

NYSAN

NEW YORK STATE AFTERSCHOOL NETWORK

Afterschool Professional Development: Resources, Outcomes, and Considerations

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Introduction and The Case for Afterschool Professional Development

Introduction

Today's out-of-school time programs operate in a paradoxical context: resources are extremely limited, yet demand for services that effectively promote healthy youth development across a range of criteria and support working families continues to increase. Research shows that afterschool professionals have a significant impact on the overall quality of the programs for which they work. In a 2004 report based on eight experts' reflections on the field, five cited staffing issues such as recruitment, training, and development as the most important aspects of out-of-school time quality systems (Little, 2004). Given that professional development resources are limited at program, intermediary, and agency levels, it is more important than ever to promote professional development experiences that are resource-efficient and accessible to as many afterschool professionals as possible while maintaining high levels of effectiveness and impact. Specifically, this paper seeks to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To outline why professional development is critical and how to maximize opportunities and resources to achieve the most impact on afterschool professionals, programs, and participants.
2. To describe and clarify the wide variety of forms, styles, and types of professional development.
3. To identify and explain the common factors – regardless of the type of opportunity – that serve as the principles for effective professional development.
4. To suggest and explore the numerous considerations for decision-makers in afterschool programs and systems regarding how to best deploy professional development resources and opportunities.

The Case for Afterschool Professional Development

Professional development can take place within a program, among programs, or through engagement with an external trainer, consultant, capacity-building specialist, or topic expert. These learning opportunities often occur through on-the-job experiences, but are also available through workshops and other types of formal training. The Massachusetts After-School Research Study reviewed indicators that lead to high-quality programming, and found that staff quality is the critical component of programs that leads to youth engagement (Miller, 2005). Other research findings indicate that, as a result of having staff attend trainings, programs recognized improvements in their environments, discipline procedures, and communication practices among staff and with youth (Gore and Anderson, 1996). Several other studies have generated similar findings about the link between staff development and program quality (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Khashu & Lobb Dougherty, 2007; Tolman, et.al., 2002).

It is important to shed light not only on the connection between professional development and program quality, but on the link between professional development and youth outcomes. While a gap exists in research in the out-of-school time field on this link, there is evidence in related fields, such as early childhood programs, that suggest a connection between staff professional development and impact on youth outcomes. These studies show promise for the impact of afterschool professional development. According to Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) (2004),

Early childhood education studies have found that the quality of daycare children receive is associated with providers' educational attainment and participation in training workshops (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2001; Norris, 2001), and that quality of care is in turn linked with children's more positive social and cognitive outcomes (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2001). Similarly, an education reform study showed that elementary school students performed higher in reading and math when their teachers had participated in and given high ratings to a professional development program that provided content knowledge and instructional strategies aligned with state education standards (Westat & Policy Studies Associates, 2001).

Types of Professional Development Opportunities

The following chart outlines the types of professional development opportunities typically available to afterschool professionals. The afterschool workforce may access these opportunities pre-service, such as during staff orientation, or in-service as professional learning needs and interests take shape. The chart may be used by program providers for professional development planning, by government agencies and intermediaries in determining how to best support professional development, and by public and private funders for planning investments in the out-of-school time workforce. The outcomes listed can be expected of high-quality learning opportunities, which are defined as those that apply the principles articulated in the next section of this document.

Name of Opportunity	Description	Typical Duration	Benefits	Expected Outcomes from High-Quality Opportunity
Workshop (conference or stand-alone)	Short, intensive session typically focused on one topic	1 – 4 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Requires short amount of time •May provide time to speak with and learn from other participants •Opportunity to network and make connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Exposure to topic •Increased knowledge
Strand of workshops	Series of short, intensive session typically focused on one theme	2 – 5 workshops of 1 – 4 hours each	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Requires short amount of time •May provide time to speak with and learn from other participants •Opportunity to network and make connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Exposure to one or more topics •Increased knowledge
Webinar	Short, intensive session typically focused on one topic delivered using a web-based visual aid and audio	1 – 2 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Requires short amount of time •May provide time to speak with and learn from other participants •Does not require travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Exposure to topic •Increased knowledge
Multi-day institute	Learning experience over two or more days focused on one or more topics	14 – 35 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Provides structure for deep discussion and topic exploration •Develops a community of learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •In-depth exposure to topic •Increased knowledge and changed behavior
Site visits	A visit to a program site conducted by afterschool professionals who wish to learn from site staff and stakeholders	2 – 6 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Learners may conduct visits individually or in groups and may engage in discussion and cross-sharing of ideas •Learning occurs in real program contexts •Allows learner to ask questions of program staff and stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Exposure to multiple aspects of an afterschool program •Time for questions and discussion •Increased knowledge
University course	A course in a higher education setting that results in the acquisition of transferable and portable credits; may be for undergraduate-or graduate-level certificate or degree program.	2 – 4 hours per week for 10 – 14 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Provides multiple incentives (learning and acquiring credits toward degree or certificate) •Develops a community of learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •In-depth exposure to topic over time •Increased knowledge and changed behavior

Types of Professional Development Opportunities (continued)

Professional credential program	Earned by an individual upon completing coursework and providing evidence of competencies; typically requires a combination of portfolio-based work and an external observation.	75 - 125 hours over several months or years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Typically structured based on experience and research •Develops a community of learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •In-depth exposure to multiple topics over time •Increase of knowledge and change in behavior, determined by credentialing agency
One-on-one coaching	A person with known expertise and skill in a specific area offers assistance to a person(s) in identifying and achieving skill development.	Ranges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Learning can be individually customized •Learner builds personal relationship and can typically access expert for additional support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •In-depth exposure to one or more topics over time •Change in behavior, determined by coach
Mentoring	An experienced person partners with a less experienced person to support and nurture personal and/or professional growth.	Ranges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Learning can be individually customized •Learner builds personal relationship and can typically access expert for additional support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •In-depth exposure to one or more topics over time •Change in behavior, determined by mentor
On-site consultation/ technical assistance	Customized services to meet program-wide needs and address systemic issues, typically identified through organization or program assessment tools and conversations with stakeholders.	Ranges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Learning can be individually customized •Learner build personal relationship and can typically access expert for additional support •Typically facilitates implementation of concepts and action steps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •In-depth exposure to one or more topics over time •Change in behavior, determined by consultant

Principles of Effective Professional Development

Successful professional development has an impact on afterschool practitioners' engagement and approach to their jobs. In order for professional development to be most effective, and to most efficiently use resources, opportunities should adhere to the following principles. These principles were developed based on out-of-school time research, practitioners' and policymakers' experience, and teacher professional development standards developed by the New York State Education Department (2009).

Principles for Afterschool Trainers:

Professional development design is most effective when it is:

- Based on a logic model, theory of change, and/or set of principles that explain how professional learning is expected to affect individual practice, programs, and youth outcomes.
- Rooted in adult learning theory: explaining why learning is necessary and content is valuable, treating participants as agents of their own learning, and incorporating participants' pre-existing knowledge and experiences (Knowles, 1990).
- Informed by afterschool professionals' competency frameworks.*
- Linked to education and/or school-age child care regulatory requirements (when applicable).
- Incorporates shared vision of line, management, and executive staff.
- Aligned with a quality framework.
- Informed by research and evidence-based practice.
- Adapted to trends, community contexts, and current events as needed.
- Intended to increase capacity for organizations (e.g. management, sustainability, etc.).

Professional development delivery is most effective when it is:

- Delivered by individuals who possess key trainers' competencies.*
- Supporting a culture of continuous improvement for all engaged in learning.
- Based in professional learning communities, or groups of professionals who share goals, inquire about and share learning, and support one another to implement changes to their practice (Hord, 1997).
- Directly relevant to practice, inclusive of opportunities to try new strategies, and job-embedded when possible.
- Coupled with adequate resources, such as materials and time for integration of new learning into practice.

Principles for Afterschool Providers:

Afterschool providers can best support professional development by:

- Incorporating professional development expectations in staff recruitment practices.
- Coaching staff members after professional development has taken place to monitor and support implementation of new ideas and skills.
- Offering regular professional development that is an integrated part of staff members' jobs.
- Supporting staff to seek and engage in professional development relevant to their jobs and interests.
- Having clearly articulated criteria through which they judge the quality of professional development both before and after engaging a professional development provider.

Principles of Effective Professional Development (continued)

Principles for Afterschool Staff:

Afterschool staff can best participate in professional development when they:

- Demonstrate a readiness to learn and adapt practices based on knowledge and skills acquired.
- Commit time and energy to learning and improving their work.
- Work independently through reading and research to learn more about afterschool practices and to stay current with the field's news and trends.
- Have knowledge of where to find additional resources and supports to continue learning when a professional development opportunity concludes.
- Bring their own knowledge and experience to professional development, serving as “practitioner-experts” during and after a learning experience (PASE, n.d.).

**There are three widely available professional competency frameworks in New York State, developed by AfterSchool Works! New York, the C.S. Mott Foundation, and the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development. See the “Resources and Research on Professional and Workforce Development” section for information on accessing these frameworks.*

+There are two widely available trainer competency frameworks in New York State, developed by the National AfterSchool Association and The After-School Corporation. See the “Resources and Research on Professional and Workforce Development” section for information on accessing these frameworks.

Considerations for Deploying Professional Development Resources

Given the diverse landscape of afterschool professional development, there are a number of decisions that afterschool providers must make in regarding how to use and access resources for professional development. The following key considerations should be taken when planning, preparing, and choosing professional development opportunities:

Cost and Investment:

Each type of professional development requires varying levels of investments, as well as varying expectations for service and outcomes based on those investments. Questions for consideration include:

- How much money will this opportunity require? Is there a per-person fee or a flat-fee? Can one person participate and turnkey information for his or her colleagues?
- How much time is required of each staff person participating in this opportunity?
- How much time is required for administrative tasks associated with this opportunity (e.g. paperwork processing, logistical planning, etc.)?
- What is our expected return on this investment? Are the expected outcomes worth our resource investment?
- Should we invest in supervisors' professional development and/or front-line staff members' professional development? What is the right balance for our program?

Learning-readiness:

Professional development is most effective when organizations and professionals are prepared to learn and change. Questions for consideration include:

- What is the best time of the day and year for professional development? Do staff members have adequate time to participate in this professional development opportunity and in follow-up activities?
- Does our program have a culture of learning? Do staff members understand the value of professional development for themselves, the program, and youth participants? Is our program prepared to dedicate resources to following-up on this professional development opportunity?
- Are participants prepared to share knowledge, skills, and strategies from this professional development opportunity with the rest of our staff in a timely manner?
- Are our staff members going to stay with our program long enough to implement the necessary changes after participating in professional development?
- Are we equipped to coach staff members after participating in professional development? Can we encourage and support staff members to share learning with their colleagues?

Assessing staff needs and interests:

Effective professional development responds to identified staff needs and is tailored to those needs. Some roles within an afterschool program may be more suited for specific types of professional development so that, identifying topics that are appealing to particular staff will help an organization support staff in exploring their areas of interest and/or need. Questions for consideration include:

- Has our program conducted an assessment of staff members' professional development needs? If so, what was learned?
- How might we think about selecting types of professional development for staff members based on their roles? Have we distinguished staff members who are building a career in the afterschool field from those who are not? Should we provide more professional development for staff members who plan to have a longer tenure with our program?
- Are there topics or skills that are of particular interest to our staff members? How do staff interests align with our program's goals?
- What systems are in place to get regular feedback from staff about their needs and interests?

Considerations for Deploying Professional Development Resources (continued)

Creating incentives for professional development:

There are a range of ways in which programs can incent professional development and learning (PASE, 2009). These incentives may lead to increased staff morale and retention. Some require resources, while others do not. Questions for consideration include:

- Can we provide job title changes (lateral moves) for staff members who have completed a certain level of professional development?
- Can we provide raises and/or promotions for staff members who have completed a certain level of professional development?
- Can we provide leadership opportunities for staff who have demonstrated high-quality performance in their role?
- Can we pay or offer compensation time to staff members who participate in professional development?
- Can we publicly praise staff who commit to their own professional learning?
- Can we reimburse staff for tuition or other costs associated with professional development?

Assessing professional development impact:

Once a program has created a professional development plan, the next step is to determine how to assess impact. Questions for consideration include:

- What are the outputs and outcomes we hope to gain from this professional development opportunity? How will we measure whether we have achieved these goals or not?
- How will we capture staff participants' feedback on this professional development opportunity?
- How will we measure changes in practice among staff after attending this professional development opportunity?

Resources and Research on Professional and Workforce Development

Afterschool Professional Competencies

- AfterSchool Works! New York, *NYS School-Age Care Credential Competencies*
<http://www.afterschoolworksny.org/sacc.html>
- C.S. Mott Foundation, *Core Competencies for Afterschool Educators*
www.afterschoolresources.org/directory/professional_development_a/professional_development/core_competencies_for_afterschool_educators.html
- NYC Department of Youth and Community Development, *Core Competencies for Youth Work Professionals*
www.nyc.gov/html/dycd/html/resources/developing_youth_workers.shtml
- NYC Department of Youth and Community Development, *Core Competencies for Youth Work Supervisors*
www.nyc.gov/html/dycd/html/resources/developing_youth_workers.shtml

Afterschool Trainer Competencies

- National AfterSchool Association, *Core Competencies for Afterschool Trainers*
http://www.naaweb.org/resource/resmgr/2010_presenters/naa_cc_final.pdf
- The After-School Corporation, *After-School Trainer Competencies*
<http://www.tascorp.org/content/document/detail/3151/>.

Professional Development Tools

- Pathfinder (professional development and career database), www.afterschoolpathfinder.org

Key Research

- “Building Professional Development Systems for the Afterschool Field,” Afterschool Investments, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/pd_systems.pdf.
- Professional Development for Youth Workers. *New Directions for Youth Development*, Vol. 104. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- “Pathways to Success for Youth: What Counts in After-School, The Massachusetts After-School Research Study,” United Way of Massachusetts Bay, the Barr Foundation and the Nellie Mae Education Foundation in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Education and the Massachusetts Office of Child Care Services: supportunitedway.org/asset/massachusetts-after-school-research-study-mars.
- “Room to Grow: Tapping the After-School Workforce Potential,” The After-School Corporation: tascorp.org/content/document/detail/2818/.

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