

APPLIED RESEARCH IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT  
*from the* HERR RESEARCH CENTER AT ERIKSON INSTITUTE

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# After-School Programs

AS THE NEED FOR AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS GROWS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, ERIKSON INSTITUTE IS JOINING OTHERS IN THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY TO ANSWER THE CENTRAL QUESTIONS: WHAT WORKS AND WHY, AND HOW DO WE GET THE KNOWLEDGE WE NEED TO MAKE PROGRAMS BETTER? KEY ELEMENTS OF THE AFTER-SCHOOL EQUATION FOR ERIKSON RESEARCHERS: A DEVELOPMENTAL FRAMEWORK, JOINT PLANNING, AND TRAINING FOR PROGRAM STAFF.

## School-Age Comes of Age

*Daria Zvetina, M.Ed.*

After-school programs now provide an important developmental setting for an increasing number of the nation's children. Bipartisan support for after-school programs, in particular those that serve low-income communities, is coming from government, private sector, and citizen stakeholders, who see school-age care as a necessary and vital community resource—a vehicle for preventing drug use and gang involvement, correcting academic failure, and reducing juvenile crime and victimization.<sup>1</sup> This call to action is being accelerated by the continued growth in the numbers of working mothers.

Riding the wave of public support, President Clinton in January proposed \$600 million to fund after-school programming in fiscal 2000, a potential tripling of the appropria-

tion for 1999. The President's focus is clear: monies should go to the Department of Education's 21st Century Learning Centers, a program that sponsors school-based after-school activities that "provide significant expanded learning opportunities for children and youth in the community and that contribute to reduced drug use and violence."<sup>2</sup> In September, the Republicans countered with a proposed budget package that includes \$300 million for after-school programs. And, meanwhile, private sector monies for such programs have been increasing.<sup>3</sup>

This dramatic infusion of funding now is raising questions by service providers and researchers alike: What do we know about the effectiveness of after-school programs?

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# From the Dean

FRANCES STOTT

*The inaugural issue of Applied Research in Child Development represents an important step in the opening of the Herr Research Center at Erikson Institute.*

After-school programs are featured in this inaugural issue of *Applied Research in Child Development*—and none too soon as far as we're concerned here at the Institute. For several years, Erikson colleague Robert Halpern has studied, written about, and worked with the community on school-age issues. Currently, as interest in and support for after-school programs builds, he is advising policy-makers, evaluating programs, writing a book, and soon to begin a new study on the opportunities such programs hold for strengthening a child's literacy. "If there is a task for after-school programs in terms of literacy," Robert says in the enclosed interview, "it's . . . as a complement to the school mission, providing a vehicle for children to express themselves and explore the world."

The introduction of this semi-annual publication represents another important step in the opening of the new Herr Research Center at Erikson Institute. Erikson

has conducted applied research for over twenty years in practical arenas to address real problems facing children and families. The Herr Research Center now is allowing us to consolidate and expand our commitment to community-based, collaborative research as a means to create change for children, particularly on our home turf in Chicago. A series of recent events initiated by leadership at Erikson has made this possible.

The first event occurred in September 1996, when Erikson's Board of Trustees approved a Long Range Plan. Included in that plan, with urging and full support from President Barbara Bowman, was a first-ever research center. Then came the essential funding for the center from Erikson friend Jeffrey Herr, as a gift to the Campaign for Erikson Institute. Jeffrey, who has supported our work for many years, understands the impact that new information can have in the hands of knowledgeable people with reason

and purpose. And, in the meantime, Erikson aggressively recruited three new faculty members to the fold, Jie-Qi Chen, Jon Korfmacher, and Aisha Ray, all of whom are now bringing important and original scholarship to our community of teachers and researchers.

*Applied Research in Child Development* will reach you in spring and fall. Each issue will focus on one specific research area in which Erikson is working. Occasional research papers also will be distributed during the year. We encourage you to comment, to question, to critique by phone, fax, or e-mail.

The Herr Research Center at Erikson Institute is becoming a hub for research, a catalyst for discovery and change. Please let us know if and how you would like to be involved. ■■

# Q&A

ROBERT HALPERN, P.H.D.

*Robert Halpern is professor at Erikson Institute and on the faculty at the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. In the late 1980s, Halpern was one of the first researchers to examine the functioning of inner-city after-school programs. He currently is principal evaluator for the national school-age initiative MOST (Making the Most Out of Out-of-School Time—see main story) and recently participated in a Capital Hill briefing on the project. Halpern, who chairs Erikson Institute’s Research Council, is now at work on a new book examining out-of-school time for low-income children in the United States. He also is beginning a national study on literacy practices in school-age programs, funded by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund. His most recent book is *Fragile Families, Fragile Solutions: A History of Supportive Services for Families in Poverty* (Columbia University Press, 1998).*

**Q. You warn against after-school programs taking on a compensatory function, particularly the remediation of academic skill deficits. Yet, this seems to be the focus of current federal initiatives. What are the dangers of using after-school programs to reinforce or build basic academic skills?**

I think there are several kinds of dangers. One of the dangers is asking particular kinds of institutions to take on tasks for which they’re ill-suited—they don’t have the resources, the staffing, the background, or the framework. Different institutions play different roles in children’s lives. Over a period of 100-125 years we’ve built the schools into an institution that has the goal of formally educating children. Yet, the fact is that people

with years of specialized training and with support from all kinds of curricular resources are having difficulty creating learning environments in which kids acquire basic skills. Why, then, would we expect people who often have only a high school diploma, who are paid \$5 or \$6 an hour, and who may be struggling with their own literacy, to address those learning difficulties? It doesn’t make any sense.

We shouldn’t ask families or after-school programs to take on the school’s mission, just as we shouldn’t ask the schools to take on the family’s role and mission or a friend’s role and mission or a neighborhood’s role and mission. After-school programs have a distinct niche.

The second danger has to do with what children need. Look at kids’

daily lives: they’ve been in school all day long. Of those five or six or seven hours, they’ve probably spent a good part on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. For better or worse, I don’t know how much more time kids can spend on a daily basis on the mechanics, which is different than homework. At its best, homework gives kids a chance to work at their own pace, and it gives families a little window into kids school lives, often the only window parents have. Kids need to have other parts of their development supported and nurtured, and this is what after-school programs should be about.

**Q. You describe the “natural task” of after-school programs as creating “spaces in which children are neither too little nor too much on**

**their own.” Would you define this more concretely and explain your developmental rationale?**

Kids need a variety of things from adults and adult institutions as well as free from and away from adult institutions. Obviously they need a psychological sense of security—of being protected—that only adults and adult institutions can provide. They need to know that somewhere back there are adults who worry about them, care about them, and are capable of protecting them. Adults also have the role of structuring opportunities for children’s learning and exploring of interests. Kids learn from experts, and adults are usually those experts, whether it’s in arts or sports or enrichment or hobbies. That’s what I mean by not being on their own.

But the irony is that kids also need to get away from adults. They need to learn to be kids, to negotiate peer relationships, to deal with conflict, to regulate their own lives and make decisions. And they also need time just to be kids—to let off steam, to play—which is better accomplished in a peer culture, away from adults. But it can’t be accomplished without that other feeling of being back-stopped in some fundamental sense.

The trick is creating a balance. And that’s what adult institutions in the U.S. have had such a hard time with. Historically, we’ve had these two schools of thought about kids.

One is the romantic school: let kids be on their own and they’ll flower and grow. And the other is the social control school: socialize them into whatever it is we need. And there’s a germ of truth in each, because kids need both. In middle childhood, the balance is particularly precarious because kids are stepping out of the family and into the world.

**Q. In an increasingly outcome-driven funding climate, what are realistic outcomes by which program success can be assessed?**

For one thing, school-age programs are not adequately funded at this point. There is very little public funding. Before we can have a debate about what programs should be expected to do, they have to be funded adequately.

Assuming that there is adequate funding, then, philosophically, I would say that school-age programs should be viewed like libraries or park districts—as a social good, something that we provide to children and families by virtue of their citizenship in society, their membership in communities. We should keep programs out of the game of only doing things for narrow, instrumental purposes. There are lots of things that are part of our world that have not demonstrated their effectiveness yet continue to be funded anyway. I don’t think, long term, that we can sustain support for after-school

programs if they’re only viewed as preventive or remedial. They shouldn’t be looked at or evaluated that way.

That said, if I were forced to evaluate program outcomes, I think I would stick to transparent outcomes that are proximate to the life and activities of the program—the things that the program provides and the things that kids experience, like time spent in a safe place, exposure to opportunities, homework help, snacks, field trips. Then we would simply look at what kids are experiencing and say that it’s very likely that if they didn’t participate in after-school programs they wouldn’t be experiencing these things. This is no different than any decent child care program. Different kids get what they need from different developmental resources, and if we provide a variety of developmental resources, we have to assume that we’ve covered our bases. We also know that after-school programs are a more critical developmental resource for some kids, who get something from them that they should be getting elsewhere but are not, whether it’s a little attention or help solving a problem at school. These things are not unimportant.

**Q. Based on your feelings about outcome evaluation, what is the appropriate role of evaluation in the life of an after-school program?**

Some argue that the primary

audience for program evaluation ought to be policy makers, to give them the information they need to decide how to make programs better. My view has always been that the primary audience for evaluation are those who are struggling to do the work—in this case the administrators, the front line staff, the trainers and the college educators who are doing school-age courses, as well as those who are funding or sponsoring programs.

The focus of evaluation and research should be to generate knowledge that can lead to improved, more sensible practice. We also do evaluation and research to clarify or illuminate the sources of the stresses and difficulties in a particular area of practice, on the assumption that a clearer understanding will make the practice more sustainable, even if it doesn't address these stressful conditions directly. And the third reason for evaluation, in my view, is that studying particular social interventions or supports illuminates a lot about how and why we mobilize ourselves in our society to meet needs and address difficulties. It provides a window into how and why we do things the way we do.

**Q. What are the greatest challenges communities face in creating an effective network of school-age child care?**

One of the greatest challenges is a lack of consensus, or, more accu-

rately, the lack of debate about what we want kids' out-of-school time to be about. Without debate, there is no clarity. So we throw images at the issue: the time should be school-like or not school-like and so on. What we need is a debate guided by a set of principles. School-age child care isn't just child care, yet it's partly child care; it isn't just recreation, yet it's partly recreation; it isn't just enrichment, yet it's partly enrichment.

Because it's hard to know what's best for kids from kids' own perspective, adults have to take responsibility for balancing what they see as their own needs and those of society with what they imagine kids' needs to be. And, the way we imagine what kids needs are is to examine the developmental literature. That's where this notion of kids needing psychological space, physical space, and social space comes from. And even though the notion doesn't sit naturally with after-school programs, that's the piece that has to get attended to.

We shouldn't need after-school programs because kids should be out playing. But kids can't be out playing—that's the world of the past. So in the world of the present, how do we deal with that issue? Low-income kids should be able to go to classes and have activities on an individualized basis like more advantaged kids do, but that's not the way society works. So what do we do? We make compromises,

which is what after-school programs are about.

**Q. What kinds of policy recommendations do you think should come out of the MOST evaluation?**

In terms of recommendations, there are three things. First, there needs to be a significant increase in public funding for after-school programs. One of the things we learned through the MOST evaluation is that the supply is not even beginning to meet the need. We also learned that funding ought to go to a variety of institutions, not just to one or two, whether they be schools or youth-serving organizations. Funds need to be distributed to the full range of institutions that are making a contribution to the field of school-age care. There also has to be some funding support for intermediary support institutions that provide technical assistance and curricular resources.

Second, effort must be made to create mechanisms, most likely at the city level, to bring the various stakeholders and participants together to do joint planning and prioritizing and to link resources. This is critical because the field is so extremely fragmented right now.

Third, although I don't believe school-age care will ever be identified as a 'professional' field, attention must be given to creating structures within programs that allow staff to be more constructive in

their work with kids. This means setting aside time and resources for weekly in-services to reflect on work and talk about struggles and the resources that need to be there. It also means identifying a number of useful curricular frameworks or approaches and getting them disseminated much more widely than they are now. School-age care is very much defined, as is child care, by its child care-like staffing model—that is, people with little or no preparation or training to work with kids, and who may or may not like kids, earning \$5 to \$7 an hour. They learn what they learn on the job.

In fact, there are very few curricular resources or frameworks for programs to draw on to create a strong curricular or content culture for minimally trained staff to step into. Thus, staff often simply do what they can to provide amusement for the kids. Also, because school-age care is part-time work, the staff generally are on their way in life from one place to another, which means high turnover. These elements can also be typical of child care but are more exaggerated with school-age programs because the work is both part-time and even more marginally funded.

**Q. Do you have plans for additional research in this area?**

I'm in the early stages of thought and work on a book on the history of

after-school programs for low-income children and that time span in a child's life, and how our society's views about time have affected children's institutions and the way we think about children.

Also, once the MOST evaluation is completed this fall, I'm joining a Chapin Hall colleague, Julie Spielberg, a graduate of Erikson's doctoral program, to do research on literacy practices in after-school programs, also funded through the DeWitt Wallace-Readers Digest Fund. The research will focus on the MOST initiative cities, Chicago, Boston, and Seattle, as well as others.

We'll be looking at what after-school programs do to broaden kids' emergent literacy, giving them a sense of ownership and the ability to communicate and create meaning. If there is a task for after-school programs in terms of literacy, it's the same as in the arts and sports: as a complement to the school mission, providing a vehicle for children to express themselves and explore their own world.

—Interview conducted by  
Daria Zvetina

### Related Writings by Robert Halpern

“Youth programs as alternative spaces to be: A study of neighborhood youth programs in Chicago's West Town.” *Youth and Society*, forthcoming.

“Programs for low-income children and families.” In S. Meisels & J. Shonkoff (Eds.) *Handbook of Early Childhood Intervention* (2nd ed.) New Cambridge University Press, forthcoming.

*Fragile Families, Fragile Solutions: A History of Supportive Services for Families in Poverty*. Columbia University Press, 1998.

*Rebuilding the Inner City: A History of Neighborhood Initiatives to Address Poverty in the United States*. Columbia University Press, 1995.

“The role of after-school programs in the lives of inner-city children.” *Child Welfare*, 1992.

“The role of after-school programs in the lives of inner-city children: A study of the Chicago Youth Centers after-school programs.” Chicago: The Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago, 1990.

# Community Focus

## AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS AT ERIE NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE

*Erie House, currently seeking accreditation of its programs from the National School-Age Care Alliance, provides one example of the Neighborhood Model, in which children have access to a community of knowledgeable adults, a mixed age group of peers, and a wide range of activities and assistance during their after-school hours.*

### ***Two sites, 110 children***

Erie Neighborhood House is a 129-year-old social service agency that emerged from the settlement house movement and now serves low-income families primarily from Chicago's West Town and Humboldt Park neighborhoods. The agency has been operating after-school programs for over 25 years. Currently it has two school-age sites—at 1347 W. Erie St. and 1701 W. Superior St.—serving approximately 110 Latino children from poor working families. The program receives funding from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and operates from 2:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. on school days, and from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. during the summer and on weekdays when school is not in session. The Erie House child care program is fully accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children; the agency

currently is seeking accreditation from the National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA).

### ***Parents as teachers***

According to Dennis Puhr, Assistant Director for School-Age Child Care, there are two philosophical thrusts to Erie House after-school programs. First, parents are viewed as the child's primary teachers. This commitment to the centrality of family leads the program to build strong collaborative and supportive relationships with parents. Staff meet with parents regularly to ensure ongoing communication and feedback about children. The program also has a very strong and active Parent Council, and Parent Resource Centers are operating at both sites.

### ***The child chooses***

Second, the school-age program is

designed according to a Neighborhood Model. Each site is designed to create a resource-rich alternative “neighborhood” in which children have access to a community of knowledgeable adults, a mixed age group of peers, and a wide range of activities and assistance during their after-school hours. Puhr notes that activities are structured according to a “snack, nap, rap, lap” model that ensures that opportunities are available throughout the afternoon for eating, resting, or spending down time, talking, and engaging in large motor activities. Homework assistance is available all afternoon and clubs such as gardening, cooking, photography, woodshop, 4-H, and swimming are designed to be educational as well as fun. Each child is free to choose both the activities and the pace at which he or she moves. In this way, the program adapts to the individual rhythms of

## A tour of Erie House after-school programs?

Call Dennis Puhr,  
773/666-3430.

each child, allowing children to transition from school to after-care according to their own pace and proclivities.

### *1:13 staff-child ratio*

The program maintains a staff-child ratio of 1:13. Each site also has several student volunteers. Child care staff are predominantly college students specializing in education, psychology, or other related fields. Staff turn over in the program is very low for the child care field: the average stay is three years. Puhr attributes this significant staff retention to a strong team approach, a reflective staff development model, weekly staff meetings and child progress reviews, monthly staff training covering a diverse range of topics, and professional development through membership in state and national child care organizations such as the Illinois School-Age Care Alliance.

### *Self-improvement assessment*

One of the program's greatest strengths, according to Puhr, is that

children have a very active voice in the functioning of the program. Not only are children free to choose how to spend their time each day, but they also are asked to evaluate the program and give input regarding the selection of program activities, field trips, and equipment purchases. Parents and child care staff also engage in the evaluation. Through the MOST initiative (see main story), Erie House has participated in the Assessing School-Age Child Care Quality (ASQ) program, a self-improvement process developed by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) and NSACA. The ASQ is designed to ensure that the program meets and maintains quality standards in a wide range of areas and involves those most affected by the program in the quality assurance process. Puhr hopes that this self-improvement process will lead to NSACA accreditation next year.

### *80 percent move up to the youth program*

With regard to measuring program outcomes, Puhr notes that the program does collect report cards, but these are gathered and used to recognize children's achievement, or to flag children who may require additional assistance, rather than measure program impact. He suggests that even when progress is noted over time, it is difficult to know whether it is attributable to participation in the program.

Program effectiveness is noted primarily in the number of children graduating from the program who choose to transition into the agency's Youth Options Program. Puhr reports that 80–90 percent of the children who graduate from the school-age program join the youth program, and 98 percent of the children who graduate from the youth program go on to college. This outcome is particularly significant since research suggests that, by fifth grade, children begin to drop out of after-school programs and move into risky behaviors and activities.

### *Funding shortfall*

Puhr notes that his greatest program challenge is a shortfall of funding. Though staff retention at Erie House is high for the child care field, he believes that increased funding would allow staff to be hired full-time and fully compensated for their worth. Puhr feels that it would be developmentally better for children to have their needs met by a more stable cadre of adults.

—Written by Daria Zvetina



# After-School

Continued from Pg. 1

What can we realistically expect these programs to accomplish? How should funding be directed?

And, at the center of the issue, amid the groundswell of support, unprecedented funding, and disparate views on purpose, there exists a burgeoning need for after-school care—a need predicted to outstrip the supply by as much as 4:1 in many urban communities by 2002.<sup>4</sup>

## Middle Childhood: Stepping Out, Discovering, Becoming

Until recently, middle childhood, ages 6–12, has been second cousin

to early childhood and adolescence as a focus of research and public attention, possibly because it has been viewed as a period of relative developmental stability.<sup>5</sup> In fact, as Erikson Professor Robert Halpern emphasizes, middle childhood is a period of critical importance during which the child steps out into a broadening social world and develops a sense of his capabilities in relation to tasks and others around him. During these years, children acquire and consolidate basic academic and social skills, dispositions toward achievement, and expectations for their own behavior

and what they will become.<sup>6</sup> If the emphasis in early childhood is upon supporting and strengthening the family, then the focus in middle childhood must be upon strengthening those broader developmental settings into which the child is moving—schools, neighborhoods, and other out-of-school environments—as well as the child's ability to succeed within them.

Historically, after-school programs for poor urban children were housed in boys and girls clubs or settlement houses and were designed to provide children with a range of supervised recreational activities to

## After-School Programs at a Glance

After-school programs are generally defined as programs that operate before and after school, during the summer, and on school holidays, and provide a variety of enrichment, sports, social, and academic activities for children from kindergarten through eighth grade. Programs range from after-school clubs and recreation programs to year-round child care.

- **Need.** In 1997, in the United States, 78 percent of households with children between the ages of 6 and 13 had employed mothers (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1998). The gap between parents' work schedules and children's school schedules can amount to 20–25 hours per week (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1998). An estimated 35 percent of 12-year-olds care for themselves regularly during after-school hours while parents are working (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).
- **Supply.** The U.S. General Accounting Office estimates that by 2002 the supply of school-age programming will meet barely one-quarter of the need in many urban areas.

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protect them from the unhealthy or dangerous elements of an urban environment.<sup>7</sup> Generally speaking, this goal has remained the same, though there is a growing push for more narrowly focused instrumental goals. Currently, after-school care is a highly diverse network of programs that vary dramatically in focus, sponsorship, structure, activities, intensity, and frequency of operation. Programs may serve children from kindergarten through eighth grade. Sponsors include non-profit social service and youth agencies, schools, YMCAs, park districts, libraries and day care agencies, as well as boys and girls clubs and traditional settlement houses.

Though programs range from full-time year-round child care programs to drop-in centers and after-school clubs, they typically focus on one or more of the following: recreation (e.g., sports activities), academic remediation or enhancement (e.g., basic literacy and math skills, study skills, tutoring, or alternative thematic curricula), or enrichment (e.g., music, art, drama, dance). Generally, the goals are to improve academic achievement, prevent gang and drug involvement and other types of delinquent behavior, or enhance self-esteem.

Often, the nature of a program's focus and activities is closely tied to the aims and resources of the sponsoring organization and the perceived needs of children being

targeted. For instance, it is not uncommon for school-based programs to primarily implement academic activities with a secondary emphasis on sports or enrichment. An example of this is the Chicago Public Schools Lighthouse Program, an academically focused after-school program that targets children who have been retained or are at risk of retention. Currently available in 315 Chicago public elementary schools, the program is staffed by teachers. Its core activity is one hour of math and reading academics, often followed by social or enrichment activities.

### **Research at Wisconsin and Erikson Provides Picture of Programs in Poor Communities**

The long-held perception of out-of-school care as akin to babysitting has had significant ramifications for program funding and staffing, as well as for research on program need and effectiveness. While the National Institute on Out-of-School Time at Wellesley College has provided school-age training and technical assistance for over 20 years, researchers have not been drawn to the study of after-school care. Two notable exceptions are Deborah Vandell and her colleagues at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Erikson Institute Professor Robert Halpern. Taken as a whole, their research is beginning to sketch a picture of after-school

care as it currently exists in poor communities. This research increasingly confirms a transactional view which suggests that the success of programs is influenced at multiple levels by characteristics of the child, the program and staff, and the larger community and social context. Key research findings have fallen into three categories: program quality, characteristics of children, and system constraints.

Over the course of almost a decade, research by Vandell and colleagues has resulted in contradictory findings regarding the relationship between school-age programs and children's emotional adjustment, academic performance, and behavior. These findings have led them to conduct more fine-grained research that has examined features of program quality as well as characteristics of children such as age, gender, and race. In line with research on quality early child care, this research has found that staff-child ratios, level of staff training, nature of staff-child interactions, and diversity and flexibility of program activities are all related to children's adjustment and satisfaction with programs. Children view the program and staff more positively when staff-child ratios are smaller, staff have more formal training, there is greater program flexibility and a greater variety of developmentally appropriate activities.<sup>8</sup> This is likely due in part to the finding that, under these conditions, interactions between

## 'Schools used to have a model that worked well.'

**Deborah Vandell and colleagues at the University of Wisconsin-Madison have studied school-age programs for the past decade, most recently conducting fine-grained research on features of program quality as well as characteristics of children.**

*"You know, ironically, schools used to have a model that worked well. It allowed children to follow their interests and had proven beneficial effects, but it came to be viewed as an expensive luxury. It was called extracurricular after-school activities.*

*"Based on my research and the research of others, there needs to be a variety of program models. More academic models is one approach. However I don't believe that at the end of the day children should be put back in a seat for regimented academic activities. Rather, kids should have the opportunity to explore specific academic interests through programs like science clubs. They should also have the opportunity to pursue enrichment activities such as art, music, sports, and drama."*

staff and children are significantly more positive.

What is known about the day-to-day functioning of after-school programs? Very little, although an early study of a network of urban youth programs by Halpern<sup>9</sup> offers insight into both the strengths of programs and the significant constraints under which they operate. Through in-depth observations and interviews, Halpern investigated the daily structure, activities, and functioning of the various programs, patterns of children's participation, group processes, and the nature of individual staff-child relationships and interactions. The study sought to understand what takes place in inner-city after-school programs, the demands and pressures that after-school programs face, and the role

of such programs in the lives of inner-city children.

With regard to program quality, Halpern found that considerable unevenness existed both within and across programs. Frequently, programs lacked a clear focus and strong leadership. Staff, though generally well meaning and caring, were poorly trained and supported, and, consequently, ill prepared to address the often pressing needs of program children. Lack of planning time and curricular support contributed to the unevenness of program implementation, which, in turn, contributed to irregularities in program attendance. Only one-fourth of program children attended on a consistent basis.

Halpern concluded that, despite these limitations, programs served several important functions for

children. They ensured that children had a safe place to go and provided a predictable routine and a clear set of normative behavioral expectations. For some children, programs also served as a vehicle for the development of a strong individual relationship with a particular member of the staff. Taken as a whole, Halpern concluded that, in concert with other developmental supports, decent quality after-school programs have modest potential to help children acquire "positive enough" expectations for themselves to counter the real threats of their larger environment.

### **Developmental Framework Is Essential**

Both Vandell and Halpern have observed developmental changes in children's interests and their involve-

ment in after-school activities as children approach early adolescence. In an early study of a network of inner-city youth programs, Halpern found that as children got older their interest in program activities waned, they appeared increasingly detached, and correspondingly their attendance decreased dramatically.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, a recent study by Posner and Vandell noted changes in children's activities and care arrangements from third to fifth grade.<sup>11</sup> Examining the after-school activities of low-income urban children, they found that, across after-school settings (i.e., after-school programs, self-care, informal adult supervision, and parent care), the amount of time children spent engaged in outdoor, unstructured activities decreased by half, and the amount of time children spent socializing tripled from third to fifth grade.

In addition, in third grade children spent a significant amount of after-school time in academic activities. However, by fifth grade children were far more likely to select enrichment activities such as music and art or coached sports over academics. Thus, as children get older they prefer to spend after-school time socializing with friends, or in hobby or sports activities.<sup>12</sup>

These developmental shifts have important ramifications for the nature of after-school care for older children and argue for the application of a developmental framework

when designing programs. Such a framework is largely absent from the current dialogue on after-school care. As this research suggests, the absence of a developmental perspective can hamper our ability to create programs that hold children's interest and meet their needs, both of which are preconditions for maintaining attendance, particularly as children get older.

A national survey on child care arrangements reported that the percentage of children enrolled in after-school care decreased steadily with age, from 22 percent in kindergarten, to 14 percent in third grade, to 6 percent in fifth grade. By seventh grade only 1 percent of children were enrolled in after-school programs.<sup>13</sup> For inner-city children, this decreased interest and attendance occurs at a time when their vulnerability to the hazards in their larger community is dramatically escalating.

### **MOST: A First Look at After-School Programs as a System of Care**

A recent national initiative, Making the Most of Out-of-School Time (MOST), funded by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, further confirms a number of Halpern's earlier findings regarding the funding and staffing constraints under which programs are forced to operate. Begun in 1993, MOST is the first foundation sponsored initiative in the country to focus on

strengthening after-school care as a system. The goals of MOST have been to test innovative strategies for 1) improving the supply, accessibility, affordability, and quality of after-school care, especially for low-income children and underserved communities, and 2) strengthening the overall coherence of after-school care as a system in each city.

To accomplish this, the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund has invested approximately \$10 million in the after-school care systems in Boston, Chicago, and Seattle. Administered by a lead agency in each city, funding has been used to support a variety of activities, including:

- a year-long planning process involving providers, intermediary organizations such as child care resource and referral agencies, advocacy groups, and colleges and universities, and city and state regulatory and funding agencies;
- the creation and expansion of after-school programs and subsidies for low-income children; and,
- enhancement of program quality through the development and dissemination of curricular resources, purchase of materials, provision of technical support and staff training, expansion of professional training and development opportunities for after-school providers, and, in

partnership with the National Institute on Out-of-School Time and the National School-Age Care Alliance, the piloting of a program self-improvement process (Assessing School-Age Child Care Quality, or ASQ) that may eventually lead to accreditation.

Evaluation of the MOST initiative is being conducted by the University of Chicago's Chapin Hall Center for Children with Erikson Institute Professor Robert Halpern as principal investigator. The

findings had emerged. The final evaluation report will be available in late 1999. The findings discussed here are those contained in the interim report as well as a number of more recent findings that were reported by Halpern in a policy briefing in Washington, D.C., sponsored by Senators Kennedy and Jeffers in spring of 1999. Together, these sources offer a first-ever look at the functioning of after-school care as a system and a window into the challenges involved in capacity-, quality-, and system-building efforts. They provide a clearer understand-

year-round programs, arts, sports, and summer programs, tutoring and mentoring programs) and the instability of funding from year to year make it difficult to arrive at one number that accurately captures the quantity of after-school resources available. So too, even if accurate, such data does not provide critical information on the quality, location, and accessibility of that supply. Thus, while MOST was successful at creating or subsidizing a sizable number of program slots, the meaning of that number is not easy to interpret. And, ultimately, the evaluation found that only between 10 and 20 percent of low- and moderate-income children in MOST cities participate regularly in after-school programs, with millions more in need.

### **MOST Leadership / Chicago**

- *Local Lead Agencies:* Chicago Community Trust and Day Care Action Council, with Program Director Leonette Coates (Erikson master's class '95)
- *National Evaluator:* Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago, with Principal Investigator Robert Halpern, Erikson Professor, and Research Associate Julie Spielberger (Erikson doctoral class '98)

purpose of the evaluation is to analyze the MOST process in each city and assess its effectiveness at achieving its goals within and across cities.

An interim report on the evaluation was issued in 1998. Though not a complete report on evaluation findings, the interim report focused on selected aspects of the evaluation from which several important initial

ing of both the strengths and the limitations of after-school care as a system and profession.

### **Need and Supply**

The evaluation team experienced great difficulty attempting to derive accurate estimates of the supply of after-school care in each city. Halpern concluded that the heterogeneity of programs (e.g., full-time

### **Provider Networks**

An examination of the organization of after-school care systems in each city revealed that the nature of provider agencies involved varies from city to city with some commonalities. For instance, across cities, youth-serving organizations such as boys and girls clubs and church-based programs are providers, but only in Chicago does the Park District play a major role. Similarly, the nature of intermediary organizations varies by city. Seattle alone has a citywide training and technical assistance agency. In Chicago and Seattle, city Departments of Human Services conduct some provider

training, and in Boston one organization provides training and support for program integration of children with special needs. Other organizations serve as curriculum and activity resources, and in each city at least one community college offers after-school course sequences, some of which confer certification. State child care agencies are responsible for licensing and other regulatory management of after-school programs; the child care subsidy program is administered by child care or human services offices.

With regard to the functioning of after-school care as a system within each city, the evaluation found that the absence of a centralized governance mechanism and fragmented public funding stream beyond child care subsidies has resulted in loosely organized systems with which individual providers may or may not identify. Leadership within these systems is diffuse and informal, frequently based on length of involvement in the field and self-selection. The absence of regular mechanisms for communication was found, at times, to result in inadvertent competition among programs.

### Professional Identity

Interviews with program staff revealed that, for many, being an after-school provider is an ephemeral identity, lacking a professional sense of self. These findings are similar to those of Halpern's earlier study in which he found that many

staff viewed being an after-school provider as a transitory position rather than a career choice. As a field of service, Halpern notes, after-school care has, as of yet, no clear boundaries or distinct professional identity. Rather, it is a system that intersects and overlaps with others (e.g., day care, education, recreation). More optimistically, he notes that, as a result of the national field-building efforts of organizations such as the National Institute on Out-of-School Time and the National School-Age Care Alliance, those involved in after-school care are slowly beginning to sense that they are involved in a common endeavor. There is also movement toward recognition of the need for professional and quality standards.

### Structured Program Self-Assessment

One of the early MOST strategies for improving program quality was the piloting of the ASQ, a structured program self-improvement approach developed by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time. The ASQ breaks program quality out into categories focused on human relationships, indoor and outdoor environments, activities, safety, health, and nutrition and assists programs to get feedback from staff, children, and parents. The process is intended to eventually lead to program accreditation through the National School-Age Care Alliance.

Ten sites in each city piloted the

ASQ, with varying degrees of benefit. The evaluation found that most programs in which it was piloted profited to some degree. However, programs were in various stages of readiness to embark on the process, with stronger more stable programs better able to benefit.

The ASQ process underscored once again the considerable variability that exists in program quality and stability. It led Halpern to observe that programs are often not able to benefit from technical assistance until they have achieved a minimal level of functioning, yet still require resources and supports to attain that minimal level. It also highlighted the fact that program improvement is frequently non-linear—setbacks occur, often due to fluctuations in staff and the propensity for programs to revert to a level of previous functioning. Piloting of the ASQ was a learning experience for its developers as well. Based upon the experience of those 10 pilot sites, the ASQ has been considerably revised.

### Financing

The MOST evaluation has also taken an in-depth look at the financing of after-school care for low-income children in each city, contrasting program costs with existing revenues. Halpern outlined some of the evaluation's findings during the recent policy briefing. He noted that, across programs, the evaluation found that the cost of providing minimally adequate after-

## **‘Our purpose is to find practical ways to integrate literacy activities into school-age programs’**

**Julie Spielberger earned her Ph.D. in child development from Erikson Institute in 1998. Now a research associate at Chapin Hall, she has devoted the last two years to MOST research (see main story) and recently joined Erikson Professor Robert Halpern to explore emergent literacy in the context of school-age programs.**

*“Staff at many school-age programs see their task for children’s literacy development as one of teaching academics. They do not recognize the connection between academics and a variety of learning experiences. Our research presents an opportunity to identify richer literacy activities—for instance, journaling, work with literature, focused field trips—that can be related to academic learning.*

*“First, we will describe literacy practices in school-age programs: the physical environment, curricular resources, and human interactions. Then we will identify staff behaviors and environments that are exemplary. We’ll survey programs in Chicago as well as around the country. Our purpose is to understand the role of school-age programs in literacy development and find practical ways to integrate literacy activities into existing programs.”*

school care runs between \$3,000 and \$4,000 per child per 12-month year. Current revenues in the form of parent fees, public funding such as child care subsidies, private funding from foundations and United Ways, and in-kind contributions cover an estimated two-thirds of program costs, leaving a significant annual revenue shortfall. The consequences of this shortfall are felt in higher parent fees, limited availability, poorer quality programs (less trained staff, higher staff-child ratios, fewer program activities), rapid staff turnover, and the absence of technical assistance resources to support program improvement.

### **System-building**

On a positive note, although the interim report did not analyze

system-building efforts per se, it did observe that MOST’s system-building strategies have strengthened the after-school systems in each city, forging relationships and creating system-level mechanisms for inter-agency coordination, joint planning and priority-setting, resource sharing, and feedback among a broad range of stakeholders. MOST has also stimulated dialogue on key after-school service issues and helped to clarify the attributes of a strong system of after-school care.

However, it was noted that a number of significant challenges exist to establishing effective mechanisms for after-school system-building. For example, participation in such mechanisms can be time-consuming, and it is difficult to engage stakeholders and maintain

participation when the benefits of involvement are unclear or lack a specific tie to funding. In line with this, Halpern observed that it is uncertain what will become of each city’s coordinating structure and process once MOST funding has expired.

### **Summary**

After-school care plays an increasingly prominent role in the lives of many of the nation’s children. To date, we know that there is a significant and growing need for after-school services, but possess little sound information about their effectiveness. From the literature, however, several things are clear. Particularly in low-income urban communities, opportunities and pressures to engage in risky and

dangerous behavior and activities increase as children get older, while the likelihood that children will participate in after-school programs that may provide protective resources decreases dramatically. In addition, the quality of after-school programs is associated with children's satisfaction and enjoyment, and possibly their adjustment.

Just as middle childhood is a time of critical growth for children, a point at which key developmental pathways are emerging, the MOST evaluation suggests that the field of after-school care is at a critical point in its evolution, with a number of possible trajectories. These trajectories turn on issues of program focus, sponsorship, quality, and professionalism, all of which are tied at some level to the allocation of resources. Public support for programs is at an all-time high, the importance of enhancing program quality is being recognized in the formation of

organizations focused on accreditation and technical assistance, and federal funding for school-based after-school care is expanding.

This heightened focus on middle childhood and after-school programs presents both a risk and an opportunity. The risk is that funding for such programs will focus on narrow instrumental goals, restrict sponsorship, and limit allocations in a way that expands availability but maintains the marginal functioning of programs. Or, that programs will be expected to compensate for other failing social institutions and developmental contexts, a task at which they are doomed to fail.

However, the opportunity also exists to bring to the field a heretofore lacking coherence, coordination, and developmental framework. Initial findings from the MOST evaluation suggest that we can better care for low-income school-age children and their parents by

bringing additional resources to bear; involving a wide variety of stakeholders such as parents, providers, educators, child care advocates, government and private funders, and children themselves; forging collaborative relationships and networks; and supporting mechanisms for increasing not only the availability of after-school care, but also its quality and professional identity.

### About the Author

*Daria Zvetina is a Chicago-based research and community planning consultant specializing in programs for at-risk children and families and the homeless. In the 1980s, she directed two after-school programs, in Chicago and Dayton, Ohio. Zvetina, who has an M.Ed. in educational psychology, has conducted research on Chicago's inner-city schools through Erikson Institute's Schools Project.*

### Endnotes

1. A 1998 national poll of registered voters found that American citizens overwhelmingly support the expansion of after-school programs. Eighty percent of those polled, irrespective of political party or whether they themselves had children, stated they would be willing to incur a tax increase to offer after-school programs to children.
2. This quoted description is contained in U.S. Department of Education material on the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program published on the department's website: [www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/21stCCLC](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/21stCCLC).
3. In the private sector, the Mott Foundation, the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, and the philanthropist George Soros have undertaken major initiatives to expand and enhance the quality of after-school programs in various cities.
4. U.S. General Accounting Office, 1998.
5. Halpern, R. (1992). The role of after-school programs in the lives of inner-city children:

### More Information

DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. [www.wallacefunds.org](http://www.wallacefunds.org). For the MOST Interim Evaluation Report, write the Communications Department, 2 Park Ave., 23rd Fl., New York, NY 10016.

National Institute on Out-of-School Time, Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College. [www.wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW/SAC](http://www.wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW/SAC)

National School-Age Care Alliance. [www.nsaca.org](http://www.nsaca.org).

21st Century Learning Centers Program, U.S. Department of Education. [www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/21stCCLC](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/21stCCLC)



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*Child Welfare*, 71(3), 215–230.
6. Ibid, 217.
  7. Ibid.
  8. Rosenthal, R. & Vandell, D. L. (1996). Quality of care at school-aged child-care programs: Regulatable features, observed experiences, child perspectives, and parent perspectives. *Child Development*, 67, 2434–2445.
  9. Halpern, 1992.
  10. Ibid.
  11. Posner, J. K. & Vandell, D. L. (1999). After-school activities and the development of low-income urban children: A longitudinal study. *Developmental Psychology*, 35(3), 868–879.
  12. In their study, Posner and Vandell found that, for African-American children in particular, time spent socializing in adult-supervised settings and involvement in enrichment activities was associated with better emotional adjustment and school success.
  13. Hofferth, S. L., Brayfield, A., Deich, S., & Holcomb, P. (1991). *National Child Care Survey, 1990*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.

## NEWS FROM THE HERR RESEARCH CENTER

### People

**Christine Salisbury**, former director of the Child and Family Studies Program, Allegheny University of the Health Sciences, Pittsburgh, joined Erikson Institute in July. While in Pittsburgh, she also was professor of psychiatry (psychology) at the Hahnemann University School of Medicine, Medical College of Pennsylvania. A specialist in developing and evaluating systems that support the inclusion of young children with disabilities in early childhood and elementary education programs, Salisbury will continue her current research work on three system-change projects funded by the U.S. Department of Education. In addition, she is engaged in research to improve service coordination for families of children birth to 8 with disabilities. She earned her M.S. in behavioral disabilities and her Ph.D. in early childhood special education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Salisbury's strong background in elementary age special education policy and practice provides a significant compliment to the Institute's nationally recognized expertise in infancy and early intervention for 0–3. Her research staff includes **Pat Husband** (M.S. in Early Childhood Special Education, Northeastern Illinois University), a well-established early intervention practitioner in Illinois; and **Todd Chase** (M.A. in sociology, Western Illinois University), who has been on staff at the University of Illinois-Chicago Children and Family Research Center and taught sociology and research courses at the university level.

**Samuel J. Meisels**, professor in the School of Education at the University of Michigan and research scientist at the university's Center for Human Growth and Development, is providing consultation to the Herr Research Center as it continues to frame its identity and goals. Meisels, for the past two decades a leading researcher in the areas of early childhood assessment and early intervention, has advised government agencies, private institutes, and foundations throughout the country and has held advisory positions with several national organizations, including Zero to Three, where he currently is president-elect of its Board of Directors.

Erikson recently announced its first two Doctoral Fellowships, awarded to incoming students **Cynthia Lashley** and **Jennifer McCray**. Lashley, the new Doctoral Fellow for Applied Research in Infancy, earned her M.S. at Wheelock College in Boston, where she worked as a research associate for the Family Child Care Project at the college's Center for Career Development.

McCray, named the Doctoral Fellow for Applied Research in Child Development, graduated in June with an M.S. from Erikson Institute. During her Erikson internship, she worked as an educational therapist with troubled children at Chicago's Virginia Frank Child Development Center. Erikson currently has 16 students in its doctoral program; 15 candidates have

received their degrees since the program was established in 1986, in affiliation with Loyola University Chicago. ■■

## Profile

### **Charles Chang, Senior Research Advisor**

Since joining the Institute in May 1998, social researcher Charles Chang has provided important consultation to faculty, research staff, and doctoral students as part of the continual process of expanding the robust nature of research at Erikson Institute.

A former senior research consultant in the Social Science Research Computing Division at the University of Chicago, Chang brings strong experience in applying research methodology across disciplines: psychology, sociology, history, education, economics. He combines knowledge in computer technology—hardware, software, operating systems, programming, networks—with a background in statistical analysis and data collection. As past editor of PCWorld Taiwan, a user-oriented monthly magazine with a 200,000 circulation, he also brings a global view of the use of technology and information to his work with colleagues.

In the past year, among other responsibilities, Chang has provided colleagues with advisory assistance on several Erikson research projects and proposals, including programs focused on the public schools, Head Start and play, technology and early education, welfare to work, and early intervention policy. He serves as a continuous resource on methodology and research design for doctoral students as they refine their dissertations. In addition, Chang and Erikson Professor Jie-Qi Chen have begun collaborating on a new project, Preparing Teachers for 21st Century Classrooms. The two-year project, funded by Polk Bros. Foundation, will create a computer training program for early childhood educators in the Chicago Public Schools, as well as explore the relationship between the use of computer technology and young children's development.

Chang earned his Bachelor of Laws degree at Soochow University, Taipei, Taiwan. He earned his M.A. in sociology with a specialty in statistics from the University of Chicago and is now currently pursuing a Ph.D. in sociology at the university.

### **Applied Research in Child Development**

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