



# ydi youth development initiative

RESEARCH SUMMARIES, VOLUME 1  
AUGUST 2010

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YDI Research Summaries provides quick and easy access to the most current youth development research. Articles from the latest issues of top youth development journals are selected and summarized. Each summary provides an overview of the article with special attention to practical findings. Specific research to practice points are highlighted in each summary. Volume 1 covers 12 articles organized into three categories: best program practices, youth program participation trends, and benefits of participation in youth programs. Volumes will be released twice each year. For questions about any of the articles in this volume or suggestions for topics in future volumes please contact [ydi@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:ydi@ag.tamu.edu).

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## **THE BENEFITS AND RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH SKATE PARKS**

### **ARTICLE SUMMARY**

Skate parks are a popular venue for leisure activity among children and adolescents. At the same time, some adults are concerned that skate parks attract an undesirable atmosphere. Also, many parks professionals are concerned about risk management in skate parks. This study investigated user behavior and the positive outcomes associated with skate park use. The authors found a strong mix of positive and negative feelings toward the skate park. User benefits included a sense of belonging, achievement, and identity development.

### *RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS*

1. The authors observed a variety of negative behaviors at the skate park, yet the park also seemed to serve a positive function for many users. This suggests that skate parks are complex with the potential for both negative and positive impacts.
2. Skate parks can offer a variety of positive benefits. Also, the authors found limited evidence that skateboarders were 'the wrong element'. Most skaters respected the park rules, each other, and their families.
3. These points are important to agencies considering adding a skate park to their existing facilities. Many practitioners have a difficult time justifying skate parks because of the popular perception that these parks attract delinquents. Indeed, as with any leisure context, the authors did observe some negative behavior at the study locations. However, most participants appeared respectful of the rules and each other.

### *FULL REFERENCE FOR THE ARTICLE*

Bradley, G.L. (2010). Skate parks as a context for adolescent development. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 25(2), 288-323. doi: 10.1177/0743558409357236

Prepared by **Daniel Theriault**



## **AN OVERVIEW OF YOUTH PROGRAM EVALUATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS**

### *ARTICLE SUMMARY*

Practitioners must be able to show program effectiveness to funding agencies, parents, and other stakeholders. Even when partnership with an external evaluator is possible, practitioners should at least be familiar with the basics of evaluations science. This article describes some of the major types of evaluations as well as the process for conducting evaluations.

### *RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS*

1. When developing a new program, consider conducting a needs assessment of potential participants to test whether or not a market for the program exists.
2. Identify the outcomes targeted by the program, such as what is the intended impact of the program.
3. Describe why the program should produce the outcome of interest. Developing a program logic model will accomplish both steps one and two.
4. The program logic model should also guide the selection of the evaluation method. Follow the link below to a complete description of the types of program evaluations.
5. Data collection needs must be balanced with participants' willingness to complete surveys. Collect as much pertinent data as possible but don't overtax participants.
6. For maximum program effectiveness, adjust the program based on your findings and repeat this process with other types of evaluations.

### *FULL REFERENCE FOR THE ARTICLE*

Duerden, M. D., & Witt, P. A. (2010). Evaluating youth programs: An overview of practitioner led evaluations. *Journal of Youth Development, 5*(1). Retrieved from [http://data.memberclicks.com/site/nae4a/jyd\\_summer2010.pdf](http://data.memberclicks.com/site/nae4a/jyd_summer2010.pdf)

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Prepared by **Daniel Theriault**



## **JUST BECAUSE SOMETHING IS LABELED A “BEST PRACTICE” DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN IT REALLY IS**

### *ARTICLE SUMMARY*

In this article, the author provides a history of prevention science and discusses problems with current research evaluations. He argues best practices are seldom supported by enough evidence to be classified as best in the field. He further states outcome evaluations are often not done appropriately and the definition of high-quality evaluations varies significantly across the field. For each problem outlined, this article suggests evaluating whether or not a best practice would apply to a given community. The article concludes with the notion that “best practice” lists are an excellent starting point for program research but practitioners need to do more homework before selecting programs for implementation.

### *RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS*

1. Prevention strategies for youth programming are based on empirical evidence and research; this data offers practitioners an indication of program success.
2. Practitioners need to critically evaluate “best practice” programs. Look into who produced the evaluation and its quality. Organizations may also have ulterior motives for promoting certain “Best Practice” programs.
3. Universal measurement tools are needed to standardize youth programming research. Completing internal evaluations with standardized mechanisms may help the field become more easily evaluated.
4. Practitioners should consider using the term “promising practices” instead of “best practices.” The former acknowledges that the practice, though promising, may need further development and validation.

### *FULL REFERENCE FOR THE ARTICLE*

Olson, J. (2010). Choosing effective youth-focused prevention strategies: A practical guide for applied family professionals. *Family Relations*, 59(2), 207

Prepared by **Kate Cromwell**



## **MEASURING STAFF PERFORMANCE IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME SETTINGS CAN HELP CREATE UNIVERSAL MEASUREMENT TOOLS FOR THE FIELD**

### *ARTICLE SUMMARY*

This article gives a definition of point-of-service quality for a variety of out-of-school time settings. It explains the Youth Program Quality Assessment as an applicable set of measures for youth-serving organizations. The Youth Program Quality Assessment is an observational assessment designed to study staff performance during out-of-school time. This assessment can be used for informal internal evaluations but is also relevant in more formal evaluations. Finally, this article discusses the implications of using quality metrics as a primary measure for out-of-school time programs. Organizations should use observational assessments to provide more frequent feedback to staff. Youth development organizations are creating measures that are applicable across a variety of organizations. As showing quality of service becomes more important, uniform standards will continue to be developed among youth organizations.

### *RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS*

1. Evaluating staff behavior in multiple types of out-of-school organizations can indicate common best practice methods that can be applied to all out-of-school organizations.
2. Evaluations of engagement and interaction of youth during out-of-school time can provide valuable information. Practitioners should standardize program evaluations and make them a consistent part of their program. Regardless of measures chosen, evaluations can give an organization meaningful feedback.
3. The Youth Program Quality Assessment produces data that is relevant to staff practices and can help practitioners understand program quality.
4. Self-evaluations should be used by organizations to chart progress and remain accountable.

### *FULL REFERENCE FOR THE ARTICLE*

Smith, C., Devaney, J., Akiva, & Sugar, S. A. (2009). Quality and accountability in the out-of-school time sector. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 121, 109-127. doi: 10.1002/yd.299

Prepared by **Kate Cromwell**



## **MAKING QUALITY A PRIORITY FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS: CURRENT ISSUES AND POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE PROGRESS**

### *ARTICLE SUMMARY*

This article expands on recent developments related to providing quality out-of-school time to children of diverse backgrounds. The authors define the word, “quality,” to outline implications for out-of-school time practice. The authors discuss how staff interactions are the most effective way to rapidly increase quality. The discussion of practice, policy, and research in youth organizations provides the outline the capabilities of current quality measurements. The authors argue specific interactions between youth and adults are the most powerful predictors of program success. By ensuring staff have access to quality, on-site professional training, managers can ensure these interactions are meaningful and provide the high quality service that helps programs improve. As accountability becomes more critical in the out-of-school time field, ensuring meaningful point-of-contact interactions can contribute to higher quality.

### *RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS*

1. Youth-adult interactions are critical to success of a program. These interactions are more important than student-staff ratio or staff members’ qualifications.
2. Given the high turnover rate of many front-line staff, it is important for organizations to offer meaningful on-site professional development on a regular basis.
3. Focus on improvement should be directed on point-of-service and front-line staff.

### *FULL REFERENCE FOR THE ARTICLE*

Yohalem, N., Granger, R. C., & Pittman, K. J. (2009). The quest for quality: Recent developments and future directions for the out-of-school-time field. *New Directions for Youth Development, 2009*(121), 129-140. doi: 10.1002/yd.300

Prepared by **Kate Cromwell**



## MANY ADOLESCENTS PARTICIPATE IN MULTIPLE YOUTH PROGRAMS AT ONCE

### ARTICLE SUMMARY

The goal of this study was to examine participation rates in various youth programs. The authors found that more than 90 percent of youth participated in at least one program. The average child in this study participated in three out-of-school time activities per year. The researchers also found that the students' participation rates declined in the two-year period when this study was conducted. In general, female participants were more active in out-of-school time activities than males.

### RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS

1. Many participants may be involved in multiple programs. To maximize your own efficiency and effectiveness, open up a dialogue with these other program providers.
2. The participation decline observed in this study may be a reflection of adolescents' desire to specialize in a single activity. Practitioners may wish to offer more advanced activities to meet this desire.
3. Declines in participation among older youth may also reflect a belief that youth programs are for younger children. If this is the case, practitioners should communicate with participants to ensure that programs are age-appropriate.

### FULL REFERENCE FOR THE ARTICLE

Balsano, A.B., Phelps, E., Theokas, C., Lerner, J.V., & Lerner, R.M. (2009). Patterns of early adolescents' participation in youth development programs having positive youth development goals. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 19(2), 249-259. doi: 10.1111/j.1532-7795.2009.00595.x

Prepared by **Daniel Theriault**



## **PARENTAL BELIEFS AND BEHAVIOR, BEST FRIEND'S INVOLVEMENT, AND PRIOR PARTICIPATION ARE ASSOCIATED WITH PARTICIPATION IN YOUTH PROGRAMS**

### *ARTICLE SUMMARY*

In youth program research, one of the most important challenges is to investigate how to get young participants into programs and keep them there. This study addressed this challenge by examining factors associated with high school students' participation in youth programs. This study was conducted over several years, with students progressing from seventh grade through 10<sup>th</sup>. The authors found that, in general, participation rates remained stable. The researchers also reported that parental beliefs and behavior, best friend's involvement, and prior participation were related to participation in out-of-school time activities.

### *RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS*

1. Parental beliefs about the benefits of programs and parental involvement in community activities were related to youth participation in this study. Practitioners should demonstrate the effectiveness of their programs to parents and provide opportunities for parental and family involvement.
2. Practitioners should allow youth, especially new participants, to participate with their friends. Practitioners should also engage participants as program recruiters.
3. The importance of positive, early exposure to youth activities cannot be underestimated. Practitioners should continually look for new ways to involve younger children in programs.

### *FULL REFERENCE FOR THE ARTICLE*

Denault, A.S., & Poulin, F. (2009). Predictors of adolescent participation in organized activities: A five-year longitudinal study. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 19*(2), 287-311. doi: 10.1111/j.1532-7795.2009.00597.x

Prepared by **Daniel Theriault**



## THE MAJORITY OF ADOLESCENT'S LEISURE TIME IS SPENT IN PASSIVE LEISURE ACTIVITIES

### ARTICLE SUMMARY

Time-use arguments are often used to justify youth programs. For example, the more time youth spend in positive activities such as volunteering and youth programs, the less time they spend in negative activities such as gang involvement. An understanding of adolescent time-use is important in marketing programs to participants and justifying them to stakeholders. This study examined adolescent time-use and found that participants spent most of their time in passive leisure activities such as watching television. The study was conducted with 562 middle-class youth over the age of 15. More specifically, about two-thirds of adolescent males' and three-fourths of adolescent females' leisure time was spent in passive activities. Further, nearly 40 percent of adolescent females spent all of their leisure time in passive activities. Youth-serving organizations should promote the fact that they can augment these passive activities with more mentally and physically challenging activities.

### RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS

1. Adolescent time-use is about balance—between passive and active, play and purposeful, and so on. Time-use in adolescence is strongly related to time-use as an adult. If adolescents spend too much time in passive activities, they may miss the benefits of more challenging activities. Conversely, too much time in challenging activities can lead to negative outcomes such as stress and burnout. Programmers should understand how their participants use their time and provide a more developmentally beneficial environment for leisure experience.
2. While general patterns exist, time-use between specific adolescents can vary. Programmers should provide a range of experiences, from passive activities such as socializing with friends to more physically and mentally challenging experiences.
3. Adolescent time-use data can be used to justify programs to potential participants, funding agencies, and other stakeholders.

### FULL REFERENCE FOR THE ARTICLE

Zick, C.D. (2010). The shifting balance of adolescent time use. *Youth & Society*, 41(4), 569-596. doi: 10.1177/0044118x09338506

Prepared by **Daniel Theriault**



## **HIGH PARTICIPATION IN MID-ADOLESCENCE LEADS TO POSITIVE VALUES TOWARDS SOCIETY IN LATE ADOLESCENCE**

### *ARTICLE SUMMARY*

This study examined the changes in activity participation intensity in students from seventh to 11<sup>th</sup> grades. Researchers compared activity participation with academic orientation, risky behaviors, internalizing problems, civic development, and family income. The research team found participation tapered off gradually with sharp declines at the end of high school. Participation was the best predictor of later outcomes such as school success and involvement. By following the same youth from seventh to 11<sup>th</sup> grades, researchers showed that although participation tapers as children get older, benefits from primary participation stretch through adolescence. Practitioners should make participation in out-of-school time programs meaningful in early adolescence. As youth become busier, maintaining intensity of participation throughout high school becomes difficult, but participation in early adolescence can contribute to positive outcomes even after participation has tapered off.

### *RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS*

1. Initial levels of participation indicated school commitment and positive societal values even after participation declined. Practitioners should make sure involvement among middle school students is meaningful and intense as benefits can be felt throughout adolescence.
2. Organized activities have a strong positive contribution throughout adolescence. The impact of programming can be beneficial even once children stop participating on a regular basis.
3. All youth show a decline in activity participation late in high school, indicating early adolescent participation must be meaningful and have lasting impact. Youth have more opportunities to be active through school as they enter high school; therefore practitioners should make programs meaningful even if children do not participate throughout their adolescence.

### *FULL REFERENCE FOR THE ARTICLE*

Denault, A.-S., Poulin, F., & Pedersen, S. (2009). Intensity of participation in organized youth activities during the high school years: longitudinal associations with adjustment. *Applied Developmental Science, 13*(2), 74-87. doi: 10.1080/10888690902801459

Prepared by **Kate Cromwell**



## **BREADTH OF EXTRACURRICULAR PARTICIPATION ASSOCIATED WITH POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

### *ARTICLE SUMMARY*

Fredricks and Eccles studied the relationship between breadth of participation in extracurricular activities and academic and psychological adjustment, alcohol and drug use, and family activity among African and European American 11<sup>th</sup> graders. Although minor differences were found in some areas, the breadth, or the range, of activities youth were involved in was positively associated with youth development. The number of activities youth participated in was a positive indicator for good grades, educational status, and civic engagement that occurred two years later. A point of diminishing returns associated with breadth of extracurricular participation was found. Even a high level of participation can produce more problem behaviors if youth feel stressed because activities have cut into their school work. The total number of activities was associated with decreased alcohol and marijuana use, but only in the European American students. Range of activities had no impact on these risk behaviors with African Americans. For both groups, breadth was not significant in spending time in family activities. A wider range of participation appears to give youth the opportunity to explore their interests, experience a fuller range of growth experiences, develop teamwork, and connect with peers and adults. More important, being involved in several activities can protect youth from failure or loss in one specific domain. Youth professionals should look at breadth of extracurricular participation to accomplish this goal. Programs should offer a variety of activities so youth can explore their potential.

### *RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS*

1. Programs should offer a variety of activities whenever possible so youth can explore other interests.
2. Schools and youth professionals should partner or create programs that complement each other as youth would benefit from extracurricular activities in both the school and community.
3. Providing highly valued and challenging activities may lower alcohol and drug usage. Youth participants will also be surrounded by a positive peer group.

### *FULL REFERENCE FOR THE ARTICLE*

Fredricks, J. A., & Eccles, J. S. (2010). Breadth of extracurricular participation and adolescent adjustment among African-American and European-American youth. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 20(2), 307-333. doi: 10.1111/j.1532-7795.2009.00627.x

Prepared by **Mariela Fernandez**



## **PARTICIPATING IN YOUTH PROGRAMS HOLDS BENEFITS FOR YOUTH AS WELL AS STAFF MEMBERS**

### *ARTICLE SUMMARY*

This study investigated the impact of employment at a summer camp on young adult staff members. Based upon focus groups and survey research, the authors suggest that camp settings in particular facilitate positive growth for young adult staff. Identified outcomes were increased confidence, problem-solving ability, career direction, and identity development. The authors interviewed camp staff members about the characteristics of the camp experience they associated with their development. The most commonly identified attributes were supportive relationships, camp traditions, success with challenges, safe environment, and the simple lifestyle of camp. Youth programs that provide these characteristics may be able to facilitate positive growth for staff members. Practitioners should create settings that promote the development of all “youth” in their programs, not just participants. By creating such settings, practitioners will be able to facilitate both staff growth and program improvement.

### *RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS*

1. Youth workers may receive many of the positive benefits of summer camp from their involvement in youth programs.
2. Youth programs that provide opportunities for the development of positive relationships among staff members and between staff and adults, opportunities for staff to successfully deal with and overcome challenging tasks, exposure to a safe environment and culture, and teamwork are more likely to deliver positive benefits to young adult staff members.
3. When recruiting staff members, practitioners should promote the benefits of youth work identified in this study as a recruitment tool.

### *FULL REFERENCE FOR THE ARTICLE*

Garst, B. A., Franz, N. K., Baughman, S., Smith, C., & Peters, B. (2009). “Growing without limitations:” Transformation among young adult camp staff. *Journal of Youth Development*, 4(1). Retrieved from [http://data.memberclicks.com/site/nae4a/JYD\\_090401final.pdf](http://data.memberclicks.com/site/nae4a/JYD_090401final.pdf)

This article is available online at [http://data.memberclicks.com/site/nae4a/JYD\\_090401final.pdf](http://data.memberclicks.com/site/nae4a/JYD_090401final.pdf)

Prepared by **Mat Duerden**



## CONNECTEDNESS TO MULTIPLE CONTEXTS LEADS TO POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT

### RESEARCH SUMMARY

The authors examined the impact of connectedness to family, school, and neighborhood had on academic and psychological adjustment. Connectedness involved feelings of support, attachment, and belonging. The study involved African American, Hispanic, Chinese American, and European American urban youth. Youth with positive connections to family and school as well as those connected to all three contexts reported higher grades than their counterparts. Youth with one or more connections reported higher self-esteem and lower levels of depression. Chinese Americans had the best grades, but often reported no connections to family, neighborhood, or school. This occurred because they were first- and second-generation immigrants often still struggling with assimilation. European Americans typically reported connectedness in all three contexts because they had the most access to resources. African Americans displayed a slightly lower connectedness to school, but a slightly higher one with neighborhood and family, while Hispanics displayed a high connection with neighborhood. For youth professionals, understanding the association between all three contexts is vital in providing successful intervention programs. Connections to all positive contexts should be valued and facilitated. Even one positive connection can help self-esteem and depression. Also, connection to one context can compensate for the lack of connection in other contexts. Youth development happens across family, neighborhood, and school. Collaboration across the three is vital in bringing up a successful youth.

### RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS

1. Chinese Americans had the most stress due to struggles with assimilation and acculturation. Practitioners should be aware of youth who may fall into the low connector profile and create ways to make programming better fit their needs.
2. The biggest predictor of depression was perceived school hostility. Schools should implement programs that target children who are more likely to be ousted by their peers in order to provide a healthy release of the negative emotions and increase the feelings of belonging.
3. Ensuring that youth are connected to at least one entity—family, school, or neighborhood— can greatly impact their psychological and academic adjustment.

### FULL REFERENCE FOR THE ARTICLE

Witherspoon, D., Schotland, M., Way, N., & Hughes, D. (2009). Connecting the dots: How connectedness to multiple contexts influences the psychological and academic adjustment of urban youth. *Applied Developmental Science, 13*(4), 199-216. doi: 10.1080/10888690903288755

Prepared by **Mariela Fernandez**





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