

2008

# After-School Programs and Reading Achievement

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AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS AND READING ACHIEVEMENT

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A Thesis Project

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

Central Washington University

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Education

Master Teacher

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by

Jamie M. Mack

December 2008

## ABSTRACT

### AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS AND READING ACHIEVEMENT

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The relationship between participating in an after-school program and accelerating reading levels was studied. Seventy-three fifth-grade students were pre- and posttested using the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test to determine reading levels. Thirty-six of the 73 students participated in an on-going 21<sup>st</sup> Century Academic After-School Program. The other 37 did not. The results showed that there was no statistical difference between participating in an after-school program and accelerating reading levels. The study also broke down the data by gender. These results showed that there was no statistical difference between males who participated and males who did not; however, there was a significant difference between the two groups of females. Possible reasons for the results and the intricacies of after-school programs are discussed.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This has been a long journey. Not only did I earn a master's degree in the past two years, but I completed my professional certification, successfully coached two middle school softball teams, joined committees in my school to become more involved, helped my husband with his business, supported friends and family in their endeavors, and most of all, had my beautiful son, Owen.

I would like to thank Dr. Lee Plourde for his endless support and thorough examination of my thesis. He pushed me along when I was just beginning, supported me as I gained momentum at the end, and was there every step of the way, even answering E-mails on the weekends! Dr. Lannie Fitch also deserves my gratitude for acknowledging the fact that I *am* a good teacher and that I *can* make a difference. He understands the importance of family and was always willing to accommodate my schedule.

I would like to thank my fifth-grade teaching team, who is my family when I am at school. They support me to no end and I love being surrounded by their wisdom and humor. They are all truly mentors whom I love and cherish.

Thank you to my parents, who have raised me to be a determined and motivated individual. Most importantly, I would like to thank my husband. Throughout long nights, cranky days, and trying to "balance," he has supported each and every decision with love and trust. I couldn't have accomplished all that I have without him.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I	BACKGROUND .....	1
	Statement of the Problem .....	3
	Significance of the Study .....	3
	Purpose of the Study .....	4
	Research Question.....	4
	Hypothesis.....	4
	Limitations .....	4
	Thesis Overview.....	5
II	REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	6
	After-School Programs.....	6
	Prevalence .....	7
	Types of After-School Programs.....	8
	Implementation Issues.....	9
	Importance.....	12
	Relationships .....	14
	After-School Programs and Educational Achievement .....	15
	Summary .....	19
III	METHODS AND PROCEDURES.....	21
	Methods.....	21
	Subjects .....	22
	Hypothesis.....	22
	Procedures .....	22
IV	RESULTS .....	24
	Assessment Overview .....	24
	Data and Analysis.....	24
V	DISCUSSION.....	27
	Recommendations .....	27
	Conclusion.....	28
	REFERENCES .....	30

## CHAPTER I

### BACKGROUND

Structured activities and services for children outside of the school day have been around for more than a century. Gayl says, “At the time, many thought responsibility for after-school programs was best left to community organizations, such as the YMCA and Boy Scouts of America” (2004, p. 2). In the mid-1990s, a confluence of factors changed the face of after-school programs. First, more parents were entering the workforce which brought a need for supervised activities after school. Second, a budding field of research focusing on the benefits of such programs that indirectly battled youth crime and directly affected social skills, led to public interest and additionally, the growing educational standards and accountability movement was motivation for the federal government to become involved in helping children to achieve.

After-school programs have been around in some form for quite awhile; however, beginning in 1994, the momentum began to pick up as the need for structured time with supervision increased. Here is a brief report of the recent history of after-school education. In 1994, Georgia created a statewide after-school initiative for middle-school students called the 3:00 Project. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) Act was introduced to provide grants to rural and inner-city public schools for projects that benefit the education, health, social service, culture, and recreational needs of the community (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

In 1995, the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC received a \$750,000 budget appropriation under the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. In 1996, Delaware

Governor Tom Carper invested \$20 million in extra instructional time for low-performing students to improve their academic performance in math, science, English, and social studies.

In 1997, the Mott Foundation in partnered with the U.S. Department of Education to provide training and technical assistance to 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program grant recipients. In 1998, the Mott Foundation partnership secured \$40 million for the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program. The Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund launched their own initiative to support the creation of 60 after-school programs in 20 communities around the country. Legislators in California established the first statewide after-school program, the After-school Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnership Program, to provide literacy, academic enrichment support, and safe constructive alternatives for students in kindergarten through ninth grade.

In 1999, President Clinton proposed an \$800 million increase to the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program over five years as part of a historic initiative to improve childcare services. In 2001, the federal budget for the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC is \$845.6 million. Finally, in 2007, the federal budget for the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC is \$2.5 billion; an unprecedented amount.

The emphasis on student achievement in No Child Left Behind (NCLB), an educational reform act signed by President Bush in January of 2002, changed the focus of the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program. The program began to grow rapidly. "In less than one decade, the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program grew from a small pilot project to an integral part of the nation's largest federal education reform law since 1965" (Gayl, 2004, p. 3). Suddenly, the time



between 3:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. became important in the eyes of the government, educators, parents, and students.

#### Statement of the Problem

Students in the United States are not making the grade. “In 1994, only 30% of the nation’s fourth and eighth graders scored at proficient or advanced levels in reading in the National Assessment of Educational Progress” (Dryfoos, 1999, p. 118). At-risk youth, who are in the greatest need of after-school opportunities, and who may be most able to benefit, are participating less than their more advantaged peers (Bouffard et al., 2006). These are the students that program leaders need to target and recruit in order to raise the level of success for these at-risk youth. After-school programs have other limitations as well. Attendance tends to be sporadic because children have other activities after school such as sports and household chores. The more parental support for these programs the more they can become a priority in the home. The duration, structure, and intensity of after-school programs can also be a downfall if not managed successfully (Gayl, 2004).

#### Significance of the Study

After-school programs can be very beneficial to struggling students and very rewarding to the adults who teach and volunteer. As Riley, Smith, Peterson, and Kanter (1999) state, “Research shows that students who are behind in reading can catch up to grade level with additional reading instruction and tutoring after school and in the summer” (p. 7). Research has also shown many other benefits of after-school programs. The peak times for juvenile crime and experimentation with drugs, alcohol and sex are between the hours of 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. (Gayl, 2004). Young People spend 40% of

their time in unstructured, unsupervised, and unproductive environments (Wright, 2005). After-school programs significantly decrease this deviant behavior and promote safe environments. After-school programs help students develop social skills and self-confidence by providing an environment that is less threatening and more diverse.

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### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to give validity to after-school programs. Parent and student buy-in is one of the most important factors in getting the right students to participate in these programs. Oftentimes, the students who are in the most need of extra assistance do not see the significance or have the motivation to get extra help. This is also true of the parents of these students. This study will show the significance and power of participating and following through with an after-school program.

### Research Question

This study attempts to answer the question: "In comparing two groups of similar students' reading levels, will an educational after school program accelerate the reading levels of the participating students compared to the non-participants?"

### Hypothesis

The following is a null hypothesis for this study. Pertaining to the acceleration in reading levels, there will be no significant difference between the after-school program participants and the non-participants in the program.

### Limitations

Limitations of this study include the fact that not all activity leaders (the after-school teachers) are certified in the field of teaching and the curriculum used is a piecing

together of many established curriculums and may be hard to reproduce. The curriculum evolves as classroom teachers see new needs for the students in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Academic After-school Program. Maturation becomes a factor in this study since the time between the reading pretest and posttest is approximately 6 months. The demographics and population of the school may also affect the generalizability of the results.

### Thesis Overview

Chapter I of this thesis focuses on the background of the problem and signifies the reason for pursuing with the research. In the next chapter of this study, the literature review, various points of research on this topic will either refute or support the research question. In chapter III, the methodology, procedures, and tools will be discussed. Chapter IV details the findings of this study and chapter V concludes the research study giving recommendations and implications for further research.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

As mentioned in the previous chapter, after-school programs have been evolving since the mid-1990s and are still being researched as to the positive or negative impact they have on youth. “Not all of the research on after school programs is so glowing, but policymakers debating the issue should remember that our national commitment to after-school programs is only ten years old” (Gayl, 2004, p. 1). Currently, society needs to study programs around the country and build on what is working. The public firmly supports after-school programs and early data or uneven outcomes should be taken into consideration but not be the determining factor in whether after-school programs should stay or go (Gayl). Current reform efforts put strong emphasis on the succession of every student. However, there is more to succeeding than just grades. Everyone, students, parents, educators, and community members need to play a role in shaping children and providing a well-rounded educational experience. Many different programs exist across the United States, with different curriculum, mission statements, teaching styles and appeal, but most have the same foundational goals in mind: the achievement of youth in school and society. This review will look at previous studies and current articles to examine current views on after-school programs in general and the combination of after-school programs and their affects on educational achievement.

#### After-School Programs

Traditionally, schools have been a 6 to 7 hr day, “But across the country, recognition is growing that children need attention not only during school but after school

hours. The school day is not long enough to teach the students all they need to learn” (Dryfoos, 1999, p. 117). Dryfoos finds that the roles of schools are evolving due to the need for supervision for working sets of parents and educators concerns about achievement. In a statistical analysis report, put out by the U.S. Department of Education, 50% of children in kindergarten through eighth grade had nonparental arrangements after school (Kleiner, Nolin, & Chapman, 2004). These data, which was collected by survey, show how important of a resource after school programs are for those students whose parents work.

#### Prevalence

Information about after-school programs has been limited, but a number of recent studies shed light on the prevalence of these programs. Data gathered by the U.S. Department of Education reveal that after-school programs increased between 1988 and 1994. The proportion of public schools reporting increased from 16% in 1988 to almost 30% in 1994. The proportion of private schools with programs increased from 33% to 48% in the same time frame (Dryfoos, 1999). The 1991 National Study of Before-and-After-School Programs is the only source of detailed data on programs that operated at least 2 hr per day, 4 days per week. At the time, it was estimated that 600,000 children were enrolled in these programs. Giving the increasing demand for after-school programs, more and more programs are popping up around the country. In 1991, 13,500 programs were identified and in 1999 it had grown to 20,000. There are many diverse needs for after-school programs and because of this, new varieties of programs are being developed (Dryfoos).

## Types of After-School Programs

### *School-Administered Programs*

The first type of after-school programming is school-administered programs, which offer extracurricular activities, extended-day programs, and school-age childcare.

The key features are the school is the lead agency, school remains open for regular school activities such as sports and clubs, and schools may collaborate with community-based organizations (CBO) to provide specific activities. Staff of this type of programming includes school and CBO personnel. The goals of school-administered programs are recreation, academic achievement, and enhancement, safe havens, and reduction in crime and drug use. The most common outcomes are improved academic achievement, better school adjustment, new skills learned, and high-risk behaviors prevented (Dryfoos, 1999).

### *Community-Based Organizations (CBO)*

Another type of after-school programming is community-based organizations. The key features are that CBO are the lead agency and operate in a school bringing in the activities and services. The staff includes CBO personnel and the goals are prevention of high-risk behaviors, creating safe havens, and community development. The possible outcomes are preliminary returns, improved school climate with reduced fighting and suspensions, improved reading scores, and reduced high-risk behaviors (Dryfoos, 1999).

### *Community/School Partnerships*

A third type of after-school programming is community/school partnerships. The key features are school and CBO services are integrated, continuity is established between academic and after-school programs, and the school is open to the community at

large. The staff are the school and CBO personnel and the goals are academic achievement, parent involvement, and community development. Early results include improved academic achievement, improved attendance, and reduced neighborhood crime (Dryfoos, 1999).

All of these programs help fill the gap outside regular school hours, yet each has a different purpose and vision with the most ambitious approach being that of the community/school partnerships that integrate advanced thinking about both education and support services into their programs. Each type of programming also has different sources of financial support, from school budgets and parent fees to foundation grants and donations (Dryfoos, 1999). There are many implementation issues that can be daunting obstacles in running an after-school program. Source of support is just one obstacle that after-school programs are currently facing.

### Implementation Issues

#### *Funding*

After-school programs do take time, energy, and money. Sometimes, teachers are willing to teach after school for extra money. Sometimes parents or para-educators are qualified to do the job. Inviting community members into the school to teach new skills is a great way to bring a town together. Oftentimes, these community members volunteer and do not receive payment. Funding though, can be a huge obstacle when starting up or sustaining a program. There are many grants available for after school programs. "Until recently, not much public money was available for after-school programs. The 1991 National Study of Before-and-After-School Care found that 83% of program income came from parent fees, and only one-third of the programs received any governmental

funding” (Dryfoos, 1999, p. 129). Most often the quality of after-school programs can be attributed to inadequate funding. The cost for a school-based, after-school program costs between \$50,000 and \$500,000 per year, depending on what the program entails.

Initiatives by federal, state, and local governments are trying to help in making more after-school programs available. Most programs are flexible with parents who owe tuition and do not send overdue bills to collections. Inadequate funding issues can also have mental and physical health effects on staff (Dryfoos, 1999; Halpern, 1999; Riley, et al., 2000).

### *Facilities*

When a school is open from early morning until late at night, there will always be issues with custodial work, which rooms are off limits, and the infamous problems with missing supplies and messy rooms. Teachers have a hard time letting other staff members into their rooms when they are not there to monitor. Custodians never have a chance to properly clean and are always working around whatever program is currently up and running. Principals will close off libraries or computer labs because of the liability of unsupervised children in these important areas. One way to combat these problems is to have a trustworthy and trained after-school staff. Some programs will go around and check all rooms before leaving at night and others are in charge of their own space. Facility issues may not be the most threatening obstacle to after-school programs, but it is certainly an issue (Dryfoos, 1999; Halpern, 1999).

### *Governance and Staffing*

Dryfoos (1999) finds that governance is only an issue when an outside organization, like a CBO, comes into the school and runs a particular program. While the



principal remains in charge of the school, the program director is in charge of the staff and facilities. This can be a problem if there is no trust, communication, and/or respect. Staffing on the other hand is another issue entirely. "All programs need staff who are qualified and committed, have appropriate experience and realistic expectations, and can interact productively with regular school staff" (Chung, 2000). Jobs in after-school programs are part-time and poorly paid, seldom offering benefits. In low-income areas it is even harder to find adults who are willing to work under these conditions. Oftentimes, the "front-line staff," who work with the youth lack time, interest, and confidence. Most staff have not had proper training in the field that they are teaching and staff turnover is high. For this reason, program directors appreciate the help of volunteers in assuring more individual attention to each child (Halpern, 1999). California Tomorrow (2007), an organization working in support of after-school programs, recommends hiring staff from the community at all levels of the program in order to bring common language, backgrounds, and cultural resources to the students in the program. California Tomorrow also suggests hiring staff that understand diversity issues, respect all groups, and are comfortable working across differences.

#### *Accountability*

In order to ensure that after-school programs receive funding, support, and an all around positive reputation, quality assessments that are research-based must be conducted. "The U.S. Department of Education recently noted that assessments of after-school activities are based mostly on the opinions of experts, not on formal evaluations" (Dryfoos, 1999, p. 130). In order to keep such programs running several key questions must be addressed: (a) Is value added by placing programs in school buildings? (b) Does

it make a difference if the program is integrated with the regular school day? and (c) What outcomes, other than improved school performance, are acceptable for accountability purposes? After-school programs may have a better chance of growing and expanding when the previous questions can be answered using an educational research approach (Dryfoos, 1999).

### Importance

#### *For Children*

If done correctly, the after-school program atmosphere should be safe and inviting. Student-teacher relationships flourish in this environment. Students begin to trust other staff besides their classroom teacher, thus creating a circle of people to go to in times of need. Not only do student-teacher relationships flourish, but also students make new friends whom they might not talk to during the day. There isn't time in the day for every fun activity that educators would like to do with kids, especially now with high-stakes testing. After school programs are a great way to incorporate activities and projects that the kids would like to do without compromising academics.

After-school programs are a place where a lot of change happens. Self-definition is critical in the early years of school. Children develop their talents, learn to recognize and overcome their limitations, and choose activities that will prepare them for a fulfilling life as an adult. Children juggle competency in academics, mixed emotions, hormones, social pressures, and relationships with peers and adults. After-school programs are a great way and a safe place for children to go through all of these changes (Larner, Zippiroli, & Behrman, 1999).

*For Parents*

After-school programs provide supervision and enrichment. It is the responsibility of parents to protect, teach, and guide their young, but sometimes parents need a little support. To these parents, after-school time is a source of anxiety, concern, and expense.

Many researchers echo the need that is growing for a supervised place for children of working families (Dryfoos, 1999; Gayl, 2004; Halpern, 1999; Riley et al., 2000; Larner et al., 1999). Larner et al. (1999) reports that "76% of mothers with children ages 6-17 were employed in 1996, and two-thirds of them worked full time. The greatest financial and time pressures confront single-parent households, where 28% of children lived in 1996" (p. 8).

*For the Public*

After-school programs are a source of prevention, learning, and guidance. "Research has found that the after-school hours--from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.--are the peak period for experimentation with drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, and sex. It is also the peak period for juvenile crime" (Gayl, 2004, p. 1). After-school programs keep children busy with worthwhile tasks while providing a safe place to be after-school. The public and policymakers have become increasingly involved with after-school programs which are seen as relevant to two policy agendas: (a) preventing crime, substance abuse, and teen pregnancy, and (b) promoting school achievement (Larner et al., 1999). Local police are now becoming advocates for after-school programs. "Widely reported FBI statistics indicate that 47% of violent juvenile crimes take place on weekdays between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m." (Larner et al., 1999, p. 9).

Educators are concerned with lagging and uneven achievement among students, despite school reform efforts. After-school programs offer remedial instruction, tutoring, homework assistance, and enrichment projects in math, science, drama, and computers as a valuable way to help struggling or disadvantaged students (Larner et al., 1999). For children, parents, and educators, especially with the rigorous standards that are being implemented in education these days, educational achievement is a huge concern and after-school programs may be an answer.

### Relationships

One key element that is often underestimated is the power of relationships. There is current research being done about relationships and how they affect student's attitudes toward school.

A positive parent-staff relationship is important because it can motivate the student to perform higher, behave better, and attend more often (American Federation of Teachers, 2007; Hammond, n.d.; National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d.; "Building", 2000). Best practices for parent-staff relationships include (a) families are welcome to visit the program at any time, (b) families are viewed as equal partners in the education and guidance of their children, and (c) staff and families treat each other with respect (Ashcraft, 2005).

Positive staff-student relationships are beneficial because the students feel safe and nurtured. The staff can judge if they are doing their job well by the students' attitudes (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.). Best practices for staff-student relationships include (a) staff talk with each child daily, (b) staff recognize the range of children's

abilities, (c) staff treat children fairly and respectfully, and (d) staff respond appropriately to individual children's needs (Ashcraft, 2005).

Student-student relationships are probably the most influential in the lives of children. Children model after their peers and want to be accepted. According to Ashcraft (2005), the following should be observable in positive student-student relationships: (a) children act on their convictions and stand up for their beliefs, (b) children attempt to resolve conflicts nonviolently, (c) children learn to value honesty and act accordingly, and (d) children cooperate and work well together.

In 2001, the Australian Centre for Equity Through Education and the Australian Youth Research Centre conducted a study titled, "Building Relationships: Making Education Work." This study found that students prioritize relationships as number one importance in their school years. First comes relationships within a peer group and secondly between teachers and students. Relationships went hand-in-hand with attitudes. Most students felt elementary school was fun, but secondary school was less fun. They enjoyed school more when they felt valued, had relationships with teachers, and played a role in the school (Australian Centre for Equity Through Education and the Australian Youth Research Centre, 2001). Families, educators, and students need to strive to achieve a positive school and home atmosphere, mutual respect among all involved, and a motivating attitude toward learning. This perfect environment will inevitably create life-long relationships and learning.

#### After-School Programs and Educational Achievement

"There is a growing belief, based on research and practice, that schooling is 'necessary but not sufficient' for supporting a range of positive outcomes including

academic achievement” (Bouffard et al., 2006, p. 1). Since many people in the educational field are supporting the above quotation, after-school programs are becoming a powerful entity in the educational system. After-school programs used to focus on the issue of supervision for those parents who worked, as discussed previously, but they are now shifting to developing children academically. “The current emphasis on performance standards and testing has led schools to look to the after-school hours as time that can be spent developing children’s academic skills” (Shumow, 2001, p. 1).

Literacy has always been a high priority for parents, educators, and education reformers alike. Educators are turning toward after-school programs for extra help in improving reading throughout the grade levels. “Not surprisingly, reading after school is the activity most predictive of higher student achievement” (Shumow, 2001, p. 3).

There are many aspects to consider when designing a quality reading program for after-school. A well-defined reading curriculum should be in place in after-school programs in order to make strides in reading. The age to target and prevent reading difficulties is in kindergarten through second grade. These students show average gains of 9 percentile points. The gains made in students not targeted until middle school are minimal. This does not mean, however, that the older students should be ignored. After-school homework assistance programs, for example, are shown to be beneficial for the middle-school age students. Attendance in after school programs by middle school students results in an increase in students’ interest in literature, rate, homework quality, engagement in school aspirations for the future, improves school attendance, and reduces dropout rates (Chung, 2000).

Duration is another aspect of quality after-school reading programs. A program that lasts fewer than 44 hr is not long enough to fully engage students while a program of over 210 hr can be daunting for struggling students. The training of after-school staff members is critical to maintain a high level of expectation, education, and understanding among students and staff. Sustaining reading gains over time should be a major goal of after-school reading programs. Since this can be a huge undertaking, at-risk students may need more than one type of reading intervention throughout the school year and into the summer (Miller & Snow, 2004).

The research indicates that children from high-risk backgrounds have the most to gain from after-school programs in terms of educational opportunity. Academically at-risk children who attended after-school programs more frequently, as compared with children who attended less often, developed better work habits in their school classrooms, attended school more often, and used less aggressive ways to solve conflicts with peers (Shumow, 2001). “Currently, after-school programs serving low-income children face increasing pressure to play a role in helping those children acquire basic literacy skills and achieve school success” (Halpern, 1999, p. 92). A study conducted by Bouffard et al. (2006) showed that parental education and family income had a lot to do with participation in after-school programs. At-risk youth, the ones who needed to be in after-school programs, were not participating at all or with as high a rate as students from more stable homes. These findings provided further evidence that after-school programs need to seek out and recruit these at-risk youth and really work at sustaining a relationship with this population to keep them in the programs (Bouffard et al.; Olsen, 2000). “During the school-age years, new cognitive skills combine with the school’s competitive

environment to heighten children's awareness of how well they perform and how they compare with others. Some expect to succeed, while others become accustomed to failing and may eventually turn their backs on the school culture" (Larner et al., 1999, p. 7).

With all the added reforms of performance standards and testing procedures, educators are not the only ones feeling the pressure. This pressure trickles down to the students and can have a lasting effect on their educational futures.

In the last decade society has paid more attention to how United States' students perform compared to the rest of the world. "The United States has a history of investing in its youth when they have steered off course" (Fusco, 2001, p. 3). Helping students to improve academic skills is worthwhile, but it is not enough to offer tutoring so that children who are failing can catch-up. After-school programs need to develop opportunities to learn in ways that creatively stretch one's capacities, not just cognitively. "Opportunities provided during these after-school hours might be lost with increasing pressures to make the grade" (Fusco, p. 4).

Structured activities after-school can help students compete in tomorrow's workforce, by providing a variety of skills that stretch and exercise the mind. These programs can help youth develop skills from leadership, to communication, to critical thinking. These programs are a perfect place for projects, real-world applications, and smaller student-teacher ratio, three things that are often forgotten during the regular school day. With high-stakes testing sweeping the nation, many elective classes are being replaced with remedial classes. Those elective classes are often vocational in nature. After-school programs are a great way to provide those opportunities that are becoming obsolete during the school day.



## Summary

What can schools do to build self-confidence? How can parents encourage students to make new friends? How can educators build lasting relationships with students? Where do these kids go after school? How can schools help the struggling readers? How can schools give these students more unique opportunities? These are questions educators ask themselves everyday. After-school programs may be the answer. It's not a quick fix and it does take time, energy and money, but the outcomes could be life changing.

At Clovis Point Intermediate in East Wenatchee, Washington, 40% of the students stay after school to participate in the 17 available after-school programs. Some of the classes offered are ninja training (physical fitness training), archery, math bingo, foreign language, and rocket launching. The programs receive funding through the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grant that the school was awarded in 2004, which is up for reevaluation in 2009 (Schleif, 2007). "Hopefully we get it back, if we lose that it's big." Principal Dennis Gibson said as cited in (Schleif, p. A2). The students know there is math and science involved but they don't seem to mind when it involves building rockets or winning at math bingo. The parents are happy with the program as well (Schleif, 2007).

Vale Elementary in Cashmere, Washington is also reaping the benefits of after-school programs. This district uses Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) to evaluate the student body. MAP tests are state-aligned computerized adaptive assessments that provide accurate, useful information in the subjects of reading, mathematics, and language usage. Vale is discovering that the students involved in the program are scoring higher and making good growth (Allmain, 2007). "We're excited to see this, because

with our program, we know what the targets are. We have a good measurement in the MAP test, and then we can target specific areas of need.” Superintendent Glen Johnson said as cited in (Allmain, p. 1).

After-school programs are an evolving issue. Without much valid research the jury is still out on whether these programs are instrumental in our youth’s lives or whether they are another strain on our ongoing battles with funding and educational standards. Most often the research points out the beneficial aspects of emerging programs. As Riley et al. (1999) state, “Research shows that students who are behind in reading can catch up to grade level with additional reading instruction and tutoring after school and in the summer” (p. 7). High quality after-school programs provide numerous family, community, social, and educational benefits-particularly for struggling students. In an environment where policy is rightly focused on increasing student learning, after-school programs are an important tool for students and schools (Gayl, 2004).

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

#### Methods

In order to proceed with this study, a clearance from the Human Subjects Review Committee through Central Washington University was obtained. This was a nonequivalent-groups pretest-posttest design, which is often referred to as quasi-experimental. This study was designed to determine the impact of after-school programs on reading levels of fifth-grade students. The study did not make an effort to determine a causal relationship between the independent variable (after-school program) and the dependent variable (reading level), but rather attempted to find statistical difference between the reading levels of students who participated in an after-school program and those who did not.

Data were collected using the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test in order to measure accelerated reading levels of both groups. The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test is a group administered reading survey test. The test gives a specific reading level that the student achieves. It can be taken online or with pencil and paper. For this study pencil and paper tests were used. It is distributed through Riverside Publishing (MacGinitie, MacGinitie, Maria, Dreyer, & Hughes, 2006). A pretest was given in September and a posttest followed 8 months later in May. An independent-samples *t* test was used to compare the means of the reading scores of the students in the after-school program and the students who did not attend.

## Subjects

The subjects selected for this study were fifth-grade students from an elementary school in east central Washington. The ages ranged from 10 to 12 years old, and included 37 males and 36 females. Thirty-five Hispanic, 33 Caucasian, and 5 students of other ethnicity participated in the study. Nine new students who were not tested in the fall were not included in the study. Nine special education students were also not included in the study. This sample was selected based on the convenience method as the researcher taught fifth grade and had access to other fifth-grade classrooms. Seventy-three students participated. The study took place during the 2007-2008 school year.

## Hypothesis

The following is a null hypothesis for this study. Pertaining to the acceleration in reading levels, there will be no significant difference between the after-school program participants and the non-participants in the program.

## Procedures

### *Research Design*

The research design was a nonequivalent-groups pretest-posttest design. Two separate groups of fifth-grade students were studied. The first group, comprised of 37 students, was enrolled in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Academic After-school Program from November through May of 2007-2008. The second group of 36 students was not enrolled in the after-school program. All students began the study with a reading level between 2.2 (second grade, second month) and PHS (post-high school). These reading levels were based on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test done in September of 2007. In May of

2008, after the after-school program had ended, all students were tested again using the same test.

#### *Measurement Tools*

The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test was the measurement tool utilized in this study. This assessment tests vocabulary as well as comprehension. The assessment gives a grade equivalency for each category and then finds an average between the two for an overall grade equivalency.

#### *Analysis Tools*

The data in this study were analyzed using an independent-samples *t* test. The *t* test is a parametric statistical equation that tests a null hypothesis that the means of two groups are not the same. After posttests were administered, the gains between the pretests and posttests for all subjects were calculated. Using the *t* test formula in the Excel program, scores from the after-school participants and the non-participants were compared. This information was then used to obtain a level of significance to statistically analyze if the null hypothesis could be rejected.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Assessment Overview

The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test gives a grade equivalency for each student based on a comprehension and vocabulary score combined. The vocabulary portion is 45 questions and the students are timed for 20 min. If they do not finish all the questions in that amount of time, those missed are counted wrong. The question is posed as a sentence with an underlined word. The student must choose, multiple-choice style, the correct definition of the underlined word. The comprehension portion is 48 questions. The students are asked to read paragraphs, short stories, and poems and respond to the questions. This portion is 35 min and any questions not finished are counted against the student. Based on a scoring rubric that comes with the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, the students' vocabulary score and comprehension score are calculated and combined to get a grade equivalency score. The combined score, for example 4.5 (fourth grade, fifth month), is used by teachers to assess a student's instructional level.

#### Data and Analysis

Fifth-grade students pre- and posttest scores were analyzed using an independent-samples *t* test. Male and female scores were then separated and also analyzed using the independent-samples *t* test to see if there was a significant difference for the different genders.

The students' scores were analyzed and there was no statistical difference between the students who attended the after-school program and those who did not (see

Table 1). The mean grade equivalency gain for the 37 participating students was 0.93, almost one grade level. Eighty-nine percent of the participating students (33 of 37) showed growth. Fifteen of the 37 participating students showed a gain of one or more grade levels. The mean grade equivalency gain for the 36 nonparticipants was 1.14, a little more than one grade level. This study yielded a nonsignificant difference ( $t_{46} = .627$ ,  $p = .27$ ).

Table 1

*Grade Levels Gained in Reading of Participating and Nonparticipating Students*

Group	No. of subjects	Mean grade equivalency gain	One or more grade levels gained (%)
Total			
Participating	37	0.93	41
Nonparticipating	36	1.14	53
Male			
Participating	22	1.23	59
Nonparticipating	15	0.62	40
Female			
Participating	15	0.54	13
Nonparticipating	21	1.29	62

When looking at the male subjects' scores, the 22 males that attended the after-school program gained 1.23 grade levels on average. All participating male subjects showed growth. Thirteen of the 22 participating students gained one or more grade levels. The 15 male subjects who did not attend gained an average of 0.62 grade levels. These scores yielded a nonsignificant difference ( $t_{15} = 1.02, p = .16$ ).

The 15 female subjects who attended the after-school program gained on average 0.54; half a grade level. Seventy-three percent of the participating female subjects (11 of 15) showed growth. Two of the 15 females who attended gained more than one grade level. Twenty-one female subjects who did not attend gained 1.29 grade levels on average. These scores yielded a significant difference ( $t_{18} = 1.97, p = .03$ ).

When analyzing the scores, two observations were made. Two students who had a net gain of zero (both not attendees of the after-school program) stayed at a PHS level. This is the highest level to obtain. Also, some students who had a negative difference were still reading higher than a fifth-grade level after decreasing.



## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

Becoming a successful reader is one of the most important skills that a person can possess. Having a broad vocabulary base and good comprehension skills helps young readers attain success in reading. In order to read well, one must practice often. After-school programs are wonderful extensions to the regular school day. These extensions give more time for struggling readers to practice reading.

This study investigated whether being involved in an after-school program could have an impact on students' reading levels. The results show that there is not a significant difference between the group that participated in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Academic After-school Program and those who did not.

When looking at the data for females and males separately, it is determined that there was not a statistical difference between males who participated in the program and those who did not. However, between the two groups of female subjects, there was significant data to reject the null hypothesis. The female subjects did not in fact benefit academically from the after-school program. The nonparticipating female subjects showed far more growth in reading levels.

#### Recommendations

It is a known fact that being able to read is necessary to function in society and be a productive citizen. There is no doubt that reading is stressed in schools nationally and worldwide. Reading is not going to go away. After-school programs, on the other hand, are still trying to find their niche in the education world. As previously stated in chapter

II, "Not all of the research on after school programs is so glowing, but policymakers debating the issue should remember that our national commitment to after-school programs is only ten years old" (Gayl, 2004, p. 1). The public firmly supports after-school programs and early data or uneven outcomes should be taken into consideration but not be the determining factor in whether after-school programs should stay or go (Gayl). Although, this particular study showed no significant difference between reading achievement and after-school programs, there are three ideas to consider. First, the sample group may have been too small. If a larger group of students was pre- and posttested different results may have been discovered. Second, when dealing with adolescents there are many factors that influence scores, such as motivation, health, instruction, and parental support. Third, after school programs provide much more than reading scores. Many different programs exist across the United States, with different curriculum, mission statements, teaching styles, and appeal, but most have the same foundational goals in mind: the achievement of youth in school and society. The recommendation is to continue to create more after school opportunities and gather more parental and community support. These programs provide safe places for students to succeed and fail.

### Conclusion

This study showed that there was no significant difference between the reading levels of students who participated in an after-school program and those who did not. There was no significant difference between male subjects who attended the program and those who did not. There was, however, enough statistical significance to reject the null hypothesis when it came to the female subjects. The nonparticipating females showed far

more growth in reading levels than the female subjects who attended the after-school program. As discussed, reading is one of the most important skills a person can attain in his/her lifetime. After-school programs are an extension of the regular school day that provides a safe place for this skill to be nurtured. Many other important skills are also enhanced by being a part of an after-school program such as developing talents, learning to recognize and overcome limitations, and choosing activities that will prepare for a fulfilling life as an adult. Although this study did not show significance, it shines a light on all the intricacies of an after-school program and illustrates that the possibilities for extended learning are endless.

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