



Expanding
minds
and Opportunities

Leveraging

the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success

This article is an excerpt from the groundbreaking book, ***Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success***. This landmark compendium, edited by Terry K. Peterson, PhD, is composed of nearly 70 research studies, reports, essays, and commentaries by more than 100 researchers, educators, community leaders, policy makers, and practitioners.

Collectively, these writings boldly state that there is now a solid base of research and best practices clearly showing that quality afterschool and summer learning programs—including 21st Century Community Learning Centers—make a positive difference for students, families, schools, and communities.

Together, the collection of articles demonstrates the power of quality expanded learning opportunities to:

- **promote student success and college and career readiness;**
- **build youth assets such as character, resilience, and wellness;**
- **foster partnerships that maximize resources and build community ties; and**
- **engage families in their children's learning in meaningful ways.**

For information on how to order the full book, download sections and individual articles, or explore the topic areas, visit www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds.

About the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project

The Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project is a 50-state initiative harnessing the power of networks and leaders to help schools and communities leverage the time beyond school to accelerate student achievement. A partnership of funders led by the C.S. Mott Foundation support the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project. More information about the book and the project, as well as additional resources, can be found at www.expandinglearning.org.

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Reversing Learning Loss Through the Arts in Afterschool and Summers

In the religion of “being-a-kid,” few times are as sacrosanct as the free hours after school and during the summer. Unfortunately for parents, educators and policy makers, it is not an easy task to convince students to put down the PlayStation and focus on learning in their time off—yet the advantages of doing so are widely regarded as critical in determining academic success. Previous studies (e.g., Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007; Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, & Greathouse, 1996) show that when students, especially those from low-income households, are not provided educational opportunities in the vast amount of time that they are not in the traditional classroom, they lag behind their peers in reading and math and are less likely to graduate from high school.

Nonprofits across the nation have been testing the hypothesis that integrating creative activities like dance, theater, music, and visual arts with core academics in the context of afterschool and summer learning programs not only reverses these troubling trends but actually helps students invest in and seek out learning, motivated by interesting, yet rigorous, educational experiences.

This article describes the academic, social, and societal benefits of creative summer and afterschool programming from the viewpoint of three successful nonprofits: Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE), Young Audiences of Louisiana, and Big Thought in Dallas, Texas. Each emphatically supports the inclusion of enrichment in extended day programs. Collectively, their experiences suggest four foundational principles for more effective afterschool and summer programming.

Why the Arts?

James Catterall (2009) demonstrates that children who participate in the arts succeed academically, socially, and cognitively in his formative longitudinal study, *Doing Good and Doing Well by Doing Arts*. In fact, the students Catterall studied showed marked gains, as compared to their peers, in most behavioral and academic areas when they maintained their involvement in the arts over the years. For most non-arts advocates, this information raises the question *why?*

Creative programs inherently offer unique environments for learning, but in afterschool contexts these benefits are especially pronounced. For instance, students who enter into formal learning with developmental or social obstacles possess the same potential as their peers and often flourish when barriers to learning are minimized or removed. An English language learning student might struggle to complete assignments in language arts or mathematics but can, just like his or her peers, paint a picture of family or master chords on the guitar by watching an instructor. The arts offer an entry point to reintroduce learning as something positive and equitable.

For Young Audiences of Louisiana, executive director Rickie Nutik has observed that students who feel displaced or dispirited in traditional classrooms or settings often find a place to shine and excel outside of the classroom, equipping them with the self-esteem to push themselves intrinsically and find the motivation to work harder. This desire is

particularly useful for helping students discover activities that they cherish—or as author Peter Benson (2008) describes it, helping students’ “spark.” Kids who find their deepest passions in an academic setting are inspired from within to achieve, both as a student and as a person. Dr. Benson found that the creative arts are consistently one of the top activities that imbue intrinsic motivation in children.

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For all students, high- and low-achieving, focusing on the arts after school and during the summers can maximize the pivotal in-school hours between 8:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Students in Chicago Public Schools attend school for less than 6 hours a day for 170 days per year (as compared to 7 hours a day for 180 days a year in Houston, for example), which means that educators often do not have the time available to go beyond basic learning. Teachers’ minutes are stretched and often

dictated by strict testing guidelines. Amy Rasmussen, executive director at Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE), believes that afterschool providers like hers are invaluable in not just lengthening the lessons taught during school, but in *strengthening* them.

Organizations like CAPE, Young Audiences of Louisiana, and Big Thought identify the concepts that students struggle with during the school day and use the afterschool time to expand students’ exposure and understanding of core curriculum. A student unable to master fractions might understand them in a dance context, learning through active, tangible quarter steps and half turns. Since 2007, CAPE has studied creativity through observable indicators, demonstrating that students participating in creative

programming report that they are better able to understand core curriculum principles when they are explained through creative activities. In one case study, a teaching artist and language arts teacher co-created curriculum combining photography with lessons on tone, a key concept measured by the English Advanced Placement Test. Of 19 students participating, 17 agreed that they believed the curriculum helped them understand tone and other literary devices in a deeper, more meaningful way (Paradis, 2011).

The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (2011) describes these kinds of outcomes in terms of "habits of mind" that create agile and flexible ways of thinking. America has entered a Steve Jobs era of success: the minds that can innovate are the minds that will find success.

Unlike 50 years ago, there is not a skill or knowledge set that will not require updating, remodeling, or improving. Today's students will have to adapt to dynamic technologies and rapidly changing industries in practically every job that they encounter in the 21st century economy.

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What Do We Know About How to Make Programs Effective, Engaging, and Successful?

To begin deciphering the ingredients of success in arts and creative learning in afterschool and summer programs, the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education in Chicago, Young Audiences of Louisiana, and Big Thought in Dallas analyzed what they learned and what strategies and approaches might have implications for others. All three organizations

- *possess decades of arts and education program delivery and coordination experience;*
- *research and evaluate curriculum, professional development, and arts integration techniques;*
- *document the academic, social, and societal benefits of creative summer and afterschool programming; and*
- *support the inclusion of enrichment in extended day programs and in the school day.*

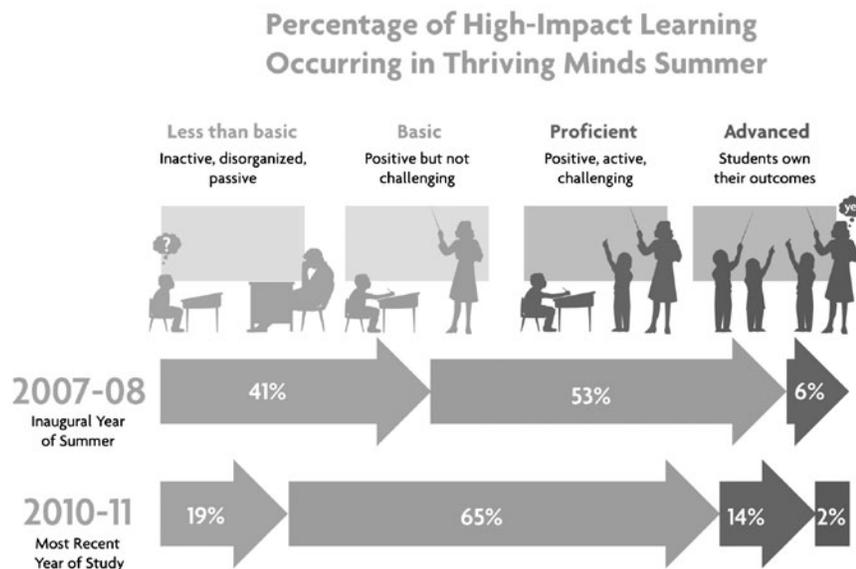
To make these opportunities happen "on the ground" in multiple locations across Louisiana, Chicago, and Dallas, they build bridges among parents, schools, instructors, cultural institutions, school districts, and city resources.

An analysis of their experiences and history of success suggests the following four foundational principles as the basis for more effective afterschool and summer programming:

1. The arts in an afterschool and summer learning context naturally advance quality teaching and learning. When students and teachers have wider parameters in how and where to carry out curriculum, the learning environment flourishes.

Students in Big Thought’s Thriving Minds Summer Camps, in cooperation with the Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD), visited a variety of city cultural and educational institutions as part of their summer learning in 2010–11. Students traveled to a nature conservatory, for instance, where they took pond samples and then drew or diagrammed the creatures they found to tie in with their science classes. Some also visited a historic district and spoke with an architect to understand the significance of buildings in their own neighborhoods. In all cases, students were exposed to distinctive lessons that lent themselves to high-impact learning opportunities.

High-impact learning is demonstrated by students when they freely offer ideas, show an active interest in making better or more creative choices, and work with the teacher to discover principles instead of memorize facts. At this level, students work towards higher grades, better answers, and intrinsic goals. The chart below provides an analysis of the increased positive influence of Big Thought programs on students’ learning opportunities in the summer. Assessed across a 4-year observational period, these opportunities are arranged along a scale of lowest impact learning (insufficient) to highest impact learning (advanced). Through a citywide commitment to creative learning, the number of Dallas participants who moved out of the “less than basic” learning designation to reach basic, proficient, or advanced increased by 22 percentage points.



Creating Quality. (n.d.). Summer learning - student benefits. Retrieved from <http://www.creatingquality.org/Home/SummerLearning/BenefitsforStudents.aspx>

The increase in high impact learning has meant that students in Dallas classrooms are beginning to catch up with their peers on standardized tests. For instance, after participating in Thriving Minds Summer Camps with greater high-impact learning, students' scores rose dramatically in only one year. Participants in grades 3 through 5 who significantly trailed their peers in 2010 saw scores on the 2011 state reading assessment rise 7 percentage points, while math scores improved more than 10 percentage points (Big Thought, 2011).

2. Educators who seek to work with afterschool and summer providers are often the crème-de-la-crème, having chosen to participate explicitly because they have the energy and desire to reach children better. These attributes are particularly useful when general classroom teachers and artists team up.

The classroom instructors and teaching artists bring complementary paradigms that both types of professionals typically find highly valuable. In the case of Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education, the organization began by examining the needs of each school to tailor programs that were most effective.

CAPE planned with the schools themselves, asking a variety of questions about the programs currently in place and determining where important connections could be made through the arts. The organization interviewed teachers and administrators to determine what kinds of integration points they needed help with, such as social studies, math, or other core subjects. CAPE's studies (DeMoss & Morris, 2002; Paradis, 2011) of the effectiveness show extensive buy-in from teachers and artists, with 91% integrating academics and with 94% of elementary students saying this made "learning fun."

In fact, the students did more than have fun—they showed gains in affective connections to core subjects. The arts consistently engaged all students in complex and analytical cognitive processes, including those students who typically struggle with academic content. No such gains were associated with traditional instructional experiences.

3. As many of us have experienced, a trip to the principal's office was not generally positive as a child and remains similarly unappealing as an adult. Too often, parents are called in to the school when there's a problem. With afterschool and summer programs, they are called in when their children are doing something positive and excelling.

Rickie Nutik explains that parents in New Orleans find afterschool and summer programs less intimidating and more flexible, encouraging them to take a more active role in their child's education. As a result, Young Audiences of Louisiana has employed a parent engagement specialist so that parents willing to help are met in the middle by the convening organization.

This success mirrors the formative work that Big Thought has done to determine what keeps parents distant from the learning process. In 2003, Big Thought began interviewing hundreds of families and found that an overwhelming majority indicated that two major barriers are lack of information (communicated in both Spanish and English and in a timely manner) and lack of transportation. By marketing and providing buses for family outings, celebration events, school-based recitals, or parent-teacher meetings, nonprofits can play a catalytic role as connectors and conveners.

In fact, many afterschool and summer learning programmers have begun to offer English classes for English language learning parents or workshops for those interested in financial literacy or parenting courses to become better all-around caregivers.

4. Thanks to the 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants provided by the United States Department of Education, nonprofits like Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education, Big Thought, and Young Audiences of Louisiana are expanding relationships with local organizations beyond the “usual suspects.”

For instance, Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education not only partners with dance and theater companies to carry out afterschool programs, they also partner with family/social service organizations that provide emotional and developmental supports to children and families.

In fact, many newly formed partnerships stemmed from the interest of a non-arts organization. Young Audiences of Louisiana found that the 21st Century Community

Learning Centers grants magnetized nonprofits in the area that had been interested in reaching children in valuable ways but that had struggled to find the right partner or mechanisms to operationalize the work. Some willing partners simply lacked funding, thus giving the 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants powerful leverage. The 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, in fact, is the only nationwide major federal education program that requires community-school partnerships to expand learning opportunities in afterschool and summers.

Moreover, 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants can also act as a catalyst to garner the attention of additional funding sources. The afterschool and summer areas have only just begun to enter the consciousness of many donors, major and minor. In order to facilitate dynamic and effective programming, it will take braided funding from multiple sources, as well as an array of partnerships, to design, deliver, and integrate creative activities. Ultimately the complexities of funding, designing, and implementing these programs are outweighed by the potential to dramatically affect student behavior, academic achievement, and development.

By placing the arts at the center of afterschool and summer learning time, arts organizations will respond to the overwhelming demand by civic leaders, parents, and educators for high quality, creative, expanded learning opportunities for children and youth.

With sustained financial support from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative and other similar state and local afterschool and summer funding streams, arts and creative education nonprofits can take the lead in providing these valuable programs and services, using what they know best—how to spark the interests of children through exciting curriculum and instruction.

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School, community, and parent leaders should reach out to their arts, cultural, and creative organizations and businesses to explore how they can systematically work together to integrate and infuse the arts into their expanded learning opportunities in the summers and afterschool. Furthermore, schools can incentivize these partnerships and creative teaching and learning by using their Title I, Title II, and local funds in new but entirely permissible ways—thereby maximizing their impact and leveraging other resources.

The beneficiaries will not just be arts organizations and participating schools but the children themselves—a goal that can unite us all.

Conclusion

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Gigi Antoni, president/CEO of Big Thought, has more than 20 years of experience as a nonprofit executive, consultant, and speaker, both nationally and internationally. She was named a Champion of Change by the White House and received the National Arts Leadership Award by the National Guild for Community Arts Education

Rickie Nutik is the executive director of Young Audiences New Orleans. She has worked on behalf of Louisiana children for over 25 years to inspire, empower, and unite children and communities through education, arts, and culture. She also serves on several community boards, including the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Youth and Families.

Amy Rasmussen serves as executive director of Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education, where she has guided the organization through unprecedented growth as a partner to Chicago Public Schools in implementing and sustaining arts programs. Rasmussen was named a Champion of Change for Arts Education by the White House in July 2011.

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