerk for stamping.
- Cards that simulate addresses or zip codes hung on the post office wall display a wide array of initial consonants. consonant blends and vowels and vowel blends.

Several groups of children take turns playing in the post office for more than a half-hour. Their play is entirely self directed and orderly. The children smile, chat with one another about the letters they are writing, and even begin to create their own birthday cards to mail.

                ~Observation notes, Erie Neighborhood House, Chicago

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   In several programs, we saw child-directed reading activities in cozy book corners or reading lofts, sometimes individually but more often than not, in small groups. On one occasion at the Erie Neighborhood House in Chicago, a group of four children excitedly participated in the following reading activity. Sitting cozily on a small couch, one child read a

large picture book, *From Head to Toe* by Eric Carle. As the child on the couch read aloud, the other children lined up casually on the rug in front of the couch and acted out the movements of the animal being read about. Each animal was engaged in moving a different body part and making animated animal movement and noises, appropriate to the animal being read about. The children were joyful and lively throughout this activity. They were thoroughly and independently engaged. When the child reading wanted to change to acting out the story, all three of the other children clamored for a chance to read. When the book was completed, the next child started over at the beginning. This was an entirely self-directed reading activity. The child reading aloud did not necessarily read fluently but that did not deter their enthusiasm. The children appeared gleeful and uninhibited while interacting as the book read over and over (at least three times during our observation).

Providing regular times for reading. Regular story times—held at the same time in the same place each day—in which books are read by able readers who model enthusiasm for a story can create children's interest in reading and accustom them to sitting and listening in a group. The next observation reflects staff and children who value reading and enjoy hearing a good story but also a structure by which children can take turns performing for their peers. It also illustrates how staff sometimes try to encourage children to read out loud, which gives them practice and increases their comfort in reading orally (an activity still often expected in classrooms), not to mention developing feelings of confidence and self-worth.

Box 4.6. Books after breakfast

The regularly scheduled group time begins about 8:30. R. draws a name from a can filled with slips of paper, and reads the name of a child who will have a turn to read today. Karen,* looking tearful, raises her hand and says it is her turn to read because she did not get a turn last week. He asks her "What did I say?" "You said I could read next." He agrees, saying, "You know what, we have time for more than one person to read." Karen goes to the book shelf, takes out *The Drawing Gourd* first but then chooses another, *I Just Forget* by Mercer Mayer. Before she begins, the staff person interrupts briefly to say that she has a list of children who will go to swimming tomorrow, and reminds the children to check with her before they leave for school. Karen sits in a small chair in front of the group, which now numbers about 25. She reads a page, then holds the book up high over her head to show the picture. Another girl stands next to her, reading over her shoulder, and helps her read some of the words (e.g., "make") or corrects her if she doesn't follow the text. When Karen reads "After school I went home…" the girl corrects her: "*Outside.*" Karen accepts the correction and reads "After school I went outside." She reads fairly well, slowly and loudly, and with apparent pride, taking time to show the pictures. The other children listen fairly attentively to what is probably a familiar and popular book.

~Observation notes, YMCA at Bailey Gatzert, Seattle

Linking books to other activities. A familiar activity is to read a good quality children's book and follow it up with another activity like cooking, art, or drama. Recall from the end of Chapter 3 (Box 3.28) the example of a whole family reading event of a Harry Potter book at the Delridge Youth Center in Seattle. At the Riverdale Neighborhood House in New York, children made apple crisp after reading a book about Johnny Appleseed, and Irish soda bread in conjunction with a book called *Albert's Bad Word*. The Cycle Wiz Factory in Chicago maintains multiple copies of a number of books in a well-stacked library at the center (some received through donations, some purchased at discount or used bookstores) and lends them out for children to take home. Cycle also connects books to monthly cultural excursions to plays and museums. During one of our visits, in anticipation of a weekend field trip to see a performance of *Charlotte's Web*, children were reading the book throughout the hallways of the

center. When children arrived at the program, the director would greet them and ask, "Do you have a copy of *Charlotte's Web* yet?" If they did not, she handed them one. We noticed two separate groups of older children reading the book to younger children, a group of two older girls reading the book in unison out loud, and a cluster of five girls writing summaries of what they had just read.

Adding reading and writing to other activities. We noticed instances in which staff had intentionally incorporated writing into an ongoing activity. For example, an after-school activity that we observed in a number of programs is called the "Peace Table," which is a process for resolving conflicts between children. Typically, the Peace Table is a small table with a couple of chairs in a corner of a program room. Posted above the table is a set of clearly written rules that states how conflicts should be resolved, that is, two children sit at the table and each takes a turn telling his or her side of the story. Older children who are familiar with the process often resolve differences without adult intervention; younger children usually need staff mediation. Children are often directed by staff to go to the table when differences arise. During a visit to a YMCA program at the Bailey Gatzert School in Seattle, we saw children going to the table on their own, talking quietly, and then leaving with their differences resolved. On a later visit, we noticed that the Peace Table the conflict resolution process had been enhanced with a writing component. A sign listed the "ABCD" steps to problem solving and advice on "ways people can solve conflicts without hurting other people." Another sign on the table itself asked a series of questions: "Did you remember to...(1) Get permission from staff to use Peace table and resolve conflict on your own? (2) Use the ABCD steps to problem solve? (3) Fill out a Peace Table Form?" Children were expected to record the nature of their conflict and its resolution on a simple paper form and leave it in a designated area.

Facilitating Book Discussions

Shared reading and book discussions, sometimes called literature circles, are slowly becoming more common. Typically, staff bring children together in book groups to read aloud, discuss, draw, write about, and act out stories. Discussions and other activities assist children in comprehension of what they have read, an important aspect of literacy. In a program at the Riverdale Neighborhood House in New York, for instance, we observed a group of sixth and seventh graders reading and discussing *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton. They read a chapter or part of one, and then discussed, reacted to, analyzed, and took collective notes on it, using an oversized "notebook". On one occasion the children discussed the difference between "socks" and "greasers", as well as the meaning of "rat race." Box 4.5 gives another illustration of the serious issues that can arise during a book discussion.

One increasingly common, although recent, format for such discussions is the KidzLit program, created by the Developmental Studies Center in Oakland, California, which provides reading and writing materials, curriculum guides, and training for program staff and coordinators. Carefully selected books, many by award-winning authors and illustrators, are about personal and social issues relevant to children. Children read aloud and/or are read to, discuss, draw and write, and act out stories, among other activities. Although the curriculum guide offers structured activities for adults (including reading aloud) and children, discussion questions and activities for adult group leaders to use, including ideas for extending reading experiences to art, drama, music and writing, staff are encouraged to be creative in implementing KidzLit.

Although we had only a few opportunities (in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles) to observe the KidzLit curriculum in action, we found variations among the three programs we visited. In one program, activity was observed to be "school-like" in structure, if not tone, and involved only reading, writing, and talk whereas another program incorporated other elements, like food, games, and drama into it activities. In one program, as described in Box 4.8 below, older children were helping to facilitate the literacy activities. In the others, adult staff members were in charge. Children reacted in a range of ways, from responding excitedly to matter-of-factly to writing reluctantly to not writing at all. In one program, staff that were just becoming familiar with the curriculum tended to use the KidzLit guide as a script and follow a strict format of discussion, reading of a story or book, having children write responses to a specific set of questions, and then more discussion. In another program, children were free to write what they wanted as long as it related to the general topic of the book. And in a third program, some children drew or dramatized the story rather than wrote about it.

Box 4.8. Child-led book discussion and writing the KidzLit way

KidzLit activities are carried out on Wednesdays between 5 and 6 o'clock in the Learning Center room with 6- to 9-year old children. According to M., the education coordinator, the goal of KidzLit is to use books as a jumping off point for kids to explore issues that matter to them (e.g., friendship, family, cultural diversity, health and safety) and relate stories to their own lives. Kids talk about stories with others, then follow up with activities such as journal writing, art and drama. As children develop reading, writing, and oral skills, they also learn to think critically, become more self-aware, and build relationships with peers and adults. M. says she was given a list of books and suggested activities focused on specific themes, but KidzLit is flexible in how it is implemented. She recently began coaching four 10- to 12-year-olds, two boys and two girls, on Tuesdays to 'deliver' the program to the younger children. Today, the older children have written a list of words (*thumbtacked, commands, sploosh, swivel chair*) on a large chalkboard and are discussing how to divide the reading among them.

The younger children dribble in for about 15 minutes from other activities. Apparently familiar with the format for the activity, they take out their journals from a nearby shelf and sit at a table. They are all very talkative, interacting with one another and M. while the older kids talk among themselves. Once five kids are at the tables, M. signals to the leaders that it is time to begin. (Two other children drift in later to join the group.) The younger ones settle down and become reasonably quietas the activity begins. The leaders ask the younger children to define words on the board and write their definitions next to the words, or, in some cases, offer their own definitions. After going through the list, the leaders tell the children, "Please copy these down." The children write the words in their journals.

Then they talk about safety in their own lives, from obeying traffic signals to being careful about where they walk or who they meet on the street to safety when home alone. The leaders ask the younger children to suggest safety rules, then add their ideas. (One leader writes words on the board while the other facilitates the discussion.) They also talk about what the children can do when home alone—e.g., lock the door, watch TV and turn the volume down, play with PlayStation—and what to do if they have a buddy with them—e.g, "don't let them play with matches," "no guns," "no drugs," and "don't pressure." Finally, two leaders present a role-play in which a girl takes a gun away from a boy.

The four leaders take turns reading *Officer Buckle and Gloria*, an award-winning picture book about safety. The reader stands in front, reads a page, then turns the book so the audience can see the picture, sometimes pausing to ask a question, "What do you think happened?" The younger children take notes on the story, beginning to write in their journals as soon as the reading begins. Some seem more intent on writing than listening, although what they write pertains to the topic of safety if not the details of the story. For example, Lisa* writes the following passage in her journal:

> We talked about safety and we talked about playing with guns. When your alone what should you do? We told them what should we do.

And Jackie* writes:

> I think the book is good because it tells you about policeman and what they do. . . and they were sad because the banana [pudding] make people slip.

M. supports the leaders by helping to quiet the younger children, and once, after a warning, she tells a child his talking is disruptive and asked him to leave.

~Observation notes, Boys & Girls Club, San Francisco

Book discussion and literature circle activities encourage children to think seriously about what they have read and relate a story to their own lives. But they can be difficult to put into practice for various reasons. Staff usually require some experience and skills in leading discussions—from asking questions to maintaining children's interest. There typically is a much wider range of language skills, reading abilities, and interests within a group of children in an after-school program than in school setting, especially when there is not enough staff to divide children by age or interest into small groups or assist with "crowd control." Limitations of time and scheduling of competing activities also can make it difficult to arrange book

discussions on a regular basis. According to the adult leader of the KidzLit activity described in Box 4.6, it has not been easy to motivate the younger children to participate because in her program it is voluntary. Having older children facilitate the activity, she hoped, would not only foster their literacy and leadership skills but also make the activity more engaging for younger children.

The experience with literature circles at the Hartley House in New York, which developed an interest format for children to lead book discussions, also illustrates the challenge of conducting special literacy activities in after-school programs. As conceived, after reading a book or section of a book that they chose, five children took on five different leadership roles— illustrator, facilitator, vocabulary person, connector, and literacy spotlight person. The illustrator drew what had been read; the vocabulary person picked out difficult words and looked up their meanings; the facilitator led a discussion; the connector connected the story to outside things, events, and people; and the literacy spotlight person highlighted particularly interesting parts of the story. However, despite efforts by both staff and children, this format turned out to be easier said than done. A public school started its own remedial after school reading program, which some parents chose over the Hartley program for their children; and other children were being picked up early or taken out for tutoring. In addition, staff came to see that the activity needed to happen more often than once a week for children to become familiar with the structure and process. Thus, the director turned the literature circles into an hour of staff-led story reading that incorporated some discussion once a week. On one occasion we observed first grade children listening fairly attentively for about 45 minutes (which included a break for cookies midway) as the program director read a Halloween story about zombies in a darkened room. From time to time they answered questions about the story—defining the word "vegetarian," predicting what would happen next in the story, and stating their ideas about who was telling the story.

Promoting Literacy for Personal and Social Uses

Using literacy for personal, social, and cultural purposes was common. Programs were using reading and writing to explore issues "close to home" and out in society. We observed literature and writing used to discover what it means to be tough, a nerd, on the edge of the group, or poor (versus rich) or to talk about friendship or safety concerns when home alone. We observed reading and writing used to share experience at home or in school, to explore prevalent feelings, and to maintain a sense of self in the face of external pressures. One example was the discussion of the book, *Summer Wheels*, described in Box 4.3 in which children explore the concept of "toughness", especially in relation to bullying. Another example was a program that has middle-school girls keep journals of their thoughts, feelings, experiences over the course of a program year, transform the material into one-act plays— monologues—and then, if they wish, perform them for other children and family members.

Other examples of personal writing activities engaged children re-writing stories in English they have read in their own language, giving a story a new plot twist or dialogue, or actually writing a complementary story to one they read. Social writing activities included children working together as a group to create a political comic strips, which involved a discussion about what makes a candidate appealing; corresponding through letters and drawings with school children in another country; and using dialogue journals, to foster a written exchange between staff and children.

Powerful activities for younger children who are beginning writers are to combine drawing and writing in journal writing and to dictate stories to older children or adults. Story dictation encourages thought, creativity, and self-expression without getting bogged down by the physical process of writing yet reinforces the connection between verbal and written language. During an observation at the Wiz Factory in Chicago, we passed an activity occurring in the hallway outside the program rooms, involving a young girl and boy, probably in first grade, and an older boy. The older boy was taking dictation from the two young children, who were playing with an assortment of small objects, mostly plastic animals. At the director's request, he explained to us with great self-assurance that the purpose of the activity was for the children to use natural objects they know or have learned about to tell a story. He was writing down what the children said exactly, e.g. "Butterflies destructed the party", and did not correct their grammar. In our view this was an important literacy experience for the older boy as well as the younger children.

A variation on journaling was observed in a media literacy drop-in program in Chicago known as Street Level Youth Media. Run as an after-school drop-in center, this program involves children 8 years and up in exploring and using computer and video technology to improve access to technology, provide opportunities for self-expression, promote self-esteem, and develop critical thinking skills—what Street Level staff term "critical media literacy." In an activity called Girls' Haven, girls are given notebooks and a specific question or topic to explore through writing and/or talking individually into a video camera or with another girl. Girls are allowed to spend an unlimited length of time talking in front of the camera about private frustrations or personal events in their lives. Older girls also teach younger girls women's poetry and help to build self-esteem and public speaking.

The GirlSpace program at Interfaith Neighbors in New York, which serves girls 12 to 15, includes rap groups, visual and performing arts activities, academic tutoring, creative writing, a Spanish club, career exploration, and training to mentor younger children. All the programs focus on girls' loss of confidence and sense of self as they enter early adolescence, both with respect to school success and with respect to "what they know"—about the world, relationships, themselves, their feelings, and so forth. Tutoring, organized around a dialogue journal, is a principal activity, and the tutors who work with the girls are all female, mostly professional women. Most of the girls who come to GirlSpace are "way behind their grade levels" in school. Tutors are not expected to make for years of academic loss, but rather to strengthen girls' interest in and capacity for help around learning problems. A weekly writing group attempts to give girls a concrete sense that "there are reasons to read and write" and help them overcome their anxieties about writing. Writing activities include autobiography, individual and group poems, and pop songs. Other art forms, especially music, are sometimes used as a lead in to writing. As girls become comfortable in the group, they are encouraged to share their writing, and give each other feedback. They also read literature selected to generate discussion about their lives and experiences, or about writing itself."

In the Coalition for Hispanic Services Arts and Literacy program in New York, children were observed constructing frames for photographs of themselves and giving them titles. In the process, instructors emphasized that presentation, mood, composition, and the title are important attributes of a photo and frame.

Box 4.9. Discussing language in relation to art

Some of the titles the children give to their framed photos are "Bow to the Queen," "Who's the boss?" "The Dead" etc. R. leads them in a discussion about the relationship of a title to a piece of art:

    R: Does a frame of a picture represent what's inside?
    C: yes and no
    R: A violent picture with a heart frame is odd and doesn't necessarily represent what's inside.
       Who has been to a museum?…What's in a museum next to the painting?
    C: The name and who created it.
    C: The name of the piece.
    R: It's called the *title.*
    R: A book is a piece of art work. The purpose of a title is to explain it. Give some ideas for titles."
    C: "Lovely"…"the head carrier"
    R: Can titles be funny?
    C: Yes
    R: They can be one word or a whole sentence.

~Observation notes, Arts & Literacy, New York

In another Arts and Literacy activity, children used writing and photography to reflect on themselves, and explore the meanings of vocabulary and concepts in relation to self-descriptions. Children took photographs of their own heads—for most, their first experience using a camera—and mounted three copies on paper bodies formed from collages and words. The first figure represented how they see themselves, the second how others see them and the third how they would like to see themselves. Underneath each figure they wrote words to describe how each persona made them feel. One girl wrote on the first figure that she saw herself as "too sexy" and underneath she added words like "shy," "mad," "smart," "blue" and "chicken" to describe her feelings. She labeled the second figure indicating how others see her as "pretty girl," and the associated words underneath were "fancy," "greedy," and little." Finally she labeled the figure representing how she would like to be seen as a "teacher," with the words "wife," "rich," "tall," "pretty," "mom" and "car" underneath.

An example of how program staff created simpler personal writing experiences—typically involving an art or craft activity—for younger children in early stages of reading and writing appears in the next box.

Box 4.10. A personal writing activity for younger children

Seven kindergartners are in the arts room with M. creating family trees. Each child already painted a picture of a tree and today is adding the names of family members. On a piece of lined paper the children have spelled out the names of their mom, dad, sister, brother, grandma and grandpas, dogs and cats with help from assistants and 6th grade volunteers. Now they pick letters on small dice from a tray and glue them onto the "branches" of their trees to spell out the names. The 45 minute activity is filled with discussion about letters and spellings of names. Jasmine* is gluing her name onto her tree backwards -I–M-S-A-J. M. comes over and asks Jasmine to compare how she wrote her name earlier with pen at the top of the picture and how she is gluing the letters now. "What is the difference?" she asks. Jasmine quickly figures it out, laughs, and fixes her mistake.

~Observation notes, Forest Hills Neighborhood House, New York

*A pseudonym

Media literacy. Another approach to helping children see the personal value of literacy activity was found in Chicago's Street Level Youth Media program. Staff strive to create

comfortable places for youth to connect and hang out, including the private Girls Haven described earlier, and encourage children to help one another. According to the coordinator, "Sometimes our 10 year olds teach our older youth. It's all about community development where the children learn from each other." In the excerpt below (Box 4.9), the Street Level instructor was assisting children in writing an autobiography that would become part of a personal web. He offered suggestions to children who were having trouble getting started, and reminded children that they were writing for an audience, not just for themselves. The focus for him was on encouraging children to write rather than correcting spelling and punctuation.

Box 4.11. Writing a personal web page

About eight kids are sitting at computers in a separate area called the editing room. They are all members of an outside child care program that brings half of its school-age group each Wednesday. The childrenare using a word processing program to write a personal story, the first step in developing a personal web page. Some write in all capital letters, others with a combination; one child, a boy, is writing with an extremely small font (so only he can read what is on the screen?). From time to time, kids asked each other for help with spelling and punctuation, e.g., "How do you change this thing from that to the comma?" or "How do you spell 'soccer'?" "I can spell 'supercalifragilistic'," someone calls out. "That was one of my spelling words in fourth grade," replies a boy.

J., the instructor, circulates around the room, pausing to talk with individual kids, answer questions, and offer help if needed. To a child having trouble getting started, he offers suggestions—"your friends…your school…do you have any pets? Ever been anywhere exciting?" He stops in front of a screen where a child has written "I come from Mars…" and asks the child, "Are you writing a story?" He nods. J. explains to him and the group, "If you're building a web page, a lot of people are going to see it." "People are going to see it?" the child asks. J. nods and asks, "So how did you come from being an earthling to being an alien?" Moving to another child, he asks, "Oh, your name is J.?" "Yeah," he responds. "Cool, that's my name." At another screen a boy comments, "I forgot to capitalize." "That's okay," J. replied, "We can worry about that later."

~Observation notes, Street Level Youth Media, Chicago

Another important function of literacy activity for children is to explore their own identities and cultures and compare them to those of other people. Some of the examples in this chapter show the use of books to explore self and culture. At the Guadalupano Center in Chicago, which serves primarily children whose first language is Spanish, we observed a pen pal project developed for children between the ages of 7 and 12 to correspond with students of the same age in a town in Nicaragua. When we visited the group of 9- to 12-year-old children, we saw copies of maps they had drawn and mailed earlier along with a set of questions to their pen pals. The maps showed the daily routes the children take to school and the Guadalupano center, including buildings and structures they see along the way (e.g., restaurants, statues, churches, and houses), and included written directions for getting from place to place. During one of our visits to the center, the American children had just received a packet of letters and drawings from the Nicaraguan students in response to their maps and letters.

Applying Literacy to Other Goals

Although most of the writing activity we observed was of a personal nature, on occasion we did see children encouraged to use literacy for practice goals and reasons. One example was the boy writing a letter to parents to ask them to contribute to a fund-raising activity for the program's newspaper club (Box 3.14). Programs used reading and writing to plan projects in the arts, to study their communities, to set goals for themselves and then assess their progress, and to critique (in a friendly way) the work of their peers. Box 4.10 describes the experience of children in a program serving Asian immigrant families used writing to help them obtain a new ping-pong table for their program and then to establish rules for using the table.

Although literacy is not the focus of the Little Black Pearl Workshop in Chicago, it is an important tool and a consequence of this program, which teaches children the profitable

connection between art and business." Children learn the vocabulary of art and business as they learn mosaics and painting, art skills that have value on the market. They also learn to plan their use of materials and time, based on information about the real costs of materials. Competencies build on earlier skills. Children are given a pretest on their art knowledge (shapes, colors, etc.), and the results influence the intensity and pace of the class. At the beginning of each seven-week session, each student is given a $2500 pretend grant to start a business to sell art objects. They are responsibility for budgeting for their overhead, license, raw materials, etc. Staff, who are professional artists or art educators, work with the children to plan their projects, considering the real cost of materials, and help them to develop a vocabulary list. The curriculum is broken down to its elements so children learn about the concepts of shape and color separately as well as how to integrate them into their artwork. Children are pushed to be original in their work and discouraged from using commercial words and logos. They also spend time writing critiques of one another's work, which are shared anonymously with their fellow artists. The culmination of their experience is the *KidBiz Expo* at which students set up booths for their businesses and sell their products to family members, friends, and guests, getting a commission from the items they sell.

Structuring Children's Writing

Throughout the examples above, adults are more or less present in children's literacy activity, depending on their ages, skills, and interests. Adult roles ranged from setting up rich learning environments, to allowing time and space for child-directed literacy activity, to facilitating specific reading, discussion, and writing activities, to actually framing an activity. In these roles, adults were scaffolding, or responding selectively to, individual children according to their abilities and interests. As a child becomes increasingly competent at such an activity, the adult can step back and allow the child to take more responsibility for it. The adult can also suggest new tasks to build on what the child is able to do to increase competence.

Structured story-writing activities are sometimes used to help children understand vocabulary/use literacy to understand the structure of different art forms. Such activities can become too much like in-school literacy activity, if staff are not careful, and inhibit children's creativity. But, they also can be useful in helping children who do not know what to write get started. As in any learning experience, it is useful for adults to be aware of different strategies to use with different children and to be flexible in using them, depending on the children involved.

At the Arts and Literacy Program in New York, children are given framework for writing stories that includes a setting, character, and action. We observed first grade children writing short stories, based on a character they had developed previously, and drawing illustrations onto a wheel that rotates from scene to scene as the story is read. Staff assisted with the writing, if children asked for help, and encouraged children to be original in their ideas and not rely on characters they knew from television and video games. Although the creative writing instructor told us that it was hard to interest children of this age in writing, with with the staff's thoughtful guidance, encouragement and enthusiasm, they seemed totally engaged and excited.

Another example involving the use of a story framework to assist children in writing was observed at the Refugee Women's Alliance school-age program in Seattle, which uses reader's theater activities to support children literacy development. Here children of similar ages responded differently to the activity. One did not appear eager to write—perhaps because it was a structured activity that came on the heels of homework time—and, in fact, felt comfortable enough to tell the staff that she "hated" the assignment. But, with the staff's attention and encouragement, she completed the project. This observation illustrates another strategy that may encourage children to write when the adult volunteer simultaneously writes her own story and later reads it to the group. It also shows adults trying to make the setting comfortable for a child, in this instance, giving her a chance to sit instead of stand to read her story out loud.

Supporting Children with Reading Difficulties

A Reading Lab at Interfaith Neighbors in New York, run by a reading specialist, provides twice weekly tutoring for children assessed (by the program) to have reading difficulties. The lab has

its own separate space and is designed to be comfortable, quiet and intimate. The reading lab emphasizes the creation of a safe, predictable environment for children, and the importance of relationships as the key to its task. The lab's work focuses equally on basic skills deficits psychological issues related to failure to learn to read (e.g. feelings of helplessness, shame or humiliation around reading and writing) and, as the lab's director puts it, "turning kids on to literacy". In our observations, the tutors took the relationship-building and the substantive work slowly, and were very flexible (to children's moods, needs, etc.) in implementing their plans, sometimes letting a lesson evolve into a conversation about school, home or other topics. The work could be very painful to the children at times. We observed a good deal of frustration, embarrassment and even resistance, but the tutors remained both patient and persistent, providing a good deal of positive feedback

Tutors receive special training, and work within a framework of lesson plans developed by the professional staff. Each plan has three parts -- word study, reading and writing. Word study uses a phonics-based approach for learning to decode, and typically involves selecting a few words, usually from books children are reading, and working with them in a variety of ways (e.g. breaking them down, putting them back together, sounding out, using alphabet and syllable cards, worksheets and games) until a child fully understands them. The idea is to build an individualized set of words the children "really know." Children get to choose books to read; and instruction is based on those choices. Children and tutor may read aloud to each other, discuss book passages, examine particular new words. Writing revolves around use of a dialogue journal, although because most participating children "hate to write", writing sometimes starts with oral recording, which is then transcribed.

Attending to Language and Vocabulary

We found a number of staff who were generally playful (as well as deliberate) about words and language—pointing out and talking about particular words with children, comparing words in different languages, making fun of words, creating silly rhymes, and so forth. The poetry instructor at the Cycle Wiz Factory reported, "We play with words as a child would play with sand in the sand-box."

We also observed staff who enrich activities with very precise language, as when an origami instructor told children, "Paper remembers when it is folded," or when children took a nature walk outside and read signs or looked at license plates. Deliberate attention to

> **Box 4.16. Word games**
>
> A bulletin board in the library area entitled "Word of the day" has a display of jumbled words and a section called "Riddle of the week." The riddle for today is "How can you double your money?" At some point children in the library notice the board. Some write down the jumbled letters and work on figuring out the word, while others read it aloud or to themselves and then return to the business of choosing a book.
>
> *~Observation notes, Chinese American*

language and vocabulary was common across a range of activity, from bulletin boards with riddles and word puzzles to commercial board games like Boggle and Scrabble to staff-made games like "Reading Detective (Box 3.13). Plans for art activities typically included a vocabulary list that reminded staff to go over particular key words or concepts with children. Book discussion activities sometimes involved developing thematically organized word lists, or lists of words to define (for example, the child-directed KidzLit activity described in Box 4.6). Children in the program at Interfaith Neighbors in New York develop and post lists of "cool words" from books they have read. At the Hartley House in New York, we saw a wall display

explaining what "genre" means, that is, "The genre of a story tells us what kind of story it is." A variety of genres—tall tale, non-fiction, fable, fairytale, realistic fiction, article, and folktale—were presented with their definitions. On occasion, homework was an impetus for staff to focus on language, as when a staff member took time to patiently explain synonyms to a child for a school assignment.

Box 4.17 Exploring language in the context of homework help

T., the assistant teacher, is helping Nicki* with a work sheet on synonyms. While reading sentences with key words in them, Nicki has difficulty pronouncing the word "mistake." T. asks, "Is that *mis* or *mit*?…Sound it out…OK let's go through the list." She asks the girl to read a list of words under the word "mistake"—"small, price, under, error, etc." –and then find the word with the same meaning. Nicki cannot find it. T. asks, "Is mistake the same as small?" Nicki shakes her head "no." T: "Small means what?" When Nicki doesn't answer, T. tells her, "It's error. Error is another word for mistake." T. then reads the sentences to the girl one at a time. "What's another word for cost?" she asks. The child points to the word "price;" T. nods. When she tries to read the word "load," T. advises, "The 'a' is silent…you're not going to hear a short 'a' or a long 'a' either." T. helps the child read the next sentence: "Dad should lessen his work hours," then reads the choices of synonyms —'reduce,' 'mix,' etc. She asks, "'Reduce' means to what?….Should he 'reduce' or 'mix' his hours?….Reduce means to make smaller."

~Observation notes, Chicago Commons NIA Center, Chicago

Language is a centerpiece of activities at the Cycle Wiz Factory in Chicago, a program that works through **"**laboratories" in a range of disciplines/fields—biochemistry, biology (entomology), French, math, music, movement—to build language skills, vocabulary, listening comprehension, oral expression, thinking skills, and the "appetite" to take intellectual risks. As with the arts, each scientific discipline has its own language for children to master, and key ideas. According to the Cycle Wiz director, the fundamental approach to literacy development, for Connie, is through language, knowing the vocabulary, being technically competent, and being able to express your knowledge orally. "Knowledge is not based on pen and paper; you should be able to keep it in your head," Connie said. Public presentation skills are important because they show that one is "part of the academy." Children are taught by experts ("wizards") get to see how scientists, musicians, and linguists think and work, and come to wrestle with and understand the deep structure of disciplines. Every activity is also tied to particular books. When we visited, a few children enthusiastically told us about books they had read in the areas of physics and mathematics—for example, Michael Guillen's book, *Five Equations that Changed the World*—books that, in some cases, seemed beyond their reading and comprehension levels.

Using the Arts and Other Symbol Systems

The arts reveal unrecognized abilities in children, which can be built on as a base for strengthening literacy, allowing children to lead from strength (for example, some children's verbal imagination are sparked by their visual imagination; expressing something first in pictures, then moving into words). That is, arts activities sometimes allow children to work simultaneously across different symbol systems—words, pictures, music, movement—based on the assumption that working effectively in one symbol system can be a springboard to others. In the words of the school-age coordinator at Chicago Commons' NIA Center, "Drama and art can help children in school achievement because they give them a sense of ownership and pride. They develop their confidence in expressing their ideas publicly. And it helps build their literacy. Sometimes older children also struggle with their literacy, too. The arts can build on what they already know."

A few programs we studied deliberately use the arts—dance and movement, photography, video, instrumental music, musical notation, song writing, drawing, mural making, cartooning, comic book illustration—as a pathway to and foundation for literacy. This process worked in different ways. Since each art form has its own vocabulary and grammar, children can be challenged to make connections between creative expression and language, learning correspondences such as movement sentences, jazz notation and writing, and narrative structure; manipulating symbols, and putting images or other basic elements together to create patterns. The idea that art tells or can be used to tell a story is common across art forms.

We found numerous examples of activities that involved the use of multiple symbol systems or extending learning in one mode to another mode. The following list indicates the variety of ways programs help children make connections from one symbol system to another:

- Using discovery carts or boxes, usually with some theme, the physical materials that go with it, and associated books;
- Linking other activities to events in a book, for example, actually cooking a meal or recipe that was thematically important
- Understanding relationships among symbol systems by having children represent their ideas in many different ideas, for example, drawing, writing and sculpture (Box 4.17), or writing, movement and drama (Box 4.18)
- Making there are connections between elements, activities in their setting; e.g. in A & L following common steps in designing a project, whether drama, photography, movement, Wiz Factory, encouraging children to take language and concepts from one lab to another
- Having children translate or re-write stories they've read in their own language (Box 4.19)
- Combining drawing and writing in journaling and letter writing activities
- Using literacy materials in pretend play and doing story dictation activities

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Box 4.19. Using writing and other media to represent personal experiences

Hanging from the ceiling are about 15 individual representations that combine drawings, writing, and three-dimensional wire sculptures entitled "What is Your Favorite Food?" Some of their written statements, which have been typed on labels and attached to their drawings, are:
"I like gyros because they smell good, they're juicy, and they're tender."
"I like Pizza because of the way it taste and I like the pepperoni."
"I like oranges because they are more watery than other foods."
"I like pizza because it's all cheesy, lumpy and good."
"I like plums because they are sweet and they make me hyper."
"I like chicken because it's crunchy and I like the skin the most."
"I like caramel cake because of the caramel."

In the art area is an exhibit of family photographs and statements by parents about their "hopes and dreams" for their children. Another display shows "Explorations of arrival time" through photographs, drawings, and children's writings. This display contains photos of each child in front of building or on a playground structure next to drawings of themselves in a program activity. Each drawing has writing on it in a child's hand, and typed quotes next to the photos. A girl has drawn a picture of a school bus and three friends and written, "I'm getting off the school bus. My friends are going inside the NIA Center and I am going in the center to. When I get into the classroom I will play with my friends I., X. and A."

~Observation notes, Chicago Commons NIA Center, Chicago

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Box 4.20. Drama and literacy

The 9 and 10 year old group are working on bringing storytelling to life. They are going to present a short play on the story *The Corn Maidens*, a Mexican folktale, to their parents in about a week. They begin with their daily warm-up activity, which includes a name game. Everyone around the room says his/her name and simultaneously does a movement and the rest of the group repeats the name and movement in unison. Then they reached for the ceiling and went around in a circle and had to say they were reaching for something, i.e., the stars. After they are warmed up they do a little vocabulary review sitting in the circle. "Does anyone remember what a chorus is?" chanting it or saying it in a choral form. The kids have it memorized. Other vocabulary terms are *narration, improvisation pantomime, tableau vivant, dialogue, gesture* and *unison*.

After reviewing the vocabulary, they are divided into two groups to practice narrating and acting the story. The narrators go to a corner with two assistants to work on reading the narrator's part in unison from xeroxed pages of the text (i.e., in choral form). J., the instructor, reminds them to explore the different tones the chorus can use and what can be emphasized etc. She works with the actors, reading the part of the chorus as they act it out. She tells them, "Let the story lead you and Listen to the words."

~Coalition for Hispanic Services Arts & Literacy, New York

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Creating Opportunities for Performance

Staff plan and create opportunities for children to exhibit their skills and interests in a variety of ways in our case study programs. For instance, staff arranged for children from East Harlem Tutorial's writing group to read their poetry at a local Barnes & Noble. Both Interfaith Neighbors and Arts and Literacy sponsor public events—"festivals"—for oral reading and performance of children's writing. The YMCA program at Bailey Gatzert arranged for a local literacy organization to help some of its students write and produce a play that was performed for parents and other community people. Creating opportunities for children to read and perform their writing for the broader community help parents and the broader community see that their children are capable, creative writers, who have something valuable to say, as well as allows children to see connections between reading and writing activity and oral performance.

In the following observation of a dramatic reading at the Chinese Information and Service Center in Seattle, we were impressed with the way in which adults and children shared responsibility for preparing for the performance (and in some cases, the children are better at translation than the adults). In addition, there was a good ambience in the room and a sense of humor. Children's protests were treated lightly by the adults, and, as a result, children stuck with the task despite their complaints. All in all, this experience reflected a safe and comfortable place for literacy and oral performance.

Conclusions: Themes and Principles Underlying Exemplary Practices

Although the programs we studied varied in their specific approaches to literacy and in their overall program quality, fostering literacy was an important objective. Program staff believed that literacy activity in after-school programs should be different from in-school literacy activity. According to a Chicago program director, "We want to promote literacy not teach it." Our observations of good programs and our conversations with providers yielded several key principles and beliefs about literacy and literacy development, as described below.

Literacy activity is most engaging for children when it is personally useful. Exemplary practices embodied the view that literacy is not simply about the ability to read and write; it is also the interest in and practice of reading and writing for a variety of personally meaningful and socially valued purposes. In order for children to become literate, they must appreciate its value for personal enjoyment and for communicating with others. Reading and writing are useful, intrinsically rewarding, and relevant to children's lives, and can be used for self-discovery, self-definition, to find a voice, to explore where one fits, to examine what the world is like, or simply to describe, observe, and reflect.

> *Literacy is critical thinking as much as physical and mental ability to read and write; the ability to analyze something and make decision. [I] want to help children get away from the fear of writing. Learning should be more relaxed and a means of introduction to new things. Kids will never learn unless it is made relevant and seen as necessary.*
> *~Education Coordinator*

Acquiring literacy is a process that takes time. Approaches that foster literacy recognize that literacy is a process. Children need time and regular opportunities to practice emerging skills. They need a wide variety of opportunities to interact with print, hear stories, read, and make choices in reading and writing. They need daily opportunities to share and talk about what they are reading and writing; and be able to work through difficulties in reading (e.g., sounding out words) with a more experienced reader. They also need choices—e.g., from variety of reading materials including magazines and comic books—to maintain their interest and motivation to engage in literacy activity.

There are many paths to literacy. There are many ways to tell a story. For many staff in the programs we observed, literacy was not only about writing and reading but about communicating meaning and representing experience through many different means—talking, dance, drawing, sculpture, music and drama. A variety of art forms and other media can be used to represent and communicate ideas. Reading and writing is also a tool for artistic work and a consequence. That is, when a child learns other symbol systems, he or she becomes more aware of language as a particular symbol system. A number of the interesting practices we observed involved connecting reading and writing to other activities and assisting children in seeing connections between different symbolic or representational systems.

Literacy development occurs in the context of social relationships. Learning involves collaboration between adults and children, older children and younger children, and peers. A strength of the exemplary practices we observed was the opportunity for a child to develop a close relationship with an adult who has no other agenda than that created by the child's support needs and interests—particularly important in programs working with children who really struggle with reading and writing. In their relationships with children, we saw adults guiding and structuring learning experiences according to their abilities, and working towards getting children to become active and responsible for their own literacy development. Adults treat children as readers and writers; as one New York writing instructor related, "I see the kids as writers, but they do not always see themselves in that context." Adults also work to create a community of readers and writers among children in which literacy experiences (reading and discussing books, writing letters to children in another country) are shared and in which children turn to each other as well as adults for help. For example, a New York literacy specialist noted that because of the wide range of reading levels within his group of children, he will pair a a good reader with a less capable reader during oral reading activities.

> *As teachers, we're learners, too. We don't tell the answers, but we provide a foundation for the kids. Thus, this is not a method of teaching what is right and wrong, but rather supporting children's development….forced learning is not always good learning. When kids are ready for an activity, they tend to grasp more easily to that subject. When it is fun for them, they want to learn more about it. They see their own progress and it encourages them to excel more.*
> ~Program Director

Some programs, such as the Chicago Commons programs based on the Reggio Emilia approach, confidently articulate a collaborative model in which adults provide a rich physical environment, but that they are learners within that environment as much as children are. Other examples reflecting this view include activities in which children to take charge of activities and lead book discussions, or in the play rehearsal at the Chinese Information Service Center in

Seattle in which children sometimes were more expert in translating the English to Chinese than the adults were.

Children need comfortable, safe places to explore reading and writing. In both the physical surroundings and human interactions, all of the programs we visited tried to create safe places where children feel comfortable and able to try new things without fear of ridicule or failure. As an instructor at Street Level Youth Media in Chicago told a young boy, "We can worry [about spelling, grammar] later."

> *In a school-age program, children should feel like someone cares about them*
> *and respect them, like a family. The program should be a place where they can*
> *express themselves and feel comfortable and safe.*
> *~Program Coordinator*

Programs we observed were aware of the importance of a proper climate for literacy activity—one that is comfortable, quiet, and intimate, and one that allows enough time for children to become fully engaged in reading and writing. Several staff articulated the view that children not only have to feel safe, but also feel accepted for who they are before they can take risks. They put great effort into helping children get over their fears of writing and reading and talking. When we observed the Cycle Wiz Factory's biochemistry laboratory, several boys were willing to take risks when they were not sure of the answer. One boy, raising his hand to answer a question about the difference between a gene and a. chromosome, said, "I'm going to try."

Children do well when there is a balance between seriousness and play in literacy. A playful approach to learning, from playing word games to incorporating vocabulary learning, reading and writing into activities like pretend play, cooking, photography, physical movement and sports distinguishes good programs. Staff encourage children to pay attention to and "play" with language, vocabulary and word meanings. When children are allowed to play with words and play with writing, they come to see literacy as something they own.

> *Activities have to be both both playful and serious. You have to be able to*
> *engage kids, yet kids won't take themselves seriously unless they feel they are*
> *engaged in a genuine and serious enterprise.*
> *~Program Instructor*

Most of the programs emphasized children's need to play and have some self-directed activities, especially after a long day at school. Staff at the Riverdale Neighborhood House program in New York said that most of the younger children are reading at grade level when they arrive in the program, but by the time they are in middle school there is a significant decline in their ability. The reason is that "they are not readers," meaning they never choose reading as something fun. One of the goals of the program is to show children that literacy can be fun. A writing instructor at the Arts and Literacy Program in New York reported that it is hard to convince children this age that being in a creative writing group is going to be any fun. However, he convinces them that writing is as enjoyable as other activities by presenting it as different from school as possible. There is no copying, no correct spelling, and all of his lessons are conducted in both English and Spanish.

Children are motivated to read and write when adults model interest and enthusiasm for literacy activity. The degree of enthusiasm of the program director and other staff about reading or writing (e.g. whether the director says that she loves to read) is, not surprisingly, a key predictor of the nature and quality of literacy activity in after-school programs and children's motivations to engage in literacy. One poetry writing teacher in Chicago told us that when you have a passion for your subject, the children "become attached to it." One of the most common ways staff demonstrate enthusiasm for literacy is making time to read to children regularly.

> *[Literacy] is contagious!…All it takes is one good story.*
> *~Program Director*

It is just as important to have people with skill, experience and understanding of reading and writing lead those activities, as it is to have artists teach art or music or dance. Adults with skills and interest are better equipped to engage children in such tasks as analyzing what works in a particular piece of writing; reading in "dialog" with children; or leading a group of readers in discussion of a text, helping them make connections to their own experience, to other texts, or teaching them to listen to and build on what other children say.

Our program observations and interviews with providers also revealed several common themes, discussed below, underlying adult-child relationships and program practices.

Adults have respect for children and their capacity to learn. A respect for children and a belief in their capacity to learn underlies the exemplary approaches and practices described in this chapter. At the same time, staff are realistic about children's current pattern of skills, recognizing that some have not had opportunity to explore and develop their abilities.

> *Our model is a strengths model. We take the position that kids are very, very smart…This is a learning environment. We think learning is a great antidote to [what children experience the rest of their lives].*
> *~Program Director*

Respect for children and their capabilities leads staff to take children seriously, recognize what they bring to an activity, involve them in planning, and build on what they already know and can do. For example, a poetry writing instructor noted that he tries to build bridges between children's words and language, and new vocabulary and ways of using words. Adults also communicate their beliefs that children can learn. Art and writing instructors encourage children to use their own ideas in their work and stay away from representations and stories using popular characters from cartoons and video games. In time, children come to see themselves as capable of learning as when a child struggling with a difficult passage told his tutor, who was trying to help, "I'm the reader, and you're not."

> *Only vocabulary words that are totally learned and understood and memorized can be added to the children's word books…and only three at a time. I don't care whether mastery takes a day to two months. I'd rather have the kids able to see what they have learned than a list of vocabulary of what they don't know. It's better to see how well you are doing than how much further you have to go and how much you don't know.*
> *~Reading Specialist*

A belief that children are capable manifests when staff appreciate children's choice of reading material and the connections children make in their reading. When children in Interfaith's Reading Lab—many of whom have never read a loud before or been read too—are given money to purchase their own book, sometimes they choose books that are way over their heads. However, with the support of their tutors, they work through the difficult parts together to make the reading an enjoyable experience.

Children's diverse backgrounds, languages, and cultures are valued and made part of literacy experiences. The programs we observed serve a diverse group of children, representing many different cultures and languages. Although diversity can be a challenge, staff respect, support, and celebrate differences in their programs. Many also take advantage of children's languages and cultures, implementing activities that use reading and writing for children to reflect on their family and culture and explore links between their personal experiences and heritage and those of other people.

> *"I want to make sure we have more books that are reflective of the kids in our program…multilingual books. At the [programs serving primarily African-American children], I want to make sure the majority of books are about African-American children, or have African-American characters. It is really important for the children to see themselves in those stories."*
> *~Agency administrator*

In after-school programs in non-English speaking communities (or serving non-English speaking populations of children), oral language typically slipped fluidly, informally, idiosyncratically back and forth between English and children's native language (including during discussion of English-language texts). At a program in Seattle, a 10-year-old girl called her father on the phone when she arrived at the center and left him a voicemail message: "I ain't go no homework." The caregiver repeated her message in a questioning tone, "I ain't got no homework?" "I'm black!" the girl retorted, and both laughed. After-school programs also seem to be a comfortable place for bilingualism. Indeed, after-school programs might be viewed as a place for preserving the native language of immigrant children (as well as introducing them to the literature of their homeland).

At the Cycle Wiz Factory, children are continually learning vocabulary of different scientific and artistic fields and continually encouraged to express their knowledge orally and in writing, but staff do not correct grammatical mistakes or use of dialect. On the other hand, in reading labs and tutorials, where accuracy is important—especially in working with older children—corrections are done gently so as to encourage and not discourage children.

Adults and program schedules respect differences in how children approach literacy. Our exemplary programs provide a predictable but flexible schedule of activities that can respond to differences in children's interests and needs. Many staff make individual plans for children, and all try to incorporate children's backgrounds and interests as well as their literacy support needs in their planning. As much as possible, activities are designed to allow children to move at their own pace. Adults play a supportive but active role, one which not only affirms the value of what children think and have to say, but frames questions, illustrates how to approach reading, text interpretation and writing, and revising, and so forth.

"I like that there's not a strict structure so we [tutor and child] don't have to follow all the rules but can improvise. She used to hate reading but now enjoys it and can make her own choices about what to read."
~Tutor

At the East Harlem Tutorial program in New York, children along with their tutors create individual portfolios that include weekly journal writing entries for the tutor and child based on objectives that were developed when the child first entered the program. These objectives have no time frame in which they need to be reached which allows for flexibility in meeting them. Periodically, the program coordinator conducts conferences with tutors to review goals and accomplishments each child and develop strategies for continued work. In one case, a tutor stated that despite an intake report saying a child had dyslexia, she believed the child was "very good at math but may just dislike reading."

Staff provide opportunities for parents, teachers, and other community members to share children's accomplishments. Although it is not often easy to connect with parents, all of the programs we visited make considerable effort to reach out to parents, from sending home notes and newsletters, talking with them at pick up time, and encouraging them to visit the program. Most hold occasional family events in which children perform or parents share in book reading and discussion. At the Chicago Commons programs, parents participate in parent-staff conferences in which they view portfolios of their children's work. They also attend staff meetings and take part in professional development activities with staff. A parent liaison provides a link to other parents who cannot attend these meetings.

Parents are equally concerned about their children's education. And they do participate…Parents are their children's first teachers. We view parents as resources.
~Program Coordinator

A number of programs also serve as an important bridge between children's homes and their schools, talking to teachers or at least becoming aware of children's school activities. Staff on occasion go with parents to parent-teacher conferences or call teachers on the behalf of parents (especially in programs serving immigrant communities). Some programs invite teachers to come to program open houses and performance events.

As noted more than once in this report, a challenge for after-school programs is meeting the demands of parents that they provide time and help for children to do homework and meeting their own program goals to provide children to play, relax, be creative, and enjoying reading and writing. Our case study programs accept this challenge and try to work with parents to help them understand program goals and benefits for children and to negotiate a homework policy that will meet their expectations.

Staff make use of specialists, external resources and networks to enrich literacy experiences for children. External organizations such as local arts organizations, museums, and libraries are potential resources for after-school programs to support children's literacy. Many of the programs we observed make more use of these resources to supplement regular program activities or provide expertise that staff do not have. For example, the YMCA school-age program at Bailey Gatzert in Seattle worked for several months with Hugo House, a local

literacy organization, to implement a drama project with some of its students that involved a variety of literacy and literacy-related activities—talking, writing, reading, drawing, and performing. At El Centro de la Raza in Seattle, a local poet comes every Wednesday evening from 6 to 8 o'clock to work with school-age children and adults on poetry writing. Other programs we visited arranged for music lessons, believing that musical experiences help to develop listening and literacy skills that are relevant to other domains of learning. East Harlem Tutorial used an outside writing consultant to facilitate a year-long writing group and arranged for children in the group to a do a public reading of their poetry at a local Barnes & Noble bookstore.

Staff have opportunities to explore and reflect on what they are doing with children. Time is often at a premium in the life of an after-school program, and it is easy get caught up in the day-to-day activities and interactions with children, and forgo staff meetings or other opportunities for staff development. Many of our case study programs are able to contract with intermediary organizations to provide targeted on-site support and training to staff. Staff are also given time to attend professional conferences and staff training workshops. Most importantly, all of the programs structure time for program staff to meet and think about children and their work in light of program goals and philosophy. For example, in a staff meeting at the Chicago Commons Guadalupano Center, a staff member discussed with others her reason for exploring "culture," a difficult idea to grasp, with her 7- to 9-year-old children in the context of the pen pal project described in Box 4.6 and how she helped them understand the concept.

Programs that use tutors or volunteer recognize that training, monitoring, and supporting tutors is itself a large job. It is important for staff to stay in touch with the work tutors are doing with children, to provide activities for their development as tutors (without burdening them), to provide some structure for their work, and to help modulate expectations. East Harlem Tutorial, for instance, has half hour "after-session" workshops for tutors, in which specific topics such as learning styles and test-taking strategies are discussed.

> *My favorite thing is poetry writing and I have not been able to do that with kids*
> *for a long time. But one of the really great things that we did at the end of*
> *"Reading is Cool" is that we had a woman come and do a training with just the*
> *leadership staff. She came and did a creative writing experience with us and*
> *talked with us about how you can do this with the kids, but basically she had us*
> *do it!"*
> *~Agency director*

In addition, most of our case study programs recognize the importance of and are setting aside in-service time for staff to explore and reflect on their own experiences as readers and writers, including what supported or hindered that experience, addressing the issue of staff's own discomfort with literacy, what staff think literacy is for, etc. and also work with staff on specific skills such as story-book reading. In one staff training session that touched on the topic of participants' own literacy histories, there were memories of shyness, of being "tracked" in school as a kid, of being forced to read certain things in school. There was mention of the positive feelings generated when one's own experiences were seen as important. Experiences such as these can help staff be more aware of their own attitudes towards literacy and more understanding about the experiences of children.

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

Although we found interesting and innovative literacy activity in a handful of after-school programs, we also found a variety of systemic challenges to such activities in the field as a whole. These included: time, space and material resource constraints; lack of staff skill and experience in fostering literacy (and limitations in staffs' own literacy skills); the wide range of literacy support needs, interests and "identities" among participating children; issues related to parental expectations; and lack of support for programs—in particular for program directors—in thinking through and trying to implement a coherent approach to literacy

activity. In addition to these challenges, many after-school programs in our study were struggling to find an appropriate stance in relation to schools, and to respond to pressure—from funders, parents and other stakeholders—to become more school-like and help address school-related agendas.

Time, Space, and Material Resource Constraints

After-school programs tend to have less total time, and particularly less functional time, than might seem available for sustained literacy activity. By the time children have arrived, settled in, done homework, had snacks, had some free time, there is simply not enough "after-school" day left." The effect of time constraints is exacerbated when homework itself is difficult. One survey respondent noted that "It has been a challenge to balance homework with other activities since a lot of our children are having problems understanding their homework. It takes them longer to complete the homework because most times they don't know what to do." Additionally, in some programs, children arrive individually or in groups (from different schools) over the course of an hour or more. The end of the afternoon is often rushed, and sometimes disorganized, with parents or siblings arriving at different times to take children home. When children know they are leaving in a few minutes they are less likely to settle down to an activity. And, at times, special activities or other agendas intervene. Staff do not feel that they can or should "protect" time for literacy (perhaps because it is not so important to them).

Time constraints on literacy activity are directly related to children's needs after a day at school. School is often very stressful for low- and moderate-income children. High-stakes testing puts pressure on everyone in the school setting, but that pressure is ultimately felt most by children. Schools in low-income neighborhoods are increasingly programmed, and staff are strict. Children experience tight control of all movement—silence is required in the halls, and in general extraordinary self-control is demanded. On top of these restrictions, more and more children are coming from school with no recess or gym. Under increased pressure and with fewer outlets for decompressing during the school day, children need time to unwind and "re-group" psychologically after-school. Many children also desperately need some physical activity. And children may not be interested in or motivated to take on even the most seemingly engaging literacy activity. (Ironically, one issue that we observed in some after-

school programs was lack of flexibility around time for children who did want to just sit and read. For example, a child would sometimes settle down to read, perhaps after finishing homework, and then within a few minutes be asked to stop, in order to transition to another activity or part of the afternoon.)

Box 5.2. The challenge of finding time to share reading experiences with children

The library is working out fabulously but the staff is facing a problem finding enough time to really assess what the kids think about particular books they have borrowed from the library. There is someone there at the library from 3-6pm one day a week. This person goes around to the separate grades that make up the after school program and sees who would like to go the library. The same children choose to go every week, which means that the others aren't really engaged in it to the same degree. Another problem is that kids are often returning books to their individual counselors because there is no librarian or they don't have the time to visit her on the day she is there. This means that the staff is missing out on hearing what about the book the kid liked and didn't like and having the opportunity to encourage them to investigate the subject further by helping them find another book on that topic. This is problematic because it is one of the program's goals. To deal with this problem they have scheduled a meeting with their literacy program evaluator to figure out other options. For this meeting they plan on collecting data on the number of books that have been borrowed according to grade level and comments from the children.

~Observation notes, Riverdale Neighborhood House

With respect to space, the principal constraints noted by providers and observed in programs were lack of dedicated space, prohibiting staff from setting up and maintaining libraries and other interest areas or displaying children's writing and other work; and lack of adequate space to create quiet, protected areas for reading and writing, whether individually or in groups. Typical comments among survey respondents included "we are in a large and very noisy multi-purpose room;" "we are unable to break children into smaller groups according to age or interest for different activities;" and "limited space: prevents reading activities that involve the entire group of children."

More selectively across programs, lack of literacy materials and/or budgets to purchase materials created moderate constraints to literacy activity. For instance, programs might not be able to afford multiple copies of books needed for book discussions. Programs were sometimes unable to update libraries, or purchase particular kinds of books.

Staff and Staffing-Related Issues

Limitations related to staffing were found in the present study to create a major obstacle to after-school programs' capacity to provide enriching literacy experiences. As we noted in the literature review, adults play important roles in scaffolding or structuring children's literacy experiences and nurturing their literacy-related identities. They "demonstrate" different ways of engaging texts, "model" excitement about reading and writing, frame and guide book discussions, help connect texts to children's experiences, serve as an audience and respondent to children's writing, help introduce children to new authors, and so forth.   These critical mediating tasks are difficult enough even for skilled literacy mentors. Yet the great majority of frontline staff and the majority of supervisory staff in after-school programs have no specific training in the area of children's literacy development. For instance, despite the growing importance of literacy and academic support in after-school programs, fewer than half of the programs in the survey reported that their staff had received training in the areas of homework

help, literacy, or math and science (34 to 39%) during the last two years. They were more likely to have received in-service training in the areas of guidance and discipline, child development, art, and recreational activities. (See Table 12 in Appendix B.) Moreover, our observations and discussions with staff suggest that many seem uncomfortable about their own identity and strengths as readers and writers.

As illustrated throughout this report, after-school program staff do their best to support children's literacy development, through such activities as talking with children, reading to them or listening to them read, and tutoring them in specific subjects. They also assume responsibility for supervising homework time and assisting children with homework if they ask for help (although they are less likely to check homework for completeness or accuracy). At the same time, staff who, through no fault of their own, have little or no specific training in the literacy arena are going to have a limited understanding of the process of literacy development and the kinds of activities that nurture such development, and are likely to have a limited repertoire of specific ideas to draw on. A concrete illustration of this in our study was the relative lack of attention to both dramatic play (among younger children) and various kinds of writing, as vehicles for literacy development.

Staff who do not see themselves as readers and writers obviously cannot provide a model of such for children. When directors and/or staff were insecure about literacy-related activity, and/or did not receive training or information or support, they tended to imitate the worst literacy practices of schools instead of the best ones; i.e. dittos, worksheets, tracing letters, drilling children. It was also difficult for after-school staff to attend to that part of their role that called for building children' confidence as readers and writers. For example, it sometimes appeared hard for staff to respond primarily as an interested audience for a child's writing and refrain from correcting a spelling or grammatical mistake.

The higher prevalence of reading and writing struggles among low-income children, and their frequently negative reading and writing experiences in school, heighten the consequences of staff limitations in the literacy arena. Staff with little or no training around literacy appeared to have difficulty knowing how to respond to children who were having obvious trouble reading or writing. On one occasion, for instance, we observed a staff member persist in trying to help a child who was struggling to sound out words in a Dr. Seuss book. The child was obviously frustrated, but the staff member told him she really wanted him to learn how to read .

A different staffing issue raised by survey respondents was not having enough staff to engage children in literacy activities. Various respondents noted that "our program needs more staff and books to implement literacy," "we need more adult volunteers," and "it takes a lot of effort for the one staff member who can help [with literacy] at a time while the other one or two are cleaning snack and preparing for next activity." A growing number of children in after-school programs are unable to get help with their schoolwork from their own families, for different reasons. As one director wrote, "More staff/volunteers is the key to providing the attention needed by youth who come from non-English speaking families."

One response to the need for more staff has been to seek out and rely more on volunteers for homework help, tutoring and other literacy-related roles. And as this has occurred, the literacy skills of these auxiliary staff have come to be an issue. In our study, high

school youth proved to be particularly variable in these roles. We observed instances in which they were patient, persistent, and good at explaining concepts, and other instances in which they showed little skill. The staff member in charge of homework help at East Harlem Tutorial told us that some high school tutors had trouble reading deeply for comprehension themselves, and so could not really help younger children learn to read more deeply. Increasingly, college students also have variable literacy skills. One New York City settlement which relies on college students for staff feels compelled to test them on basic skills before hiring them, in order to be sure they have adequate literacy and numeracy skills to help children with homework.

Programs that provide tutoring typically have to devote a good deal of effort to recruiting, training and supporting tutors. A small program in Seattle, the Refugee Women's Alliance, tries to find have enough volunteers so that each child has one person to read to him or her and assist with homework, but usually has to settle for one adult for every five children. The much larger East Harlem Tutorial program in New York needs 400 to 500 tutors to meet all its tutoring needs, and may have to recruit and train 300 new tutors each year. In some cases, tutors are not found and ready for children until late winter.

Children's Diverse Literacy-Support Needs and Interests

Children bring varying levels of ability, experience, and interest to reading and writing, and have widely varying views of themselves as readers and writers. Children bring their own histories and "communities" to their literacy activities. Families socialize children to the value and uses of literacy and provide the foundation for children's identities as readers and writers. And although literacy development continues to be influenced by their families and communities, children's school experiences play an increasingly important role in shaping their views of what literacy is and their identities as readers and writers.

Together with the wide age range in children served, these influences act to create children with diverse literacy support needs, interests and identities, in turn creating all kinds of challenges for the after-school programs in our study. A group of 15 or 20 children might, at times, have almost as many different homework assignments. A group pulled together for a book discussion might include children who read a particular book with ease and children who barely understood it. A program might serve children from three or four or more ethnic and linguistic communities. After a day at school, a few children like curling up with a book, others have no interest in or endurance for "more" reading or writing.

Some children served by the programs in our study have limited experience in reading and writing outside the school context. According to after-school staff, some children do not know how to read a book at the most basic level, in other words, how to approach the experience. Some do not understand that if they like one book by a particular author, there may be others by that author to try out. Many children do not know their reading interests or tastes; many have never read a book for the sheer enjoyment, and/or never been read to by an adult. Staff in the programs studied told us that too many children—perhaps a majority—do not see themselves as readers and writers (or even as capable learners). Staff comments gave the impression that the majority of children understand reading as a necessary life skill, or a school activity, not as something inherently pleasurable.

With respect to writing, the most common challenges noted were reluctance to write, and lack of voice and conviction in writing. Both problems become more acute as children grow older. Staff report that it is hard to convince children that they have something to say. It was noted that some children find it hard to write about themselves; perhaps they have never been asked to think of themselves as worth writing about. One writing teacher noted also that children don't know how to create their own stories—they only seem to be able to build on an existing story, using characters from popular culture that they already know well. Staff in a handful of programs noted that children's reluctance to write seemed to be due to fear of being of being judged and evaluated.

A significant dilemma faced by after-school programs is how best to address the distinct needs of children having serious difficulty learning to read and write, and/or with deeply-rooted anxieties about reading and writing. These are children who need more, often far more, than engaging literacy environments and activities. Throughout our observations, we noted children's complaints that reading or writing are "boring" appeared to serve as a defense for reading or writing difficulties. Children's literacy difficulties were often a subtle mixture of fears, shame, and skill deficits. Speaking of the child she worked with, a tutor at one program told us that "sometimes she wouldn't show up at all, or she would be hiding upstairs" [in a different part of the building].

Struggles with reading and writing were intertwined with struggles in school. It was reported to use, and we observed firsthand, that detachment from school and school success appears in at least some participating children by 5th or 6th grade. Children stop doing homework, in part because they no longer see the point, and in part because they have not yet mastered literacy. They have learned to pretend that they can do the work, for example getting good at guessing or getting enough of a text to respond without really understanding what they're reading.

After-School Programs and School-Related Agendas

Children's attitude toward literacy, and view of themselves as literate beings, are strongly shaped by school experiences, and this fact, ironically, creates challenges for after-school programs. One such challenge is related to the narrow, and in some cases negative, quality of children's literacy experiences in school. As we noted in the introduction, such experiences are characterized by a preoccupation with building skills, reliance on commercial textbooks, frequent testing, and lack of attention to what children and their families bring to the literacy experience. Rather than helping children become readers and writers, these experiences frequently discourage children's literacy efforts and interests. And it is this process that creates a dilemma for after-school programs and their staff. For instance, it is reportedly not uncommon for children who do like or even love to read in elementary school to learn to become passive in the face of text, to come to dislike or even hate reading by middle school years.

After-school program staff know that it is important for the children they serve to do well in school, and they recognize the importance of maintaining good relationships with schools. In fact they sometimes complained to the investigators about teachers' unresponsiveness to their efforts to work together more closely around homework and other academic needs. Yet after-school staff also sense, and in some cases know clearly and can

articulate, that they do not want to reproduce the schools' dominant approach to literacy activity. A few program directors told us that they view the role of after-school programs as creating a different environment for fostering children's literacy than that found in school.

Staff in the exemplary programs we studied were best able to articulate the idea that what after-school programs do is fundamentally different than what schools do. For instance, the writing teacher at Brooklyn's Arts and Literacy program told us that he thought his activities and ways of working with children were "the opposite of conventional schooling in that there is no copying, no correct spelling, all the lessons are taught in both languages and are conducted in both languages. [I want] the kids to have a sense of accomplishment so the kids are allowed to work at their own pace there is no discussion of having to finish the project". A senior staff member at Interfaith Neighbors told us that "we make it different [from school] because we can." Although they have some literacy-related accountability—due to pressure from funders—it is less "narrow" than the kind that schools have. Interfaith Neighbor's executive director told us that, unlike schools, after-school programs have the luxury to set aside goals and outcomes when necessary, in order to take the time to create the healthy climate and relationships prerequisite to learning. The director of Chicago's Cycle Wiz Factory noted that her program and staff felt compelled to counter schools' message to the children that they were not smart and could not master complex ideas and subjects.

A different school-related dilemma for after-school programs, especially those located in schools, is growing pressure to commit to addressing school system learning standards, to serve as an extension of other school district literacy initiatives, and even to set aside time for standardized test preparation. In Seattle, for example, where community organizations rent space in school buildings to run their after-school programs, a new school district policy will provide space at low or no cost if programs can demonstrate that the experiences they provide advance the learning standards of the public schools. Here again, after-school providers both want to be responsive, and want to keep a certain distance from school agendas.

Relationships with Parents

Challenges in relationships with parents centered around two issues: tensions between program staff and parents about expectations with regard to homework; and program staff perceptions that parents were not supporting their children's efforts at school or at the after-school program. While after-school program staff believe in shared responsibility for helping children with homework, they recognize that some parents are either unwilling or unable to assist their children, due to work schedules and other family responsibilities, language barriers, educational limitations, or personal issues. At the same time, after-school staff are troubled by what they perceive to be a growing belief among parents that after-school programs have primary responsibility for homework. That belief shifts the burden of responsibility too far, and, as noted earlier, can turn after-school programs into little more than homework help centers. After-school providers' resentment around this issue is exacerbated by the perception that some children, at least, are not getting a positive response and praise from parents for good work at school. The staff member at one program in New York City told us that the children "rushed to bring him school work," which he put on display on a bulletin board, because "they don't always or even usually get praise from their parents."

A growing number of after-school programs also face the issue of figuring out what it means to foster literacy in a linguistically different or multi-ethnic community. Parents from different immigrant groups have distinct expectations about language and cultural issues, as well as about program emphases. For example, in Asian immigrant communities there is a strong parental emphasis on children mastering literacy and language in English, combined with a deep commitment to maintenance and celebration of Asian culture and custom. (The latter typically occurs through the arts and "cultural" activity, but may also occur through reading or listening to stories from one's native land, learning writing systems, and so forth.)

Lack of External Supports for After-School Programs' Literacy Efforts

An important finding of our study was that most after-school programs struggle in isolation in their efforts, whether modest or significant, to foster literacy. Most program directors are either unaware or lack the time and energy to pursue external literacy resources that might be drawn on. For instance, the literacy field is full of wonderful and practical books about guiding children's reading and writing development, and although most of these books are directed at teachers, they could be useful to after-school providers. The field also contains a sizable group of resource people and centers that do training and technical assistance around literacy. In most cities, there are also individuals and institutions that could be linked to after-school programs as well, for story-reading, writing workshops, and the like. Conversely, of the hundreds of literacy specialists around the country with expertise in school-age children, a handful at most are paying attention to after-school programs.

Many of the program directors we surveyed and talked with said that there are few curricular resources to help them to think specifically about literacy activities for their programs.[10] Some programs have developed or adapted and are implementing their own curricula such as the Reggio Emilia approach used in the Chicago Commons after-school programs, the Beacon's "Literacy Links" manual, and the PATH literacy curriculum created by Interfaith Neighbors, Inc. in New York. In at least a couple of programs we visited, staff maintained their own notebooks of ideas for literacy activities that they had read about, learned in a workshop, and/or tried with children. In a few of the programs we studied, directors mentioned particular approaches to homework help that had been helpful to them, specifically "Homework without Tears" and "Homework Enrichment Training."[11] In addition, a few new curricular resources applicable to community-based settings have emerged just in the last few years. As reported in Chapter 4, in a small number of programs across the country (in Seattle, New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles) we observed the implementation of two recent approaches to fostering children's interest in and enjoyment of literacy activities. One was

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[10] Two national youth-serving organizations, the YMCA of the USA and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, have long encouraged their sites to support children's academic and literacy skills through informal learning experiences, including leisure reading, writing activities, and word games, but because they believe that programs should tailor their activities to their communities, they generally have not advocated the use of any particular curriculum (e.g., Taylor, personal communication, 2000).

[11] There also are a several recent commercial curricula for after-school and summer school programs that claim to develop reading, writing, and math skills while making learning fun. These programs—examples are Voyager, Foundations, Sylvan Learning System's Mindsurf, and Explore—provide curricula, materials, and training for staff (typically schoolteachers). In some cases, they also offer partnerships with cultural institutions (for example, the Smithsonian and National Geographic Society) to enrich children's experiences (Coltin, 1999; Pekow, 1998).

Reading is Cool! a recreational reading program developed by School's Out Washington that trains providers to think more intentionally about literacy and infuse literacy into ongoing program activities. The other was KidzLit, created and tested by the Developmental Studies Center, which provides a variety of carefully selected children's books that relate to various cultural and ethnic backgrounds and life experiences, curriculum guides and suggestions for extending reading experiences to art, drama, music and writing, and training for staff.

Lack of a Coherent, Guiding Philosophy for Literacy Efforts

Given the range of other constraints facing after-school programs, lack of an internally generated framework for literacy activity was particularly constraining. We found that although many directors expressed interest in "reconstructing" their programs to include more literacy-fostering activity, they typically did not know how or where to begin to act on that interest. They wished there were more outside resources to help them to think specifically about literacy activities for their programs.

There is no authority to decide what an appropriate role should be, leaving each program and initiative to figure it out for itself. In part the lack of a framework for literacy in after-school programs is the result of diversity in the after-school field; in part it is the result of disagreements, even among reading experts, about the value of homework and how best to support children's literacy development. Although the national offices of the YMCA and Boys & Girls Clubs have developed literacy-related initiatives and encourage programs to support and enrich children's learning in fun, informal ways, local programs are fairly autonomous in their programming, and what goes on depends largely on the knowledge and comfort directors and staff have with literacy and the perceived needs of their community.

As we found, there are potential external resources available to after-school programs—local arts organizations, museums, libraries, and other cultural institutions, and training organizations—that can strengthen the ability of after-school programs to support children's literacy. There also are a few intermediary organizations that have developed resources and training experiences for after-school literacy activity that support the principles that emerged from our study of exemplary practices—for example, the Developmental Studies Center, Schools' Out Washington, and the National Institute on Out-of-School Time. However, given the isolation under which some programs operate, there is a lack of awareness of these supports or time to seek them out—often in addition to limited budgets to pay for outside consultation.

However, none of the programs in our survey sample or our case studies seemed to be drawing upon these commercially available curricula.

CONCLUSIONS: A ROLE FOR AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS IN LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Teaching kids to read, or tutoring kids who are not reading at grade level. is not what we're equipped to do. We don't have reading specialists in our after-school programs unless it's part of a grant and part of a tutoring program. Our staff are not reading specialists. We need to know what it is that we can do. We can provide print-rich environments; and we can provide computers and technology; and we can provide books; and we can provide staff who read with kids and help kids make connections in what they read. We can provide opportunities for kids to write their own poems or scripts, or read scripts and take on roles. That's our role in literacy; it's not teaching kids to read, but doing things that use reading and writing.
~Agency Program Director

Our study findings suggest:

- After-school programs provide a potentially strong base for nurturing children's literacy development, and for providing a variety of types of literacy experiences.
- The role of after-school programs should be to provide complementary and perhaps very different kinds of literacy purposes and experiences than those provided by school.
- Within the after-school field as whole, much work needs to be done if they are to fulfill their distinctive potential.

We observed that good after-school programs approach literacy, and work to support children's literacy development, in different ways. In other words, literacy activities naturally fit differently into different programs, and they tend to work best when they reflect the character and are integrated into the daily life of a program. There are, nonetheless, purposes and principles for supporting children's literacy development that appear to hold across settings (as opposed to "program models" to be promoted wholesale in the after-school field). For example, as noted earlier, our findings from programs doing exemplary work around literacy suggest that after-school programs are particularly well suited to such purposes as:

- Helping children see how and why reading and writing might be useful, intrinsically rewarding and relevant to their lives
- Strengthening children's sense of themselves as readers and writers
- Strengthening their belief that what they have to say is important
- Exercising their imaginations
- Helping children explore the links between their own experiences (and local culture) and those of others
- Helping them understanding the structure of and correspondences between different symbolic systems

Our study findings suggest that after-school programs are well-suited to fostering the *social dimensions* of literacy, with children sharing ideas, collaborating, helping each other, responding to and critiquing each other, and solving reading and writing problems together. They are also well-suited to addressing the *cultural dimensions* of literacy, in particular to

helping children explore the particular literacy traditions of their families and communities, and to serving as a bridge for children between those traditions and the literacy demanded in school.

The principles that emerged from our study are articulated at the end of Chapter Four. They point, for example, to the importance of a supportive but active adult role, one which not only affirms the value of children's interpretations of text, of what children think and have to say, but frames questions, illustrates how to approach reading, text interpretation and writing, and revising, communicates the importance of and models excitement about literacy activity. They point to the importance of respecting children's choice of reading material and the connections children make in their reading, in nurturing children's commitment to literacy. They point to the importance of balance between seriousness and playfulness in literacy activities and remind us that children love to "play" with language, vocabulary, and words. They point as well to the importance of the proper climate for literacy activity (comfortable, quiet, intimate), and for sustained time for children to engage in reading and writing.

A number of attributes of after-school programs (at their best) make them particularly distinctive as literacy nurturing environments. These include their *psychological/social climate, their motivational structure, their temporal structure, and adult roles*. Children typically see after-school programs as a safe context, with a relatively modest adult agenda. Unlike school, after-school programs are places designed for children to feel successful. Reading and writing efforts are not tied to tests and grades, promotion and retention, and the focus is not on errors but on individual interests, choices and accomplishments. Children not surprisingly enjoy reading and writing more when they know they will not be tested and quizzed on their efforts.

The goals and uses of reading and writing in after-school programs, especially as articulated and implemented in the exemplary programs, also appear to be strongly motivating for children: reading and writing to explore who one is and might become, to express private feelings that are hard to talk about (this was one use of journals), to seek people to identify with. Children's motivation to write is fueled also when they feel they've written something that gets a positive response, another characteristic of the exemplary programs in our study. (Conversely, of the many reasons children struggle to read and write, after-school programs are perhaps best suited to address motivational and psychological ones; perhaps also helping build the background knowledge sometimes needed to be drawn on to understand text.)

Although time-starved on a day-to-day basis, after-school programs tend have a relatively relaxed temporal framework with respect to children's literacy acquisition. That is, children do not feel pressure to master new learning challenges quickly. With the exception of homework, there is as much or emphasis on the process of a task as on the timely completion of it. This fact is critical to children who are struggling with literacy. One tutor at East Harlem Tutorial told us that she spent "the entire year last year on getting [one particular tutee] to read and enjoy it."

A Gap Between Potential and Current Realities

If after-school programs represent a potentially rich and supportive base for children's literacy activity, they are by and large not yet achieving that potential. Only a handful of programs have thought intentionally about literacy. A very small group of programs seem genuinely

"literacy infused," with literacy activity present throughout the formal and informal life of the program. A slightly larger, though still small, group might be said to "literacy rich", with clear goals related to literacy, and a variety of regular activities. But in the great majority of programs literacy is barely present, at best a catch-as-catch-can phenomenon. Beyond time spent doing homework, children in most after-school programs are spending relatively little time on literacy activity. (There actually may be more literacy activity during the summer than during the year in some programs.)

We learned that while it was not hard to find interesting practices and approaches, but it was hard for many, perhaps most, programs to create and sustain the right conditions for implementing these practices and approaches. In some respects, the challenges of strengthening literacy activity in after-school programs are similar to those entailed in strengthening program quality generally. These are addressing serious resource constraints in the field—tackling space constraints (ironically, programs that operate in schools sometimes have the greatest difficulty creating an appropriate physical space for reading and writing.); developing mechanisms for linking programs to external resources and providing programs the support to use those resources effectively; and providing programs long-term technical assistance in such critical areas as planning, staff development, and curriculum.

A lot of the work to be done with after-school staff is very basic, around reliability, follow through, planning, and prioritizing how they use their time. Some of the work that needs to be done is more specific to literacy. It is critical, for instance, to address some staff members' own mixed or negative history with literacy, especially to provide opportunities for staff to talk about and reflect on their own childhood literacy experiences. It will be important for training and staff development strategies to keep in mind the different kinds of staff in after-school programs—core staff, adult tutors, high-school and college tutors, specialists. Volunteers, for example, need to be respected for what they are doing, yet also be willing to fit within the philosophy and expectations of a particular program

Many after-school staff require support and training in developing the literacy-related potential in various after-school activities. For example, while it is true that if a child learns the structure of one particular art form, gets excited about and learns to express him or herself in that art form, that understanding, motivation and skill can transfer to the literacy domain, such a transfer is not automatic. It requires skillful adult facilitating and bridge building.

It seems logical to consider ways of bringing the enormous body of literature, expertise, and experience in the field of children's literacy development to after-school programs in usable forms. This ranges from simple insights, such as how to help children select "just right" books, or how to get the most out of journaling, to more complex challenges, such as structuring book discussions and assessing children's literacy development progress. In a related vein, just as organizations now exist to link young visual and performing artists to after-school programs to teach, demonstrate, design and oversee productions, etc., it might make sense to organize efforts to link young writers—of both fiction and non-fiction (e.g., journalists)—to after-school programs. Compared to reading, writing continues to receive relatively little attention in after-school programs, and this would help address that imbalance. (The few professional story readers available in any city already seem to have some connections to the after-school field, although they work more in libraries, schools and early childhood programs.)

We would, finally, urge a reconsideration of the central role that homework time has come to play as a literacy activity. Homework time benefits children whose parents cannot help them because of language difficulties, sometimes allows for extended one-to-one interaction with an adult or older child, and offers after-school staff a window into the academic skills of participating children. Yet, more often than not—especially given the dubious quality of some homework assignments--homework time has come to crowd out other, potentially more enriching activities. We suspect that it has also led, in some cases, to further disengagement of low-income parents from their children's school lives.

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APPENDIX A

RESEARCH METHODS

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH METHODS

The following questions guided the research design and data collection methods:

- What is the range of current objectives, practices, settings and activities related to literacy in after-school programs serving low-income children?
- How do specific contextual and programmatic factors shape literacy practices and environments in after-school programs?
- What are some of the more interesting and exciting literacy-related approaches, practices, and activities found among after-school programs? How can the room environment in after-school programs be organized and supplied to promote literacy activity?
- In what ways might participation in literacy activities benefit low-income children?
- What are appropriate expectations of after-school programs regarding the promotion of children's literacy?

Multiple methods of data collection were used—a mail survey, observations of after-school programs, interviews with program staffs, directors, trainers and intermediaries, and information-gathering on interesting approaches and curricular models.

Mail Survey

The mail survey was conducted during the winter and spring, 2000, in Chicago and Seattle. It was designed primarily to address the first goal of describing the current range of literacy practices in after-school programs serving low-income children, and to identify the factors that shape prevailing practices. The survey sought information on a number of topics including program and staff information, the environment for literacy development (materials and activities), homework practices, and issues regarding the accomplishment of literacy activities in after-school programs.

Sample Selection

Because this study built on the work Chapin Hall did in the MOST evaluation, it made sense to consider one or two of the MOST cities for the survey. We had knowledge of and relationships in those cities that made it relatively easier to define the universe of potential respondents, and actually carry out the survey. Although no one city could be considered representative in terms of program types, populations, funding, etc., from a practical standpoint we knew it would be easier to manage a survey of programs in Chicago, including piloting the survey and following up with non-respondents to increase response rates. In addition, Chicago is large enough and diverse enough in a variety of ways to suggest that findings from that city might be *somewhat* more generalizable than those from Boston or Seattle. In the end, we were able to include a second city in our sample and chose Seattle, which, we believed, might provide more of a contrast in terms of program quality than Boston would.

Our sampling strategy was to reach all providers and most program sites within certain categories that serve low-income children, namely, settlements, youth-serving organizations, and large non-profit child care providers that provide local or state child care subsidies for

eligible families.[12] Initially we planned to sample a small percentage in other categories such as programs run by the public schools, parks programs, drop-in programs, and library programs. However, although we were able to include a small number of "Park Kids" programs run by the Chicago Park District in the sample, we decided to focus primary on programs operated by community-based organizations.[13] (In Seattle, we did survey a number of programs located in public elementary schools, but these are programs operated by outside community organizations.)

Survey Design

Intended for program coordinators and directors, the survey consisted primarily of multiple choice questions, with some open-ended follow-up questions. Topics included: (1) general program data on sponsorship, facilities, size, funding, and staffing: (2) children's background, including language issues experienced by children, and their race or ethnicity; (3) staff education and experience; (4) policies, staff roles, and activities related to homework; (5) program challenges around homework and homework help; (6) learning, enrichment, and literacy materials; room layout as it pertains to literacy; (7) practices that encourage children to engage in literacy activities; (8) other literacy-related enrichment activities such as art, science, drama, music, cultural activity; (9) use of computers; (10) role of volunteers; and (11) communication with parents. (Copies of the survey and cover letters can be found in Appendix E.)

We developed the survey and cover letters during the fall in consultation with members of an internal advisory group, the Survey Lab at the University of Chicago, the directors of Chicago and Seattle MOST, and five external advisors.[14] The survey was pilot tested with a small group of directors of after-school programs in Chicago. These directors reported that they found the survey interesting and not too long, and that it made them think about literacy in new ways.

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[12] As we did in the MOST Initiative, we used a definition of after-school programs as center- or agency-based services that provide some combination of care and protection, enrichment, academic support, and opportunity for free play to children ages 5 to 14, on a regular basis (at least two or three, but typically five days, per week). Most after-school programs share a common activity structure--some homework time, arts and crafts, table games, physical activity, expressive arts and/or cultural activity, perhaps some tutoring, reading time, and science activity. Many programs also provide full-day care during school holidays and the summer months.

[13] We also knew that although it would have been interesting to do so, it would be difficult to make arrangements to survey staff of after-school programs in Chicago public schools within our time frame. The Chicago Public Schools offer a variety of after-school options, the largest of which is the Lighthouse Program. The program began during the 1996-97 school year at forty elementary schools placed on probation because of low scores on standardized achievement tests. The first hour is "intensively" focused on math, reading, and test-taking skills, using a prescripted lesson approach; the second hour is intended to be more social and extracurricular in orientation. In 1997-98, at least 145 elementary schools participated in the Lighthouse program. The number of participating schools more than doubled during 1998-99, thanks in part to new federal funding received through the 21st Century Community Learning Center program.

[14] The following individuals provided helpful feedback on the survey content and format: Michele Cahill, Senior Program Officer at Carnegie Corporation; Joan McLane, a professor of child development at the Erikson Institute who has done extensive research and writing on literacy development; Susan O'Connor, formerly of NIOST and co-author of a recent paper on literacy in after-school programs; Eric Schaps, President of the Developmental Studies Center, developer of a literature-based after-school curriculum, and Brenetta Ward, of the YMCA of Metropolitan Seattle and former coordinator of Seattle's Reading is Cool Initiative.

Survey Administration

The survey was mailed out during the third week of January, 2000, to 450 programs. The main source of contact information were mailing lists supplied by the resource and referral agencies in the two cities, the Day Care Action Council of Illinois in Chicago and Child Care Resources in Seattle. (A small number of the program names were obtained from Chicago MOST and the Chicago Park District.) The survey was aimed at directors or supervisors of programs that serve a consistent group of school-age children on a regular basis, at least two days a week. A reminder postcard was sent out at the beginning of February. By the end of February, our response rate was approximately 30%. A second mailing went out at that time, and by the end of March, the response rate was 37%. During April and May, we sent a third mailing using certified mail to selected non-respondents that were major providers in each city; this was followed up during June with a small telephone survey. We achieved a final response rate of approximately 48%.[15]

There seem to be several explanations for the lack of returns. One was the inherent limitation in relying primarily on resource and referral mailing lists for the survey sample. Because the updating process is time-consuming and ongoing, these lists are not necessarily complete or up to date and are likely to misrepresent the total population of out-of-school time programs. For example, unlicensed and license-exempt programs are less likely to be listed than licensed programs. In Chicago, programs run by the public schools are not included; and very few programs run by parochial or other private schools are included in the lists from either city. Although the Chicago Park District has over 70 "Park Kids" programs, only twenty that are currently receiving staff training through Chicago MOST on the NSACA Quality Standards were selected by the Park District to receive the survey. (And despite this connection to Chicago MOST, it has been very difficult to get many of these programs to respond to our mailings.)

Other reasons include the fact that directors and staff of after-school programs are simply very busy and the survey may appear to be time-consuming. We were mindful of the length of the survey in the drafting process, of course, and eliminated a number of questions from earlier drafts. Yet, in order for the survey to yield any meaningful information about literacy practices in after-school programs, we believed that it had to be as long as it is. Although we hoped that sending the survey out under the names of both Chapin Hall and MOST would motivate people to respond, this may not have been as strong an inducement as initially assumed. We also have learned through our follow-up telephone survey that the mailing lists used—primarily obtained through the resource and referral agencies in Chicago and Seattle—contained a number of programs that either do not serve school age children or are no longer in existence.

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[15] In addition, at the suggestion of staff members from PASE (Partnership for After School Education), we tried to expand our sample and sent an additional 150 questionnaires for them to distribute during a meeting with after-school providers in New York City in June. To our disappointment, only two questionnaires were returned.

In the end, even though we hoped for a somewhat higher rate of returns, we were pleased with the quality of the responses received. We also are confident that the survey sample represents the major providers serving low-income children in each city, including a sizeable proportion of second-language children.

Data Analysis

Survey findings were entered into a Filemaker database and exported to SPSS for analysis. The data were organized to address the major research questions guiding the study. The survey data were particularly relevant to questions about the range of current objectives, practices, settings and activities related to literacy in after-school programs serving low-income children and the contextual factors that influence these literacy practices and environments. In the analysis, we looked for variability in theoretically important contextual and programmatic predictors and in literacy practices themselves. For example, factors that might shape literacy practices in after-school programs include type of sponsor and setting, children's backgrounds, community characteristics, program goals and philosophy, staff background and skills, adequacy of financial resources, and staff understanding of the concept of literacy.

Case Studies

Using interviews, observations, and documentary analysis, we conducted case studies based on of a small sample of programs in order to complement the breadth of the survey. Case studies allowed us to examine in depth the dynamics and practices within a range of programs; to come to understand more deeply the nature, dynamics and constraints to literacy practices and activities. They also allowed us to explore instances of programs reported to be doing exemplary and/or interesting literacy activities.

In selecting programs for case study, we looked for variation in the type of setting and sponsorship and population and community characteristics. We considered such sites as arts-based programs, extended-service school programs, academically-focused after-school programs providing one-to-one tutoring and mentoring; library-based enrichment programs offering homework help, reading, computer activities, and book-based arts activities; and traditional youth-serving programs, such as YMCA and Boys & Girls Club sites, including a small number of NSACA-accredited program. In addition, we sought to observe examples of after-school programs implementing particular curricular approaches supportive of literacy development. These were the Developmental Studies Center's literature-based curriculum; the Chicago Commons' Reggio Emilia approach, a project-based curriculum emphasizing collaboration, creative thinking, and multiple means of symbolic representation; and "Reading is Cool!" a "literacy infusion" model that includes recreational reading, creative writing, poetry, journal writing, puppet shows, and dramatic arts.

During the fall of 2000 through the summer of 2001, we made multiple visits to sixteen programs in three cities; six in Chicago, six in New York, and four in Seattle. All were in low socioencomic communities and served a high proportion of low-income and/or minority children. Some of these programs were selected on the basis of reports from foundations, literature reviews, and recommendations from intermediaries of programs doing exemplary and/or interesting work in the area of literacy.

- Chicago: Chicago Commons Guadalupano Center, Chicago Commons NIA Center, Erie Neighborhood House, LaSalle Street Cycle, Little Black Pearl Workshop, and Street Level Youth Media
- New York: Coalition for Hispanic Family Services (Arts & Literacy Program), East Harlem Tutorial, Forrest Hills Neighborhood House, Hartley House, Interfaith Neighbors, and Riverdale Neighborhood House
- Seattle: Chinese Information Service Center, El Centro de la Raza, Refugee Women's Alliance, and the YMCA Enrichment Program at Bailey Gatzert.

Additional program data came from two other sources. One, we re-examined ten case studies conducted for the MOST Evaluation. Second, we made single visits to observe and interview staff at ten additional programs. Among these programs were four Chicago programs, the Carole Robertson Center, Chinese American Service League, Hyde Park Neighborhood Club, and Valentine Boys & Girls Club. We also observed four additional programs in Seattle, the, Delridge Youth Center, Meadowbrook Community Center, Seattle Emergency Housing Service, and YMCA Enrichment Program at Thurgood Marshall; the LA's Best program at Esperanza School in Los Angeles, and the Columbia Park Boys & Girls Club in San Francisco.

The sample of case study sites included traditional, well-established after-school programs run by youth-serving organizations and social service agencies as well as programs that are doing interesting work with school-age children in the area of literacy, the arts, and/or cultural enrichment. Interviews with program directors and selected staff members focused on the following topics: program organization and structure, funding, objectives and priorities, perceptions of the children served, parental expectations, staffing, approach to and types of literacy activity, literacy-related in-service experiences, staff knowledge and perspectives on literacy, and challenges to doing literacy activities and fostering children's literacy development. Observations allowed us to describe in detail program environments, including the day-to-day schedule of activities; the arrangement of the room furnishings and materials; the supply, variety, and quality of literacy and other materials; displays of children's work, and staff and children's activities. Observations also gave us a sense of actual (as opposed to reported) practices, including the frequency and nature of staff-child interactions, child-child interactions, and children's engagement in literacy activities. We tried to schedule some of our visits to capture any non-routine literacy activities or projects.

Data Analysis

Field notes and interview transcripts and summaries were coded and analyzed qualitatively to identify themes and trends in the data. The data were organized and coded primarily by their contribution to addressing each research question: current typical practice, range of practices, factors shaping practices, exemplary practices and approaches. We examined each of the case study programs as a whole, described its policies and practices, and tried to discern relationships among key variables (e.g., how staff characteristics seem to shape the way they relate to literacy activities). We looked for exemplars or models of good practice within each program. We also looked at particular variables across all the programs observed to discern consistent patterns and variability with respect to particular variables (e.g. how homework time is done).

Contacts and Interviews with Intermediary Organizations and Literacy Specialists

We met or talked with representatives of a number of intermediary organizations working with after-school programs including Chicago and Seattle MOST, NIOST, PASE, the Literacy Assistance Center, the Institute of Literacy Studies, The After-School Corporation, Developmental Studies Center, Girls, Inc., LA's BEST, and the YMCA. During the spring and summer, we communicated with individuals representing a number of intermediary organizations working with programs in the area of literacy development. These include the individuals affiliated with organizations listed above and others, including Lena Townsend (the Bowne Foundation), Kim Sabo (City University of New York), Susan Neuman (formerly of Temple University), Joan McLane (Erikson Institute), David Alexander (National Institute on Out-of-School Time), Fran Chamberlain (Developmental Studies Center) and Richard Weissbourd (Read Boston).

Additional opportunities to share ideas and findings emerging from our study with others came during presentations at two conferences, the National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA) Conference in April, 2000, and the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) Conference in April, 2001. Audiences for both sessions expressed considerable interest in the topic of the role of after-school programs in supporting children's literacy development. Several participants in the NSACA Conference session reinforced issues emerging from the survey such as the lack of connections between schools and after-school programs, the lack of time—sometimes because of homework demands—to do literacy activities with children, the lack of space, and lack of experience and training among frontline staff. Some participants also expressed their disappointment that the presentation did not include more concrete suggestions about how to incorporate literacy activities in programs, suggesting that the field is hungry for more programmatic resources in this area.

Documentary Analysis

In addition to program materials gathered during our site visits, we also analyzed selected publications on curricular approaches to after-school programming in general, and literacy development in particular, as well as reports of program evaluations. These included materials pertaining to KidzLit, an after-school reading program by the Developmental Studies Center; evaluation studies of LA's BEST, an after-school program based in the public schools; and the Reading is Cool! approach developed by Schools Out Washington, as well as other curricular resources.

APPENDIX B

Mail Survey Sample

APPENDIX B: DESCRIPTION OF SURVEY SAMPLE

A sample of 212 participated in the mail survey, 124 programs in Chicago and 88 programs in Seattle. As Table 1 shows, the largest group of respondents consisted of program coordinators or directors, followed by agency directors or school principals. A small number of surveys were completed by lead staff, education coordinators, or social workers.

Table 1. Description of Survey Respondents

Position/title	Frequency/Percentage		
	Chicago	Seattle	Total
Youth/ School-Age Program Director/Coordinator	58%	72%	64%
Agency Director, Assistant Director, School Principal	25%	15%	21%
Lead Staff (Head Teacher or Group Worker)	5%	9%	7%
Park Supervisor, Site Coordinator	7%	--	4%
Administrative Staff	2%	2%	2%
Education Coordinator	2%	1%	2%
Social or Family Support Worker	1%	--	1%
Sample size	**124**	**88**	**212**

Sponsorship and Program Type

About a fourth of the respondents labeled their program as a non-profit child care center (or, in a few cases, home), and another fourth, as a not-for-profit social service agency or settlement. About 17% of the respondents represented a youth-serving organization (e.g., Boys & Girls Club or YMCA), 13%, a parks and recreation program, and 10% a for-profit child care center. Another 10% were made up of respondents from a parochial, other private, or public school. As Table 2 indicates, Chicago respondents represented a higher proportion of non-profit social service agencies and youth-serving organizations than Seattle respondents. Seattle respondents, in contrast, represented a higher proportion of for-profit child care programs and programs run by the public schools.[16]

Table 2. Types of Organizations Represented by Respondents

Organization	Percentage of Respondents		
	Chicago	Seattle	Total
Non-profit child care center or home	27%	23%	25%
Non-profit social service agency or settlement	29%	14%	23%
Youth-serving organization (Boys & Girls Club, YMCA)	25%	18%	17%
Parks and recreation agency	13%	14%	13%
For-profit child care center or home	7%	14%	10%
Parochial or other private school	5%	7%	6%
Public school	1%	9%	4%
Church or other religious organization	1%	2%	1%
Non-profit education or arts organization	2%	--	1%

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[16] This reflects differences in the resource and referral database listings from which we drew most of our respondents as well as differences in the roles and importance of particular providers in each city.

Nearly two-thirds (63%) provided closed enrollment programs only, while a fourth provided both open drop-in and closed enrollment programs for school-age children. There was some variation between the two sites in this regard. A third of Seattle respondents provided both types of programs, compared to only 18% of Chicago respondents. The vast majority (93%) of the respondents served children five days a week. Most (87%) of the programs were open for three hours or longer after school. Nearly three-fourths were licensed programs, and the others were either license-exempt or non-licensed. Only a fourth of the programs had received accreditation by a national agency, in most cases by the early childhood organization, NAEYC.

Table 3. Average Number of Children Served Daily

Average Number Served/Day	Percentage of Respondents		
	Chicago	Seattle	Total
Less than 20	19%	13%	16%
20-39	23%	34%	28%
40-69	28%	32%	30%
70-99	16%	14%	15%
100 or More	14%	7%	11%

Children Served

The average number of school-age children served on a daily basis reported by the respondents ranged from a low of three to a high of 225 children. Table 3 shows that the median number fell in the range between 40 and 50. A higher percentage of Chicago respondents (14%) than Seattle respondents (7%) represented programs serving a hundred children or more.

There was considerable ethnic diversity among the children served by the survey respondents. The largest racial and ethnic categories were Black/African-American, White/European-American, and Hispanic/Latino. Table 4 presents the percentage of programs serving one or more children in each group.

Table 4. Percentage of Programs Serving Children of Different Ethnic Groups

Ethnic Category	Percentage of Respondents*		
	Chicago	Seattle	All Programs
Black/African-American	73%	85%	78%
White/European-American	41%	86%	60%
Hispanic/Latino	51%	67%	58%
Asian/Pacific Islander	23%	74%	43%
Black/African or Black/Caribbean	41%	34%	38%
Indian/Pakistani	12%	14%	14%
Native American	3%	30%	14%
Eastern European/Russian	12%	13%	12%
Middle Eastern/Arabic	8%	11%	9%
Multi-racial	2%	7%	4%
Other	2%	7%	4%

*Respondents that reported serving one or more children of each ethnic group

Most of the programs in the survey sample serve low-income children, with 88% providing subsidies or reduced fees for children whose families demonstrate financial need. In a majority (53%) of the programs, at least half of the enrolled children receive some kind of subsidy. A sizable percentage (40%) provides subsidies to most (75% to 100%) of their

participants. As Table 4 indicates, there was some disparity between these findings for the two cities. Chicago programs served a higher proportion of children eligible for reduced fees. More than half of the Chicago programs provided subsidies to three-fourths or more of their children compared to only 16% of the Seattle programs responding to the survey.[17]

Table 5. Percentage of School-Age Children Receiving Subsidies

Percentage Children with Subsidies/Reduced Fees	Percentage of Respondents		
	Chicago	Seattle	Total
Less than 25%	25%	51%	36%
25 to 49%	5%	19%	11%
50 to 74%	13%	14%	13%
75 to 100%	57%	16%	40%

Additionally, the survey sample represents programs serving a large number of children for whom English is not their primary language. About half of the programs reported that they serve one or more children who speak English as a second language. The most common second language represented by the sample was Spanish (approximately a third of the sample), followed by Chinese, Vietnamese and other SE Asian languages (about a fourth of the sample); about 12% of programs serve second language children who speak Polish, Russian or another Slavic language. About a fourth of the programs have staff who speak another language in addition to English.

Table 6 indicates that there were a few variations in the number of children served as a function of the reported primary goal of a program; for instance, a respondents representing recreational programs tended to serve larger groups of children compared to other program types, while a higher percentage of "academic" programs served smaller numbers of children.[18]

Table 6. Average Number of Children Served Daily by Program Type

Average Number Served/Day	Program Type[a]/Percentage of Respondents			
	Child Care	Academic	Enrichment	Recreation
Less than 20	18%	21%	11%	12%
20-39	24%	31%	34%	32%
40-69	30%	23%	34%	28%
70-99	17%	10%	16%	25%
100 or more	11%	15%	5%	13%
Sample size	**92**	**48**	**40**	**32**

[a]Respondents indicating primary purpose of program is provision of child care, enrichment, academic help, or recreation.

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[17] This reflects differences in the sizes and demographics of the two cities as well as differences in the types of programs (and the economic mix of children they serve) represented by the respondents.

[18] As reported elsewhere in this report, survey respondents were asked to indicate the primary goal or purpose of their program among four options. They selected child care most often (44%), followed by academic support (23%), enrichment (19%), and recreation (15%).

In addition, there was some variation in the provision of subsidies as a function of program type. Compared to other program types, respondents whose primary purpose was recreational served a smaller percentage of children requiring financial assistance.

Table 7. Average Number of Children Receiving Subsidies by Program Type[a]

Percentage Children with Subsidies/ Reduced Fees	Percentage of Respondents			
	Child Care	Academic	Enrichment	Recreation
Less than 25%	35%	25%	40%	56%
25-49%	10%	8%	13%	9%
50-74	15%	21%	5%	6%
75-100%	41%	46%	43%	28%
Sample size	92	48	40	32

[a]Respondents indicating primary purpose of program is provision of child care, enrichment, academic help, or recreation.

Staffing

The surveyed after-school programs have about five or six staff members, on average, one or two full-time and three or four part-time. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of the respondents reported having some volunteer help in their programs (although we did not ask them to specify the number of volunteers). Most often, volunteers were high school or college students and parents. Other volunteers included local business employees, senior citizen, and participants in public service organizations such as AmeriCorps and America Reads.

Table 8. Number of Full- and Part-time Staff in Surveyed Programs

Number of Staff	Percentage of Respondents	
	Full-time	Part-time
One	31%	15%
Two	25%	14%
Three	10%	13%
Four	7%	11%
Five or more	14%	40%
None or not reported	13%	17%

Table 9. Types of Volunteers in Surveyed Programs

Volunteer Category	Percentage of Respondents*
High school students	66%
Parents	58%
College students	45%
Community members/senior citizens	28%
AmeriCorps/America Reads/City Year	16%
Business employees	15%

*Percentage of the 137 respondents who reported using volunteers in their programs.

Staff Background

Staff education and experience levels varied widely from one program to another. Educational levels of directors, program coordinators and lead staff ranged from having only a high school diploma (or GED) to having a graduate degree. Two-thirds of directors and program coordinators (67%) have college degrees, but less than a third (28%) of lead staff have college degrees. There were no major differences between the two cities in terms of staff background. Seattle staff had somewhat higher levels of experience working with children (an average of almost 8 years vs. 7 years for Chicago). They also had a greater proportion of lead staff with college degrees but also had more lead staff with only a high school diploma than staff of Chicago programs. Tutors and special instructors (e.g., in the areas of art, drama, and language) in Seattle had somewhat higher levels of education than Chicago specialists, but this was not a large category of staff in either city (8% of the total number of staff positions reported).

Table 10. Education and Experience of School-age Program Staff

Staff Position	Education Level*		# Years Working with School-Age Children	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
Director, Program Coordinator	4.5	1-6	10.4	0-35
Lead Staff	3.1	1-6	4.5	0-30
Assistant Staff	2.2	1-6	3.4	0-20
Tutors, Special Instructors	3.6	1-6	6.1	0-20

*Scale: 1=HS/GED (High School degree or equivalency); 2=Some College (some college courses but no degree); 3=Advanced Certificate (a certificate in a special area of study such as school-age, child development, etc.); 4=AA (Associates degree); 5=BA/BS (Bachelors degree); 6=MA/MS/MEd (Masters degree)

Table 11. Range of Education Levels of School-age Program Staff

Education	Staff Position			
	Directors and Coordinators	Lead Staff	Assistant Staff	Tutors/ Specialists
High School diploma	2%	10%	33%	12%
Some college (incl. Adv. Cert.)	17%	45%	48%	34%
AA degree	14%	17%	8%	9%
BA degree	47%	25%	11%	29%
Masters degree	20%	3%	1%	16%
Number of staff*	286	481	171	82

*Number of staff for whom information was provided; a total of 1077 staff positions were listed among the 212 survey respondents.

With regard to the in-service training of front-line staff, survey respondents reported that the most frequent areas in which staffs received training during the last two years were guidance and discipline, child development, recreational activities, and art experiences for school-age children. Fewer than half of the programs reported that their staffs had received training in the areas of homework help, literacy, or math and science.

Table 12. Staff In-service Training Experiences

Training Category	Percentage of Respondents*
Guidance and discipline	77%
Development of school-age children	69%
Recreational activities	65%
Art experiences	58%
Program management	41%
Homework help	39%
Literacy development	36%
Math and science activities	34%
Other	17%

*Percentage of 212 respondents reporting that frontline staff had
in-service training in each area during the previous two program years.

APPENDIX C

Tabulated Survey Findings

APPENDIX C: TABULATED SURVEY FINDINGS

When survey respondents were asked to indicate the principal goal or purpose of their after-school program, child care was selected most often (44%), followed by academic support (23%), enrichment (19%), and recreation (15%). (Without child care as an option, each of the other three purposes was selected by about a third of the respondents.) A somewhat higher percentage of Chicago respondents described the main purpose of their programs as academic compared to Seattle respondents, who, in contrast, were more likely to view enrichment as the primary purpose of their programs.

Table 13. Primary Purpose of Surveyed Programs

Primary Purpose	Percentage of Respondents		
	Chicago	Seattle	
Child care	44%	44%	44%
Academic support	25%	19%	23%
Enrichment	16%	23%	19%
Recreation/free time	15%	15%	15%
Sample size	**124**	**88**	**212**

Literacy Environments

Most of the surveyed programs provide access to writing tools and materials and at least a modest selection of fiction and non-fiction books. A majority of the programs responding to the survey (71%) have money in their budgets to purchase books, although we do not know how much is actually allotted for reading materials. A greater percentage of the surveyed programs (83%) receive books through donations. The public library is a source of books for less than half (42%) of the programs. In addition, many programs provide language-rich board games and academic resources–encyclopedias, dictionaries, reference books and textbooks. Props for dramatic play, which can provide a context or stimulus for children to explore and play with literacy tools and ideas, also can be found in a number of after-school programs.

Table 14. Availability of Literacy-Related Materials

Material	Percentage of Respondents*
Variety of writing tools--pens, pencils, markers	99%
Variety of paper for writing and drawing	98%
Variety of storybooks	97%
Board games	94%
Dictionary for children's use	92%
Variety of nonfiction books	88%
Books about different ethnic/cultural groups	77%
Rulers and calculators for children's use	73%
Dramatic play materials	72%
Word games, crossword puzzles, Mad Libs	60%
Puppets	58%
Educational computer software	57%
Worksheets	57%
Children's magazines	53%
Tape recorders for children's use	51%
Books for children and families to borrow	49%
Set of encyclopedias	48%
Children's notebooks or journals	47%
Computer children use for word processing	44%
Books on audio tapes	33%
Books in languages other than English	31%
Internet access for children	15%
Sample size	**212**

*Material "available regularly" vs. "available on special occasions" or "not available"

Less commonly available are materials such as crossword puzzles and other word games, puppets, educational computer software, children's magazines, worksheets, and tape recorders. Almost half of the programs responding to the survey reported offering some kind of lending library of books for children and/or their families to borrow, journals for children to write

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in, and computers with word processing capabilities. Only a third or fewer provide books on audiotapes, books in languages other than English, and computer access to the Internet.

As Table 15 suggests, there were differences in material resources among programs that may reflect differences in their goals and purposes. For instance, survey informants representing recreational programs reported less often that they supply multicultural books, children's magazines, non-English language books, and educational computer software than respondents representing other types of programs. Academically oriented programs are more likely than other programs to use worksheets and own a set of encyclopedias, but are less likely to provide dramatic play materials, puppets, and tape recorders.

Table 15. Variations in the Availability of Literacy-Related Materials by Program Type

Material	Program Type/Percentage of Respondents*				
	CH.CARE	ACAD.	ENRICH.	RECR.	ALL
Books about different ethnic/cultural groups	80%	75%	85%	66%	77%
Dramatic play materials	79%	54%	73%	75%	72%
Puppets	63%	40%	70%	53%	58%
Educational computer software	61%	60%	58%	41%	57%
Worksheets	51%	71%	55%	53%	57%
Children's magazines	55%	48%	63%	41%	53%
Tape recorders for children's use	63%	31%	53%	38%	51%
Set of encyclopedias	41%	65%	45%	44%	48%
Books in languages other than English	27%	38%	40%	19%	31%
Sample size	92	48	40	32	212

*Material "available regularly" vs. "available on special occasions" or "not available"

Most of the surveyed programs provide a separate area for reading books. Most also provide display areas for the products of children's art activities and many also display children's writing. Two-thirds of those responding to the mail survey) appear to make time in their schedules for children to read on their own, although the amount of time varies according to type of program (see Table 17). They are less likely to set aside time for writing; only about half of the survey respondents reported having a specific time for writing at least once a week.

Table 16. Descriptions of Literacy Environment and Scheduled Activities in Surveyed Programs

Literacy Environment Indicator	Percentage of Respondents
Homework time (optional or required)	98%
There are display areas for children's artwork	97%
There is a separate quiet area for reading books	87%
There are display areas for children's writing	79%
Scheduled time for children to read on their own daily/weekly	66%
Books are displayed in a particular way	53%
Scheduled time for children to write on their own daily/weekly	49%

Table 17. Variations in Scheduled Literacy Activities of Surveyed Programs by Program Type

Literacy Activity	Program Type/Percentage of Respondents*				
	CH.CARE	ACAD.	ENRICH.	RECR.	All
Homework time (optional or required)	98%	100%	95%	97%	98%
Specific time for children to read on their own daily/weekly	60%	88%	68%	47%	66%
Specific time for children to write on their own daily/weekly	42%	71%	45%	44%	49%
Sample size	92	48	40	32	212

Table 18. Frequency of Selected Literacy-related Activities of Children in Surveyed Programs

Children's Activity	Percentage of Respondents*
Read for their own pleasure	75%
Read to other children or adults	51%
Talk about books they have read	46%
Go on field trips	38%
Sing or do other musical performances	37%
Write stories, songs, plays or poetry	33%
Act out stories or plays, including	25%
Write in their own journals	21%
Write about their experiences	21%
Use books, Internet to do research	19%
Attend theater, dance, music events	14%
Write letters/newsletters about program	11%
Write letters to other people	10%

*Activity done "frequently" rather than "sometimes" or "rarely/not at all."

Literacy Activities

The most common literacy activities in after-school programs, according to both our survey and observations of programs, are homework and independent reading. About three-fourths of the survey respondents reported that children frequently read for their own pleasure and/or have adults who read to them. In about half of the surveyed programs, children spend time reading to other children or adults. In less than half of the programs, however, do adults help children choose books to read, and in less than a fourth do adults take children to the public library.

Table 19. Frequency of Literacy-related Activities of Adults in After-school Programs

Adult Activity	Percentage of Respondents*
Converse with children during	91%
Sit and talk with children during	83%
Read to children	68%
Tutor children in academic areas	66%
Listen to children read	62%
Read children's writing	58%
Tell stories to children	49%
Help children choose books to	42%
Take children to the public library	21%
Write responses to children's	19%

*Activity done "frequently" rather than "sometimes" or "rarely/not at all"

Approximately two-thirds of the survey sample reported that staffs read to children on a regular basis, and better than half listen to children read to them. Other kinds of literacy experiences occur less frequently. Only about a third of the respondents indicated children write their own stories, songs, plays or poetry. Even smaller percentages reported that children spend time acting out stories and plays, writing about their experiences, and using books or the Internet to research new topics.

Most of the survey respondents reported that adults talk "frequently" with individual children during activities and while eating their snacks. Many after-school programs also set aside time for story reading and group discussions. In only about half of the surveyed programs do adults tell stories to children, and in only slightly more than a third (37%) do children reportedly sing or do other kinds of musical performances. Field trips, which are another potential source of learning and can be connected to reading and writing activities, are provided by only 38% of the surveyed programs on a frequent basis. Even fewer are able to attend artistic performances.

Table 20. Frequency of Selected Literacy Activities by Program Type

Activity	Number Percentage of Respondents*				
	CH.CARE	ACAD.	ENRICH.	RECR.	All
Children read for their own pleasure	74%	69%	90%	69%	75%
Adults read books to children	62%	77%	75%	63%	68%
Adults tutor children in specific academic areas	59%	90%	63%	53%	66%
Adults listen to children read	52%	81%	65%	56%	62%
Adults read children's writing	59%	65%	53%	47%	58%
Children read to other children or adults	43%	60%	55%	50%	51%
Children talk about books they have read	33%	56%	60%	50%	46%
Children write stories, songs, plays or poetry	26%	44%	40%	25%	33%
Children write in their own journals	19%	27%	23%	13%	21%
Adults write responses to children's writing	18%	31%	15%	6%	19%
Sample size	**92**	**48**	**40**	**32**	**212**

Homework

Homework time is a regular activity in almost all of the programs surveyed, and most after school programs as a minimum encourage children to do their homework. At least a third of programs report assigning homework if a child has none. However, programs differed in their policies about whether it is an optional or a required activity. In at least two-thirds of the surveyed programs, children spend time on homework although it is reported to be a choice somewhat more often than a requirement.

After-school staffs typically assume responsibility for supervising homework time and assisting children with homework if they ask for help, although they are less likely to check homework for completeness or accuracy. Staffs of some programs give children incentives for doing their homework regularly, and some also provide additional homework activities for children without school assignments.

More often than not, after-school programs do not keep track of children's school progress. Less than half (43%) of the survey respondents reported that they look at children's report cards, and only a fifth of them reported that they maintain copies of their report cards or other written information on children's school achievement on file. In all of these aspects, there were wide variations among programs depending on their primary purposes or goals. As expected, academically-oriented programs were much more likely than other types of programs to look at children's report cards and/or keep copies of them and other records of school progress.

Table 21. Homework (HW) Policies by Program Type

Activity	Program Type/Percentage of Respondents*				
	CH.CARE	ACAD.	ENRICH.	RECR.	ALL
HW is one of many activity choices; most children choose to do it in the program	36%	17%	31%	13%	27%
HW is one of many activity choices; only a few children do it in the program	23%	8%	21%	31%	20%
All children are required to do all of their HW at a designated time	9%	44%	13%	22%	19%
All children are required to do some of their HW at a designated time	18%	27%	13%	19%	19%
Children are "encouraged" to do some HW at the program	9%	4%	6%	6%	7%
Whether children do HW depends on parents' preferences	3%	--	1%	6%	4%
HW is not an activity in our program	2%	--	5%	3%	2%
All children are required to do HW but choose when to do it	1%	--	3%	--	1%
Sample size	**92**	**48**	**40**	**32**	**212**

Table 22. Staff Roles in Relation to Children's Schoolwork in Surveyed Programs

Staff Role	Percentage of Respondents*
Supervise homework, observe and help if children ask	95%
Communicate with parents on a regular basis	71%
Have some contact with children's teachers	52%
Check and make sure homework is complete	51%
Check and make sure homework is accurate	50%
Look at children's report cards	43%
Provide additional homework activities if child has none	36%
Reward children for doing homework on a regular basis	35%
Communicate with teachers about children's schoolwork	32%
Call parents if child is having difficulty with homework	26%
Write notes to parents on a regular basis	24%
Keep copies of children's report cards on file	21%
Keep written records of children's school progress	19%
Contact teacher if child is having difficulty	18%
Have regular meetings with teachers	10%

*Note: Multiple responses are possible.

Although program staffs typically talk with parents at pick-up times, only 71% of the survey respondents report that they have "regular" communication with parents. A small percentage, one-fourth of the sample, writes notes to parents on a regular basis. A little more than a third reportedly call parents if children seem to be having difficulty with school, while only a fourth call parents if their children are having difficulty with homework. In a fifth (21%) of the programs, parents ask staff to talk to teachers about their children's schoolwork. Staffs of Seattle programs are somewhat more likely to have some contact with teachers, undoubtedly reflecting the fact that many Seattle programs run by community-based organizations are located in school buildings, in contrast to Chicago programs. In turn, staff of Chicago programs report more frequently that parents ask them to talk to teachers.

A majority (61%) of 5 of to 7 year olds spend less than a half hour doing homework while at their program, while a majority of 8 to 10 year olds (61%) and 11 to 13 year olds (71%) spend between half an hour to an hour on homework. Although older children, 11 to 13 years of age, spend greater amounts of time than younger children do on homework, on average, only a small percentage (13%) spend longer than an hour.

Table 23. Time Spent on Homework in After-School Programs by Age Group

Time	Age Group/Percentage of Respondents		
	5-7 year olds	8-10 year olds	11-13 year olds
Less than 30 minutes	61%	35%	16%
30-60 minutes	38%	62%	71%
More than 1 hour	1%	4%	13%
Number of responses*	**199**	**200**	**164**

*Number of respondents who provide homework time for each age group. Lower response rate for 11-13 year olds reflects the fact that fewer programs serve older children.

There was ambivalence about whether or not homework occupies to much time in after-school programs. Almost half of the survey respondents did not think that homework takes up too much time in after-school programs. About one-fifth believe that homework does take up too much time. A third of the respondents were uncertain or neutral. Responses to the question of whether children have enough time to relax and play after school were also mixed. A little more than a third of the sample believe children do not have enough time to relax and play after school. A little more than a fourth believe children do have enough time to relax and play after school, while a little more than a third were uncertain.

Table 24. Survey Respondents' Attitudes about Literacy and Homework in After-school Programs

Attitude Statement	Percentage of Responses			Mean*
	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Neutral	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	
Parents help more with homework in the evening	65%	28%	7%	2.0
Children usually need adult help with homework	62%	32%	6%	2.1
Parents often don't have time to help with homework	65%	21%	14%	2.3
Staff are too busy; would like more time to talk	46%	33%	21%	2.6
Teachers give children too much homework	47%	27%	26%	2.7
Parents lack language or other skills to help with	45%	26%	28%	2.7
Children do not have enough time to relax and play	38%	34%	28%	2.8
Parents expect programs to do too much to help with homework	20%	38%	42%	3.3
Schools expect to do too much to help with homework	23%	33%	44%	3.3
Homework takes too much time in after-school programs	19%	35%	46%	3.4
After-school programs should be responsible for making children do homework	16%	24%	60%	3.7
Children only read or write when they do homework	15%	20%	64%	3.8
Staffs do not have skills to help older children w/	16%	16%	68%	3.9

*Rating scale: 1=agree strongly; 2=agree; 3=neutral; 4=disagree; 5=disagree strongly

Respondents generally agreed that although children usually need adult assistance with their homework, after-school programs should not be responsible for ensuring that children do their homework. Yet, while parents should spend more time helping their children with homework, they often do not have time and, sometimes skills, to assist their children.

Issues and Challenges

Survey respondents described a wide variety of factors that limit their capacity to provide literacy activities for children. These included philosophical disagreements with parents, physical limitations such as time, space and material resources, and personnel, either a lack of staff or a lack of staff qualifications. One of the biggest barriers to implementing literacy activities was lack of space. Another perceived limitation was a lack of resources. Equally significant was the limitation posed by not having enough staff qualified to engage children in literacy activities. Some of these comments signaled the view that literacy activities should be adult-initiated and directed. For example, "our program needs more staff and books to implement literacy," "we need more adult volunteers," and "it takes a lot of effort for the one staff member who can help [with literacy] at a time while the other one or two are cleaning snack and preparing for next activity." On the other hand, a few comments reflected the view

that literacy can and should be engaging and fun for children and the need for increased staff knowledge about appropriate practices for school-age programs in all areas of development. Another burden is posed by children who are unable to get help with their school work from their families. Several respondents, while believing that helping children with homework is the duty of the family, recognized the reality of parents who are unable or unwilling to assist their children.

Table 25. Perceived Challenges to Implementing Literacy Activities in After-school Programs

Challenge	Percentage of Responses
Parents expect too much from program and/or do not do enough at home	16%
Lack of space and facilities	13%
Lack of staff; need more volunteers	13%
Lack of funds for resources and/or staff	12%
Schedule and time constraints	8%
Lack of staff qualifications and training	8%
Desire to give children time to relax after school, not duplicate school	7%
Lack of communication with school	3%
Number of responses	**104**

APPENDIX D

Program Observations and Interviews

Appendix D. Program Observations and Interviews

Name of Program/Individual	Location	Date(s)
AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS		
Carole Robertson Center	Chicago	3/2000
Chicago Commons Guadalupano* Kimberly Cothran, Coordinator; Leticia Munoz, Lead Teacher ;Anna Zuazo, Lead Teacher	**Chicago**	11/2000;1/2001; 3/2001; 4/2001; 5/2001; 8/2001
Chicago Commons NIA* Pauline Benton, Coordinator; Theresa Reese, Lead Teacher; Kimberley, Lead Teacher	**Chicago**	10/2000; 11/2000; 1/2001; 4/2001; 6/2001; 8/2001
Chinese American Service League* Yu-ling Wu, AS Program Director	**Chicago**	7/2001; 9/2001
La Salle Street Cycle Wiz Factory* Connie Von Brant, Executive Director	**Chicago**	11/2000; 2/2001; 3/2001
Erie Neighborhood House* Dennis Puhr, Program Director; Valery Shepherd, Assistant Director	**Chicago**	5/2000; 10/2000; 11/2000; 2/2001
Hyde Park Neighborhood Club C. Hamilton-Doyle, Program Director	Chicago	10/1999; 9/2000; 3/2001
Little Black Pearl Workshop Desiree Simpson, Director of Program Operations	Chicago	10/2000; 5/2001
Street-Level Youth Media (Neutral Ground)* Charlotte Saenz-Boldt, Deidre Searcy, Co-Directors Malin Lindelow, Program Coordinator; Jaime Perez, Program Instructor	**Chicago**	10/2000; 3/2001; 5/2001
Valentine Boys & Girls Club Deborah Jaye, Program Director	Chicago	2/8/01
LA's BEST/Esperanza School Gabriela Sanchez, Site Coordinator	Los Angeles, CA	3/2000
Coalition for Hispanic Services Arts & Literacy* Instructors: Jennifer, Joy, Rigoberto, Roberto	**New York**	5/2000; 1/2001; 2/2001
East Harlem Tutorial* Carmen Vega Rivera,-Executive Director	**New York**	5-7/2000; 3/2001; 4/2001; 7/2001
Forrest Hills Neighborhood House Helena Ku, Director of Children & Teen Services	**New York**	11/2000; 12/2000
Hartley House* Andre Esguerra, After-school Director	**New York**	8/2000;10/2000
Interfaith Neighbors* Eileen Lyons, Executive Director; Alice Voygt, Reading Specialist	**New York**	7/2000; 12/2000; 4/2001; 5/2001; 7/2001
Riverdale Neighborhood House* Daniel Eudene, Executive Director; Cathy Smith, Deputy Director of Children's Services	**Bronx, NY**	10/2000; 12/2000
Columbia Park Boys & Girls Club Elena Engle, Program Director; Meenha Lee, Education Director	San Francisco, CA	2/2000

Chinese Information Sevice Center* Lauren Lee, Program Director; Wei-Yi Chu, ASP Coordinator	**Seattle**	**11/2000; 7/2001
Delridge Youth Center Debra Pigott, Program Director	Seattle	11/2000
El Centro de la Raza* Sylvia Blanco, ASP Coordinator, Hilda Magana, Director	**Seattle**	7/2000; 11/2000; 4/2001; 6/2001
Meadowbrook Community Center	Seattle	72000
Refugee Women's Alliance (ReWA)* Pang Chang, SA Program Coordinator	**Seattle**	7/2000; 11/2000; ; 4/2001; 6/2001;
Seattle Emergency Housing Service Elizabeth Perry, AS Program Director	Seattle	7/2000
Thurgood Marshall YMCA Edgar Masmela, Director; DeForrest Phelps, Coordinator	Seattle	4/2001
YMCA Bailey Gatzert* Rick Boudreaux, Program Director	**Seattle**	**11/2000; 7/2001
AGENCY DIRECTORS AND INTERMEDIARY ORGANIZATIONS		
Karen Haigh, Executive Director, **Chicago Commons**	Chicago	20/2000
Barbara Taylor, Associate Director, Program Development, **YMCA of the USA**	Chicago	12/2000
Carla Sanger, President and CEO, **LA's BEST**; Linda Faye Long, Director of Education	Los Angeles, CA	3/2000
Lena Townsend, **Robert Bowne Foundation**	New York	5/2000
Neil Webster, Literacy Coordinator, **Small Settlement Network**	New York	1/2001
Developmental Studies Center: Fran Chamberlain, Dir Afterschool Literature Project; Amy Schoenblum, Materials Developer; Rosalie Torres, Research & Evaluation Director	Oakland, CA	5/2000
Susan B. Neuman, Associate Professor, Temple U.	Philadelphia, PA	4/2000
Mary Bristow, Director of School-Age Enrichment, **YMCA of Greater Seattle**	Seattle	11/2000
Linda Llavore, Reading Is Cool trainer, **School's Out Washington**	Seattle	4/2001
Sarah Mello-Temple, Educational Enrichment Coordinator, **School's Out Washington**	Seattle	7/2000; 11/2000; 4/2001
April Miller, Reading Is Cool trainer, **School's Out Washington**	Seattle	5/2001
Brenetta Ward, Director of Child Care and Community Education, **YMCA of Greater Seattle**	Seattle	11/2000

*Case study sites
**Also observed during the MOST Evaluation (1997-1998)

APPENDIX E

Selected Case Study Descriptions

Box E.1. Arts and Literacy Program, Coalition for Hispanic Family Services, Brooklyn, NY

The *Arts and Literacy Program*, sponsored by the Coalition for Hispanic Family Services, is located in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn, and serves a mostly Latino population of children. The actual programming takes place in local schools, in borrowed space—classroom or cafeteria. As the name implies, the program uses the arts as a vehicle for promoting literacy as well as a variety of other traits and abilities. Although aware of the program's goal of nurturing print literacy, staff take a broad view of the concept, which includes abilities in specific arts, creativity, love of learning, connecting to (and critiquing) culture, and "seeing things differently" (e.g. seeing deeply when looking at the world around one), and less directly, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, learning to work as part of a group, good work habits, self-assessment, and learning to pay attention to details. The staffs are almost all young, more or less aspiring artists in fields such as photography, video, dance, cartooning, instrumental music, creative writing, drama. (The director, Laura Paris, is herself a sculptor.). There are also assistant teachers. The artist-staff work about 20 hours a week, and reportedly start at $15/hour; assistant teachers earn about $10/hour.

The basic program model is built on (more or less) month-long projects designed by the staff, sometimes with input from the kids. (Some staffs are based at a site, others rotate to the different sites to carry out the projects.) The staffs are encouraged not to repeat projects undertaken with one group with other groups; the idea is to keep the projects fresh. A common, defined process, both shapes the projects before work with children is begun, and then with the children. There is a general plan that includes the basic concepts to be conveyed (for example, in one photography project it was "understanding composition" and "color as mood"), learning and skill development goals, the steps in carrying out the project (described as breaking the product of a project and its activities down into component parts), and the "vocabulary" involved. (The scope and length of the projects seem intended to give children a visceral sense of what it takes to work through an idea, from planning, to

To some extent children have individual goals within the context of the common goals of a particular project. Each child has a portfolio that accumulates during the year. When the projects are completed, staff and children sit down and review them, a kind of interim portfolio review . . . Children critique their own work and also learn to critique each other's work.   In reviewing the project with the teacher they reveal the new vocabulary and concepts they have learned, which in turn become part of each child's portfolio. For example, a photography project might require and use such vocabulary as "composition" and "focus", and when he sits down with a particular child at the end of that unit the photography teacher might ask her for the word for something "when it is not blurry", i.e. focused.

All children do at least some creative writing during the year, including poetry, drama and comic strips; and projects involving other art forms usually include some reading or writing along the way, including written plans, and children's own written review of their work on a particular project. We observed the drama teacher read stories to children, and then have them share in the reading, passing the book around a circle. She had them write monologues using specific objects as an inspiration, and then perform them.   The "cartooning" teacher had children write about the characters (i.e. who they were) before drawing them. The children also learned how to use a story board to plan a narrative.   The photography teacher had children give titles to their compositions. One of the props for an end-of-the-year street festival was kites with tails made up of index cards woven through strings, on which children had written wishes. . . One of the two creative writing teachers we observed, himself a poet and Latino, seemed to focus strongly on encouraging children to overcome what he noted as an aversion to writing, and to see themselves as writers; it was also clear from his feedback that he was giving them reasons to be proud of their writing.

One of the most powerful aspects of this program is the fact that staff share a number of fundamental premises and perspectives (on their work and on children), while each being very much an individual and different from his or her colleagues. This is probably a function of **careful hiring and a strong staff socialization process**, through **regular meetings** in which **core ideas are reiterated and more importantly illustrated through project planning and review**.

One important guiding idea is that each of the arts has its own concepts, structure, and vocabulary, and relatedly that a particular artistic product is the result of a large number of identifiable technical and creative skills. By implication, learning the general concepts and vocabulary and the specific skills that underlie making art are both critical to mastery . . .The staff discuss with the children what it takes to make, what must be considered in making, a painting or photograph or poem. As they plan projects, they break down the tasks and steps into smaller elements for children to master.

On one occasion, we observed a poetry-writing class, in which the children were writing poems using the vertical and right-to-left structure of Chinese calligraphy poems. The writing teacher said that he was trying to get the children to understand the structure and conventions underlying different kinds of writing. The photography teacher pressed a group of children on what was behind a picture. He told us that he wanted to help children develop what he called "a visual language," by which he meant the ability to use a variety of concepts—foreground-background, perspective, shape—to create a visual composition. The dance teacher talked of "movement vocabulary", with individual movements the equivalent of words that are combined to create movement sentences, a group of movements which when combined convey a complete thought, and then compositions. The music teacher worked with such fundamental "elements" as music, harmony, melody and rhythm.

Staff share an awareness of the power of working across symbol systems or modalities, i.e., from pictures to words, words to pictures, movement to words, pictures to drama . . . They noted to us that children seemed to have different preferred ways of learning and expressing themselves, and having projects in a range of arts allowed different children to find their expressive and creative niche. We observed one of the writing teachers lead an exercise in which children drew pictures that seemed to them to correspond to particular words (that were not concrete objects). He also had children create "noise poems", corresponding to sounds they were familiar with. (He had children go out into the streets, identify neighborhood sounds and "convert" them to poetry, which could use made up words.). The dance teacher used words to explore movement, for example, asking kids to think of movement/action words that begin with "s" -- swinging, stretching, standing -- and then demonstrate those words. She would read a poem and then ask children to develop movement that corresponds to the images of the poem. She also created a dance out of the pictures and story in a picture book about a particular Puerto Rican myth. One small music project was to take a list of new vocabulary words, unfamiliar to the kids, and have them translate the words into a musical equivalent, in melody or rhythm. Children also wrote songs, identifying themes (e.g. emotions, places), writing about them and then learning to structure them within traditional forms of song. The photography teacher had children take photographs that corresponded to particular emotions.

Staffs also share a commitment to helping children break free of the stereotyped images that they are pummeled with in popular culture. One of the creative writing teachers told us that he tries to get the children "to work toward originality and away from simply repeating stories they have heard or using the same characters from cartoons and games". Yet staff also seem to realize that they can use popular culture to achieve their aims. Thus one photography project involved creating a CD cover (which involved creating a pretend rock group, giving it a personality and a name, etc.).

It appears that there is an emphasis among some staff in development of narrative skills. For example, in one drama class, the children had worked in small groups to develop vignettes related to different steps in a trip to Puerto Rico, and these were then pulled together and acted as a whole, in a kind of small play . . . The photography teacher described one project in which a series of photographs were sequenced in such a way as to create a narrative. They did a movie called Life: they chose words for each letter, words with some personal meaning to them, and then found images to represent/reflect the words chosen. The "cartooning teacher noted that he emphasized development of character and a story.

This program reflects a belief in the important role of performance and product as part of the creative process. There is an annual anthology of children's work, mostly poetry, also a play and some mini-biography; an annual street festival, in which children get to perform some of the work they have produced during the year; regular parent workshops, part of the purpose of which is to familiarize

parents with kids' work in the program. Different opportunities for performance affirm for children the value of their work, and the fact that they have something to contribute, to say.

Not least, the staff seem especially attuned to the interpersonal dimensions of their roles and of an after-school program, talking about wanting kids to feel safe, have a sense of continuity and familiarity, and opportunity to explore who they are . . . One of the writing teachers noted also that it was through his relationship with the children, and his efforts to "affirm who they are that they would start to take chances".

Box E.2. Interfaith Neighbors, New York, NY

Interfaith Neighbors, located on the upper east side of Manhattan, serves children from the Yorkville and East Harlem neighborhoods. The program has three principle sites -- a main site (on 82nd Street), a site for an all-girl's program, called GirlSpace (on East 109th Street), and a site at P.S. 38, which is part of the TASC (The After-School Corporation) program. At the first two sites the program serves older school age children, generally ages 10 through 14. This program is characterized by the use of literacy activities, especially writing, for self-exploration, self-definition, and personal expression ("expressing one's life"); to provide opportunities for children to share their voices with others, both peers in the program and a wider audience; and to help children better understand and grapple with the "social realities" they face.

The activities at each site, including literacy activities, are somewhat different, but share a set of underlying assumptions and a common philosophy. These include the importance of creating a safe, predictable environment for children (and for staff as well); the importance of relationships as the key to other work; and the need to deliberately build and continue to nurture a sense of community. (This includes attention to the time it takes -- time that must be built into the program schedule -- to nurture both relationships and overall community.) Staff also seem attuned to a need to counter children's feelings that they cannot be successful -- at school in general, and with particular reading and writing tasks.   Putting these elements together, the overarching task at Interfaith is to create settings in which children feel safe and valued, but are also challenged to think and question.

The program has a strong social work perspective, a legacy of it's origins as well as of the current director, a social worker. Staff are a mixture of social workers and educators/artists. All children have a psychosocial assessment (including an academic assessment) upon enrollment. Children are assigned to staff who act loosely as "case managers." Staff pay special attention to the role of groups, and are in fact trained in social group work theory and principles (e.g. group development, group dynamics, the evolving role of the leader). Group building and maintenance activities can be seen throughout the program. For example, rituals play an important role in activities. At the main site on one occasion, children were gathered at the beginning of the day to "check in/check out". Each had a chance to share something about his or her day, an event, thought or feeling. On another occasion a staff member used a talking stick, passed from child to child, who then had a chance to share his or her thoughts, to end an activity. (The social work perspective in the program has also helped staff to appreciate that "learning losses" in children often have either or both psychological roots and psychological consequences.)

The main site, which is some respects closest in structure to a typical after-school program, emphasizes homework help and tutoring, runs extended "adventures in learning" programs, exploring specific topics in depth, and generally provides a space where children can "make friends, talk about things that concern them, discover their strengths and interests, and feel safe and supported" (from the program brochure). During one visit, the main room was observed to be rich with the products of children's activities -- artwork and writing on the walls, a mobile hanging from the ceiling -- and full of social life, as small groups of older children talked, played board games, talked with staff. During the year of our visits the focus of the adventures in learning program was the history of African American music in the U.S. Students had read books and done research on jazz and blues, listened to and discussed music, developed an illustrated timeline, written biographical material on key figures, and created collages with their information, hung from the ceiling.

The main site uses high school students for the bulk of homework help, and this was observed to work well -- the children really liked the relationships with older youth, and the high school students seemed familiar with some of the homework assignments.   On one occasion we observed a high school student work with a young girl for almost an hour and a half, helping the girl memorize a poem by writing it with her, going over words the girl did not understand, discussing the meaning of the poem, and sharing associations.

Some children at the main site also receive weekly tutoring, focused on either homework or a school topic or assignment the child did not understand. Dialogue journals are used as organizers for tutoring. Children can write down help needs and goals for tutoring, there is some autobiographical writing, some

writing in response to specific questions, developed by Interfaith staff, about books children are reading, and some ongoing dialogue between tutor and tutee about a range of personal topics. Dialogue journals are used in a variety of ways by children and tutors -- some contain math problems, others poems that the child or tutor likes; there are discussions of politcs, trips, feelings and moods, long-term goals. Children sometimes use them to communicate needs or worries that were probably difficult to say out loud. One child, for example, wrote her tutor that she wanted to learn how to count money and understand its value, another that she was afraid of going to high school.

The main site also has a reading lab, which provides twice weekly tutoring for children assessed (by the program) to have reading difficulties. The reading lab was started because Interfaith staff perceived a need to better understand and address the reading difficulties they were observing in children. (Staff also observed that children were "hiding" their reading difficulties: "most of the kids have gotten all the way through elementary school by becoming masters at . . guessing -- guessing meaning, guessing comprehension".) The lab has its own separate space, on a different floor than the main program, assuring children who wish it a measure of confidentiality and privacy. It is designed to be comfortable, quiet and intimate.

The lab's work focuses equally on basic skills deficits (e.g. lack of word attack and decoding skills, not knowing how to engage text); psychological issues related to failure to learn to read (e.g. feelings of helplessness, shame or humiliation around reading and writing) and, as the lab's director puts it, "turning kids on to literacy". She adds that many of the children served by the reading lab "have never read aloud before or been read to . . ." Formal reading assessments by the lab staff identify reading problems, begin to build background knowledge on a child's family and school life, create individualized profiles, and give staff a sense of "where children were last successful" with reading and writing. That is the starting point for the lab's work. Tutors receive special training, and work within a framework of lesson plans developed by the professional staff. Each plan has three parts -- word study, reading and writing. Word study uses a phonics-based approach for learning to decode, and typically involves selecting a few words, usually from books children are reading, and working with them in a variety of ways (e.g. breaking them down, putting them back together, sounding out, using alphabet and syllable cards, worksheets and games) until a child fully understands them. The idea is to build an individualized set of words the children "really know". Children get to choose (actually to "buy" with money provided by the program) books to read; and instruction is based on those choices. Children and tutor may read aloud to each other, discuss book passages, examine particular new words . . . Writing revolves around use of a dialogue journal, linked to reading material Since most participating children "hate to write", that segment of the program sometimes starts with oral recording, which is then transcribed. The lab uses a movable cart full of literacy resources (dictionaries, books, writing materials) Lab staff make a point of trying to engage parents -- especially to explain to them, to get them to truly understand the nature of their children's reading difficulties. But staff note at the same time that it is very difficult to engage parents.

As with other Interfaith programs, the reading lab emphasizes the creation of a safe, predictable environment for children, and the importance of relationships as the key to other work (including re-building motivation to read and write). In our observations, the tutors took the relationship-building and the substantive work slowly, and were very flexible (to children's moods, needs, etc.) in implementing their plans, sometimes letting a lesson evolve into a conversation about school, home or other topics. The work could be very painful to the children at times. We observed a good deal of frustration, embarrassment and even resistance, but the tutors remained both patient and persistent, providing a good deal of positive feedback

The programs at GirlSpace, which serves girls 12 to 15, include rap groups, visual and performing arts activities, academic tutoring, creative writing, a Spanish club, career exploration, and training to mentor younger children. All the programs focus on girls' loss of confidence and sense of self as they enter the early adolescent years, both with respect to school success and with respect to "what they know" -- about the world, relationships, themselves, their feelings, and so forth. Tutoring is a principal activity, and the tutors who work with the girls are all female, mostly professional women. As at the main site, tutoring is organized around use of a dialogue journal. Most of the girls who come to GirlSpace are way behind their grade levels" in school. Tutors are not expected to make for years of academic loss; rather

to strengthen girls' interest in and capacity for help around learning problems: "The tutors are told they may not put a dent in what they girls need to know but they are showing them the skills to help themselves." There is a weekly writing group whose main goal is to help girls overcome their fear of and anxiety about writing, and to give them a concrete sense that "there are reasons to read and write."[19] Writing activities include autobiography (with individual assignments driven by particular questions), individual and group poems, and writing pop songs. (The writing group leader uses other art forms, especially music, as a lead in to writing.) As a group solidifies, girls are encouraged to share their writing, and give each other feedback Girls also read literature selected to generate discussion about their lives and experiences, or about writing itself.

Historically, Interfaith's *assumptions about and purposes for literacy* have been embodied in a writing-based curriculum called PATH, developed by its own staff, to provide structure for much of children's writing activity in the program. PATH was originally developed for use with groups of children during the summer preceding seventh grade (entry to junior high school), viewed as an important, and precarious, developmental moment. The idea was to use carefully sequenced and structured writing assignments to help children think about past, present and future, begin to define themselves, learn how to express themselves, strengthen writing skills and interest in writing, and learn how to share and support others, in a safe context. As the group gelled, and a measure of trust developed, children would share writing, providing additional material for reflection on self, discussion, feedback. Writing assignments included a " bio-board", which children used to write brief biographies, a "bio-poem", designed to capture who they are and what they are like, "treasures from the past", a written description of objects, memories, that hold special significance in the child's life, "windows to my soul", a combined pictorial-writing assignment in which children describe what and how they are on the outside , and then on the inside. Other activities included writing about writing, writing about "how to be a girl" (or boy), and writing about friendship. Sharing one's writing was voluntary, and to give it a heightened symbolic importance, groups used a "share chair", in which children would sit while sharing their work. Group leaders attended also to the skill of "learning to be an audience", how to participate through listening and sharing reactions.

Annually, Interfaith sponsors the Festival of Urban Voices, a juried writing "competition" in which children from throughout northern Manhattan can submit poetry, short stories, play or essays. Those selected participate in workshops with Interfaith's lead writing teacher (a professional writer by background), in which work is revised and prepared for a spring public performance and publication.

Interfaith Neighbors' literacy activities reflect particularly well the social and emotional "uses" of literacy—for sharing experience, exploring identity, affirming self, and finding a voice—and the value of public performance

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[19] In an article on an earlier version of the girls' writing group, called Young Women's Voices, Katherine Sorel, the group leader, noted that Interfaith's director, Eileen Lyons, hypothesized that early adolescent girls resist "self-silencing" through writing, turning to writing "as an outlet for those inner voices and as a medium for exploring their inner thoughts and feelings"; "Young women's voices: Using writing to help girls maintain their voice and sense of self", Literacy Harvest (The Journal of the Literacy Assistance Center), Spring 1995.

Box E.3. Chicago Commons and the Reggio Emilia Approach, Chicago, IL

During the 1990s, there was growing interest among American educators on the implications of the Italian Reggio Emilia approach for early childhood programs in this country. Key principles of Reggio Emilia include the □□the role of the environment-as-teacher, □□children's multiple symbolic languages, assessment through □□documentation, □□long-term projects, □□the teacher as researcher, and □□home-school relationships (New, 2000). *Chicago Commons*, a century-old settlement and social service agency, provides comprehensive child-care services at six sites in four low-income neighborhoods. Its school-age programs serve 165 children between the ages of 5 and 12 years. Chicago Commons has been exploring the application of Reggio Emilia principles gradually since 1993, first with its early childhood programs and recently, in the last two years, in its four school-age programs. Chicago Common's executive director considers the assimilation of Reggio principles into the after school programs to still be in its infancy because, in her view, it takes at least five years of working with the concepts for them to be really integrated into program activities.

The following principles about learning lie behind activities in the Chicago Commons programs:[20]
- An image of the child as capable, ready to learn and socialize
- An environment that provokes and supports a sense of wonder, experimentation, thinking, socialization and connections with nature and culture
- Use of visual arts and graphic languages to express and represent experiences
- Use of documentation to see, reflect, and revisit ideas, feeling, experiences, and learning
- Use of collaboration among children and adults
- Use of observation and listening to promote emergent curriculum and in-depth studies based on the interests and motivations of children and teachers
- Parent-teacher partnerships
- Organizational structure and staff development that fosters vision, dialogue, planning, and reflecting

We observed two of the after-school programs, one at the Guadalupano Family Center and one at the NIA Family Center. Guadalupano, which has three classrooms, is located in the Pilsen neighborhood on the near south side of Chicago and serves a predominantly Hispanic population. NIA, which has two classrooms, is located in a primarily African-American community on Chicago's west side. In many respects, the Chicago Commons school-age programs provide a schedule of activities typical of many after-school programs. Children arrive on foot or by bus after school and have some free time for snack and socializing. Time is set aside for homework, physical activities (indoors or outdoors), a large group activity, and individual activities such as reading, writing, painting, drawing, and playing board games. What is not typical of many traditional after-school programs is the consideration given to the physical environment, the time devoted to "explorations" of the natural environment through different forms of symbolic representation, and the opportunities for staff development.[21] During regular weekly meetings, staffs spend extensive time talking about Reggio principles, reflecting on the activities in their rooms and planning in relation to children's ideas and progress. Staffs are encouraged and given time to attend meetings and conferences explicating Reggio ideas, including travel to Italy.

Reggio calls the physical environment the third teacher. A program director explained that a wide variety of materials (clay, paint, charcoal, wire, natural materials like wood, acorns, rocks, shells, etc.) are used as "another language" to represent one's identity, experiences, and connections to family and community. The attention given to the physical material environment at the Chicago Commons centers is apparent both indoors and outside, and in the entryways and hallways as well as in the classrooms. At the Guadalupano site, for example, the outside of the building is decorated with large, brightly

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[20] Source: Chicago Commons Child Development Program literature.

[21] Explorations of children's environment, including materials **(**light, clay, watercolors, mirrors, natural materials (twigs and stones**)** and recycled materials such as bottle caps and ribbons. This has included an emphasis on encouraging the expression of ideas, experiences, theories, and emotions in different languages. According to this approach, language has a broad definition. It includes such things as drawings, sculpture, words, and even photograph, among other. There is an interaction between responding to the children's questioning of things by some provocation in their daily lives. This enables staff to continue to help them discover, explore and socialize within this newfound interest or study.

colored (although fading in places) murals done by parents five years ago. The small reception area and indoor stairwell area to the second and third floor is clean and attractive, furnished with plants and bulletin boards documenting families' and children's experiences. One display in the hallway between the second and third floors presented school-age children's drawings of city buildings and photographs of their activities in studying the city. Another display described a project in which the children visited the Sears Tower and later made 3-D representations as well as drawings of the building. Typed words in English and Spanish next to the drawings and photographs explained their meaning for the viewer. The documentation included both a description of the content of the activity and the process, e.g., the materials the children used for their study and the fact that they worked together in a group.

Each of the program rooms has a somewhat different character. All are light and bright, well-equipped yet not cluttered, often with real materials, and although open, designed with separate areas for quiet and noisy activities. The Chicago Commons approach emphasizes the importance of incorporating physical aspects of the neighborhood as well as family language and culture into the program. Thus, large windows in each of the rooms provide a good view of the city outside, helping children "keep their connection to the environment." All have specially made large easels in the art areas, and most of the furniture is not the standard fare of childcare centers. Nearly a third of the room for the 5 to 7 year-olds was filled with a sizeable dramatic play area, outlined by a large wood framed structure suggestive of a wood-framed house. The furniture, table and chairs, cupboard, etc. was all sized to older children and looked to be of very high quality. All of the room walls were decorated with hand-made displays of the children's explorations of materials and representations. One display, also in the 5 to 7 year old room, consisted of children's self-portraits and names made of modeling clay.

All of the rooms make creative use of different materials and textures in their furnishings; in addition to both tiled and carpeted floor areas, one can find furniture of wood, wicker, metal, and/or stone. Plants are in abundance, on window ledges, on the floor, or hanging from the ceiling. One room also featured tree trunks and wood branches hanging high above the ground, which appeared to blend easily into the internal environment. Children walk among these natural, living objects comfortably. With the addition of the large windows surrounding the room, the trees outside allowed the external world to literally be taken in. Mirrors and other reflective surfaces are placed on wall at heights where children can view themselves or activities in other parts of the room.

Much in the physical environment and structure of the curriculum supports children's literacy development and recognizes their accomplishments. For example, children's artwork is displayed, for example, drawings and photographs of children individually or in groups and written descriptions or children's quotes describing a project or activity. Two large boards on the wall contained enlarged photos of the children engaged in various activities. Under the photos were descriptions of the activity (*Exploring with Paper, Identity with Paper*), in some cases in Spanish as well as English (*Explorando con Papel*), as well as the children's creations and their thought processes about their work.

Each of the school-age rooms has one or two computers (usually working) with attached printers and a CD-rom drive. In a room for 7 to 9 year olds at the Gualalupano Center, instructional educational software included these titles: *PowerRangers Data Zord –Interactive game*, *Disney's Swampberry Sling*, and *Jumpstart for Grades 2 and 3.*) Above this computer area is a schedule with days of the weeks and times listed in 15-minute increments. Children sign up for a time and, as one boy explained, if the individual scheduled does not use the computer within five minutes of his/her time, it is open for anyone to use. In additon, a bookshelf was filled with various books that were displayed in an attractive manner and easily accessible. Individual folders for each child also are kept on another shelf within easy reach. They contained each child's name on the spine and appeared to be decorated by the children.

The dramatic play area in one of the school-age rooms contained materials such as paper, envelopes, and trays filled with office-like supplies. There were also shelves underneath the counter filled with plastic foods and cookware---reminiscent of an area in a home. On one day we observed, three young girls were role-playing going to the doctor's office. One child was the doctor, the other the patient and the other the secretary. They utilized numerous supplies in the role-play (i.e., The secretary asked the patient why she needed to see the doctor and appeared to be writing this down on a pad of paper). In

another area was a large shelf filled with science equipment such as microscopes, slide projector, and many plants above it.

In-depth studies of the physical and social environment, usually coming from an idea or interest expressed by a child, involve a variety of media and means of representing and communicating ideas. One project we observed developed as a result of a relationship between a Chicago Commons studio artist and a school in Nicaragua. Children at the bilingual Guadalupano site exchanged letters and drawings with children in the Nicaraguan school and discussed similarities and differences between their experiences.

According to one staffer, the most important things that children gain from the Reggio-based after-school program are developing social skills, having fun, and enjoying a "sense of family." Children should feel "like someone cares about them and respect them." An after-school program should be a place where they can express themselves and feel comfortable and safe. Reggio involves children in planning and decision-making; for example, where to hang a mural they recently completed. The Reggio approach also encourages teachers to look at children in many different ways (so it does not matter how verbal a child is, for example), to listen to children, and to learn with them. Learning is "an opportunity for all of us," not just for children." Thus, "there is no desk (at the front of the room) saying *I'm the head…* The teachers are all over the classroom--walking around just like the children. Kids already know that adults are in control (in the world), so it is the interaction that makes a difference (makes kids feel more comfortable)." Staffs try to take the children's pursuits into account when they structure an activity. At the same time, in the context of implementing activities suggested by children's interests, staffs are gaining knowledge along with the children.

The after-school program also supports children's school achievement by giving children a different setting in which to do their homework, away from the parental pressure of home, and a choice of when to do it. Staffs can observe children's learning skills and sometimes can pick up on children's difficulties with reading and writing. Last year when a staff noticed a girl having difficulty reading, she arranged a meeting with the program coordinator and mother and advised the mother to talk to the child's teacher. This year, after getting extra tutoring at school, the child is improving.

"As teachers, we don't tell the answers, but we provide a foundation for the kids," a program coordinator told us. "This is not a method of teaching what is right and wrong, but rather supporting children's development. Forced learning is not always good learning. When kids are ready for an activity, they tend to grasp more easily to that subject. When it is fun for them, they want to learn more about it. They see their own progress and it forces (innately) them to excel more."

"When learning is connected to the community, it is easier for kids to identify who they are (i.e., family lives and memories). *Hands on experiences* change learning as well. Beyond reading, they *experience* words…an example of this is making letters with clay. *This is hands on!* In a similar manner, hunting for letters within the home is also hands on. In terms of my own child, I will say to her, "let's go and find all the letters that start with your name." This can be a fun experience and it allows the child to physically do something…this is also something that parents can join in with their children…There are different levels of learning (at play here).

According to another program coordinator, literacy "is a way of connecting to the world. It's how you express your ideas, whether it's through reading, writing or drawing (art)." Drama and art activities also assist in school achievement because they give children a sense of ownership and pride. They develop their confidence in expressing their ideas publicly and are able to practice their emerging writing and verbal skills. Some older children struggle with their literacy, too. The arts can build on "what they already know." Individual and group journal writing is a common activity in several of the Reggio classrooms we observed. Staffs assist children who are not yet writing or struggling with it by taking dictation.

Box E.4. Street-Level Youth Media, Chicago, IL

Street-Level began about 10 years ago when a small group of media artists developed a video project to help diffuse tension between two rival youth gangs which involved the exchange of videotaped letters between members of the gangs. Street Level now runs three distinct youth media programs: a drop-in program at three sites, an in-school media arts program, and a Special Projects video production job program for older youth, which includes Photo Shop Time, Web design, and Girls Haven. Five co-directors who are professional artists and art educators, share the management of Street Level. In addition to the five co-directors and instructional staff, Street-Level is guided by a ten-member Board of Directors, which includes a youth member and the coordinator of Girls' Haven.

The drop-in program, known as "Neutral Ground" targets students in third grade through high school and provides access to a variety of computer equipment and software, including e-mail accounts, and video production equipment. At a basic level, the drop-in program provides a safe place where kids can do homework and develop good relationships with adults. The program is flexible, with the degree of structure dependent on the needs of the children who come. Some children attend regularly throughout the week, indicating that parents use Street-Level as a form of after-school care. Sometimes students go to after-school sports activities and then come to Street-Level afterwards to wait for their parents to pick them up. The staff estimates that the Chicago Avenue site serves about 20 to 40 youths per day. Friday is a particularly popular day. Girls Haven, which meets once a week, is a video journaling program designed by a group of Street-Level teenage students who got funding for the project. The Girls Haven provides young girls with the opportunity to talk on or off camera about what happens in their daily life. Older girls also teach the younger kids women's poetry, self-esteem and public speaking. A new Boys Group was recently started.

The *goals* of the Street-Level programs are to improve access to technology, provide opportunities for self-expression, promote self-esteem, and develop critical thinking skills—or what Street Level staff call "critical media literacy." Critical media literacy means being able to read and interpret what one reads but also knowing that the skills of reading and interpreting are *constructions.* Street-Level is not just about providing technology and training, but doing something with the opportunities and tools provided. Media literacy has meaning only when children create work themselves, according to two of the program directors, Deidre Searcy and Charlotte Saenz-Boldt. In the drop-in after-school program, media literacy is "hands-on and ongoing in an intuitive sense, more like play."

Participation varies considerably from children who come regularly to those who only come once, but the "majority" are kids who come several times a week. Staff want to understand why kids come and why they don't, what they are learning, and how participation impacts their lives. They also want to know how much structure is appropriate and how to keep kids involved. They want to be more intentional than in the past about what happens, to reach other children not yet involved, and to share their experiences with other educators and artists.

We observed the *environment and activities* at the Neutral Ground drop-in center in a storefront building on Chicago Avenue, a major thoroughfare, in the predominately Latino West Town neighborhood of central Chicago. (The other two Street-Level drop-in programs are at the Broadway Armory Park District site on the far north side of the city, and at the Elliot Donnelly Youth Center on the south side.) This drop-in program is available from 2:30 to 7:30 five days a week and is staffed by two full-time staff, Malin, the coordinator, and Jaime, an instructor, and several part-time instructors. In the first third of a large room was an area furnished with several comfortable couches. About four elementary school kids were lounging on the couches, all were wearing white shirts and dark pants or skirts. There was a large circular tent like structure in back of one of the couches, which we later learned was a separate space for girls called "Girls' Haven." Beyond this area were two computer labs, each of which is equipped with about 12 to 15 computers, both MACs and PCs, as well as a large work room where video production and editing, among other activities, occur.

Throughout the program areas, there are signs explaining the program and listing rules of behavior. A sign in the main computer area: "No printing music lyrics or any game cheat codes at all." Sign in the back art room: "This room is <u>only</u> for art making (i.e., graphic design and video editing.) It is <u>NOT</u> for

browsing the WEB, chatting, or games." The sign on the Girls' Haven tent states that it is available Tuesdays and Fridays from 5 to 7:30 and invites girls to "bring a friend or come alone but express yourself." Children's writings and drawings also have been posted. Several writings posted around the staff desk in the main room were directed to Malin; e.g,

```
DOGS
Dogs are beautiful
In this case I think that dogs
Are a girl's best pal.
By: Becky R
To: Malin"
```

A goal of Street-Level is to give the youth a comfortable place to explore technology by incorporating it into daily interactions, which include homework help, research help and other academic activities that the children bring to Street-Level. "We serve a population that often doesn't have a telephone or a computer in the home. We're here to give them access to resources and tools for communication. We are all artist and we use art as a tool for social change and literacy. The arts are underfunded in most Chicago schools and we are working to change that." Media literacy, recreational components, academic components are all used to create comfortable places for youth to connect and hang out. "Sometimes our 10 year olds teach our older youth. It's all about community development where the children learn from each other."

One day, in the late afternoon, there were about a dozen kids from the neighborhood at computers in the main room; some older ones were helping younger kids. A 3rd or 4th grade boy was sitting at a small table with an older boy, getting help with his homework. Another group of about eight kids was in a second computer area, the editing room. They were all members of an after-school program run by the Family Circle Day Care. The program brings half of its group each Wednesday. The activities of this group were mostly individual interactions between Jaime, a Street Level instructor, and the kids who were using a word processing program to write a personal story, which was the first step in developing a personal web page. Some of the kids were writing in all capital letters, others with a combination; one child, a boy, was writing with an extremely small font (so that only he could read what was on the screen?). From time to time, kids asked each other for help with spelling and punctuation. Jaime circulated around the room and paused to talk with individual kids, answer questions, and offer help if needed. He offered suggestions to children who were having trouble getting started, and reminded children that they were writing for an audience, not just for themselves. The focus for him was on encouraging children to write rather than correcting spelling and punctuation.

In the main room, a few children were hanging out in the couch area, a boy was finishing his homework, another was playing chess on the computer, and another was using a drawing program. Most of the rest of the youth (mostly midd-school and high-school kids) seemed to be word processing. When a younger boy complained to Jaime about something that a high-schooler said to him, Jaime spoke to the older boy. The boy tried to brush Jaime off, but he remained firm and said that his language was not appropriate behavior for the program.

The program coordinator believes that after-school programs have some responsibility for school achievement. Street-Level has a *reading group*, which meets once or twice a week. It helps kids with their schoolwork. "I also believe it depends on who needs it the most it needs to be structured. We establish reading groups or math groups based on the needs of our students."
Regarding homework, she says, "Academic achievement is very important. If a student can't read and comprehend then how are they supposed to navigate a desktop? If they don't know the basics then how can they participate? We provide one-on-one homework help. We have math volunteers who come in 2 hours a week and work with student who need help with their math. We don't force the kids to do homework, but we do encourage them to do it first, before they begin their after-school activities. We try to address individual youth needs." The general policy at the Neutral Ground site, especially during the first hour is to allocate computers based on the priority of schoolwork.

Parent involvement is another component of the program, according to the coordinator: "We have 20 or parents who are involved but we are trying to get more of them involved. Many of the parents work long

hours and they aren't bilingual, so it's hard to get parents to feel comfortable and those are major challenges…" Street-Level hosts parent nights several times per year, they have youth evaluation programs and parent evaluation programs. She went on to say that they worry about the parents that they don't see. She also stated that they want to be more connected with the local schools. It is important to collaborate and work together.

Street-Level provides a range of materials including; computer hardware, software, internet access, video production equipment, camera, a space for creativity, and computer education software. They also provide a curriculum build around media literacy, Photoshop workshops, production workshops, and Girls program. The educational CD's include Family Health by Mayo Clinic, Encyclopedia Grolier, Magic School Bus series (Animals, Dinosaurs, Inside Earth),Thinking things 2- Rainforest,3D Atlas, Hyperman, Family Tree, The pre-school to learning math, Musical instruments, *Encarta 98 (PC & Mac), Africa Trail, Princeton Review College, Lovejoys College Counselor, Director Chair, Costume Closet, Elroy hits the path, Homework Buddie, Kids Typing, Writing and Creativity, Pantsylvania, Writing ages 6 – 12, Kids Typing, The Amazing Writing Machine, Tessel Mammal, Reader Rabbit, Math Rabbit.*

Examples of other literacy activities at Street-Level.
- Street-Level engages both girls and boys in lots of discussions about the media, both in coed groups and individual boys' and girls' groups.
- Girls are encouraged to bring in media images from any mass media source, including magazine articles, television shows, music posters, etc. so that they can discuss why the media portrays images of women in certain ways.
- Digital imaging workshops allow the children to create different self- portraits using digital technology.
- Sometimes staffs remove the soundtrack from videos so that the children can make their own.
- Street-Level staff uses the *Critical Response Process,* which involves allowing the artist to critique his/her own work and then critique the work of other artists. A group of girls wrote scripts on video, and got feedback from an audience of their peers. In this process, the artist leads the discussion and asks questions; gets feedback using a structured format.
- Children are learning to use storyboards, which is described as a literacy tool to teach narration while planning a video. Children illustrate a series of frames and then put them together to form a video segment. The staff interviews the children to come up with questions that can be explored by way of a video exercise. During the storyboard activity the children are given several sheets of paper. They are instructed to draw the scene they want to film, then underneath they are asked to describe that scene or create dialogue for the scene.
- *Journaling:* Video Camera journaling allows youth to be expressive. First the children are given notebooks. Then they are given a specific question to explore, next they talk about their feelings or reactions to the question given. (This occurs about once a week. Sometimes these activities are guided and sometimes they are independent.)

Staff comments on children's interests and skills:
- Some of the young boys in the program are behind in school, some of it is due to learning disabilities and some of it is due to other factors.
- What motivates the children is instant gratification. It allows them to be successful and the youth are less likely to get bored with some of the computer and video activities.
- Most of the youth are bilingual, some being recent immigrants, and tend to favor Spanish more than English. Other youths help the staff by trying to "take up the slack" when translation is needed.
- In general, the "boys struggle with reading and the girls struggle with math". "Maybe its not encouraged to do either but I also believe outside encouragement plays a part."
- "Technology is usually seen as the boys territory. These gender issues play a part in learning."

Box E.5. La Salle Street Cycle Wiz Factory of Learning, Chicago, IL

The *Wiz Factory of Learning* is a four-year-old program of the La Salle Street CYCLE (Community Youth Creative Learning Experience), a 39-year-old community based educational organization in Chicago serving low-income children in the Cabrini Green North Town community. The program's premise is that inner-city children are capable learners and need to believe that they are "very, very smart." They can and should be given the opportunity to wrestle with complex, higher order learning material, to study and master different disciplines in-depth, and to develop an "appetite" for taking intellectual risks.

The program works through "laboratories" in a range of disciplines/fields -- biochemistry, biology (i.e. entomology), French, math, music, movement, martial arts. A "wizard" -- a practicing scientist, poet, jazz musician, dancer, or a linguist -- leads each lab. An important principle reflected in the Wiz factory is the importance of deep expertise on the part of staff in a specific discipline --including "literacy practice" -- as a base for introducing and luring children into the world of that discipline. The biochemistry wizard notes that when you have deep expertise in a subject you can play with it in a way that entertains as well instructs. He draws his lessons and activities from whatever he is working on himself at the moment: "So if I am at home and I am reading about adenosine triphosphate, which is the energy molecule in the body, that is my topic for the day". The poetry wizard told us that when you have a passion for your subject, the children "become attached to" that passion and thus to the subject. The children get to see how wizards think and work, to wrestle with and understand the deep structure of disciplines. Selected children become wizard apprentices themselves. One day we observed a middle school girl who was a junior math wizard teach a math lesson to a small group of early elementary school girls, using an abacus.

Like Arts and Literacy, The Wiz Factory is one of a handful in our study using **the arts -- movement, photography, video, music, song writing, drawing, mural making, cartooning and comic book illustration -- as a pathway to and base for literacy**. Children learn that, as with each scientific discipline, each aesthetic discipline has its own language, symbol system, thought structure and key ideas. For instance, in tai chi there is a word or phrase corresponding to each movement. In musical notation there are symbols for particular notes, beats and pauses, minor or major keys. Children are challenged to make connections, and see the correspondence, between other forms of symbolic representation and language. The dance teacher uses very specific words to describe and shape the children's movements. The children were asked to describe the texture of specific movements. She helped the children create "movement sentences." In the Jazz Lab, children were learning jazz notation and then combining the notes into musical phrases, sentences and whole narratives. As they "sang" particular pieces, the notation was converted to oral language

Language and words are emphasized throughout the program, especially language that provides a frame for thinking -- hypothesis, investigate, verify, test, observe. Wizards are very conscious of and deliberate with the language they use. In a few of the labs the wizards encourage word play, rhymes, word games. The vocabularies of the sciences are particularly helpful in giving children a sense of word roots, that can be transferred for use in a variety of literacy activities. "Young entomologists" became expert taxonomists, learning the language and logic of insect classification (e.g. kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species), and some Latin along the way. One day we observe the Biochemistry Wizard beginning a lesson with a group of children as follows: 'We live on earth, and earth has a gravitational field. Because of that it causes substances to crystallize . . . in a geometric shape: hexagons, pentagons, octagons . . .This seems to be a language itself, which I have learned is an original language". Activities in the labs or out in the city --"Off to Oz" excursions -- are tied/linked back to particular books. For example, when the children went to a play about Albert Einstein, they were also given biographies of Einstein. When they saw the movie "October Sky", they were each given the book as well. (The children can keep books that they choose to read, building their own personal home libraries.)

The Wiz factory also reflected a few more general principles . . . One is what the program's executive director describes as an "**unconditional regard for children's ability to learn**", combined with a recognition that **some children lack opportunity to explore and develop their abilities**, and **a**

realistic appraisal of children's current pattern of skills. A related principle, articulated by a "writing Wizard" at the Wiz Factory, is a recognition that children have to not only feel safe, but feel accepted for who they are before they can take risks. This was captured during one of our observations of the biochemistry wizard. The wizard encouraged the boys to say things in their own way. When a boy hesitated with an answer, he paused and said, "Take a deep breath, take your time" or "Relax and let go". Also evident in the program was the importance of **building on what children know and can do**, recognizing what they bring to an activity. One poetry-writing session began with children identifying words and phrases that might be used for constructing poems that day. He noted that he tried to build bridges between children's words and language, and new vocabulary and ways of using words.

APPENDIX F

MAIL SURVEY INSTRUMENT

_____

A SURVEY OF DIRECTORS AND COORDINATORS
OF AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

This survey is designed to learn more about literacy activities in out-of-school time programs for children *5 to 14 years of age*. Its purpose is to provide information that will be useful to policy-makers, funders, and professionals in the field. All responses to this survey will be kept confidential, and no program will be identified by name. We estimate that the survey will take about 35 minutes to complete. Thank you for your time and assistance.

CHAPIN HALL CENTER FOR CHILDREN
The University of Chicago
1313 East 60th Street
Chicago, IL 60637
(773) 256-5187

General Program Information

1. Your position/title: (Circle *one* number only.)

      1   School-Age Program Director/Coordinator

      2   Lead Staff Person (Head Teacher, Head Group Worker)

      3   Educational Coordinator

      4   Social Worker

      5   Agency Director

      6   OTHER: _____

2. Which phrase below best describes your organization? (Circle *one* response.)

      1   Church or other religious organization

      2   Youth-serving organization (e.g., Boys and Girls Club,YMCA/YWCA)

      3   Non-profit social service agency

      4   Settlement house

      5   Parks and Recreation

      6   Parochial or other private school

      7   Public school

      8   Non-profit child care center

      9   For-profit child care center

      10   OTHER: _____

3. Do you provide regular after-school programming that runs *at least two* days a week and serves a *stable* group of school-age children?

      1   Yes   2   No ∧ *If no, do not fill out the rest of this form.*
                    ¬   *Please return it to us in the enclosed envelope.*

   a. If yes, please circle the *one* response that best describes your program:

      1   an after-school program with closed enrollment

      2   an after-school drop-in program with open participation

      3   a combination of drop-in and closed enrollment programs

      4   OTHER: _____

4. After-school programs have different purposes and priorities. Please number the following goals from 1 to 4 in order of their importance in your program:

     _____ Recreation/free time

     _____ Enrichment

     _____ Academic support (for example, tutoring)

     _____ Child care

a. How many days a week is your program open?

    1   Two days/week   3   Four days/week

    2   Three days/week   4   Five days/week

b. Hours open after school: From: _____to: _____

c. Is your program licensed by the state? *(Note: This information will not be shared with anyone outside the research team.)*

    1   Yes   3   License is pending

    2   No   4   Exempt from licensing

d. Has the program been accredited by a national agency?

    1 Yes   2 Not yet   3 No plans

  If yes, check one:

( ) NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Youth Children)

( ) NSACA (National School-Age Care Alliance)

( ) Other: _____

e. About how many school-age children do you serve after school on a daily basis?_____

f. Please estimate the percentage of children in your program who receive financial assistance, including child care subsidies, sliding fees, or scholarships:

                                        _____%

g. Ethnic/racial background of children: (Circle item number and indicate about how many children are in each group.)

1 Black/African: ___   7 Asian/Pacific Islander: ___

2 Black/African-American: ___   8 Middle Eastern/Arabic: ___

3 Black/Caribbean: ___   9 Native American: ___

4 Eastern European/Russian: ___   10 White/European-American: ___

5 Hispanic/Latino: ___   11 Other: _____: ___

6 Indian/Pakistani: ___

h. Are there children in the program for whom English is their second language?

  1 Yes   2 No *(If no, go to question i)*

 (1) If yes, about what percentage of children speak English as their second
    language?

    1 20% or less   3 41-60%   5 81-100%

    2 21-40%   4 61-80%

(2) If yes, what first language(s) do they speak? (Circle all that apply.)

1 Arabic   5 Hindi/Urdu   9 Spanish

2 Chinese   6 Mien/Thai/Kmhmu/Lao 10 Vietnamese

3 Croatian   7 Polish/Russian   11 Other: _____

4 French/Creole 8 Amharic/Tygrina/Oromo 12 Other: _____

(3) Do staff use languages other than English in the program?

    1 Yes   2 No
 i. Do you also serve school-age children during any of the following times?

    1 Evenings   3 School holidays   5 None of the above

    2 Weekends   4 Summer

After-School Program Staff and Volunteers

*Please note: If you have **both** types of after-school programs, closed enrollment and drop-in, please answer questions with reference only to the **closed enrollment** program. If you only have a **drop-in** program, answer questions for that program.*

Check one: Information pertains to   (   ) closed-enrollment program (   ) drop-in program

5. Number of staff employed in this program

    Full-time: _____   Part-time: _____

6. Ethnic/racial background of program staff: (Circle each item number that applies and indicate

   how many staff are in each group.)

    1 Black/African: ___   7 Asian/Pacific Islander: ___

    2 Black/African-American: ___   8 Middle Eastern/Arabic: ___

    3 Black/Caribbean: ___   9 Native American: ___

    4 Eastern European/Russian: ___   10 White/European-American: ___

    5 Hispanic/Latino: ___   11 Other: _____: ___

    6 Indian/Pakistani: ___

7. What is the education and experience of all school-age program staff, including the director, full-time and part-time staff?

Title	Education Level/Highest Degree Earned (circle one)*						# Years Working with School-Age Children	Check if also has a CDA*
	HS/GED	Some College	Advanced Certificate	AA/AS	BA/BS	MA/MS/MEd		
a. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	_____	( )
b. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	_____	( )
c. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	_____	( )
d. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	_____	( )
e. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	_____	( )
f. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	_____	( )
g. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	_____	( )
h. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	_____	( )
i. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	_____	( )

*Definitions of terms: HS/GED = High School degree or equivalency; Some College = Some college courses but no degree; Advanced Certificate = Certificate in a special area of study such as school-age, child development, etc. ; AA = Associates degree; BA/BS = Bachelors degree; MA/MS/MEd = Masters degree; CDA = Child Development Associate.

8. During the last two program years, has your frontline staff had in-service training in any of the following areas? (Circle *all* that apply.)

   1 Development of school-age children   6 Math and science for school-age children

   2 Helping children with homework   7 Art experiences for school-age children

   3 Guiding and disciplining children   8 Program management

   4 Literacy development   9 OTHER: _____

   5 Recreation activities for school-age children

   _____

9. Do volunteers work with children in your program?

   1 Yes   2 No *(If no, go to question 10)*

   a. If yes, who are your volunteers? (Circle all that apply.)

   1 America Reads Volunteers   5 Business Employees

   2 AmeriCorps VISTA   6 Parents

   3 High School Students   7 Senior Citizens

   4 College Students   8 OTHER: _____

b. What activities do volunteers do in your program?

1	Play games with children	7	Assist staff with room maintenance
2	Tutor or mentor individual children	8	Assist in supervising groups of children
3	Read books to children	9	Do special projects (arts, science)
4	Assist staff in taking children on trips	10	OTHER: _____
5	Help children with homework		_____
6	Tell stories to children		_____

Program Materials

10. At this time, which of the following materials are available in your after-school program? For each item, circle one response:

	Regularly	On special occasions	Not available
a. Variety of storybooks	1	2	3
b. Variety of nonfiction books	1	2	3
c. Books in languages other than English	1	2	3
d. Books about different ethnic and cultural groups	1	2	3
e. Children's magazines	1	2	3
f. Crossword puzzles, *Mad Libs*, and other word games	1	2	3
g. Board games	1	2	3
h. Educational computer software	1	2	3
i. Books on audio tapes	1	2	3
j. Puppets	1	2	3
k. Dramatic play materials	1	2	3
l. Books for children and families to borrow	1	2	3

10. (Continued) At this time, which of the following materials are available in your after-school program? For each item, circle one response

	Regularly	On special occasions	Not available
m. Tape recorders (for children's use)	1	2	3
n. Variety of writing tools (pens, (pencils, markers, crayons)	1	2	3
o. Variety of lined and unlined paper for writing and drawing	1	2	3
p. Worksheets	1	2	3
q. Rulers and calculators (for children's use)	1	2	3
r, Children's notebooks or journals	1	2	3
s. Computer that children use for writing (word processing)	1	2	3
t. Internet access (for children)	1	2	3
u. Dictionary (for children's use)	1	2	3
v. A full set of encyclopedias	1	2	3

11. Do you have display areas for children's artwork?

      1   Yes   2   No

12. Do you have display areas for children's writing?

      1   Yes   2   No

13. How do you get children's books for your program? (Circle *all* that apply.)

      1   Donations
      2   Public library
      3   Program budget *(please answer questions 13a-c)*

      4   OTHER:_____

     a. If you have money budgeted for books, is this a separate line item?

      1   Yes   2   No

     b. Approximately how much was spent on children's books last year? _____

     c. Who orders books for the program? _____

14. Do you have a separate, quiet area for reading books?

    1   Yes   2   No

15. Are books located in one section of the room or many different areas?

    1   One section   2   Many different areas of the room

16. Are books displayed in any particular way in the program room(s)?

    1   Yes   2   No

    If yes, please describe: _____

Program Activities

17. At this time, do any of the following literacy-related activities occur in your after-school program? Circle one response for each item.

	FREQUENTLY (Several times/week)	SOMETIMES (A few times/month)	RARELY OR NOT AT ALL
a. Children read for their own pleasure	1	2	3
b. Children read to other children or adults	1	2	3
c. Children talk about books they have read	1	2	3
d. Children write stories, songs, plays or poetry	1	2	3
e. Children write in their own journals	1	2	3
f. Children sing or do other musical performances	1	2	3
g. Children help to write letters or newsletters about the program	1	2	3
h. Children act out stories or plays, including their own	1	2	3
i. Children go on field trips	1	2	3
j. Children write about their experiences	1	2	3
k. Children write letters to other people	1	2	3
l. Children attend performances of theater, dance or music	1	2	3
m. Children use books or the Internet to research new topics	1	2	3

18. Do staff or volunteers do any of the following activities in your program? Circle one response for each item.

	FREQUENTLY Several times/week)	SOMETIMES (A few times/month)	RARELY OR NOT AT ALL
a. Adults read books to children	1	2	3
b. Adults listen to children read	1	2	3
c. Adults tell stories to children	1	2	3
d. Adults tutor children in specific academic areas	1	2	3
e. Adults sit and talk with children during snack time	1	2	3
f. Adults have conversations with individual children during their activities	1	2	3
g. Adults take children to the public library	1	2	3
h. Adults read children's writing	1	2	3
i. Adults write responses to children's writing	1	2	3
j. Adults help children choose books to read	1	2	3

19. Does your program have a specific time (other than homework time) when children are encouraged or required to read on their own?

    1   Yes   2   No

a. If yes, how often?

    1   Daily   3   Once or twice a month
    2   Once a week   4   A few times a year

20. Does your program have a specific time (other than homework time) when children are encouraged or required to write on their own?

    1   Yes   2   No

a. If yes, how often?

    1   Daily   3   Once or twice a month
    2   Once a week   4   A few times a year

21. If you do not have specific times for children to read or write on their own, what is the primary reason? Circle *one* response:

1 Children have been in school all day

2 Children don't seem to like reading and/or writing

3 Staff are not trained to set up reading or writing activities

4 There is no time in the program schedule

5 Other activities have been more important

6 We just haven't thought of doing these activities

7 OTHER: _____

22. After-school programs have different policies about children doing homework. Which of the following statements best describes your after-school program? Circle *one* response:

1 Homework is not an activity in our program; children do their homework at another time
   (If homework is not an activity, go to question 26)

2 All children are required to do all of their homework at a designated time

3 All children are required to do some of their homework at a designated time

4 All children are required to do homework but choose when to do it

5 Homework is one of many activity choices; most children choose to do their homework in the
   program

6 Homework is one of many activity choices; only a few children choose to do their homework
   in the program

7 OTHER:

_____

23. If children do homework in your program, on average, about how much time do they spend on it each day? Circle *one* response for each age group.

a. 5 to 7 Year Olds	a. 8 to 10 Year Olds	b. 11 to 13 Year Olds
1 No time	1 No time	1 No time
2 Less than 15 minutes	2 Less than 15 minutes	2 Less than 15 minutes
3 15 to 30 minutes	3 15 to 30 minutes	3 15 to 30 minutes
4 30 to 45 minutes	4 30 to 45 minutes	4 30 to 45 minutes
5 45 minutes to 1 hour	5 45 minutes to 1 hour	5 45 minutes to 1 hour
6 More than 1 hour	6 More than 1 hour	6 More than 1 hour

24. What is the role of staff in relation to children's homework? Circle *all* that apply:

    1   Supervise, observe and give help if children ask

    2   Check and make sure homework is completed

    3   Check and make sure homework is accurate

    4   Provide additional homework activities if child has none

    5   Give children recognition or awards for doing homework on a regular basis

    6   OTHER: _____

25. What is the role of staff in relation to children's school progress? Circle *all* that apply:

    1   Keep written records of children's school progress

    2   Communicate with classroom teachers about children's schoolwork

    3   Communicate with parents on a regular basis

    4   Look at children's report cards

    5   Keep copies of children's report cards on file

    6   OTHER: _____

26. Which statements below describe communication between your staff and parents regarding children's schoolwork? (Circle *all* that apply.)

    1   Staff rarely have a chance to talk with parents

    2   Staff talk to parents when they pick up their children

    3   Staff write notes to parents on a regular basis

    4   Staff call parents if child is having difficulty with homework

    5   Parents call staff if child is having difficulty with school

    6   Parents ask staff to talk to teachers about their children's schoolwork

    7   OTHER:_____

27. Which statement best describes communication between teachers and your staff? Circle *one*:

    1   Staff have little or no contact with children's teachers

    2   Staff contact teacher only if child is having difficulty

    3   Teachers call program staff if child is having difficulty

    4   Staff and teachers have regular meetings (When and where do they meet? _____

    _____

    5   OTHER: _____

28. Thinking about the children and families you serve, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Agree Strongly				Disagree Strongly
a. Children usually need adult help with their homework	1	2	3	4	5
b. Teachers give children too much homework	1	2	3	4	5
c. Parents expect after-school programs to do too much to help children with their homework	1	2	3	4	5
d. Schools expect after-school programs to do too much to help children with their homework	1	2	3	4	5
e. After-school programs should be responsible for making sure that children do their homework	1	2	3	4	5
f. Children do not have enough time to relax and play after school	1	2	3	4	5
g. Parents should spend more time helping children with their homework in the evening	1	2	3	4	5
h. Parents often don't have time to help children with homework	1	2	3	4	5
i. Parents often do not have language or other skills to help their children with homework	1	2	3	4	5
j. After-school staff do not have enough skills to help older children with homework	1	2	3	4	5
k. Staff are very busy and would like more time for talking with individual children	1	2	3	4	5
l. Homework takes up too much time in after-school programs	1	2	3	4	5
m. The only time children read or write is when they do homework	1	2	3	4	5

29. Are there any particular issues or challenges in terms of parent expectations, scheduling, staff skills, space, or materials that affect your staff's ability to implement literacy activities in your program?

30. Please attach a copy of your printed schedule to this form or write it below. Also please feel
free to add other comments about your program below.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

Please return in the enclosed postage paid envelope to**:**

After-School Program Survey/Spielberger
Chapin Hall Center for Children
1313 East 60th Street
Chicago, IL 60637
(773) 256-5187
Fax: (773) 753-5940