

Learning In Afterschool

Preparing Youth for the 21st Century

A project of Temescal Associates and The Sunset Neighborhood Beacon Center

Project Position Statement

www.learninginafterschool.org

In 1992, the Carnegie Corporation published [*A Matter of Time*](#). This study challenged us to address both the risks and the opportunities of the out-of-school hours. It highlighted the large percentage of [waking hours](#) young people spend outside of the classroom. It also made us aware of a [spike in crime](#) involving young people as victims or perpetrators between the hours of 3-4pm. These facts became cornerstones of the afterschool movement.

As a movement, afterschool advocates sought to address the issues of safety and risky behavior by taking afterschool programs to scale. Over the last decade, afterschool leaders worked hard to address the challenges faced by going to scale so quickly. Now is the time to declare the unique opportunities for learning that should define afterschool programs in the decade ahead.

The supporters of the *Learning in Afterschool Project* believe that if afterschool programs are to achieve their full potential, they must become known as important places of learning – more



specifically, learning that excites young people in the building of new skills, the discovery of new interests, and opportunities to achieve a sense of mastery. Afterschool programs have [unique advantages](#) that perfectly position them to accomplish these things in ways that [complement](#) the learning that happens at school and home and offer valuable [extended learning opportunities](#).

Now is the time to declare the unique opportunities for learning that should define afterschool programs in the decade ahead.

The *Learning in Afterschool Project* is promoting five core learning principles that should define afterschool programs. These learning principles are strongly supported by recent [brain research](#), [afterschool research](#), and the [growing science of learning](#). They are also well aligned with the [21st 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 below support each other and provide an important framework for afterschool programming. Further, there are a number of [exemplar afterschool programs](#) that strongly draw upon and demonstrate the Learning in Afterschool principles. These learning principles include:

1. Learning that is Active

Learning and memory recall of new knowledge is strengthened through different exposures – seeing, hearing, touching, and doing (1). 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)



2. Learning that is Collaborative

Knowledge should be socially centered, as collaborative learning provides the best means to explore new information (3). 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 be helped to 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 (4). 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 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. Meeting new people can expand social networks in ways that create new opportunities. 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.

It is important to acknowledge that there are additional [learning principles](#) that are important to afterschool programming, as well as [other efforts](#) to promote rich learning in and outside of school. (Underlined words are hyperlinks that can be found on the website version of this statement, at www.learninginafterschool.org.)

Endnotes

Photographs courtesy of the following afterschool programs: Sunset Neighborhood Beacon Center, YMCA of Greater Long Beach, Champions, and Bay Area Community Resources.

This position statement was written by Sam Piha, Temescal Associates.

- (1) http://education.alberta.ca/apps/aisi/literature/pdfs/bbased_learning.pdf
- (2) <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/content/contareas/science/eric/eric-1.htm>
- (3) http://education.alberta.ca/apps/aisi/literature/pdfs/bbased_learning.pdf
- (4) <http://www.teenempowerment.org/pdfs/After-Schoolstudy.pdf>