

Preface

The recent surge of interest in afterschool programs, along with a dramatic increase in funding, offers educators a unique and exciting opportunity to strengthen learning beyond the school day. Afterschool programming offers one contemporary means of bringing to life the ideas of great school reformers and educational theorists such as John Dewey, Rudolf Steiner, Howard Gardner, and Ted Sizer, all of whom stress the importance of deep, experiential, and participatory learning to a growing mind and society. Afterschool programs offer the ideal conditions for this kind of learning with their small groups, voluntary participation, lack of bureaucracy, chances to experiment continually with new content and materials, and opportunities to forge strong relationships among peers, as well as between staff and students.

However, in order to realize their immense potential, afterschool programs will require a great deal of theoretical and practical support. Our motivation for researching the existing knowledge and practices in afterschool settings was to help “scaffold” the field’s development by creating typologies that will help practitioners, researchers, and policymakers in the field evolve a clear and coherent plan of action.

This book represents the culmination of over a year of intense work. It began as a white paper that served as the foundation for the conference entitled *Afterschool Settings: Learning with Excitement*, which was held in February 2002 at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) and sponsored by Harvard’s Program in Afterschool Education and Research (PAER) in collaboration with McLean Hospital’s Developmental Psychology Research Program.¹ The paper and conference served as PAER’s first step in an ambitious agenda of future research, technical assistance, city-

1. For additional information on the organizations mentioned in this preface, please see Appendix A.

wide initiatives, and training to be developed collaboratively with national and local experts, afterschool practitioners, foundations, and Harvard's host communities (the Allston-Brighton, Fenway, and Mission Hill sections of Boston, and Cambridge, Massachusetts).

The paper and conference were made possible by a grant from Robert Kargman and a five-year commitment by Harvard to strengthen afterschool learning environments in Boston. Kargman, a Boston-based businessman with strong ties to HGSE, approached the senior author with the idea of creating an annual conference to address promising practices and strategies that promote quality afterschool programming. We decided on a first conference that would bring practitioners, funders, policymakers, and researchers from Cambridge, Boston, and across the country to Harvard to discuss and debate the development of afterschool education as a field. Our paper would produce an in-depth review and provide recommendations in the area of learning in afterschool settings; together they would serve as the starting point and focus for the conference. We began inviting panelists for the conference and were surprised by the overwhelmingly enthusiastic response. Clearly, we had hit a nerve. The Nellie Mae Education Foundation generously provided additional funding to bring speakers and participants to Cambridge from across the country.

By this time we had completed the white paper. Our scope was both local and national: we interviewed national leaders and talked to participants in the afterschool movement at many levels of expertise; we also focused a great number of our inquiries on Harvard's local host communities. One year earlier, Harvard University had made a historic commitment to create a better infrastructure for afterschool programs. Five million dollars for five years were committed and the Harvard After-School Initiative (HASI) became a founding member of the largest Boston private-public collaboration serving children and families: the Afterschool for All Partnership. Under the mayor's leadership and chaired by successful entrepreneur Chris Gabrieli, thirteen foundations, corporations, businesses, and organizations committed more than \$23 million to expand available slots in programs, to work toward sustainability, and to improve quality by focusing on learning.

Harvard is the only institution of higher education in the Partnership and does not see its role as solely to provide funds. We are attempting to

create interest in afterschool throughout the university, to build bridges to the community, and to train our undergraduate and graduate students in collaboration with community organizations. We are also developing courses that deal with afterschool education, which will generate additional interest among undergraduate and graduate students to volunteer in programs throughout the city.

PAER addressed the goal of improving afterschool programs through learning when it took on the report and conference that evolved into this book. We have made many changes since we were invited by the Harvard Education Press to create the book, including the incorporation of many conference participants' suggestions and criticisms, and the addition of a number of commentaries by our panelists.

It is exciting to have such strong partners in our efforts to increase visibility and academic rigor in this growing field. We have already mentioned our funders, Robert Kargman, Nellie Mae, and HASI, but we wish to formally thank them here for their continued support and encouragement of our efforts. Robert continues to be a friend and someone who has a deep appreciation of the significance of community-building and afterschool education. Nellie Mae is led by a wise and forceful president, Blenda Wilson. She and her program officers Gene Lee and Lynn D'Ambrose are dedicated to many of the topics raised in this book. For their contributions to our thoughts and the field in general, we also wish to thank our colleagues on the HASI executive committee—Jane Corlette, Kevin McCluskey, Paige Lewin, Judith Kidd, and Judy Palfrey—and the consultants—Andrew Bundy and Elaine Fersh. We thank Ronay and Richard Menschel, Paul Sidel, and Bill Thompson for all they do to support our work. We are also very grateful to Dean Joel Monell at HGSE, to our new Dean Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, and to Bruce Cohen, president of McLean Hospital, for their strong support of our work.

Additionally, we wish to thank all those who attended the February 2002 conference for their thoughtful and enthusiastic participation, which helped shape our revisions and expansions. We particularly appreciate the contributions of the panelists and discussants who prepared formal responses to the conference white paper: Tina Blythe, An Me Chung, Jennifer Davis, Mary Lou Fishman, Lucy Friedman, Chris Gabrieli, Tim Garvin,

Carrie Hickey, Inez Johnson, Leigh Van Dyken, Laura Wolhaffe, and Bernie Zubrowski. We further want to express our gratitude to conference panelists Harris Cooper, Adriana de Kanter, Reed Larson, Pilar O'Cadiz, Sam Piha, and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, who revised transcripts of their commentaries for inclusion in this volume despite an extremely tight schedule. In completing our reviews of the literature for each chapter, we owe much to our committed research assistants and associates, Jennifer Boyd, Sara Heller, Elena Reilly, Jodi Rosenbaum, and Lisa Wahl. Further thanks are due our colleagues at PAER for their comments, support, and inspiring work in the field. We also owe a debt of gratitude to our professional writer and editor, Andrew L. Wilson, who helped meld our writing styles and offered critical feedback. Doug Clayton and his team at the Harvard Education Publishing Group are also due our thanks for their patience and editorial advice. Finally, our thanks would not be complete if we did not thank Patricia Quintin and Pat Furia, administrative assistants at PAER and McLean. And, as always, many thanks for insight, inspiration, and support to Maryanne Wolf, Ben, and David!

We hope this volume captivates and inspires your thinking about after-school education, and that it will further all subsequent efforts to create a viable and sustainable field of practice and scholarship.

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