

Jelio



**Researcher and
Practitioner Dialogue**

**The Building Intentional
Communities Program**

**Bringing families
into out-of-school
time learning**



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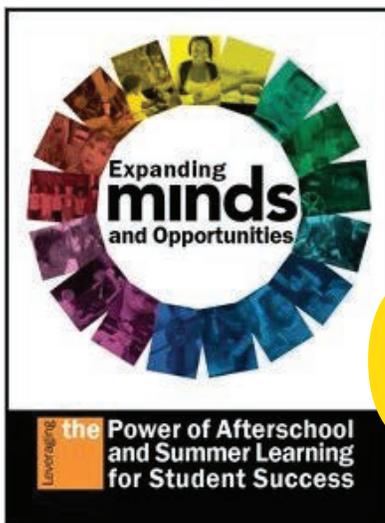
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Welcome to the inaugural issue of *The Journal of Expanded Learning Opportunities (JELO)*. The JELO is a peer-reviewed, online, open-access publication of the Central Valley Afterschool Foundation.

The mission of *The JELO* is to foster the dissemination of scholarly research and deeper learning from a variety of disciplines related to out-of-school or expanded learning time. This work was spurred by the interest of program practitioners, educators, community members, and young people in the Central Valley of California. As more experts joined the conversation, the discussion grew to incorporate research and programs within California and throughout the nation.

Very few peer-reviewed journals dedicate themselves to the field of expanded learning, although research in this field is sought out by institutions of higher learning, as well as policy makers and advocates. From an academic standpoint, the field has grown to the point that merits the development of a publication like *The JELO*. From a policy and advocacy standpoint, *The JELO* will increase public awareness of the field of expanded learning, but also support empirical research.

Although research in expanded learning is currently disseminated to the public through a variety of informal venues, *The JELO's* peer-review process will help to ensure the validity and reliability of research. This project will provide for a scholarly exploration of expanded learning, and create opportunities for practitioners to learn about the current research in the field. In addition, practitioners will have access to critical information on cutting edge practices that have the greatest impact for young people.

While remaining rooted in California, *The JELO* will connect research and practice throughout the nation, fostering a dialogue that engages researchers and practitioners in the field. *The JELO* does this by seeking articles that make important connections to the [Learning in Afterschool and Summer](#) (LIAS) principles, which promote the core concepts essential in expanded learning time.

This work builds upon *Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success*, edited by Terry K. Peterson, Ph.D. This groundbreaking compendium contains studies, reports and commentaries by community leaders, elected officials, educators, researchers, advocates, and other prominent authors. *The JELO* will continue to publish the work of more thought-leaders, supporting the growth of knowledge and practice in expanded learning. For more information about *The JELO*, guidelines for submitting an article, and access to this and future issues, go to www.centralvalleyafterschool.org or contact Dr. Kimberley Boyer at kboyer@centralvalleyafterschool.org

Thank you for your commitment to expanded learning and your support of research in this thriving field. We welcome you to *The JELO!*

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Reading and Beyond

Foreword By Terry K. Peterson, Ph.D

There is a growing body of evidence that quality after school and summer learning opportunities can deliver positive results for students.

Increasingly, providers want to improve their program design, staff members want to improve their delivery, and funders want more data showing impact. Education and community leaders are exploring avenues to use some of the 70-80% of the time young people are not in school to reinforce and expand a balanced approach to learning and positive youth development. So this is a most opportune time to launch *The Journal of Expanded Learning Opportunities*.

During the past five to eight years, we have learned a great deal about how to expand learning after school and during summers. This new knowledge includes:

- Best practices to improve program quality
- Areas that can realistically and positively be impacted by quality after school and summer learning programs
- How to build stronger school community family partnerships

These advances and others are captured by the almost 100 authors in the 2013 landmark compendium, *Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success*. The interest in the compendium has been so significant that a second printing of the hardcopy of the publication was initiated after only eight months of the first printing and 100 articles are being downloaded daily for free from the website: www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds. The size and depth of *the compendium* also gives practitioners and advocates a very good tool to make policy makers, funders, and the media concretely aware of this growing, important field.

The Journal of Expanded Learning Opportunities (JELO) builds upon the work of *Expanding Minds and Opportunities* by inviting the continuous sharing of peer-reviewed research, which will support ongoing efforts to improve after school and summer learning opportunities and strengthen community-family-school collaboration. The themes of *The JELO* are right on target and include:

- Fostering the discovery, collection, and dissemination of scholarly research related to the activities in which young people engage during their expanded learning time
- Increasing public awareness of the field of expanded learning
- Creating opportunities to thoughtfully and intentionally bridge research and practice, fostering a dialogue that engages both researchers and practitioners in the field

I am so pleased that this first issue of *The JELO* addresses the importance of after school and summer programs in expanding young people's learning opportunities. These programs offer hands-on experiences that enrich learning, build on and apply what students learn in the classroom, and support better collaboration among families, communities and schools.

Terry K. Peterson is a Senior Fellow at the Richard Riley Education Institute and at the College of Charleston a consultant to the CS Mott Foundation, and the editor of Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning.





RESEARCHER AND PRACTITIONER DIALOGUE

with Pedro Noguera, Ph.D – *New York University*
and Diego Arancibia – *ASAPconnect*

Through the publication of original empirical, practical, and theoretical manuscripts, *The JELO* promotes scholarship and consciousness of the ways in which young people's engagement in expanded learning activities contributes to their learning and development. Ultimately, *The JELO* seeks to connect research and promising practices throughout the nation, with a particular focus on California, fostering a conversation that engages researchers and practitioners in the field. With each issue, *The JELO* plans to publish a dialogue between a researcher and a practitioner discussing expanded learning from each other's perspective. For this first issue, we present a conversation between Dr. Pedro Noguera, of New York University, and Mr. Diego Arancibia, of ASAPconnect. Dr. Noguera represents an academic perspective, while Mr. Arancibia represents a practitioner perspective. Both discuss their views on expanded learning and how *The JELO* can contribute positively to this field.

How has the field changed in the past 5 years?

Pedro: *We have gone from thinking of after school as a form of day care, to seeing it as a way to expand and deepen learning opportunities. In the most exemplary programs we have begun to recognize that the expertise of community-based professionals can be as valuable (and in some cases even more); than that of traditional educators. Expanded learning time is now seen as an equity initiative that can begin to reduce the*

opportunity gap between affluent and poor children.

Diego: *Five years ago there was a sense that compliance and quality were mutually exclusive. This false dichotomy, I believe, polarized the field. Even site visits were viewed through this either/or lens (i.e. compliance site visit or quality site visit). Yet and still, there have been intentional and innovative developments whose aim has been to galvanize programs and professionals under a common vision. The BOOST conference has been a catalyst in this effort. Leadership at the state level has also evolved into a driving force for this vision of expanded learning. And though the focus of certain initiatives in programs may have changed in these past five years, the passion of the practitioner has remained as a constant reminder that youth come to programs but stay for the people.*

What do you think out-of-school time / expanded learning will be like 10 years from now?

Pedro: *It's hard to tell because the pace of change is fast, and more educators recognize that we can't continue to do things the way we have and expect different results. However, expanding learning time costs money and it's not clear where the funds will come from to allow this to happen on a larger scale. However, if we are creative with how we use resources and schedule staff (like Generation Schools in New York and Denver) and if we get flexibility from state*

regulations and in union contracts, it may be possible for expanded learning opportunities to occur more quickly. The research on the benefits is clear and compelling, but the constraints are real, too.

Diego: “To anticipate what 40 year olds will be like in 20 years from now, don’t look at today’s 40 year olds; look at today’s 20 year olds.” *The Next 20 years: How customer and workforce attitudes will evolve* by Neil Howe and William Strauss.

10 years from now... 2023. Nationally, we will embrace and identify with the name Expanded Learning. I believe we will see a more integrated approach in providing services to our youth. Alignment will not be this either/or idea as it is currently discussed, but rather, core day instruction and expanded learning opportunities will be coordinating with the student at the center of the discussion. I also believe our work as expanded learning professionals will be recognized and cited in university settings and teacher training programs. We will have administrators at the local, district and state level who have lived the ‘after school’ experience as student participants and site level leaders.

What do researchers and practitioners (i.e., those who deliver programming) gain from dialoguing with each other?

Pedro: When the dialogue is premised on a recognition that both parties bring valuable knowledge and experience to the conversation about how best to serve children, we can get a clearer sense of why certain practices are more effective at boosting academic performance and promoting youth development. Most, though clearly not all, researchers lack the contextual and cultural knowledge that the practitioners possess. Similarly, many practitioners lack the insights that might be obtained from knowledge of the research literature regarding best practices. Together, researchers and practitioners can work to achieve a higher level of impact and sustainability. It may also increase possibilities for replicating successful practices.

Diego: I believe when researchers connect with practitioners, a synergy is produced. Both groups stand to gain insight and legitimacy... and the field benefits. Researchers will be provided with an authentic lens to the field. Practitioners will gain confidence in their practice as it will be vetted and validated through research and academia. The field, in general, will benefit as it can serve as the Research and Development (R&D) of education. By providing an intellectual

framework that can be assessed in real-time, researchers and practitioners can effectively identify ‘blind spots’ and drive innovation. That being said, there is a tremendous need for “translators” in our field; individuals who are able to synthesize both worlds (practitioner and research) and articulate the nuances to both audiences. This will lend to an integrated approach in program delivery and scaling quality.

What benefits do you think the journal will yield for the field of out-of-school time/expanded learning?

a. For practitioners?

Pedro: Practitioners will have a resource they can turn to for guidance and insights into how to do this work most effectively. They can also learn about innovative practices that are being applied elsewhere.

Diego: As one of my mentors stated to me years ago, “Diego, we (the field) suffer from the poverty of intellect.” This journal will provide practitioners access to the intelligentsia of expanded learning. It will root their practice in research and also provide them with a historical reference to our work that can be dated back to 1914.

b. For researchers?

Pedro: Researchers will also learn about successful practices and can gain insights into the types of measurement strategies that can be used to assess the effectiveness of programs. Measures that go beyond exclusive reliance on grades, test scores and attendance.

Diego: Researchers will have a feedback loop from the field to link theory and practice. With over 4,000 programs in California, this could possibly be the largest “petri dish” in the nation that aims to cultivate innovation and quality in education.

c. For young people?

Pedro: If young people have a role in the writing and production of articles they will obtain an avenue for voicing their concerns and perspectives to a national audience.

Diego: Ultimately, young people will be provided with dynamic and intentional programming that is relevant to their needs in becoming active participants in their communities.



THE BUILDING INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES PROGRAM: CREATING ENGAGED, CRITICAL THINKERS IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

Practitioner Article

Sangita Kumar and Tanya Mayo – *Be The Change Consulting*
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Introduction

Building Intentional Communities (BIC) is a professional development program for educators and after school practitioners that aims to help after school programs create environments which foster young people's intrinsic motivation and help them develop the character strengths and skills they need to be successful in school and in life. BIC is founded on the belief that every young person has a deep desire to learn, grow, and contribute in a significant way to the world around them, and that their environments can be purposefully structured in a way that helps them fulfill this desire.

Historically, young people have been viewed more as "problems to be managed" rather than autonomous and creative critical thinkers, capable of making healthy and adaptive choices and significant contributions to their communities (Lerner, 2005, p. 12; Lerner, Brentano, Dowling, & Anderson, 2002). Evidence of this deficit-based approach is readily apparent in our

educational system, where disruptive and anti-social behaviors are often seen as character flaws, which can be intervened upon by "fixing" the child (i.e., lecturing or disciplining them or bringing in professionals to solve the problem).

Conversely, our experiences in youth development programs and educational settings have revealed a clear connection between young people's behaviors, the learning environment created by the instructor, and the curriculum used in the classroom. As we designed the BIC initiative, we tried to better diagnose where behavioral issues begin, considering that "character flaws" might actually be maladaptive coping strategies. Perhaps young people choose to be disruptive because they lack the skills and tools to address their needs in adaptive ways.

Building off the youth development literature and the founders' decades of experience with young people in education settings, the BIC program attempts to

re-imagine the after school program environment to better meet the needs of today's young people. Our program model places the learning process, rather than learning outcomes, at the center, and prioritizes emotional safety, relationships, youth autonomy, and the development of communication, leadership, and social skills. Undergirding this approach is the understanding that when young people's lower order needs are met (i.e., physical and emotional safety) (Maslow, 1970) and they are provided with the opportunities and scaffolding for skill building and prosocial connectedness (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010) they are better prepared to be active and engaged learners and experience success in school and in life.

Although we believe that the BIC model could be successfully applied in various educational settings, we piloted our work in school-based after school programs as they provided the most flexible entry into local school systems. In addition, after school programs are often committed to providing comprehensive, socio-emotional supports that develop young people as healthy individuals as well as learners (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Halpern, 2002). Therefore, this context is well aligned with the BIC framework and curriculum.

In the following sections we will provide an overview of the BIC model and curriculum, describe the process by which it was implemented in after school programs in Oakland California, and share some preliminary evidence of the program's impact. Finally, we will discuss the implications of our evaluation findings and recommendations for BIC program implementation and program sustainability.

The Building Intentional Communities Model

FIGURE 1: THE BIC MODEL

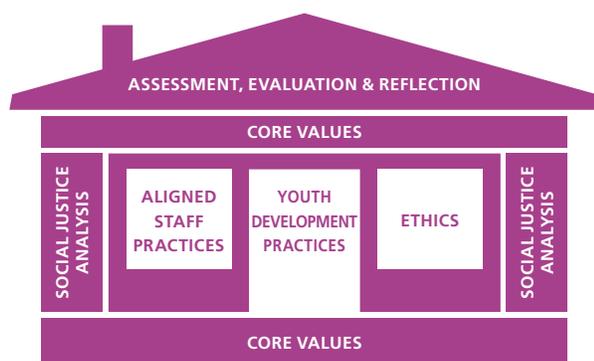


Figure 1 offers a visual metaphor of the BIC model as a house. Community relevant core values make up both the foundation and roof of the house. Together, young people and staff choose the values, which then serve as guiding practices and a compass to guide choices and navigate conflicts.

Analysis and discussion of social justice issues (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002) provides the framing “walls” of our model: what happens inside the learning environment is shaped by and responsive to what is happening outside those walls. All too often young people in urban communities experience violence, racism, or poverty in their lives, yet they don't have the chance to address these traumas in school or other settings (Black & Krishnakumar, 1998). In this scenario we see students start to believe that what they are learning about in school is not relevant to them, because they are not learning the tools and skills to navigate their most pressing concerns.

In one “window” of this model are the aligned staff practices, including youth-centered facilitation strategies, behavior guidance strategies, and asset-based language used by all staff to create a uniform ethos in the learning environment. In the second “window” is ethics. The BIC program provides young people with opportunities to grapple with different values and social norms, and apply these values to challenging scenarios. In this way, young people experience the complexities involved in making choices that balance short-term and long-term benefits and consequences. Through this examination, young people discuss what they believe, what they have experienced and what they plan to do when ethical dilemmas arise in their life.

Foremost, the “front door” of our BIC model is youth development practices that give young people opportunities to learn and practice leadership and conflict resolution skills. In a safe learning environment, young people can reflect, express themselves, and be actively engaged. We have seen repeatedly that when we create the right conditions for learning, students connect to their intrinsic motivations to learn, grow, and take their place as leaders in the world around them. Young people choose to go to math class because they want to be a doctor so they can heal sick people. They strive to become better writers because they feel they have an important story to tell. They stand up to a bully because they realize they are powerful, and can be a leader in their community.

Finally, the BIC Model is topped by ongoing assessment, evaluation and reflection to ensure that BIC is having the desired impact. In addition to ongoing internal reflection and evaluation, BIC has contracted with outside evaluation firms to do rigorous mixed-methods evaluations (Public Profit, 2012).

The Building Intentional Communities Curriculum

The BIC program was designed over a four-year period to help after school instructors address challenges in young people's behavior; support the development of young people's skills like goal setting, accountability, and conflict resolution; and create program routines and rituals that produce a strong learning climate. We believe that if educators can connect these concepts to students' day-to-day lives, then students will be better able to become engaged learners. The curriculum provides concrete guidance for current BIC participants, as well as strategies to sustain their efforts after their three-year participation in the initiative has concluded.

The BIC program is comprised of four primary tools. The first is a set of recipe card boxes, each containing about 50 activities that are 30 to 45 minutes in duration. Each activity is experiential, connects to a value and skill(s), and ends with a structured reflection. Program staff are encouraged to pair these activities with an opening and closing activity to construct a full lesson. The modular nature of the activities allows staff to pick and choose an activity that can be uniquely tailored to meet a specific need in the classroom, for example a need to build classroom community, address gossip, or talk about hate-speech. These activity cards allow after school program staff to implement BIC program tasks easily, and in tailored ways to fit the needs of the young people in their program. For example, one program coordinator using the BIC recipe cards reported the following:

"The curriculum is so easy to use, you just pull it out of the box and a great lesson emerges that is not only fun for the young people but is also really meaningful and deep."

The second tool is the advanced curriculum comprised of detailed lesson plans for sessions lasting 45 to 60 minutes, including structured openings, two experiential exercises, and a debrief for each session. These activities are packaged into units, allowing staff to provide sequenced sets of fun games and exercises on specific topics such as empathy, perspective tak-

ing, and conflict resolution. An after school program coordinator, in their third year implementing the BIC program in their program shared the following:

"The success of being in the third year of BIC is that the staff are being versed in the structure. The curriculum is really straightforward, provides that practice for our staff to have a routine, something that's really fun and engaging, goes more into the meat of the curriculum, open-ended questions, debrief. That structure staff gets on a regular basis increases their capacity."

The third set of tools are the staff development exercises. For staff to embody this content they too need to be engaged in a reflection on their values, beliefs and practices. These tools include implementation guides - "how to" booklets that include self-reflection exercises, as well as practical tools and strategies for curriculum implementation, and activity guides the guide experiential exercises for young people.

Finally, the BIC program model also includes a weekly one-hour "Leaders of Today" enrichment class that integrates the above tools to teach young people how to re-frame conflict, deepen relationships, and take powerful leadership roles. This class takes a restorative approach to conflict by re-framing chronically violent behaviors as resiliency tools that young people use to cope with their loss of hope and curiosity, and we help them change these behaviors by establishing new and deeper relationships with peers and staff.

Experiential Learning at the Core of Program Design

The BIC program and curriculum focus on the *process* of learning just as much, if not more, than the learning outcome itself. When meeting with after school program coordinators or staff, we ask them to show us what is celebrated in the classroom by looking at what is on the walls. Do we only see the perfect papers, or also evidence that learning was the outcome of a series of experiments and drafts? Are students simply repeating the right answer or discussing how they solved the problem, and the mistakes they made along the way? The BIC curriculum relies on experiential learning to give students a problem to solve in which they have to apply their own thinking to figure out the solution. In this process we weave together the idea that *what* our students are learning is as important as *how* they are learning it, and instill in young people the idea that they have the skills needed to solve problems.

Helping instructors make this shift from teaching to facilitating has been one of the most challenging, but interesting parts of this initiative. Our experiential learning activities create challenges that excite and energize young people, which can initially feel chaotic or unstructured. For example, in one activity, the “Perfect Square,” students are blindfolded and divided into two groups. Each group has to create a perfect square with a rope, while keeping one hand on the rope at all times. Chaos erupts as students yell over each other, give commands, misunderstand directions, and struggle to communicate what they want to happen. But the chaos only lasts until blindfolds are removed and each group is asked to assess their square: “What did you do well? What would you do differently next time?” A skilled facilitator will help students make deeper connections by asking questions such as “Are there times when you felt frustrated during this activity? What can you do to work through your frustration when solving a problem? When else does this happen?” The discussion is charged as students struggle to make sense of what they experienced and how it connects to other parts of their lives. They quickly realize that the deepest learning did not come from making a square, but from the process of reflection that followed.

Holding a debriefing session after the activity helps young people work together to understand the significance of what just happened and shows kids that the instructors don’t always have the right answer. The objective is for each young person to draw their own conclusions, reflect on what worked for them, and make choices about what they will do next time. Time and again, we see young people light up in these debriefing sessions. They are reflecting; making connections to feelings, values, choices and motivation. This is the foundation through which we can help them feel interested in reading, work hard at math, or find new ways to resolve a fight on the playground.

Pathway for Building Intentional Communities: BIC Program Implementation

Be the Change Consulting has been developing and refining the BIC initiative since 2009 through their work with Oakland Unified School District’s after school programs. Initially BIC offered after school programs the opportunity to send staff members to two-day workshops or a four-part series of BIC trainings, but over time the program has increasingly emphasized that greater impact can be achieved through more intensive participation by all program staff throughout the school year.

In the 2012-2013 school year, 11 schools participated as “Intensive” sites, engaging in seven key capacity building activities to help them create a more positive program environment, expand facilitator capacity and provide young people new tools and opportunities (see Table 1 on next page).

Capacity Building Activities for Sites

Because BIC’s success is heavily dependent on where after school programs are in their own development when they begin, we developed both a Program Pathway and Site Capacity Assessment Tool to assess sites’ baseline status. BIC curriculum and training have a much higher impact on programs with strong organizational infrastructure and commitment to engaging in BIC. Those without a solid program structure and capacity are less likely to succeed at implementing BIC, because they are busy securing after school program resources, managing classroom behavior issues, and operating the basics of the program. Therefore, the BIC Program Pathway (see Figure 2 on next page) begins with several prerequisites necessary before a site begins implementing BIC.

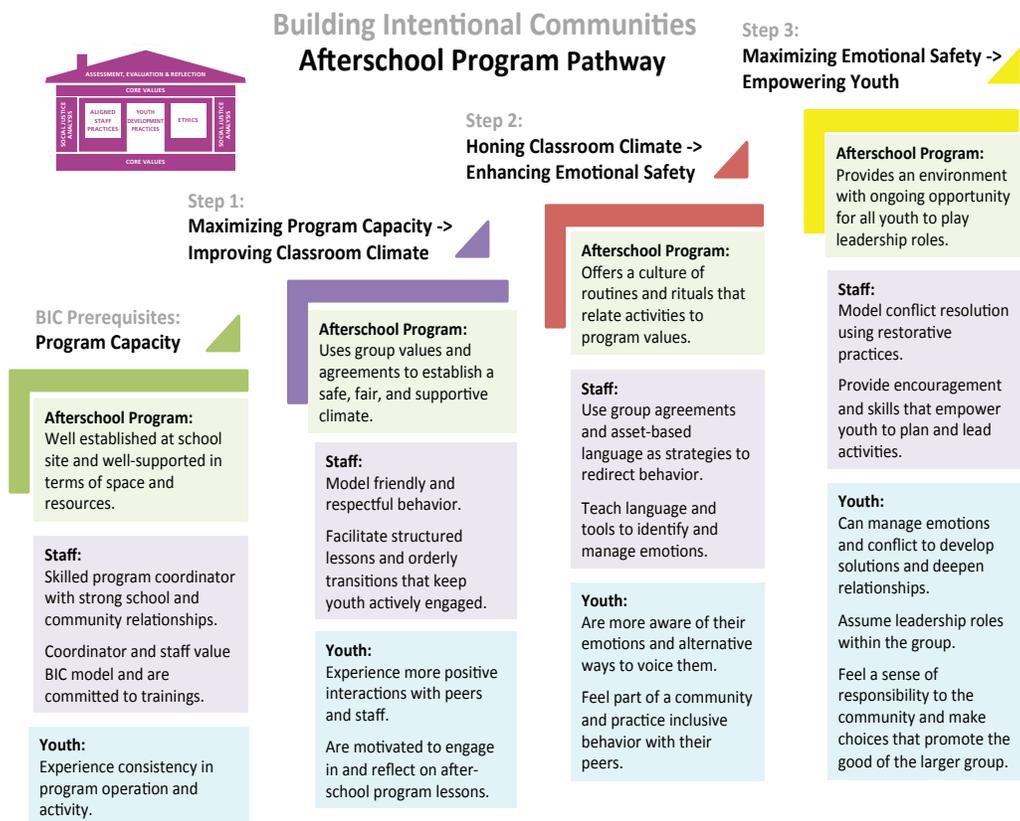
The Program Pathway also illustrates how sites implementing BIC improve their programs through an evolutionary process. For example, sites must address some basic program capacity and classroom climate issues (Step 1) before moving on to honing classroom climate to a point at which emotional safety for young people is achieved (Step 2). Next they can work on maximizing emotional safety to the point at which young people are truly empowered to handle situations and relationships on a deeper level (Step 3).

The Program Pathway also displays the desired practices and goals that can be achieved at the program, staff, and youth levels.

TABLE 1: KEY BIC PROGRAM ACTIVITIES FOR INTENSIVE SITES

<i>School-Site Coordinators Activities</i>	
Kick-Off Retreat	Two-day retreat for coordinators at the start of the school year to review the model, establish goals, and assess each school site's strengths and opportunities.
Coordinator Huddles	Monthly group coaching sessions for coordinators to share successes, challenges, strategies in implementing the BIC model at their sites. Coordinators also engage in group planning for upcoming BIC activities to shape the initiative together.
One-on-one Coordinator Coaching	Six structured sessions with a BIC systems coach to review and troubleshoot challenges in implementing the BIC curricula, supporting staff, and establishing organizational practices that support the BIC model.
<i>Leaders of Today Class Instructors Activities</i>	
Enrichment Class Learning Community	Trainings for instructors of the Leaders of Today enrichment class to review upcoming curriculum and practice facilitation techniques. Each site then offers this enrichment class once a week to deeply engage young people in values-based leadership.
Classroom Coaching	Monthly classroom observation and feedback sessions with a BIC coach to help support Leaders of Today instructors to strengthen de-brief, create experiential learning opportunities, and reinforce classroom culture.
<i>Full After School Program Staff Activities</i>	
Climate Builder Trainings	Four school-site trainings for an entire after school staff to integrate the BIC model into theory and practice.
Blasters	Given out four times a year, Blasters provide a two to three week curriculum schedule geared towards building a sense of team, reinforcing community values, addressing inclusion, and deepening values like friendship, accountability, peace and justice.

FIGURE 2: BUILDING INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM PATHWAY



Program Impact

Public Profit, a private consulting firm, conducts yearly evaluations of the program in Oakland, California. The research questions guiding the evaluation thus far include:

- What culture and climate changes are observed among BIC programs in terms of practices, systems, and design that facilitate young people's character and moral development?
- What classroom management and facilitation shifts are observed among staff operating BIC classes?
- What character shifts can we see in the attitudes and behavior of young people?

The evaluation reflects a synthesis of several tools, including the School-Age Program Quality Assessment (SAPQA), a research-based, point-of-service quality rating scale (Center for Youth Program Quality, 2010); staff and young people surveys; focus groups, one-on-one interviews with key staff; and observations of BIC training sessions. The evaluation to date has identified some positive impact on all three levels.

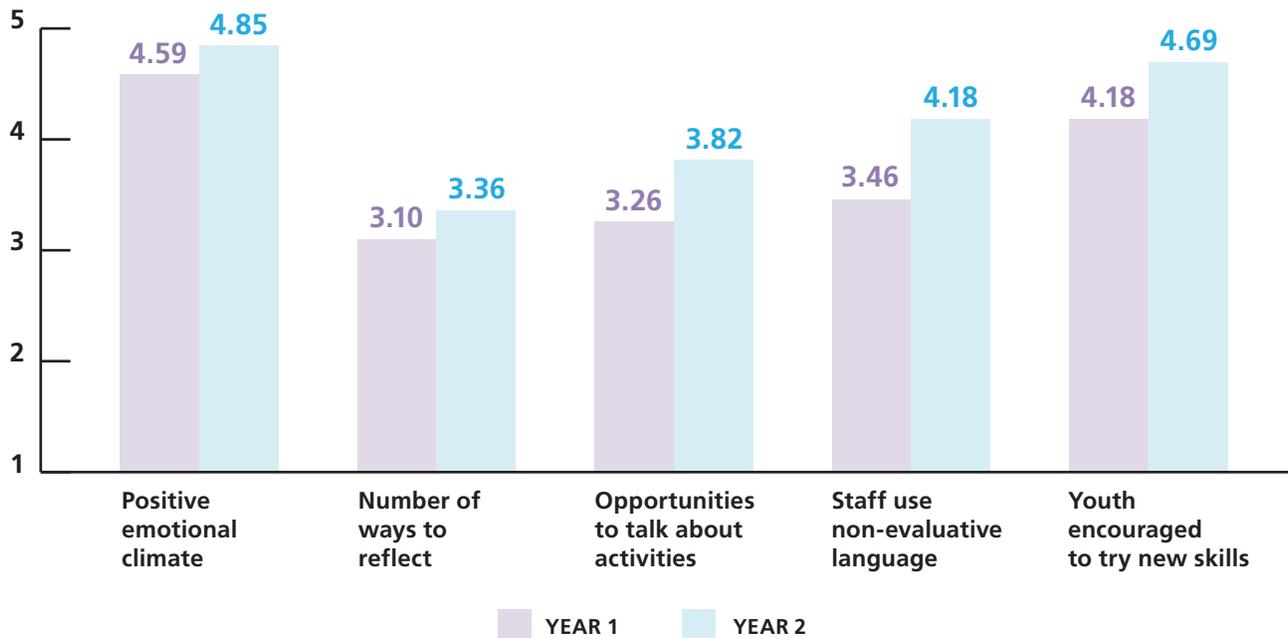
Program Level

At the program level, sites participating in BIC (whether as Intensive sites or those who solely attended BIC trainings) showed significant increases (over two years) in program quality scores in the following areas: positive emotional climate, the number of ways in which young people can reflect within the program, opportunities to talk about activities, staff support young people using non-evaluative language to acknowledge accomplishments, and the frequency with which young people are encouraged to try new skills (Figure 3).

Staff Level

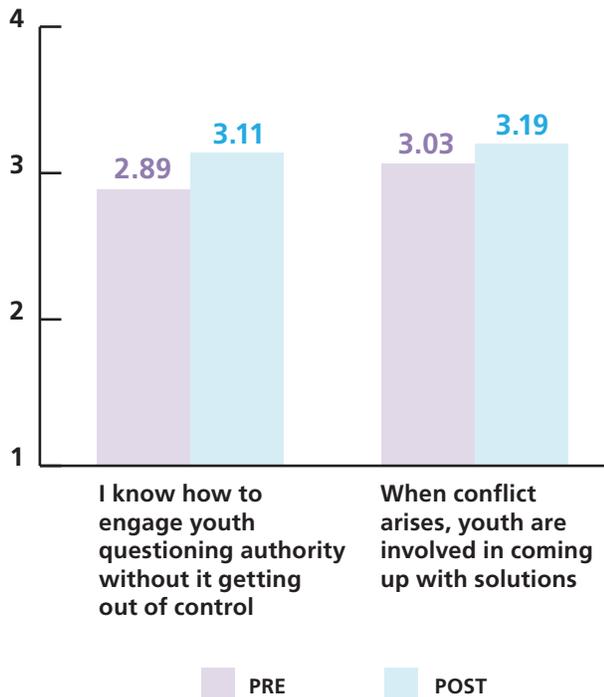
Over the course of the year, BIC participating staff reported increased ability to engage young people in questioning authority without it getting out of control and to involve young people directly in conflict resolution more often (Figure 4 on next page).

FIGURE 3: IMPROVEMENT IN PROGRAM QUALITY INDICATORS FOR BIC PARTICIPATING PROGRAMS



Source: Site visits using the School-Age Program Quality Assessment as part of the Oakland Unified School District After School Program Evaluation in 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, (n=38 BIC participating sites). Indicators are scored with a 1, 3 or 5, with 5 representing the highest quality rating. Findings are statistically significant at the P<.10 level.

FIGURE 4: IMPROVEMENT IN “ENGAGEMENT” INDICATORS



Source: BIC Staff Pre and Post Surveys in 2011-2012, (n=32 BIC participating staff). Responses based a 4-point scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree and 4=Strongly Agree. Findings are statistically significant at the P<.10 level.

For communities facing high levels of violence, BIC activities provide after school programs process tools to create greater healing. Young people learn that violence is neither the norm nor the best solution, and that it negatively impacts everyone’s long-term opportunities. Students are able to discuss and better understand complex concepts such as race, homophobia, and poverty. For example, a BIC program coordinator shared the following:

“I really didn’t want my staff to open up conversations about race or identity. But as we began the process we realized that these kids are experiencing these issues every day, but with no adult support on how they respond to them. I was shocked at how much trauma they had already experienced. And the activities to look at skin tone or hate speech were so simple - they were the perfect light touch to open up a heavy subject. I realized I’d been doing my kids and staff a disservice by keeping these topics out of our curriculum.”

Another program coordinator provided an example of how BIC materials helped transform her program climate by providing young people with the tools to approach conflict differently:

“My kids were always fighting. In West Oakland that’s what they know best. You have a problem, fight it out, argue, yell. Whoever’s loudest is probably right. After BIC we have seen a transformation in our school. Our kids still fight, they have conflict and get mad at each other, but now they go to the Talk it Out Table and pull out the feeling cards, the value cards, the problem journals. They have strategies to solve their problems. But the most surprising thing to all of us is that they really want to solve these problems. So the fighting was just their only strategy before, now that they have other ways, they choose the less harmful approach.”

Youth Level

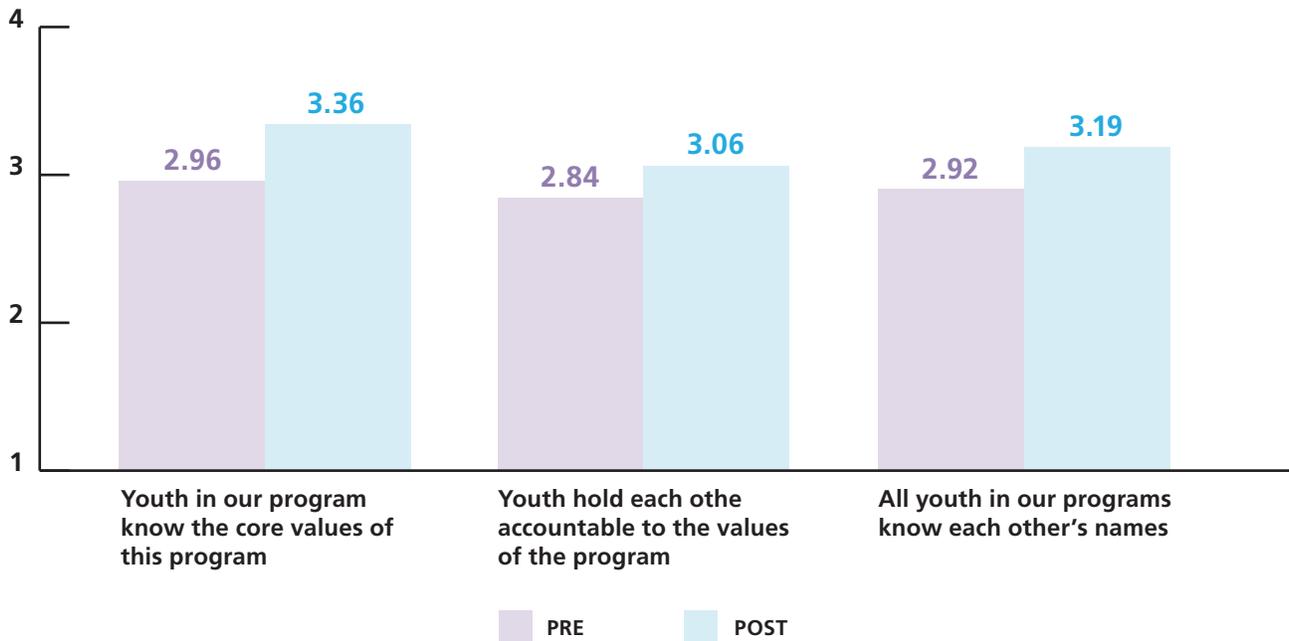
After implementing BIC, staff members reported a stronger sense of community among young people; young people were more likely to know the program’s core values, hold each other accountable to those values, and know each other’s names by the end of the school year (see Figure 5 on next page). In addition, there was a decrease in the frequency of bullying, as reported by staff at BIC participating sites (see Figure 6 on next page). Moreover, young people reported increased opportunities to engage in planning and leadership (see Figure 7 on next page).

Students attending after school programs at BIC sites provided concrete examples of how the learning environment, peer relations and leadership opportunities have improved:

“I love the Pay it Forward Jar in our class. When people do nice things we write notes and put them in the jar. It makes me happy when my name gets into the jar, because I know my friends notice when I am being helpful.”

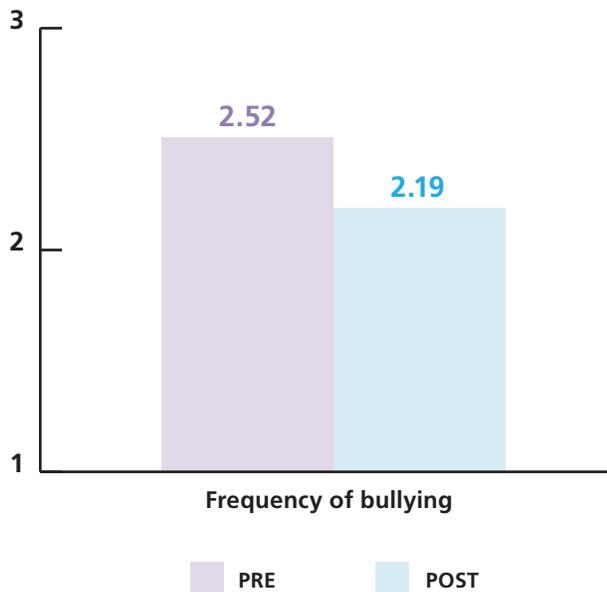
“We talked about the drama that was happening in our community in our (BIC enrichment) leadership class. People in our neighborhoods don’t know that peace is better than violence. So we planned a peace march to let them know that we live here, we care, and our ideas about our neighborhood matter too. I don’t know if our peace march will change everything, but it changed things in my family, and my friends’ families. I guess that’s a good start.”

FIGURE 5: IMPROVEMENT IN “COMMUNITY” INDICATORS



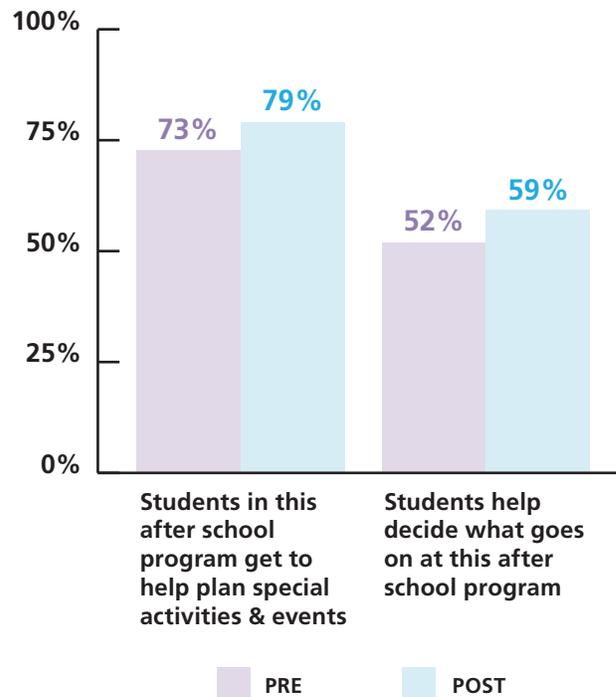
Source: BIC Staff Pre and Post Surveys in 2011-2012, (n=32 BIC participating staff). Responses based a 4-point scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree and 4=Strongly Agree. Findings are statistically significant at the P<.10 level.

FIGURE 6. REDUCED FREQUENCY OF BULLYING



Source: BIC Staff Pre and Post Surveys in 2011-2012, (n=32 BIC participating staff). Responses based on a 4-point scale: 1=Never, 2=1 to 2 times/month, 3= 1 to 2 times/week, 4=3 to 5 times/week. Findings are statistically significant at the P<.10 level.

FIGURE 7: IMPROVEMENT IN “YOUTH LEADERSHIP” INDICATORS



Source: 2011-2012 Pre and Post Surveys among young people at BIC participating programs (n=413 young people). Responses are binary: 0 = No, 1 = Yes; figures reported above represent percentage of young people who answered yes. Findings are statistically significant at the P<.10 level.

At the conclusion of its three-year pilot phase, BIC refined the program design to emphasize the more intensive components that have had the greatest impact on program and staff capacity and on young people's outcomes. In the 2012-2013 year the BIC model was piloted in nine high school after school programs with strong connections to college, career and workforce readiness and in the 2013-2014 school year the model will expand to eight middle schools.

Recommendations for Implementation and Sustainability

For a program interested in implementing the BIC curriculum, an ideal first step is to engage in a two-day training to introduce staff to the model and strategies. This could be followed by a three-week Blaster calendar to provide staff with first-hand experience conducting BIC value-based activities and to begin shifting program climate.

At that point, a program can determine how intensely it would like to implement the BIC initiative. One entry point is to offer the BIC Leaders of Today enrichment class to serve as a nucleus for the cultivation of ethics, building of socio-emotional skills and promotion of civic responsibility. BIC trainings can also help align staff practices in behavior guidance, conflict resolution and other BIC strategies. Sites ready to engage at a higher level can use BIC activities to develop authentic leadership opportunities for all young people. These experiences, which build over time, will shift young people's motivation to be good, do the right thing, and keep learning.

Ideally the BIC model takes three years to integrate fully. In the first year of implementation, we seek evidence that BIC activities are integrated into lesson plans and that program values are visibly posted and practiced in classrooms. By the second year there should be a culture of systems and routines in place and staff should be able to anticipate and navigate problems in advance. After three years of support from BIC, sites will possess the integrated systems, classroom management strategies, and curriculum to continue implementation on their own.

Once a program completes the three-year BIC training cycle, sustainability relies on the maintenance of staff facilitation skills (aligned staff practices), program design (the ongoing experiences offered young people) and curriculum used (what skills young people develop).

Embedding a capacity building tool such as BIC into all after school programming provides a clear map for quality improvement. While standardized assessment tools like the SAPQA have lent us a shared language for examining program quality, many after school providers lack capacity-building opportunities for after school programs or a detailed plan and specified tools to help them achieve quality success. As one program coordinator said:

"I wish I had BIC three years ago when we first got our SAPQA (scores). Now that I have this curriculum it really sets the tone for being young people developers: the intentionality, the vocabulary, the connection to social-emotional learning, trying to service the community. It's much broader than just giving them something to do until their parents come get them at 6:00 p.m."

Moreover, we see great potential for extending the BIC model into school-day settings. Program staff currently report that their students notice the difference between the after school BIC learning climate and their experiences during the school day:

"Some of the key lessons behind BIC activities – 'win-win, lose-lose', 'use just what you need' – I hear the kids taking these lessons from after school into the school-day. It's great to see their light bulbs go off when they make connections from the activities to real life."

"It would be great if we could have a training for principals and school day teachers so they could see how valuable this is. It is just not enough to get this kind of experience and support at the end of the day – they need it all day long."

By integrating aspects of the BIC model throughout the school day, students could feel more consistently supported in exercising group values, self-awareness, young people leadership, and conflict resolution. To that end, staff at some participating sites reported sharing their BIC curriculum and other materials with school day teachers during the 2012-2013 school year. Principals of schools that have been able to experience the BIC curriculum are excited about the potential benefits it can offer in the school-day setting:

"I was a district administrator for many years in high schools where the level of violence was high and classroom accountability was low. I saw teachers who came into the field with passion struggling to gain control

of a classroom, and ultimately losing the battle. Be the Change Consulting's approach to changing the classroom climate is powerful. This year we will pair their trainings, curriculum and facilitation with our other initiatives to start the shift in our school by first building community, establishing our social-emotional learning skills, and then moving toward our academic goals."

"I love the BIC model. The idea that learning doesn't happen without a focus on values, relationships, and leadership experiences is central to my beliefs about education as well. This year we are bringing the BIC model to our school day and after school program. We will adopt their curriculum for our advisory period, and integrate their climate building procedures into our restorative behavior guidance approach. My staff already are resonating with the packaging of the ideas that are profound yet easy to digest."

"This approach works. I've seen it work in our after school program, and I'd like to see what it could do in our school day. I'm intrigued at the possibility and we will engage Be the Change Consulting to present their ideas to our staff this year."

Conclusion

The 2012 – 2013 academic year marks the third anniversary of Building Intentional Communities. In this past year alone the program has reached over 100 Oakland after school staff in 40 programs. Among these programs there are encouraging indicators that suggest BIC trainings and materials have played a role in initiating positive change. As the BIC program continues to grow and refine its model, we expect to see many more positive changes related to creating and sustaining cohesive after school communities with shared social and moral values.

As one program coordinator said: "The BIC curriculum for our program was like a perfect match. It folded in perfectly for our culture. I had this idea in my head of what would make a perfect after school program, but I couldn't put it together, and BIC has done that."

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Bringing Families into Out-of-School Time Learning

Practitioner Article

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Youth increasingly need a broad set of skills to succeed as adults in the 21st century. To address this need, many educators are adopting a broadened vision of learning, in which youth have access to an interconnected set of supports that complement and amplify school-based learning. These supports include out-of-school time (OST) programs and families' active engagement in young people's learning. In particular, through OST programs, youth can engage in new and different learning experiences that are often not available in schools. These learning experiences can include those that focus on academic skills, but also extend beyond to provide youth with active, applied, and collaborative learning opportunities that promote a variety of other skills that youth need to succeed, such as creativity, problem solving, team work, critical thinking, and digital literacy. Similarly, parents are instrumental as the primary bridge between multiple learning settings (Harris, Rosenberg, & Wallace, 2012). Family engagement in learning "helps to create consistency and reinforce learning and developmental messages across learning contexts (in school, in afterschool and summer programs, and at home)" (Deschenes & Malone, 2011, p. 9).

Reflecting the essential role of families and OST programs in supporting children's learning, a shift is occurring in the relationship between parents and OST programs, from a focus on engaging parents to increase

their children's OST participation (*program-centered*) toward a focus on helping parents support their children's learning and development in and beyond OST settings (*learning-centered*). While limited in scope, the program-centered approach nevertheless creates a necessary structure upon which to build the learning-centered approach: youth must first participate in OST programs with the support and encouragement of their parents before programs and families are able to work together to support young people's learning. In addition, whereas OST programs used to take the lead in supporting young people's learning in their programming, they are increasingly working with families as essential partners to promote a shared responsibility for learning (Rosenberg, Lopez, & Westmoreland, 2009).

In a learning-centered approach to family engagement, families play a central role in understanding and managing their children's learning experiences both in and outside of school. When OST programs offer opportunities for families to engage directly in their children's learning and development, parents, programs, and youth can all see benefits. In particular, families can see improvements in their communication with and understanding of their children (Kakli, Kreider, Little, Buck, & Coffey, 2006; Kreider & Raghupathy, 2010); increases in their communication with teachers and involvement in school activities, including parent-teacher

conferences (Birmingham, Pechman, Russell, & Mielke, 2005; Reisner, White, Russell, & Birmingham, 2004; Rigg & Medina, 2005; Warren, Brown, & Freudenberg, 1999; Warren, Hong, Leung-Rubin, & Sychitkokhong-Uy, 2009); and expanded opportunities to access and engage in learning experiences alongside their children. Programs benefit because parents can be valuable assets in bolstering the learning that the program promotes by extending the learning through related home- or community-based activities. Parents can also work with programs to help staff understand their children's learning needs, and can share information with staff about children's lives outside of the program, which may affect their ability to function within it. Ultimately, family engagement in OST can increase the chances that the youth involved will have successful experiences in these learning opportunities both within and beyond the OST program.

This paper provides an in-depth look at how one program has embraced a learning-centered approach to family engagement in OST. It also provides overviews of two other OST programs that have adopted a learning-centered approach to family engagement. The paper ends with suggestions for how OST programs can adopt learning-centered family engagement strategies in their own work.

Techbridge: Expanding Girls' Access to STEM Learning Opportunities

One promising example of an OST program that has adopted a learning-centered approach to engaging families is [Techbridge](#) in Oakland, California.¹ By involving families in co-learning experiences, where families learn alongside their children, and inviting parents to co-create various program elements, Techbridge helps families feel deeply connected to what their children are learning. As described below, this involvement goes far beyond parents' facilitation of their children's participation in the program.

The Techbridge organization seeks to expand girls' academic and career options in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).² Techbridge serves approximately 400 girls in fifth through twelfth grade each year across 18 yearlong OST and summer programs.³ As part of its mission to increase the number of women and underrepresented minorities in STEM careers, Techbridge targets schools where many fe-

male students do not have opportunities to engage in applied STEM learning. The girls Techbridge serves are often not actively encouraged to explore such content areas at home, where they have few opportunities to see female family or community members working in STEM careers.

To help expand girls' notions of what academic paths and career options are possible for them, Techbridge provides hands-on learning in STEM content areas so girls have the opportunity to become confident and competent in using technology and mastering science and engineering concepts. Co-taught by a Techbridge program coordinator and a teacher from the host school, the OST and summer programs allow girls to engage in learning opportunities where they design their own video games, program mobile apps, and create HTML coding (for such purposes as programming the movements of a robot). The project-based nature of the work allows girls to explore, ask questions, tinker, and develop perseverance as their projects sometimes succeed and sometimes fail. Girls also learn to work in teams and develop leadership skills that benefit their development across a variety of other academic and personal domains.

A crucial part of Techbridge's efforts to help girls see STEM as providing viable career options—rather than just the subject of fun extracurricular activities—is the use of female STEM professionals who serve as role models, working with Techbridge girls on projects throughout the year and interacting with them on field trips. These professionals, including engineers and computer scientists, show the girls what careers in STEM fields actually entail to help demystify those fields of study and inspire the girls to pursue such careers themselves. Often, role models are alumnae of Techbridge who come back to share what they have accomplished since leaving the program. The role models are often close in age to the current participants and have similar backgrounds and life experiences, which help the girls envision their own ability to pursue similar college majors and careers.

In an effort to expand the program's reach beyond the direct OST and summer programming it offers, Techbridge is collaborating with Girl Scout councils on Girls Go Techbridge. As part of this partnership, Techbridge provides Girl Scout staff and volunteers with packaged lesson plans based on its engineering and

1. Information on the Techbridge program provided through telephone interview with Linda Kekelis, Executive Director, December 21, 2011 (with additional personal communication via telephone and email).
2. Techbridge was launched at Chabot Space & Science Center with a grant from the National Science Foundation in 1999. As of 2011, Techbridge has operated as a separate 501(c)(3) nonprofit.
3. In 2012, Techbridge received the Silicon Valley Education Foundation's STEM Innovation Award for achievement in science education.

science curriculum, related supplies, and training. These Girls Go Techbridge “programs-in-a-box” include materials for girls to engage in hands-on project work. To ensure that this strand of its work also includes a focus on the family’s role in supporting girls’ STEM pursuits, each box includes strategies for families so they can also understand and support the STEM learning projects provided by the boxed program. This partnership has allowed the program to extend its reach to 17 Girl Scout councils and over 6,000 girls across the country.

Engaging Families to Promote STEM-based Learning

Techbridge understands the critical role of the family in mediating girls’ experiences with STEM-related learning opportunities, and the program takes active steps to educate families about the benefits of exposing their daughters to STEM fields of study and career options. A key component of Techbridge’s work is helping families understand how they can extend the benefits of their daughters’ participation in Techbridge’s OST offerings by promoting and supporting their daughters’ interests in STEM through conversations, activities, and visits to science museums and other community settings around the Bay Area. And as part of its professional development to prepare teachers to carry out the after-school program, Techbridge provides training on family engagement to ensure that teachers understand the importance of involving the girls’ families in supporting their STEM-related interests and activities. At trainings, teachers learn strategies for encouraging parents to attend family events, including making personal phone calls, engaging families in hands-on activities, and ensuring that programs are inclusive to those who are not English fluent.

Techbridge has developed a free, downloadable family science guide—[Science: It’s a Family Affair](#)—to help families understand some of the concrete ways they can help foster their daughters’ curiosity about and love of science and engineering. Available in English, Spanish, and Chinese, the guide includes ideas for how parents can create learning experiences out of everyday materials, vacations and family trips, and excursions into the community. The guide includes examples of science projects families can do with their children at home. The featured experiments involve everyday items that families are likely to have, such as paper, tape, rubber bands, and string, rather than sophisticated or expensive equipment. The document also includes “guiding questions” for parents to ask their child as they do the experiment to help extend the learning value of the task.

The current version of the science guide also provides families with a set of tips to help maximize their visits to science and technology museums. These tips include suggestions such as “Make the connection: Is your child studying earth science, physical science, or life science in school? Let your child be the expert and explain to you the most fascinating concept he or she learned in class and how it relates to the exhibit” (Anaya, Kekelis, & Wei, 2010, p.13). These tips help families actively engage with their child’s museum experience rather than just supervising their child’s journey through different exhibits.

Techbridge has a page on its website dedicated to family resources. This page also provides additional tips for how families can better support their daughters’ interest in STEM activities and careers. Recognizing that girls often need specific, targeted encouragement to step out of their comfort zone and pursue fields of study that they have been socially conditioned to avoid, the tips include specific guidance for encouraging girls in STEM fields and breaking through the barriers that often prevent girls from seeing STEM pursuits as viable academic and career paths. The family resources section of the website also includes a variety of hands-on activities families can do with their daughters, with a set of tips about encouraging the girls to take the lead on the projects and suggestions for extending the learning value of the project beyond the task itself.

Soliciting Feedback from Families

Techbridge deliberately involves families in the development of programming materials and guides for using community-based science centers to ensure that its materials relate to families’ needs and address questions they might have about STEM fields of study. In its development of the family science guide, for example, Techbridge sought input from parents and their feedback led to the inclusion of do-at-home activities in the final version of the guide. Techbridge also solicited input from families about what to include in the tips about visiting museums. This led to tips such as checking out the museum’s website and planning a visit around the exhibits and shows of interest, following up on topics of interest by going online or visiting the public library, and other suggestions that families could relate to and find useful.

Techbridge seeks input from families in a variety of other ways to help improve its program offerings and home-program communication. At the end of each

programming year, Techbridge surveys parents to find out what changes parents would like to see in the year to come (e.g., more communication about field trips), and Techbridge shares information with parents about the projects on which the girls are working. Techbridge also holds focus groups with parents each year on such topics as what additional information parents want from the program, and what learning opportunities Techbridge should provide the girls through its programming. Parents have suggested more frequent showcases of girls' projects and additional activities for families to work on at home. The program also holds focus groups with the girls it serves to get their feedback on how well the program is addressing their needs and interests. This triangulation of data between the girls' and their parents' input has allowed Techbridge to better address parents' concerns. For example, some parents expressed that they did not want to limit their daughters' college and career options by focusing conversations on STEM fields, while the girls who were part of the program said they wanted *more* information about STEM career paths. Techbridge was able to take the girls' feedback to the parents and the role models to help them understand what the girls themselves wanted and offer ways that parents could support their daughters' quest for academic and career guidance.

Evaluation of the Techbridge Program

Each year, Techbridge conducts an evaluation of its activities to assess the program's progress against its goals. Evaluation results from the 2012–2013 school year demonstrate the success of Techbridge afterschool programs. In particular, of the girls who participated:

- 94% believed that engineering is a good career for women
- 94% knew more about different kinds of jobs
- 94% knew more about how things work (like simple machines)
- 94% said that because of role models and field trips, they were more interested in working in technology, science, or engineering
- 92% worked hard to understand difficult things;
- 92% felt more confident using technology
- 80% planned to take advanced math and/or science classes (Ancheta, 2013)

Techbridge has also analyzed results of a survey assessing the usefulness of the family science guide. Evaluation results indicated the guide was helpful for parents, with nearly all of the parent respondents rating the guide as "excellent" or "good." In addition, the majority of the parent respondents found the guide helpful in encouraging them to explore science careers with their daughters and in providing ways for them to encourage their daughters in science and engineering overall.

Other OST Examples of Learning-Centered Family Engagement

There are a number of other OST programs that seek to engage families in meaningful, learning-oriented ways. Two promising examples are described below. While these two programs do not include the full array of integrated family engagement activities that Techbridge offers, they have adopted family engagement strategies that are much more *learning-centered* than *program-centered*, and help illustrate additional ways in which OST programs can meaningfully engage families.

MAKESHOP: Helping Families Tinker Together to Learn Together

The [MAKESHOP](#) studio at the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh provides children and their families with opportunities to co-engage in creative hands-on "tinkering" that promotes cognitive, physical, and emotional engagement with tangible materials.⁴ Directed at children between the ages of 8 and 12, the studio's workshop-like space invites children and families to test out their knowledge about how objects work, how they are created, and how they can be used. MAKESHOP teaching artists approach each visiting family with the question, *what do you want to make today?* Children and their families create a variety of products with the materials at hand, such as electronic circuit boards, knitted garments, and lawn tools. In developing the studio, the program's founders sought to offer opportunities for parents and children to work side by side and have conversations about what they were creating, rather than parents adopting a detached supervisory role while their children worked independently on projects.

4. Information on MAKESHOP provided through telephone interview with Jane Werner, Executive Director of Children's Museum Pittsburgh, and Lisa Brahms, Research Fellow at Children's Museum Pittsburgh, March 14, 2012. Additional information provided through Werner, J., & Brahms, L. (2012). MAKESHOP: Family engagement in exploration, creativity, and innovation. *Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) Newsletter*, IV(2). www.hfrp.org/Makeshop

MAKESHOP staff members believe that providing children with opportunities to engage in open-ended creative processes helps enhance children's ability to problem-solve, think creatively and flexibly about how to accomplish a goal, work collaboratively with family members toward the creation of an end product, and engage with both familiar and unfamiliar objects in different ways to create something of value. These skills enable children to be nimble and adaptive in their use of knowledge, which can help prepare them for a rapidly evolving workplace where innovative thinking and adaptability are vital. MAKESHOP's founders also discovered that this co-learning process often helped reignite a love of learning among adult family members, making them more likely to continue fostering similar learning experiences outside of the museum and actively engaging with their children in learning.

Tech Goes Home: Creating Technologically-Fluent Families

[Tech Goes Home](#) (TGH) is a Boston-based OST program that helps youth and families understand how they can use technology to enhance learning and development, and engage with one another as co-learners as they navigate new technology.⁵ TGH's school-based OST program provides middle school students and families within the Boston Public Schools with 15 hours of computer-based training across multiple sessions, guided by a teacher-trainer from the partner school. TGH deliberately targets families who have the least access to technology as well as the least amount of interaction with the schools, as the program seeks to boost not only technological fluency, but families' engagement with the school overall.

TGH created a co-learning environment that equally engages youth and their families; the majority of the programming time is spent helping youth and families work together on computer-based projects that require them to collaborate with each other. These learning experiences open up conversations between parents and children about topics they might not have previously discussed, such as life goals or finances. One popular project activity, for example, involves using the Internet to plan a set of weekend activities for the entire family (taking into account each family member's age, interests, etc.) with specific criteria, such as not spending any money on excursions.

Program trainers also recognize the importance of helping parents understand what their children know about

technology and how they use it. This helps parents become more informed about how to help guide their children's technology use and ensure that children are using the Internet safely and engaging with computer programs and apps that have actual learning value. Parents are given resources such as the [Common Sense Media](#) website to help navigate the wide array of technology and digital media options available to their children. An important component of TGH's guidance in this area is the creation of a co-constructed technology use contract on which parents and children agree. The contract is designed, in part, to help foster parents' continued engagement with their children's technology use after the TGH training sessions end and thus retain and build on the technological fluency they developed during their time in the program. At the end of the 15-hour training series, youth and their families receive a reduced-price computer and discounted broadband so they can continue to engage in computer-based learning activities at home.

Implications for Practice

OST programs that adopt a learning-centered approach to family engagement recognize the critical role families play in helping to shape their children's learning experiences. These programs also understand the need for families to actively engage with those learning opportunities, rather than just sit on the sidelines and merely oversee their children's participation. OST programs that take a learning-centered approach to family engagement put families at the front and center of the programming they provide for youth. In this approach, the inclusion of family engagement is a *necessary*, rather than *nice*, component of their programming goals.

This learning-centered approach is one that all OST programs can incorporate, in various ways and to different degrees, depending on their goals and capacity. The strategies outlined above provide a small sample of the ways that programs can think about family engagement as an integral part of young people's learning experiences and how they can incorporate promising strategies into their own programs. The following set of practices can help OST programs adopt a more learning-centered approach to family engagement:

- View families as partners who actively facilitate young people's learning, rather than just people who enable young people's participation in OST programs.

5. Information on Tech Goes Home provided through telephone interview with Deb Socia, Executive Director, and Daniel Noyes, Senior Program Director, February 2, 2012.

- Develop family-oriented guides, learning exercises, or other concrete ways for families to engage with OST content and extend the learning beyond the hours of the program. When developing ways for youth and their families to extend OST learning, be sure that the suggested activities are realistic for families to do, given such constraints as limited time and money.
- Provide opportunities for parents to attend OST program sessions so they can directly participate in their children's learning. To accommodate parents' work schedules, consider holding special co-learning sessions during evenings or on weekends. While events that showcase young people's work provide opportunities for parents to see what their children have accomplished, it can be even more meaningful for families to engage in learning activities alongside their children.
- Share information with parents about their children's learning, including specific areas of strength or talent as well as areas of challenge that youth are working through. Invite parents to share their own information about their children so program staff can improve their understanding of the youth they serve.
- Solicit feedback from families at multiple points during the program. At the beginning of a program, ask parents what they hope their children will learn and what they are most excited about regarding their children's participation in the program. Once the program has been going for a while, use surveys, focus groups, or other methods to find out from parents how well the program is meeting their – or their children's – expectations. Ask families for ideas about how to improve the way program staff engages with them.

The goal of a learning-centered approach to family engagement is to help OST programs better serve youth by inviting parents to participate in and extend the learning offered through OST programming. When programs see family engagement as a key component of young people's learning, family engagement becomes integrated into the core of what OST programs do, benefiting youth, their families, and the programs themselves.

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