

Developing the Afterschool Professional and the Profession: Addressing Quality and Scale

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Executive Summary

With the growth in the number of community-based and public school-based afterschool programs, attention has focused on how to best support and strengthen the quality of their offerings. What is the breadth and depth of professional development opportunities available for afterschool staff around the country? What are gaps in these offerings and what are barriers to their utilization? What are strategies for expanding these opportunities, and who might be key organizations to involve? The goal of the Afterschool Training Analysis and Inventory Project, a collaboration between the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the Partnership for After School Education (PASE), has been to assess what are the professional development opportunities available to part-time and full-time staff who work in or relate to afterschool programs, whether they are school teachers, principals or superintendents, or community agency youth workers, program managers or executive directors.

To assess nationally the need for and the availability of afterschool professional development resources, PASE convened a series of Forums in eight cities, surveyed approximately 350 professionals who are linked to afterschool education, and created a database of training resources available nationally and in the cities of New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

PASE identified a series of strategies that include expanding the availability of training, diversifying training content according to different categories of afterschool staff, and providing training in a variety of modalities so that diverse learning styles are accommodated. These three dimensions (content, staffing, and modalities) together create a rich environment for professional development.

Professional development opportunities need to scale up. This requires training trainers with expertise in core afterschool content areas. Leadership is required to guide this scaling up, and leading thinkers and doers in afterschool and closely aligned fields need to be included in these leadership opportunities. Leadership structures should anchor and guide professional development initiatives, as well as identify and harness resources across disciplines to benefit the afterschool profession.

The Need for Professional Development¹

Caring for children and youth during out-of-school time has become a pervasive family challenge. Workforce trends indicate there are more working parents who spend more time at work than ever before (The After School Corporation, 1999). The widespread need to find safe, affordable arrangements for their children is reflected in a recent C.S. Mott Foundation/J.C. Penney national poll in which the vast majority of respondents (86%) believe afterschool programs are a necessity. Certainly the number of afterschool programs has been expanding in recent years (Policy Studies Associates, 1998). Examples of new public and private initiatives include the U.S. Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Center initiative, the California State-funded After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program, The After School Corporation, LA's BEST, the Beacons and Virtual Y's, and the rapid growth of afterschool professional networks such as the Partnership for After School Education (PASE) and the National School Age Care Association (NSACA).

With the growth in the number of programs that serve increasing numbers of children and youth, greater attention has been paid to the benefits of afterschool (see a concise summary of research by The After School Corporation, 1999). The impact of afterschool programs has been well documented by researchers who have found that academic performance, in-school behavior and attendance, and high school graduation rates all improve as a result of participating in afterschool programs. Beyond school outcomes, researchers report that children who participate in afterschool programs have fewer behavior problems in the home, and during adolescence are less likely to use drugs and alcohol, and are less likely to become pregnant. As might be anticipated, the capacity to generate positive outcomes is contingent upon the quality of the afterschool program.

While program quality is a result of numerous factors, including adequate funding, low staff-child ratio, engaging curricula, access to nonfinancial resources, and the involvement of parents, research has found that the amount and quality of training for staff is a critical element (California Department of Education, 1999). If training is critical to the effectiveness of afterschool programs, what is the breadth and depth of its availability? Secondly, considering the rapid growth of the field, how might these offerings be made even more available, in a range of topic areas that are well suited to the diversity of professional and experiential backgrounds of those who staff afterschool education programs?

Afterschool Professional Development

Training is a particular challenge to the afterschool field for a number of reasons. First, those who staff afterschool programs come from a diversity of professional and experiential backgrounds. A typical afterschool program may have a group of high school and college students working directly with children, alongside a cadre of school teachers, art specialists, and volunteer community residents. These staff represent a range of skills and perspectives on how to work with young people, reflecting similarities and differences in their professional

¹ While we recognize there are important differences among the terms, "professional development," "training," and "staff development," for the purpose of this document we use them as synonyms to mean opportunities to improve one's skills and knowledge over the long-term.

development needs. In addition, learning styles will usually differ, requiring alternative training methods and modalities.

Complicating matters is that there is no one place to go for professional development. There is no “Afterschool University.” Learning about health and safety guidelines may come from one source, not-for-profit management training might come from another, while curricula and pedagogy may come from a third (if at all). Just as staff will have different backgrounds, so will trainers, and this multiplicity of perspectives makes it hard to share a common vision and best practices of what afterschool education is about, and therefore what training should be. Without such a common framework, it is difficult to create and support a culture of professional development. Such a culture is critical if staff are to make a long-term commitment to enhancing their skills and knowledge, and feel that becoming an afterschool educator is a professional identity worthy of building a career around.

Building a culture of professional development is especially needed when considering who makes up the workforce. While extremely committed, this devotion does not apparently stem from what we customarily think are traditional rewards. Working in afterschool programs has often been inappropriately considered a low-paying caretaking job that requires few skills aside from an interest in children. According to numerous surveys, staff are typically poorly paid, work part-time, and have no benefits (Halpern, 1999). Clearly this is at least partially the result of not conceiving of afterschool education as a field, let alone a profession.

At the same time, the expectations of afterschool programs and their staff have been raised. Parents want homework to be completed, schools demand reading and math scores to increase, and children and youth want something that is fun and different from school. The consensus vision of afterschool education is of a program that provides a comprehensive, cohesive, balanced, enriched, and innovative learning environment that is responsive to the needs of children, parents and communities. Core youth outcomes include being a complex thinker, skilled communicator, responsible citizen, and self-directed adult. Creating and sustaining programs that support these outcomes requires a committed and skilled workforce. The challenge to staff development is to assist practitioners to identify a set of core values, principles, and practices that will guide their work. The good news is that, in contrast to the recent past, the value of afterschool is appreciated. However, there is a lag in addressing staff development needs.

Findings: Voices From The Afterschool Field

Over the past year, PASE has collaborated with the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, and other groups in eight cities to assess professional development opportunities that are available to part-time and full-time staff who work in or relate to afterschool programs, whether they are school teachers, principals or superintendents, faith-based groups, or community agency youth workers, program managers, executive directors, parents or volunteers (see a summary of what was learned in each city in the attached Matrix of Cities). PASE found that not every geographical area has the same afterschool professional development resources or the same needs. Unanimity and variation are important to consider

because response strategies then need to be flexible, distinguishing between what is essential to all, and what is critical to some. Key findings include:

- Opportunities to access professional development resources vary across cities, but in every city the need for training outstrips its availability. There are few college-level afterschool academic programs and pre-service options that prepare the potential workforce for the afterschool world. In-service professional development opportunities are infrequent, differentially reach staff, and are often for select audiences, e.g. only for teachers or staff from a single agency. Pockets of comprehensive in-service professional development systems exist, but one-shot trainings and single workshops are more the rule;
- In-service training topics are not well aligned with a coherent vision of afterschool, and there is no agreed upon core knowledge for afterschool staff. Universally, major training gaps include how to integrate academic standards with youth development when designing afterschool programs, and how to create effective collaborations between schools and community based, youth-serving organizations.
- Practitioners consistently state that barriers to utilization of existing staff development opportunities include lack of knowledge about what, where and when training is actually available, as well as cost, transportation, and scheduling;

In a series of Round Table Forums across the country with the diverse groups of professionals connected to afterschool education, their suggestions for how to improve what is available to the field include:

- Professional development needs to be organized so that is inclusive of and builds community with local groups, takes advantage of local practitioner expertise, and is ongoing and long-term. Opportunities should be open to diverse constituency groups, and inclusive of all types and levels of staff;
- There should be more networking and professional development opportunities, ones that draw together practitioners from a diversity of fields who are united by their connection to afterschool—starting with bringing together in-school and out-of-school educators;
- There needs to be incentives that recognize the value of professional development, whether this is by ensuring that full-time and part-time staff utilize training opportunities, paying staff for time spent in training, or by enabling practitioners to accrue training hours for the purpose of career advancement, certification, or academic degrees.
- Incentives and mechanisms should be developed to encourage organizations, like a Boys and Girls Club or a school district, that provide high quality training to their own staff, to open these up so other organizations may participate;
- Training of trainer initiatives need to be routinely developed to increase the diversity and number of staff developers, and to maximize the availability of professional development opportunities;

- More and better materials need to be developed for staff training. Clearinghouses of information, training events, curricula, materials and resources need to be created so that practitioners can “one-stop-shop.”

Strategies To More and Better Professional Development

Based on findings that reflect commonalities and differences in what practitioners say is needed across the country, PASE has identified a set of strategies that when implemented in a complementary manner, lead to the following outcomes:

1. Increased breadth and depth of professional development opportunities available to practitioners;
2. Increased talent pool of trainers who can provide professional development;
3. Increased capacity to organize, coordinate, continuously improve, and sustain professional development opportunities.

Over the course of the past year, through individual conversations and Round Table Forums, PASE has met an incredibly diverse, committed, and provocative group of educators, afterschool champions, and thinkers. Some come from national organizations, others are from local grassroots programs—they represent a range of perspectives and expertise. This incredible depth of experience needs to be mobilized and focused to accomplish these outcomes. The following sub-sections flesh out what needs to be developed, and returns to this point about galvanizing groups across the country to make it happen.

Going 3-D: Expanding the What, Who and How of Professional Development

Participants in the Round Table Forums extensively discussed the range of skills that are needed to provide quality afterschool programs to children and youth. It quickly became clear that the expansion of professional development opportunities needs to occur along three dimensions: more content areas, the ability to address the distinct needs of different categories of staff, and more diverse training methods and modalities. Each of these will be described in turn.

Dimension 1: Develop and Diversify Content Areas

The afterschool field needs trainings that enhance practice. For direct service staff, theories of child development are of little use unless they can be translated into new activities and approaches for use in working with children. Management staff, on the other hand, need training that strengthens their program design, staff development, and leadership skills while combining up-to-date theory with promising practice. The overall goal remains--to increase the capacity of practitioners and programs to provide quality afterschool programs.

To organize the growth in topic areas, there are a few basic principles to consider. Content must allow for the sequencing of professional development, enabling one to construct a pathway from novice to expert. Secondly, professional development should allow the individual to shift their educational perspective and belief system so that it is aligned with youth development principles that resonate for both in-school and out-of-school educators. This aspect of professional development focuses on the conceptual or philosophical basis for working in afterschool education. Third, professional development should allow individuals to gain specific curricular skills in a range of content areas, as well as pedagogical skills related to working with children and youth.

In our discussions with practitioners, there is a broad consensus that management and direct service staff, whether they are working in school based or community based afterschool programs, need to access professional development that encompasses four areas:

1. Child-Centered Practice

- *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*: Staff need to be introduced to child and youth development theory in the context of community based and school based afterschool education--to help them understand the children with whom they work.
- *Group/Classroom Management & Conflict Resolution*: Effective group management is a pre-condition to effective pedagogy, and staff require skills and strategies to maintain group focus and guide learning, while having effective strategies for dealing with inter-student conflict.

2. Programming

- *Literacy, The Arts, and Youth Leadership*: Families, schools and afterschool practitioners are searching for engaging literacy, arts, and youth leadership activities that are fun, do not feel like “school,” and support positive youth outcomes that encompass, but are not limited to, academics. Practitioners not only need to know what they might do with children, but with increased experience they need to develop their skills to develop their own curricula. While literacy, the arts and youth leadership are the broad topic areas, these should be inclusive of many subjects, including:

- ✓ Math
- ✓ Science
- ✓ Technology
- ✓ Sports & Recreation
- ✓ History & Culture
- ✓ Health

3. Organizational, Management & Leadership Issues

- It is essential that management staff are skilled in at least the following areas:
 - ✓ *Managing staff*, including hiring and retaining staff, supervising and maximizing staff skills;
 - ✓ *Operations*, including finances, legal regulations & requirements, and managing supplies and resources;
 - ✓ *Programming*, including design, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

4. School and Community Collaboration

- *Children in the Context of Community and Family*: Practitioners frequently point out that staff need to understand the community, cultural, and family backgrounds of the young people with whom they work—whether a program is community based or school based.
- *Accessing Community Resources*: Many of the in-school educators who participated in Round Table Forums indicated they were especially interested in how to access community resources, and link curricula to the world of the neighborhood.
- *Linking the In-School and After School Day*: While the cultures that distinguish schools from community based organizations might not be easily broken down through content oriented training, certainly school teachers, principals and out-of-school practitioners should be able to articulate the purpose of afterschool activities in the vocabulary of academic standards. In addition, both in-school and out-of-school educators need to be more knowledgeable about how the other's institution functions in order to mutually influence and reinforce the links between the two.

Dimension 2: Organize Curricula Content According to Different Staff Levels

As programs grow and develop, and their afterschool efforts intensify, the diversity of their staff increases. Teachers are recruited to work in the afterschool hours, young adults are employed and a more complex system of management and managers develops. Many staff are part-time, and must use their limited staff development to maximum benefit. And the range of fields from which these staff are drawn continues to grow. There is a need, therefore, to tailor trainings to these very different audiences. One size does not fit all, and trainings need to reach these staff and speak in a language they understand.

PASE asked practitioners to identify the types of skills afterschool staff require. There is the distinction between direct service staff who work directly with children and youth, and those who manage programs or direct organizations. Secondly, there are specialists with particular expertise in a content area, like artists, science teachers, etc., and “generalists” who may be expert in working with young people but do not specialize in a particular afterschool activity. These distinctions are valid both for community based organizations and schools, and are

important when organizing professional development. Identifying the appropriate audience for training is critical to making professional development worthwhile.

Since staff titles vary from organization to organization, it is easier to focus on staff functions. The following are distinctions that practitioners make among staff functions:

Direct Service Staff

- ✓ New-To-Afterschool Staff (first time workers, young adult group leaders, and volunteers)
- ✓ Experienced Youth Practitioners
- ✓ Teachers
- ✓ Activity Specialists

Management Staff

- ✓ Afterschool Program Administrators
- ✓ School Principals
- ✓ Executive Directors of Community Agencies
- ✓ School Superintendents

See the attached Matrix of Afterschool Staff Skills to see how training content relates to staff function.

Dimension 3: Expand Professional Development Methods and Modalities

What is the best method for learning about and internalizing a broad range of topic areas? Just like young people, adults have diverse learning styles. Training methods need to accommodate this diversity. Practitioners need to see, touch, and directly interact with other programs—not just hear about them in workshops and conferences. Professional development methods and modalities can be organized into six areas, and the point is that the richer the variety of modalities, the better for supporting practitioner efforts to continuously improve the quality of afterschool programs:

1. *Direct Instruction:* This is the traditional approach to professional development, in which an expert typically communicates in primarily verbal ways, but can be designed in creative ways that move beyond “chalk and talk” methods. Direct instruction can occur in a variety of ways, including through single workshops, a series of connected workshops, half-day seminars, on-site training, mini-courses, conferences, or symposia.

2. *Learning Communities:* Learning communities enable practitioners to come together, exchange ideas and examine practice, with guidance and facilitation. This can occur through large or small group meetings that focus on a specific topic, but are structured around peer exchange and mutual learning, rather than around the communication of specific content by an expert to the practitioner. Staff meetings can be organized to function as a learning community, as can affinity groups of practitioners—artists from different organizations, for example, who meet on a regular basis to reflect on practice.

3. *Demonstration Projects*: Program visits that allow staff to observe one another in action, and see different curricula and approaches to working with youth are effective methods for supporting practitioners. This enables practitioners to dialogue in greater detail and specificity about pedagogical techniques, while also opening up the conversation to such common challenges as how daily schedules are structured, how transitions between activities are organized, and other such important day-to-day issues.

4. *Professional Networks*: Seeing and interacting with peers is of critical importance to building a sense of professional identity, and this facilitates a shift in the afterschool culture from being self-identified as low-skilled child caretakers to seeing oneself as a skilled youth developer. Entering into a room filled with peers often has the important effect of giving practitioners a physical sense that they are connected to a large group of peers who share the same challenges--a group that can both offer and benefit from the sharing of experience

5. *Training of Trainers*: While professional development strategies that incorporate the training of trainers is certainly a capacity building strategy (that is the focus of the next section of this document), it should also be considered a training modality for two reasons. First, by typically transferring knowledge and skills directly to “end users”—the trainee—afterschool professional development initiatives often constrain their potential impact. The afterschool field should make greater attempts to build into professional development mechanisms that put “legs” on training so that it transmits more extensively through an organization. One practical place to start is with “teach backs,” whereby staff who attend a training are provided with additional materials and specific strategies for communicating what is learned to their peers back at their work site. This is rarely, if ever, done—and when it is, there is usually no guidance or support given to the staff person who must play this pivotal role. This strategy should almost be automatic, given the paucity of professional development opportunities as it stands.

Secondly, using training of trainers techniques should be considered as a modality or training method because it facilitates the internalization of information that might otherwise be lost. When people know they will need to communicate newly learned information to others, they approach training differently. By relying on this approach, the likelihood that knowledge and skills will be transferred to others is maximized.

6. *Distance Learning*: Identifying and adapting content for distance learning modalities is a strategy for reaching a broader audience than in-person professional development venues. Materials that allow staff to conduct “teach backs” to colleagues who are unable to attend training events are especially necessary, as described above. Certain content areas and training methods may be more appropriate for distance learning, and these should be identified.

The 4th Dimension: Galvanizing the Talent Pool of Trainers

Increase Number and Diversity of Trainers: While program practitioners require training in a range of areas, there must be an explosion in the *number* and *diversity* of trainers available to provide this training. To generate the pool of trainers, a vast network of leaders and practitioners must be excited and mobilized. Teams of experts need to be created in the different training content areas to identify and reach out to existing trainers or potential trainers in such diverse

fields as public education, higher education, early childhood programs, social work, psychology, the arts, cultural institutions, libraries, and public parks and recreation. While the professional development needs that fall under these content areas are varied and diverse, PASE believes a philosophical and conceptual standard must be established to guide the training provided by trainers.

Establish Standards of “Good” Afterschool Professional Development: Just because a staff person has experience and skills, does not necessarily mean they will be a good trainer. Training trainers requires curricula that cover two areas. First, the specific content that a training is to focus on. Second, alternative methods to use when training staff with different experiential and professional backgrounds. Since many different organizations train trainers, a common set of standards or principles needs to be agreed upon. Core standards might include professional development that:

- Reflects a combination of youth development and education approaches to working with youth;
- Draws from experienced practitioners;
- Allows for a range of learning styles;
- Integrates theory and practice;
- Involves staff in identifying their own needs;
- Is inclusive of all staff levels, while appropriate for each staff level;
- Is inclusive of cultures and builds on community;
- Offers opportunities for participants to interact and learn from one another;
- Honors life experiences of participants;
- Integrates multiple disciplines; and
- Enables the evaluation of both individual and program progress as a result of participating in professional development.

Expand Professional Networks To Include Trainers: Just as practitioners can benefit from a professional network, so can trainers. Often trainers are part of a freelance workforce, and they need a mechanism that allows them access to information about practice, industry trends, and jobs. In addition, afterschool practitioners, and their counterparts in allied fields such as education, benefit from freelance opportunities to be trainers, allowing them access to secondary income sources while also expanding their professional identity. Providing the equivalent of a magnet to which trainers might be drawn is an effective strategy for increasing the capacity of the afterschool professional development field.

Greater Inter-Agency Linkages: Beyond the supply of individual trainers, afterschool programs are themselves a critical source of professional development support to colleague agencies. While greater contact is beneficial, the power of reciprocal visits and telephone conversations is even greater when focused on addressing specific organizational or programmatic challenges. Carefully planned, orchestrated, and facilitated agency-to-agency, person-to-person, or person-to-agency mentoring and technical assistance are effective mechanisms for improving program quality when the issues are well defined, the partnering entities are well matched, and the scope of the support provided is realistically planned.

The 5th Dimension: Leadership

Catalyzing the Development of Content and the Pool of Trainers: In order to expand the who, what, and how of professional development, a coalition of constituency groups needs to come together on a local and national level. The leading thinkers and doers in afterschool education need to form affinity groups around training content. Since afterschool draws from so many fields, there are useful resources from established fields like in-school education, museums, community based youth serving organizations, social work, psychology, extension services, libraries, etc. These groups need to organize, further develop, and adapt, as necessary, training curricula to make them more accessible to the afterschool field. In addition, these groups may identify and recruit a wider pool of trainers from their contacts within their areas of expertise. This is not a question of identifying a small team of trainers, but of building on a municipal, regional, state and national level, large cadres of locally available trainers.

Through the Round Table Forums, practitioners were most often proud of their afterschool programming efforts, and local experts and leaders frequently emerged from these discussions. From city to city, their professional identity often changed, in large part because the make-up of the afterschool field differed. In Dallas it was a school superintendent, in Atlanta it was the United Way, and in Los Angeles it was a community based organization. There are important differences between cities, and the following outlines them:

- The public school system may or may not be active in the area of afterschool programming. If it is, its focus may be limited to just test scores and remedial programs, and not to a broader range of activities and approaches to working with youth. Some public school systems routinely collaborate with community based organizations, while others do not.
- Many cities do not have a history that has resulted in the development of grassroots, community based youth serving organizations. In such cases, as an independent sector, these organizations may be few and far between, dominated instead by national youth-serving organizations (like the YMCA). In either case, often these organizations are not well networked with one another.
- In many cities and states, there are relatively few public and private funding streams available to the afterschool field. In other places, there are high profile government initiatives to support extended day learning opportunities.
- Cities differ in terms of the “politics” among organizations, and these politics must be understood in order to organize an effective and coordinated system of supports to afterschool practitioners. Answers must be sought for such questions as “Who are the key players and what are the turf issues,” and “How much collaboration currently exists among organizations.”
- Cities differ in terms of the vision of afterschool programming that dominates. Sometimes the purpose of afterschool is primarily stated in terms of academic support, other times the vision is stated more broadly to include youth development approaches to working with young people.

Since communities do differ, local partnerships need to be created, capable of building on local assets and able to reach out to important stakeholders that others might not know about.

Leadership partnerships may be composed of the following types of members:

Local Community and Faith Based Organizations, Local Chapters of National Organizations, Cultural Institutions, and Technical Assistance Partners: There are outstanding local community based organizations who are content specialists, and who develop and implement professional development. This talent pool can be mined to broaden the range of what is available.

Public Schools: In-school educators utilize creative curricula that may be used in the afterschool world. These curricula may need to be somewhat adapted for a non-classroom setting. In addition, in-school educators are a critical audience to involve in the development of content since they represent a large segment of the institutions that directly implement or oversee afterschool programs.

Higher Education: Another rich resource pool for afterschool programs is higher education, particularly with prominent schools of education. Higher education is an essential partner for working through courses of study that might lead to certificates, credentials, and/or degrees for afterschool practitioners as well as for trainers. In addition, organizing, packaging, and marketing professional development is central to the business of higher education, and this expertise is of tremendous use to the afterschool world. Lastly, higher education is well positioned to evaluate the effectiveness of program and training of trainers curricula.

Funders: Funders are key partners for a number of reasons. First, since they review so many proposals and frequently conduct numerous site visits, they frequently have developed a formal or informal assessment of common challenges and strengths of different afterschool programs that is of tremendous use when developing strategies to enhance the field. Secondly, for obvious reasons, funders are a critical audience if the rationale for professional development and its associated costs are to be legitimized and institutionalized.

National Partners: Many national organizations have either their own membership base for which they have designed curricula, or they have developed curricula for which they are seeking markets. These curricula should especially focus on the essential elements of professional development that practitioners require—so that this content need not be re-invented by each local afterschool program. Secondly, national networks of afterschool programs and training resources exist, and there is much to draw on by bringing these organizations together.

Principles To Frame Leadership Partnerships: To be effective, these cross-disciplinary coalitions must share a common framework that anchors and guides their activities. This framework might be based on core afterschool program outcomes that serve as the focus of coalition initiatives. Underlying principles might state that afterschool programs must provide children and youth with opportunities and supports that enable them to:

- Develop academic competencies through enrichment in academic areas which complement and do not duplicate school-day curricula;
- Develop positive relationships with adults and peers, and a sense of closeness and belonging;
- Contribute to their community;
- Explore a wide range of activities and develop mastery in selected fields;
- Gain self-awareness through new experiences and guided reflection.

Core principles to guide the development and provision of professional development might include:

- Professional development must be part of the formula for good afterschool programs. Professional development must be institutionalized, both as a principle and a successful practice, into agency structure.
- Professional development needs to be comprehensive, serving a range of staff abilities and employing a variety of entry points, and offering opportunities for deeper and broader mastery.
- Afterschool education is a blend of many fields, including, but not limited to, education, social work, and youth development. Professional development must draw upon these fields.
- In training afterschool practitioners, both theory and practical applications are important. Training must help practitioners “translate” theory into practice and practice into theory.
- No one institution or set of institutions can feasibly meet the demand for training on a consistent basis. Capacity building and the creation of learning communities are essential strategies to address the need for professional development.

In addition to galvanizing the expansion of professional development opportunities, these national and local partnerships may assess, organize, and make available information that afterschool programs say they need. The following are examples:

- *Directories of Afterschool Training Resources*: Almost universally, practitioners around the country report that they do not know who is providing professional development, what the topics cover, or when these opportunities are available. Directories of *locally available* afterschool training resources are needed so that staff, especially those who work directly with young people, can utilize what is available. In addition, a regularly updated calendar of upcoming opportunities is essential if programs are to be able to plan for staff to attend training.
- *Directories of Afterschool Programs* are also needed for two reasons. While obviously these directories are of enormous help to those who are looking for programs, they are of equal help to organizations who provide professional development. Such directories will make it much easier for technical assistance organizations and other types of institutions (like museums, schools, higher education, etc.) to market existing and new trainings to the afterschool world.
- *Clearinghouses* of afterschool curricula and other types of program resources are essential so that programs have greater access to a full range of materials. However, since this can often

overwhelm users because it is difficult to assess the strengths and weaknesses of materials without actually using them, it would be worthwhile to make recommendations based on a set of criteria. Those recommended might be presented as “Best Bets” to highlight how and why they might be of use.

Conclusion

Put yourself in the shoes of a director of a small, faith-based organization running an afterschool program or of the Site Coordinator in a school-based afterschool program. Your staff consists of volunteers, teenagers working toward academic credit, a few school teachers, and a handful of part-time staff. Your budget is not much bigger than your staff, and most of your time must go toward finding funding to keep the doors open. And now you want to access professional development for your staff. What might three-dimensional professional development opportunities look like?

You could enter the “universe” of professional development through a quarterly forum, open to the field, that focuses on a topic such as “creative literacy through the arts.” Forums may be organized so that there is a panel discussion by experts from a variety of disciplines, including higher education, arts councils, funders, city agencies, and community based organizations. This is followed by breakout workshops, facilitated by youth-serving practitioners, that are highly interactive and give participants an opportunity to gain specific knowledge or skills. You could also come to an Annual Conference to network and learn more about this field you are part of. While at the conference, your eyes may be opened to so many interesting programming ideas in the arts and literacy that are presented by your peers in dozens of workshops. You really wish your staff had been there to see how much more can be done with kids and how much more fun and learning could be had. They care so much about children, but they don’t yet have the skills to work with kids these ways.

You’re convinced you want to strengthen the literacy component of your program right away, so you might participate in a Peer Technical Assistance program where seasoned youth-serving practitioners who have strong literacy programming can help you strengthen yours. You could become part of an Organizational Mentoring Project and benefit from being paired with an established agency mentoring yours in a variety of areas, from fund development to management practices.

You could send your staff to a school-based Afterschool Learning Lab, which are programs that open their doors to allow practitioners to observe good programs in action. And when your staff returns from visiting the Lab with a strong appetite to learn more, you can send them to a Training Institute, where they can participate in workshops and seminars on a series of foundational and advanced topics.

If afterschool programs are to meet the increasing demand for their services, while supporting important youth outcomes, a key challenge is to broaden and deepen the scale and scope of professional development opportunities. How might leadership be encouraged, career opportunities expanded, and the long term development of the afterschool workforce be ensured?

As many afterschool experts have said across the country, these hurdles must be met if the field is to have the capacity to continuously improve and evolve programs to meet the interests and needs of young people, families, and community institutions.

Through a year-long assessment process in a variety of cities across the country, PASE has identified a series of strategies to positively impact on youth development. These strategies focus on expanding what training is available to practitioners, further segmenting the different categories of staff that need similar and different types of training. This training needs to be creatively designed in a variety of modalities so that diverse learning styles are accommodated.

Moreover, professional development needs to scale up, and to do this requires both the training of trainers who are skilled in different content areas, but also requires local and national leadership opportunities for key experts and leaders in afterschool and closely aligned fields. These leadership structures both anchor and guide professional development initiatives, as well as identify and harness resources across disciplines to benefit the afterschool profession.