

# A Crosswalk

Between the *Learning in Afterschool* Learning Principles and Afterschool Quality Measurement Tools

By Sam Piha and Corey Newhouse



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## Introduction

Over the last two decades, we have seen an extraordinary increase in public and private investments in afterschool programs. As these investments and the number of afterschool programs grew, there was an increased demand that programs provide a consistent level of quality. As a result, many afterschool researchers and organizations developed tools that helped programs define and measure aspects of program quality.

During the roll out of the *Learning in Afterschool* project, several afterschool leaders asked how the *Learning in Afterschool* learning principles correspond to afterschool quality measurement tools that are currently being used in the field. In response, we offer this paper, which identifies the overlap between the learning principles promoted by the *Learning in Afterschool* project with items in six program quality measurement tools – tools that serve as good examples of quality measurement tools for afterschool programs.

Through this comparison, we hope to establish the strong relationship between the *Learning in Afterschool* learning principles and what you would expect to see in a quality afterschool program. We are also seeking to identify which learning principles are most aligned and which seem to be absent from the quality equation.

All of these tools examine aspects of program quality that go beyond the *Learning in Afterschool* learning principles. It is important to note that these other aspects of quality are also important. The selection of a tool for assessing program quality should be driven in large part by how the contents of the entire tool matches with the beliefs and goals of the program. For programs that are focused on learning or would like to increase their focus on learning, using a tool that aligns well with the LIA principles may be of particular importance. For an excellent review of well-tested afterschool program quality tools, see *Measuring Youth Program Quality* by Nicole Yohalem and Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom:

[http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/files/MeasuringYouthProgramQuality\\_2ndEd.pdf](http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/files/MeasuringYouthProgramQuality_2ndEd.pdf).

Further, there are many program quality assessment tools currently being used in the field that are not detailed in this paper. However, we provide a listing of some of these other tools at the end of this paper.

## About the *Learning in Afterschool* Project

The *Learning in Afterschool* project is an effort by afterschool advocates and leaders to unify the field of afterschool and focus the movement on promoting young people's learning. The supporters of the *Learning in Afterschool* project believe that if afterschool programs are to achieve their full potential, they must be known as important places of learning that excite young people in the building of new skills, the discovery of new interests, and opportunities to achieve a sense of mastery.

## *Learning in Afterschool Learning Principles*

### **1. Learning that is Active:**

Learning and memory recall of new knowledge is strengthened through different exposures – seeing, hearing, touching, and doing. Afterschool learning should be the result of activities that involve young people in “doing” – activities that allow them to be physically active, stimulate their innate curiosity, and that are hands-on and project-based. Hands-on learning involves the child in a total learning experience, which enhances the child’s ability to think critically.

### **2. Learning that is Collaborative:**

Knowledge should be socially centered, as collaborative learning provides the best means to explore new information. Afterschool programs are well positioned to build skills that allow young people to learn as a team. This includes listening to others, supporting group learning goals, resolving differences and conflicts, and making room for each member to contribute his or her individual talents. Collaborative learning happens when learners engage in a common task where each individual depends on and is accountable to each other.

### **3. Learning that is Meaningful:**

Young people are intrinsically motivated when they find their learning meaningful. This means having ownership over the learning topic and the means to assess their own progress. Motivation is increased when the learning is relevant to their own interests, experiences, and the real world in which they live. Community and cultural relevance is especially important to new immigrant youth and those from minority cultures. Rather than learning that is focused on academic subjects, young people in afterschool can apply their academic skills to their areas of interest and real world problems. Also, when learning involves responsibility, leadership, and service to others, it is experienced as more meaningful.

### **4. Learning that Supports Mastery:**

Young people tell us they are most engaged when they are given opportunities to learn new skills. If young people are to learn the importance and joy of mastery, they need the opportunity to learn and practice a full sequence of skills that will allow them to become “really good at something.” Afterschool activities should not promote the gathering of random knowledge and skills. Rather, afterschool learning activities should be explicitly sequenced and designed to promote the layering of skills that allows participants to create a product or demonstrate mastery in a way they couldn’t do before. Programs often achieve this by designing activities that lead to a culminating event or product that can be viewed and celebrated by peers and family members. For older youth, many programs are depending on apprenticeship models to assist youth in achieving a sense of mastery.

### **5. Learning that Expands Horizons:**

Young people, especially those from low-income families and neighborhoods, benefit by learning opportunities that take them beyond their current experience and expand their horizons. Learning about new things and new places promotes a greater sense of potential of what they can achieve and brings a sense of excitement and discovery to the learning environment. Afterschool programs have the flexibility to go beyond the walls of their facilities. They can use the surrounding community as a classroom and bring in individuals and businesses that young people may not otherwise come into contact with. Expanding young people’s horizons also includes helping them to develop a global awareness. This includes increasing their knowledge of other cultures and places and their understanding of the issues and problems we have in common across cultural and political divides.

The *Learning in Afterschool* project is promoting five core learning principles that should define afterschool programs. These learning principles are strongly supported by recent research on brain development, education, afterschool programs, and the growing science of learning. They are also well aligned with the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills and workforce skills that young people will need to succeed in the years ahead, as well as efforts to increase young people’s interest in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

Each of the learning principles, cited on page 4, support each other and together provide an important framework for afterschool programming. There are a number of exemplar afterschool programs that strongly draw upon and demonstrate the *Learning in Afterschool* principles.

## Afterschool Program Quality Tools

Below we assess the overlap between the *Learning in Afterschool* learning principles and six program quality measurement tools currently being used in the field. The tools we examine are the Youth Program Quality Assessment (David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality), Out-of-School Time Program Observation Tool (Policy Studies Associates), The Assessment of Afterschool Program Practices Tool (NIOST), The Comprehensive Summer Program Observation Tool (National Summer Learning Association), The California After School Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool (California Afterschool Network), and The Quality STEM Assessment in Out-of-School Time: Dimensions of Success Observation Tool (Program in Education, Afterschool and Resiliency at Harvard University).

For each measurement tool, we offer an overall description of the tool, summarize the extent of alignment with the *Learning in Afterschool* learning principles, and include a table that rates the level of alignment and offers example items from the quality measurement tool that correspond with each learning principle. Though individual items are pulled out here for purposes of demonstrating alignment, it is important to note that individual items should not be pulled out and used in isolation, as this may affect the integrity of the scales and the eventual quality findings.

Below is a key that defines the levels of alignment we describe. These ratings are based on the number of items that correspond to the learning principle definitions and how well they align.

<b>Strong Alignment</b>	Assessment tool has multiple measures of and/or measures that strongly correspond to the LIA principle. Using this tool will provide a robust sense of the program's alignment with the LIA principle.
<b>Moderate Alignment</b>	Assessment tool has several measures that correspond to the LIA principle, though some elements are not covered. Programs may need more information about their activities to fully assess their alignment with the LIA principle.
<b>Minimal Alignment</b>	Assessment tool has few or no measures that correspond to the LIA principle; using this tool will not offer information about the program’s alignment to the LIA principle.



# Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA)

## *Developed by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality*

**Overview:** The overall purpose of the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) is to encourage individuals, programs, and systems to focus on the quality of the experiences young people have in programs and the corresponding training needs of staff. While some structural and organizational management issues are included in the instrument, the YPQA is primarily focused on what the developers refer to as the “point of service” – the delivery of key developmental experiences and young people’s access to those experiences.

Primary Purpose(s): Program Improvement; Monitoring/Accreditation; Research/Evaluation

**Program Target Age:** Grades 4 – 12

**Relevant Settings:** Structured programs in a range of school- and community-based settings.

**Developer’s Website:** <http://www.cypq.org>

**Source:** *Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment Tools*, Nicole Yohalem and Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom, March 2007.

### **YPQA Tool Description: Subscales**

The YPQA instrument is broken into four major subscales, each broken into different categories. These are listed below and those most closely associated with the five *Learning in Afterschool* learning principles are shown in bold.

- I. Safe Environment
  - A. Psychological and emotional safety is promoted
  - B. The physical environment is safe and free of health hazards
  - C. Appropriate emergency procedures and supplies are present
  - D. **Program space and furniture accommodate the activities offered**
  - E. Healthy food and drinks are provided
  
- II. Supportive Environment
  - F. Staff support a welcoming atmosphere
  - G. **Session flow is planned, presented, and paced for youth**
  - H. **Activities support active engagement**
  - I. **Staff support youth in building new skills**
  - J. **Staff support youth with encouragement**
  
- III. Interaction
  - K. **Staff use youth-centered approaches to reframe conflicts**
  - L. **Youth have opportunities to develop a sense of belonging**
  - M. **Youth have opportunities to participate in small groups**
  - N. **Youth have opportunities to act as group facilitators and mentors**
  - O. Youth have opportunities to partner with adults

IV. Engagement

P. **Youth have opportunities to set goals and make plans**

Q. **Youth have opportunities to make choices based on their interest**

R. **Youth have opportunities to reflect**

**Summary: Alignment with Learning in Afterschool Learning Principles**

The YPQA is strongly aligned with four of five *Learning in Afterschool* principles, and will provide robust information about the ways in which out-of-school time programs provide active and engaging activities that encourage youth to build mastery and work collaboratively on meaningful activities. The YPQA has multiple items that explore the extent to which youth are building conflict resolution and group process skills in support of collaborative learning.

The YPQA does not explore the extent to which young people are able to engage in their communities, nor does it explore the building of global awareness.

## Youth Program Quality Assessment Tool – Table 1

LIA Principle	Level of Alignment and Observation Examples
Active	<p><b>Strong Alignment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities incorporate both abstract principles and concrete objects (II-H)</li> <li>• Activities involve youth in engaging with materials or ideas (II-H)</li> <li>• Program activities lead to tangible products or performances (II-H)</li> <li>• Youth have multiple opportunities to practice group-process skills (e.g., actively listen, contribute ideas or actions to the group, take responsibility for a part)(III-N)</li> <li>• Program space allows youth and adults to move freely while carrying out activities (I-D)</li> </ul>
Collaborative	<p><b>Strong Alignment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth have structured opportunities to get to know one another (III-L)</li> <li>• Groups have a clear purpose and all group members cooperate in accomplishing it (III-M)</li> <li>• Youth have multiple opportunities to practice group-process skills (e.g., actively listen, contribute ideas or actions to the group, take responsibility for a part) (III-N)</li> <li>• Activities involve different group sizes (III-M)</li> <li>• Youth are encouraged to think about the consequences of their actions (III-K)</li> <li>• The program has conflict resolution practices in place that are used by staff and youth (III-K)</li> <li>• Staff approach conflicts calmly (III-K)</li> <li>• Staff seek input from youth in order to determine both the cause and solution of conflicts and negative behavior (III-K)</li> </ul>
Meaningful	<p><b>Strong Alignment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth make decisions about how they do things (process) and what they do (content) (II-H)</li> <li>• The program environment is inclusive and respectful of all youth (III-L)</li> <li>• Youth make plans for activities (IV-P)</li> <li>• Youth have the opportunity to reflect on their progress (IV-R)</li> <li>• Youth have the opportunity to talk about what they are doing (II-H)</li> <li>• During activities, all youth have one or more opportunities to lead a group (III-N)</li> </ul>
Supports Mastery	<p><b>Strong Alignment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth are encouraged to try out new skills or attempt higher levels of performance (II-I)</li> <li>• Youth receive support from staff despite errors and are encouraged to correct their mistakes (II-I)</li> <li>• There is an appropriate amount of time for all of the activities (II-G)</li> <li>• The activities include structured opportunities to publicly acknowledge the achievements, work, or contributions of at least some of the youth (III-L)</li> <li>• Activities culminate in a presentation or final product (II-G)</li> </ul>
Expands Horizons	<p><b>Minimal Alignment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth are encouraged to try out new skills or attempt higher levels of performance (II-I)</li> </ul>