

# A Different Kind of Child Development Institution: The History of After-School Programs for Low-Income Children

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*Over the past decade politicians and policy makers, the media, child development professionals, and parents have focused increasing attention on the after-school hours of children aged 6 to 14, coming to view this daily time period as one of unusual “risk and opportunity” (Hofferth 1995). Attention to the after-school hours has led in turn to renewed interest in a longstanding child development institution, after-school programs, particularly those serving low- and moderate-income children. This article examines the historical development of after-school programs serving low-income children, including objectives and practices in each era, formative influences, implementation challenges, and role in children’s lives. In a final section, the author discusses the current pressures facing the after-school field and suggests an appropriate set of purposes and expectations for the coming years.*

One boys’ club is worth a thousand policemen’s clubs.

Jacob Riis (cited in BWR 1918b)

It is not what the boy does to the wood but what the wood does to the boy.

Anonymous participant in a 1936  
meeting of Chicago Boys’ Clubs  
(CBC 1948)

Over the past decade politicians, policy makers, the media, child development professionals, and parents have focused increasing attention on the after-school hours of children aged 6 to 14, coming to view this daily time period as one of unusual “risk and opportunity” (Hofferth 1995). The risks perceived for these hours range from boredom, worry, and “idleness” to self- and socially destructive behavior; the opportunities range from caring relationships with adults to enrichment to extra academic learning time. Attention to the after-school hours has led in turn to renewed interest in a longstanding child development institution—after-school programs, particularly those serving low- and moderate-income children.<sup>1</sup> There are new government-funded, after-school initiatives, new foundation grant pro-

grams, and efforts by scores of community groups around the country to create more after-school programs in their communities. Some 20 to 25 percent of low- and moderate-income urban children aged 6 to 14 (perhaps 3 to 4 million children) now spend three to five afternoons a week (and sometimes all day during the summer) in after-school programs, and participation rates appear to be growing. Following home and school, after-school programs are coming to be a third critical developmental setting for low- and moderate-income children.

Given renewed societal interest and growing participation in after-school programs, it is an appropriate moment to step back, examine the evolution of their role in low-income children's lives and reflect on what that role ought to be in the coming years. This article attempts these two tasks by examining the objectives and practices of after-school programs in each era, formative influences, implementation challenges, and the role of these programs in children's lives. A final section includes discussion of the current pressures facing the after-school field and suggestions for an appropriate set of purposes and expectations for the coming years.

As the historical account reveals, the after-school field has a rich and interesting tradition of service to children. Yet it is also a field that has struggled to define and remain true to coherent assumptions and purposes. After-school programs have defined themselves in terms of protection, care, opportunity for enrichment, and play while simultaneously defining themselves in terms of socialization, acculturation, training, and problem remediation. Providers have argued that program activities should be shaped by children's interests and preferences and yet also by what they as adults thought children needed. Proponents have sometimes found it easier to define after-school programs by what they were not—family, school, the streets—than by what they were.

There are many reasons for what might be called the struggle for identity within the after-school field. These include how and why the field first emerged, the diversity of sponsorship, the voluntary nature of children's participation, and American society's basic ambivalence about low-income children and their support needs. This struggle has, ironically, had some positive consequences. It has given after-school programs room to be a different kind of child development institution—one that mostly avoided pathologizing low-income children and one that can identify gaps in children's lives and try to fill them. It has allowed after-school programs to be adult-directed institutions where the adult agenda is relatively modest. And it has allowed them to be responsive to changing needs and circumstances in the lives of low-income children. Yet, lacking a defensible alternative (or conviction in their own convictions), after-school programs have found it difficult to resist pressures to contribute to what Kozol (2000) describes as the harsh societal agenda for low-income children. They have been unable

to resist pressures to promise more than was commensurate with their means; and they have been especially unable to resist pressures to promise to compensate for the perceived limitations of other institutions.

### THE CONTEXT FOR THE EMERGENCE OF AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

After-school programs first emerged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, in the form of small, idiosyncratic “boys’ clubs,” often no more than a storefront or room in a church or other local building. Two trends provided the backdrop for their emergence. The first was a gradual decline in the need for children’s paid labor in the urban economy as a whole and in working-class families’ own micro-economies. The second was the growth of schooling, fueled by passage of compulsory education laws, large scale investment in school construction, and the greater availability of children to attend school. At the turn of the century some 20 to 25 percent of urban children were gainfully employed (Zelizer 1985, 57). Paid child labor declined by half in each decade between 1900 and 1930. That decline was spurred by, and in turn led to, an increase in school participation rates. In 1900, 59 percent of children aged 5 to 17 attended school; by 1928, 80 percent did so (Brenzel, Roberts-Gersch and Wittner 1985, 480). During that period the point at which most children left school shifted from the end of fifth to the end of eighth grade.

Together, the two trends helped create a distinct childhood culture with its age-graded peer group, its own locations, norms, rules, and rituals. The public school, like the larger industrial model it resembled, altered children’s consciousness of time, demanding that they learn to submit to punctuality, efficiency, and adherence to schedules. The after-school hours emerged gradually as discretionary time, a counterpoint to the rigid schedule and adult agenda of school, and, from the perspective of adult-child relations, as negotiated time. Children would continue to help after school with industrial home work well into the 1930s (Boris and Daniels 1989). Girls would retain a variety of domestic responsibilities, especially child care, for decades. But for the most part children gained a say in how after-school time would be considered and used.

If the decline in child labor and growth of schooling created out-of-school time, other factors created the rationales for organized programs to fill it. The first was overcrowding and lack of privacy in tenement apartments (as well as continued use of homes for piecework), which pushed thousands of children into the streets. Children were not just pushed into but were attracted to the streets, by the richness and variety of street life, the possibility of earning some money, and a few hours of freedom from family responsibilities or conflict. At the same time, many adults viewed the

streets as unhealthy for children, exposing them to unsavory characters, unwholesome temptations, and illegal activities. Street traffic was growing, heightening the risk of injury and death to children; streets were used increasingly for commercial purposes; and real estate development was encroaching on play space. Dargan and Zeitlin (1990, 71) cite one early commentator who asked, "What kid could raise \$15,000 just to keep a vacant lot?"

The immediate responses of municipal authorities to the conflict between children's needs (and preferences) and adult concerns was to pass curfews and other "street laws" prohibiting fire setting, begging, roaming around, loitering, blocking sidewalks, and playing street games (Goodman 1979; Nasaw 1979). These laws, enforced by police and the new juvenile courts, led to large numbers of arrests. Yet progressive reformers began reinterpreting the "problem" of working-class children's out-of-school time as an opportunity, to use that time to improve those children, and through that effort ultimately to improve society. In this they were guided by their belief that children needed to be prepared for the new industrial society that was emerging (and in fact that it was children who would remake society) and by new ideas about childhood and children's needs emerging from the nascent child-study movement.

Among these new ideas, ideas that were by no means coherent or consistent,<sup>2</sup> one was particularly relevant to the emerging after-school field. This was the notion of play as a critical element of children's lives. It was argued that play was how children learned and made sense of the world. Play could free low-income children (at least temporarily) from the realities of circumstance and, more broadly, restore some balance to an increasingly alienating, dehumanizing industrial culture (Kadzielski 1977). Play could counter the grinding, oppressive environment of the tenement (Taylor 1914). Yet, to have these beneficial effects play had to be organized and supervised. Although working-class children were in fact extraordinarily imaginative in their adaptation to and transformation of the urban environment, their self-directed play was seen as unimaginative, unproductive, and occasionally a pathway to trouble (Addams 1909/1972). In such play, children were seen at best to waste time "idling" and fooling around or at worst to draw on and reenact the negative adult behavior they saw around them: "Lady Bum and Cop, Police Patrol, Burglar, the latest crime or sex scandal" (Woods and Kennedy 1922/1970, 106-107).<sup>3</sup>

## THE EMERGENCE OF AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

The perceived need for adults, specifically middle-class adults, to involve themselves with working-class children's out-of-school-time and play led to two responses. One was what has come to be called the organized play-

ground movement. (For histories of this movement see Kadzielski 1977; Goodman 1979; Cavallo 1981; Hardy 1982; Reiss 1989). The other, of course, was the development of indoor programs for after-school play, recreation, and informal education. At times in the early years the two were intertwined. After-school programs, however, would become a better defined, more fully institutionalized, and more versatile approach to working with children.

The first after-school programs were developed by individual men and women intent on rescuing children from the physical and moral hazards posed by growing up in the immigrant neighborhoods of major cities. These men and women sought to create protected spaces in storefronts, churches, or other buildings where children might relax, play board games, read, and be provided as much instruction as they would tolerate. Although some early programs had evangelical aims (Schneider 1992), the majority were intended primarily as a refuge and diversion from the streets. Children could drop in when they wished, expectations were low, and "any youngster who refrained from tearing up the place was welcome" (MacLeod 1983, 66).

A typical developmental pattern for these clubs involved a gradual, room-by-room physical expansion and a corresponding addition of activities as more children showed up. For example, in 1876 businessman Edward Harriman opened a boys' club with an initial membership of seven in a building on Tompkins Square in Manhattan (Zane 1990). Within a decade the program had taken over more space and had playrooms, reading rooms, and a "makeshift" gymnasium. By the late 1890s, activities had come to include a natural history club; fife, drum and bugle corps; singing class; writing and bookkeeping classes; and wrestling. By 1900 the Tompkins Square Boys' Club had 400 regular members and plans were underway to build or renovate a new facility. Although still staffed largely by middle-class volunteers, the program now had a paid superintendent.

Settlements began doing boys' and girls' work almost as soon as they appeared in the mid-1880s. Children were sometimes the first to show up at new settlements, mostly out of curiosity; and so children's work was sometimes the first concrete activity. Settlement residents nonetheless were not always sure what to do with children. John Elliot (1921), founder of the Hudson Guild Settlement in Manhattan, noted that "finding out just what a boys' club should do was for a good many years a matter of serious perplexity" (p. 17). By the turn of the century, churches and other religiously based organizations were also providing after-school programs as were organizations serving specific ethnic groups. School authorities were ambivalent at best about after-school programming, due to reluctance to take on a social welfare role and to loss of control over their space. Nonetheless, as one progressive leader noted, in arguing for use of schools

during the after-school hours, “the opportunity is there, the power is there, the buildings are there . . .” (Simkhovitch 1904, 411).

As the after-school field was elaborated during the first two decades of the twentieth century, it took on the decentralized, idiosyncratic form that would characterize it throughout the century. Although what came to be called boys’ and girls’ work quickly became identifiable as a form of practice, the after-school field would not develop as one formal system of services. Different kinds of agencies sponsored after-school programs, and each local sponsor set its own policies and priorities. The role and importance of specific providers varied from city to city. After-school programs emerged, as they would remain, mostly privately sponsored and funded.

Boys’ clubs and settlements were the two largest sponsors, although the term boys’ club was used in a generic way by many agencies. By around 1910 the concept of the “mass club” emerged. Many boys’ clubs began campaigns to raise money for their own buildings, which usually meant space for a gym, industrial arts rooms, studios, a library, kitchen, occasionally an auditorium, and/or swimming pool. These new buildings enlarged the reach of boys’ clubs, which began serving as many as 200 to 300 or more children a day, but also increased operating expenses, making fundraising a growing part of the role of superintendents and boards. Settlements, in contrast, had more restricted space than boys’ clubs. They were designed more along the lines of a home, and their activities sometimes took place in dining rooms, parlors, and even residents’ bedrooms. Because of space limitations, settlements tended to have less physically expansive and active offerings than boys’ clubs; they viewed themselves as more selective in how many and whom they served, on the grounds that “it is better to know a few children well than many superficially” (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 73). They usually served well under 100 children daily, typically somewhere between 30 and 60; and they tended to have smaller groups.

One group that after-school programs hardly reached was African American children. Practices nonetheless varied from city to city and sponsor to sponsor. New York agencies, for example, were somewhat open to integration whereas Chicago agencies were much less so. Boys’ clubs were more likely to be integrated than settlements. The latter feared that racial integration would lead white ethnic families to pull their children from programs. Settlements located near African American neighborhoods contrived to find ways to avoid serving African American children “until neighborhood transition brought them face to face with it. Then they almost always chose, in one way or another, to follow the color line” (Philpott 1978, 323). Settlement leaders (and their financial backers) made a few token efforts to support the development of African American settlements. For instance, the Henry Street settlement in New York City helped start and supported the Stillman House for Colored People on West 60th Street. As Philpott

(1978, 314) notes, “whites committed just enough resources to Black Belt settlements to ensure a ‘margin of safety’ in neighborhood relations.” Few African American settlements survived very long, being both underfinanced and understaffed. Old line African American churches like Chicago’s Olivet Baptist Church provided a small amount of programming, but such programming rarely reached the poorest children (Spear 1967).

#### THE ELABORATION OF A PROGRAM

Most after-school programs operated five or six days a week and were open evenings as well as immediately after school. Some operated throughout the year, although the venue typically shifted out of doors in May or June. Participation was either free or virtually so. By 1910 most sponsors were serving boys and girls, although in different measures. Settlements, for instance, valuing such feminine ideals as “social cooperation, empathy, loyalty,” were strongly committed to serving girls (Cavallo 1981, 111). Although boys’ clubs began serving girls soon after they opened, there was general agreement that clubs could not have girls in “common membership” with boys. Rather they had to have their own separate programs.

Most programs relied heavily on part-time workers and volunteers to lead clubs and classes and might have five or 10 volunteers for every paid staff member. Men and women skilled in specific trades or crafts might receive some payment for teaching classes or might donate a few hours a week. For most other volunteers, motivated by religious or civic feeling, after-school work was a calling. For college students it was a form of service, field work, or practicum. Some programs used former participants as staff.

Organized activities took place in classes and clubs, each of which might have anywhere from four or five to as many as thirty children. Most classes and clubs were scheduled once or twice a week. Children typically participated in one or two classes at a time and perhaps one club as well. Classes focused on a particular activity, and children typically enrolled based on individual interests. Clubs were more socially oriented and their composition was determined by age, friendship, interests, and occasionally by ethnicity or nationality. Clubs elected officers, set their own rules, and chose (or had a hand in choosing) the projects and activities they engaged in and sometimes chose their own members.

Collectively, the range of activities offered by after-school programs was enormous, though any one program would offer only a handful of choices at any point in time. On a typical day there might be anywhere from three to five separate clubs or classes meeting. For girls there might be some combination of sewing, knitting, dress-making, embroidery, etiquette, elocution, housekeeping (“domestic science”), little mothers’ clubs, even “quiet”

clubs (for frail girls). Activities for boys included metal and wood work, cobbling, radio signaling and radio repair, wireless telegraph, electricity, parliamentary law, camera, printing, and barbering. Activities for either or both boys and girls, although usually conducted separately, included debate, health and hygiene, cooking, stenography, drawing, poster-making, photography, home-culture clubs, book-binding, ceramics, toy-making, basket-making, hammock-making, drama, dance (usually folk-dancing), choral, band, and perhaps music lessons. Special activities for younger children might include imaginative and dramatic play, story-reading, "fairy play," and doll clubs.

Programs had scout troops and hiking or explorers clubs. Children visited museums, parks, the seashore, newspaper printing plants, factories, local universities. Many programs served meals or milk and snacks, a smaller number provided health and dental check ups, and a few had Saturday baths for children. When space permitted, programs also set aside space for reading and study. For instance, as early as 1907, New York City's Henry Street settlement provided study rooms where children could do homework and receive assistance from residents and volunteers (Wald 1915, 103). On Fridays, time was set aside for book selection and reading. Programs also published newsletters written and produced by participating children. Articles covered a range of topics from descriptions of activities and trips to poetry, announcements, and social commentary.

After-school programs typically had one or more game rooms where children could drop in to play board games, read magazines, talk, and hang out. The game room was sometimes the first stop for children newly enrolled in a program and could at times get very crowded. A visitor to the game room at a boys' club on Avenue A and 10th street in Manhattan, noted that "upward of two hundred tykes, with very little supervision, were playing a variety of table games, mostly caroms" (BWR 1918a, 9).<sup>4</sup> Some boys' clubs also had "rough and tumble rooms," where boys were free to tussle, wrestle, punch a heavy bag, and make as much noise as they wished. Most boys' clubs and a few settlements had gyms, some clubs and settlements had playgrounds, and both might also have rooms or other space for boxing, wrestling, and free weights. The gym was typically the center of gravity in boys' clubs and basketball a central activity. Other common sports included indoor baseball, boxing, wrestling, gymnastics, and track and field.

## FINDING A PURPOSE

Embedded within the processes of gradual, if idiosyncratic, expansion and elaboration of a program of activities was a gradual expansion of purposes

and goals and a struggle to define a guiding purpose. One basic goal, from early on, was care and protection, particularly for younger boys and for girls. This goal derived both from the perceived dangers of the streets and families' need for both parents to work. A Chicago Boys Club report described many working-class children as "half-naked, under-sized, uncared for" (CBC, 1908, Box 1, Folder 1). Wald (1915, 111, 133) noted that some children whose mothers worked all day were "locked out during their absence [and were] expected to shift for themselves," with nowhere to go and no money for meals.

A second goal certainly was to create greater opportunity for play, although this goal was often viewed as a means to more instrumental ones such as fostering creativity and self-expression, strengthening group skills (e.g. cooperation, turn-taking, setting and following rules), and even building character. The problem was that children wanted to play on their own terms and in their own way—in other words they wanted to make after-school programs theirs—and this was a constant source of struggle with program staff in the game room and in club meetings. Programs tried at first to subdue children's "superabundant energy" and tendency to "break into something which approaches anarchy" (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 79). Over time, most came to tolerate and accommodate these traits.

From the outset, after-school proponents linked their work to prevention of problems, especially crime and delinquency. They quoted police officials, who noted that "crime increased nearly 50 percent in poor city wards at the end of the school day" and argued that after-school programs were the most effective means of reducing those figures (Cavallo 1981, 86). Prevention of crime was argued to have economic as well as social benefits. Proponents compared the small cost of serving children in after-school programs to the much higher cost of holding young criminals in jail (BWR 1922, 31).<sup>5</sup>

After-school leaders also believed that too many boys were moving into adolescence without a sense of their vocational talents and were unequipped for a particular vocation and, therefore, after-school programs had a responsibility to meet this need (BWR 1923, 20). They wished to teach boys to "think with their hands as well as their heads" (Marshall 1912, 317). Industrial crafts, sometimes called manual training, were particularly likely to be vocationally oriented. These were intended to familiarize boys with the basic concepts of specific trades, introduce them to a variety of tools, teach specific skills such as "precision and patience," and not least of all give boys useful vocational skills (CC, Box 6, Folder 1). A description of the activities of a printing class in the Somerville, Massachusetts Boys' Club captures the seriousness of some classes: "There are six boys in this class striving their best to learn how to set up a job, how to throw back type, and how to feed a press correctly" (WWB 1915, 57).

Goals for girls focused for the most part on bringing out artistic abilities and on preparation for domestic responsibilities and family life. Although girls could and did participate in athletics, it was agreed that girls' athletics should not focus on competition but on "the development of general physique . . ." (Carson 1990, 175). Older girls were seen also to need skills to negotiate sexual risks associated with family boarders and a general susceptibility to being preyed upon; and they also needed fortitude to cope with stress related to responsibility for the care of younger siblings (NUS, Box 44, Folder 4; Woods and Kennedy 1922, 94). More subtly, after-school programs carefully tried to play a role in creating social space for girls to become more independent.

The large majority of children served by after-school programs in the early decades came from immigrant families. As such, "Americanization" was a major objective. Americanization would occur partly through cultural transmission. A 1913 statement of philosophy for club work at New York City's Henry Street settlement noted that "the club leader's function is to pour into the child's life all the cultural material at her command" (Carson 1990, 176). It would occur partly through simple contact with American staff. A speaker at the 15th Annual Boys' Club Federation Conference told his audience that the best way "to impart Americanism to children of alien birth or parentage is to put an American heart up against their hearts" (BWR 1921, 7). It would occur partly through teaching middle-class American mores and practices, for instance teaching girls to make beds "in the American manner" (Crocker 1992, 128). And Americanization would occur partly through a process of deracination. As one writer noted, the boys' club is "a crucible in which various races are melted down into Americans" (WWB 1912, 90).

To an extent, providers viewed the specific activities they sponsored, the relationships children developed with staff, and the values inherent in their institutional setting as combining to provide what Wald (1915) called "incidental education" and Bellamy (1912) described as "teaching by indirection." Adults had a clear role in guiding and shaping children's experience, but it was a hidden one. Thus children would do useful things in a fun way. More broadly, after-school work with children was seen as a "support" for "lives unfolding" (GH, Box 3, Folder 6). Children were seen to need time for talk about wishes and worries, help with personal problems, and linkage to resources outside the program. Club leaders were asked to keep an eye on children, looking for signs of problems and letting head workers know of anything they saw or heard. Speaking of her participation at Hull House as a child, Dorothy Sigel noted that "You didn't realize you were being observed or that someone was really caring about you personally. There must have been, in all the residents' duties, sort of an unspoken assignment, each of them choosing a few [children] that they were following up on" (cited in Silberman 1990, 54).

*Not Family and Not School*

After-school programs also defined their role in part by contrasting themselves to other child-development institutions, particularly home and school. They tried to position themselves as “a supplement to the home” (GH, Box 3, Folder 3). Yet sponsors commonly cited family neglect and inadequacy as a rationale for their work. Immigrant parents were deemed incapable of preparing their children for the demands of a complex, industrial society; and their values were deemed irrelevant, even harmful, to their children. In reality, though children certainly bore responsibility for finding a way in the world and sensed the possibility of greater freedom, they remained “attached by affection and respect to the traditional practices of parents” (Berrol 1995, 86). Moreover, immigrant parents themselves were trying to balance tradition and adaptation to a new world. As one woman who grew up in a Jewish immigrant family recalled, “My parents knew only that they desired us to be like American children; and seeing how their neighbors gave their children boundless liberty, they turned us also loose” (cited in Graff 1995, 278).

With respect to the schools, the leaders of after-school programs were decidedly ambivalent. After-school programs would never “usurp the place of school”; but at the same time they provided “opportunity for experimentation [with educational methods] not possible in a rigid system” (Wald 1915, 106). To some extent, progressive educational thought with its emphasis on following children’s interests, practical learning experiences, plentiful but carefully orchestrated play, and the group as social and learning unit provided a conceptual link to after-school work and sometimes directly shaped that work. Karger (1987, 18) notes that “Dewey’s principle of learning by doing became the second commandment” of Unity House settlement in Minneapolis.

Yet the dominant characteristics of schools were such that after-school proponents could not help but contrast their programs to them. Observers commonly described schools as “mechanical” and deadening with rote recitation and drill. Children in classes of up to 50 or more children “sat at desks bolted to the floor, obliged to keep still and silent” (Macleod 1998, 81, 88). A reformist school principal noted that in most schools children were forced to “take on the stiffness and deadness of age” (Patri 1925, 14). After-school programs, by comparison, were said to be settings where children came to feel valued and successful and were recognized for who they were. A settlement-based group leader noted in his plans for the year that “I should like to make the boys feel that everything they do and say does make some difference” (CC, Box 6, Folder 1). Learning in after-school programs focused on the whole child. Since schools were “too busy to give much time to play,” after-school programs would provide that function (Chew 1913, 333).

## EVOLUTION TO 1950

In the period between 1920 and 1950, after-school programs and their sponsoring agencies became part of the solidifying human service system in the United States and established themselves as a child-rearing institution. Sponsorship remained diverse, with settlements and boys' clubs being the two biggest providers, but churches also served a moderate number of children. (By 1921 some 75 churches in Chicago were providing after-school programs.) The number of boys' clubs expanded steadily throughout the 1920s, leveled off during the 1930s, and began growing again in the post-war years. In 1942 there were 209 clubs nationwide; by 1959 some 550 clubs with half a million members (Sapora and Mitchell 1961). As a whole, the boys' club system maintained a loose affiliative structure, with each local club in a neighborhood or community being largely autonomous and responsible for its own finances. From the 1920s through the 1940s at least, boys' clubs tended to serve far more boys than girls. Chicago Boys' Club data, for example, indicate that at least 80 percent of participants during this period were boys (CBC, 1944, Box 1, Folder 1).

The activity structure of after-school programs, established in the pre-war years, would change little in the ensuing decades. For instance, in the 1920s and 1930s, Grosvenor House, a settlement in New York City which served between 25 and 50 children each day in its after-school program, had classes in metal work, carpentry, cobbling, basket-weaving, bead work, cooking, sewing, poster work, dance (folk, rhythmic, and tap dancing), decorative arts (e.g., designing and painting lampshades, making sconces), clay-modeling and pottery, book-binding, block printing, weaving, and drawing. Children typically signed up for two classes at a time. Time was set aside each afternoon for free play in the game room or outdoor playground. There were once or twice a month outings, weekend activities, a library that was "thronged with young people daily," health and dental clinics for children, and a hot lunch program. Some participating children also joined age-based social clubs, "which choose their own work for the year" (G.H., Box 3, Folders 3-6).

Clubs remained an important program element, providing time to talk and plan. A club leader's report on the Chicagoettes, a girl's club at Chicago Commons, reported that the girls "knitted and played concentration and guessing games. They discussed new members and planned to ask two more girls to join them" (CC, 1938, Box 6, Folder 5). Another club of ten- to thirteen-year-old girls spent weeks planning a holiday party, during that time also having a variety of discussions about boys, school, and parents' discipline practices among other topics. Clubs and some classes continued to be staffed partly, and in a few settings almost wholly, by volunteers. These included college students, young junior league members, and more selec-

tively by older youth from the neighborhood. A 1928 survey of twelve after-school programs on Chicago's northwest side found that over two thirds of all staff were volunteers, with most of the rest being part-time paid staff (CC, Box 6, Folder 1).

As would be the case again in the 1950s, neighborhood change unsettled some after-school programs and their sponsoring agencies beginning in the mid-1920s. Established immigrant groups gradually moved to other neighborhoods, to be replaced by new immigrants often of different backgrounds. Programs both adapted and began setting up outposts in new neighborhoods. By the 1930s they were also establishing outposts in a growing number of new public housing developments, in some cases lobbying during the planning phase for space to be set aside for indoor recreational facilities. A few African American children were served in the newer programs, but most continued to remain largely excluded. One participant at a 1927 girls' workers meeting in New York City noted that "we tactfully discourage some races [from participating] and make it appear accidental" (UNH, Box 7, Folder 63).

#### GOALS AND EMPHASES

The diverse rationales and goals articulated by after-school providers in the formative years became a basic vocabulary for the field, and new problems and social conditions shaped the story-line by which after-school programs lived. Providers continued to describe their role as broadening children's cultural horizons, discovering and nurturing children's talents, discovering "the incipient talent of the neighborhood," (C.C., Box 6, Folder 2), and building character (Carson 1990, 1730). For boys, providers talked about fostering prevocational and trade skills described as "trade beginnings." For girls, they continued to emphasize preparation for family life and fostering strength to "bear the burdens" of life (CC, Box 6, Folder 2).

For younger children, providers emphasized the developmental value of adult-supervised play; for older children, they emphasized the dangers and temptations of unsupervised play in the streets and the benefits of organized activity in preventing truancy, delinquency, and gang formation (Robinson 1932; Jones 1943). In discussing the arts, sports, and clubs offered by after-school programs, Jones (1943) argued that "any clever adult who appreciates the value of this kind of activity . . . has at hand possibilities for preventing and curing delinquency" (p. 87). A tendency to describe the purposes of after-school work in broad, somewhat ephemeral terms also continued. Program reports suggested that, at heart, the work was about supporting "lives unfolding" (GH, 1930, Box 3, Folder 6) or about helping children "learn to live" (CC, 1936, Box 50, Folder 1).

After-school programs also continued to define and frame themselves as an alternative to school. In a 1932 talk, Ruth Canfield of the Henry Street

settlement told fellow art instructors that, since school focused on producing conformity, it was their role to help children see that they were unique individuals who could create something original (UNH, Box 6, Folder 54). At a 1935 conference, Charles Hendry of the Boys Club of America noted that “those close to Boys’ Clubs know how sterile and how futile much of the education of the school is” (CBC, 1935, Box 1, Folder 1). At the 1936 annual meeting of the Chicago Boys’ Club, Daniel Calhoun of the Old Town Boys Club noted that although “we cannot do all the things a school does . . . a boy is not only being educated, he is learning to live” (CBC 1948, Box 50, Folder 1).

More broadly, sponsors continued to struggle with the questions of what traits they were trying to nurture and what children needed from them. Some argued that children most needed guidance, others respite from external demands or opportunity to play, and still others hands-on work with useful tasks (see, e.g., Lambert 1944). Many programs tried to find a balance in their emphases, to be both society- and child-centered. Socialization and acculturation would be tempered by nurturing the child’s own talents and unique personality and by supporting the child’s right to play and self-expression. The leader of a “play” club for nine- to twelve-year-old girls at the Northwestern University Settlement in the early 1930s captured the duality of most after-school work, noting that she wanted to “leave [the girls] to their own whims as much as possible, but to demand a certain amount of orderliness” (NUS, Box 45, Folder 9).

Local Child Study Associations played a role in arguments for after-school programs to address children’s developmental needs rather than one or another adult agenda.<sup>6</sup> They promoted the idea of play schools, after-school and summer centers that could provide “space and materials for real play and sympathetic, understanding, friendly teachers who genuinely like their charges,” and not least a place where “the child feels safe and accepted, and where he can express his own needs through the medium of play” (Lambert 1944, 18; see also Franklin and Benedict 1943). Play schools were developed within settlements, schools, churches, the new public housing developments, and other community centers. Some of these were infused with the new idea of play as not just the child’s natural mode of learning and mastering the world but as a form of therapeutic activity. Play was children’s mode of expressing feelings; of working out inner conflicts, fears, and worries; of striving for mastery and control and of exploring the physical and social world.

### *Struggles and Issues*

This second phase in the development of the after-school field brought a measure of reflection and self-questioning. Although some issues that had

arisen during the formative decades of after-school work dissipated, others gradually became characteristic of the field. Common problems noted by class and club leaders included eliciting interests, sustaining engagement, and controlling acting up. Programs struggled especially with what to ask of and try to accomplish with the majority of boys who seemed mostly to want to hang out, fool around, and use the game room and gym. Yet boys also were willing at times to embrace activities outside the realm of what would be considered masculine on the streets. Describing a group of fairly tough “street boys” in his club, one club leader noted that “they are particularly interested in story-playing and any acting” (CC, Box 6, Folder 2).

Beginning in the late 1920s, program reports began to reflect worry about the quality of children’s experiences. For instance, a mid-1930s study of arts and crafts in Chicago after-school programs by Edith Kiertzner, a local leader in the after-school field, described them as uninspiring: “Typical crafts programs consist largely of a series of dictated lessons in folding, cutting and pasting” (cited in CBC, 1934, Box 1). Criticism about quality was often tied to worry about staffing. One report noted that club leaders who only came once a week for the meeting of their club failed to connect with or understand the larger program (CC, Box 6, Folder 4). Program reports from 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s describe an almost chronic struggle to find and retain both club leaders and staff with specific vocational and artistic skills. Reports in some years indicated about a 50 percent year-to-year turnover rate for volunteers (see e.g., CC, Box 6, Folder 5). There was also turnover during the year, affecting the momentum of clubs as well as participants’ morale and attendance.

During this period, the leaders of the after-school field came to feel a need to improve the status of the field, by professionalizing and by articulating the methods of after-school work with children. In spite of the fact that most staff had little preparation for such work with children and the reality that many were volunteers, leaders within the field began to describe boys’ and girls’ work as a profession and debated what formal knowledge was central to it. One article argued that “those natural bents which qualify some of us boys’ workers must also be buttressed with a knowledge of psychology, both as it relates to the individual and to the mob; [also] psychiatry, sociology . . .” (BWR, 1923, p. 23).

Some in the after-school field argued that the theory and practice of “group work” ought to be the defining method of after-school programs. Group work proponents argued that the group, not the individual, was the key unit in after-school programs; and the challenge was to use the group experience to foster both social learning and individual development. Some within the field resisted the idea of group work as an over-arching frame, arguing that the better model was that of apprenticeship or mentorship.

The debate was partly about means and ends: Was the purpose of engagement in specific prevocational or artistic activities to develop skill in those domains or to use the activities for fuller self-development? (By implication, was it more important for staff to have group work skills or specialized skills in some art or craft form?)

#### EXTERNAL EVENTS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON PROGRAM GOALS AND ACTIVITIES

After-school programs, like other human services institutions, have always had to contend with and respond to external events affecting their sense of purpose, role, and day-to-day work. In the 1920s, working-class children were seen to face a new set of issues with the rise of popular culture and amusements such as motion pictures and the penny arcade. In a 1925 report, the drama instructor at Chicago Commons complained that boys mostly wanted to act out everything they saw at the movies and burlesque shows (CC, Box 6, Folder 1). After-school programs enlisted themselves in the new struggle to help children make sense of and resist the images and messages of the mass media and popular culture including earlier exposure to sexual matters. A 1925 report of the Minneapolis Women's Cooperative Alliance noted that an important function of settlement after-school programs was to help immigrant children learn to distinguish the "true American ideals from the cheap and unwholesome" ones (cited in Karger 1987, 63).

During the 1920s and 1930s, children's developmental needs were redefined again by the psychiatrists and social workers of the mental hygiene movement to include psychological needs. After-school staff were urged by mental hygiene specialists to help identify children having adjustment problems, whether due to timidity and shyness, over-conformance, laziness, or quarrelsomeness (Cohen, 1999). Promotion of adjustment and of mental or "emotional" health became additional purposes of after-school programs. One speaker at an annual meeting of Chicago Boys' Club directors noted that "recreation in a game room is just as necessary to the mental hygiene as is sleep to the physical tissues" (CBC, 1936, Box 50, Folder 1). A 1937 report on the after-school program at Grosvenor House, a settlement in New York City, noted that the staff must ask themselves "What emotional health habits am I helping these children acquire?" A few after-school leaders even began to use a psychodynamic frame in talking about after-school work. Karger (1987) cites the comment of a girl's worker in a Minneapolis settlement in the mid-1930s: "A settlement is there to meet all disclosed needs [of the girls] and to sense and anticipate those which are dormant and not disclosed" (p. 93).

*The Great Depression*

The depression of the 1930s brought both challenge and some new roles for after-school programs. As budget pressures forced schools to eliminate art, music, manual training, physical education, and health services, after-school sponsors felt compelled to try to compensate. Yet the budgets of youth-serving and community-based organizations were as if not more decimated than those of schools. Workers at the Chicago Boys' Clubs, for instance, took pay cuts of 25 percent or more and sometimes were not paid at all. Between 1931 and 1935 the number of art instructors in settlements in Manhattan declined from 61 to 21 (UNH, Box 6, Folder 54). To some public officials and private donors, the concepts of play and enrichment came to seem superfluous, even absurd, in the face of mass unemployment; and after-school providers found that they had to defend parts of their work, especially the value of play.

During the first half of the 1930s especially, the physical and psychological well-being of school-age children (and their families) seemed to deteriorate before the eyes of teachers, social workers, and after-school providers. A 1931–32 girls' department report at Chicago Commons noted that "this spring 75 girls were weighed for camp, 48 were underweight. During the past two years we have seen the children get thin and pale in our classes." The report also noted that in one third of neighborhood families "no member is employed" and that children in these families were restless, distracted, and irritable because of home conditions. Two years later, reports from the same agency noted that in 161 of 284 children enrolled no member of the family was working, that children's clothing was deteriorating "causing intense humiliation," and that many more children had "bad teeth" (CC, Box 6, Folder 3).

Children once again assumed significant economic responsibility within (and for) their families and took on the worries and cares of adults. As the depression continued, reports appeared of disillusionment, anger, and rebellion in children. After-school providers tried to respond to children worried about their parents' well-being and those who either wanted or felt forced to quit school to help their families. Children appeared to seek out settlements and boys' clubs for their stability, facilities, meals, and preoccupations. One program report noted growing evidence of conflict at home due to fathers' unemployment "causing children to look at Grosvenor House as a place of refuge and sanctuary" (GH, Box 3, Folder 8).

By the second half of the 1930s, a modest proportion of New Deal funds and resources became available to programs, primarily through the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the Federal Arts Project, and the National Youth Administration (NYA). Many programs became temporarily dependent on WPA workers and visual and performing artists funded through the

Federal Arts Project to provide classes in whatever areas they could teach. About 10,000 NYA-subsidized youth aged sixteen to twenty-four worked in after-school and related recreational programs in urban areas under the supervision of “teachers, playground supervisors, recreation directors, and settlement house workers” some of whom were themselves funded through the WPA (Lindley and Lindley 1938, 49). The NYA also supported some after-school program development. In Birmingham, Alabama, the NYA cooperated with community leaders to establish a boys club in a low-income African American neighborhood in a building donated by a local citizen. NYA youth led classes at the club in athletics, choral, manual training, and art and led study groups and helped establish a library (Lindley and Lindley 1938). On Chicago’s south side, NYA youth rehabilitated the south-side boys’ club, which had long served African American youth but had fallen into disrepair due to lack of funds, and then helped staff the club after it re-opened.

#### *World War II and After-School Programs*

During World War II, after-school programs were part of a society-wide mobilization affecting virtually every social institution. Like schools, after-school programs were asked and took it upon themselves to help children cope with the stresses associated with the war. In this light, after-school providers defined three principle roles: providing care and supervision to children of working mothers, helping children cope with psychological stresses of the war, and providing a vehicle for children to contribute to the war effort.

At the height of World War II, six million women with children under 14 years of age were working in factories and other “essential” jobs (Meyer 1943; that number still constituted only about 20 percent of all mothers of children in that age group). Mothers mostly worked because they had to and some because they found they liked the work or the freedom it offered. Rural women generally and African American women especially valued new opportunities to escape farm labor and domestic work (Rose 1997). Regardless of working mothers’ motives and the fact that their labor was critical to the war effort, they were still criticized. Tuttle (1993) writes that “the American latchkey child was one of the most pitied home front figures of the Second World War, and his or her working mother was not only criticized but reviled” (p. 69). Children whose mothers worked were seen to lose their psychological “anchor,” especially in the after-school hours (Fredericksen 1943, 161). There were also reports of malnutrition linked to maternal neglect (Meyer 1943). Mothers working long hours were exhausted, irritable, and inattentive (Tuttle 1993, 67). With fathers away and mothers working, social control was weakened and family routines disrupted. As in World

War I, numerous anecdotal reports suggested that school truancy and delinquency were on the rise (Meyer 1943), although the former may have been due partly to a renewed rise in child labor among children in the ten to fourteen age group.

The decline in parental availability and emergence of the latchkey child led existing after-school programs to assume a more explicit child-care function and for day nurseries and kindergartens to serve more school-age children before as well as after school. Defense Day Care and Defense Recreation Committees set up by state and local governments stimulated some after-school care. For instance, in Detroit the State Day Care Committee used War Chest funds to set up after-school "canteens" in schools and other facilities. The Los Angeles committees developed a rich array of "nursery schools, playgrounds, community halls, gymnasiums, libraries, clubs, handcraft and educational classes, and good recreational leadership at the housing projects" (Meyer 1943, 158). Local school districts in dozens of cities sponsored school-based, extended-day programs sometimes operated by community agencies and private groups. Funding came from parent fees, local Community Chests, "War Chests," and local school districts. Close to 300,000 children participated in such extended-day programs staffed primarily by college and high school students.

Although creative, these locally funded efforts were inadequate to the demand and were further hampered by staffing and facilities shortages. Yet the federal response to the need for all kinds of care was extremely modest due to ambivalence in key political quarters about maternal employment and the belief that child care provision was not an appropriate government role (Tuttle 1993, 70). The U.S. Office of Education sponsored a short-lived program called Extended School Services that set aside modest funds for start up, coordination, and purchase of curricular materials but not for ongoing program operations. Some funding for new and expanded facilities was provided in 1943 and 1944 through the Community Facilities Act (commonly called the Lanham Act). This funding went mostly to schools, a few recreational facilities, and a few day care centers, only slightly easing extreme facilities shortages. The lack of federal response led to harsh criticism of the government by labor leaders, women themselves, and even by normally conservative corporate executives such as Henry Ford. Cities around the country were paralyzed by expectations of federal funding that never materialized. Meyer (1943) noted that "I must in all candor report that [the administrators of the Lanham Act are] criticized from one end of the country to the other" (p. 156). Instead of leading the way, the federal government created an atmosphere of "confusion and antagonism" (p. 371).

School-age children residing in cities were affected to differing degrees by the climate of fear, worry, and anger created by the war and by the civil preparations that were made for enemy attacks, especially in coastal cities

and war production centers. Children were literally bombarded with endless patriotic messages and figuratively bombarded by enemy attacks that never came. (These phantom attacks nonetheless took on a measure of reality through black outs, air raid drills with sirens blaring, and construction of bomb shelters.) Children were affected more directly by family disruption and dislocation. They worried about fathers and brothers sent off to fight; and they struggled to adapt to strange communities as millions of families made what became permanent moves, primarily from rural areas to war production centers near or in urban areas.

In trying to help children cope with war-related stresses, after-school programs, like parents themselves, were buffeted by the contradictory opinions of child-development experts. Advice ranged from reassuring children that they were safe to keeping them busy (i.e., diverting them from their fears and worries), asking them to summon their courage, and asking adults not to let children see their own fear (Kirk 1994). It was suggested that children would feel less helpless if they were better prepared, so after-school programs rehearsed routines for the air raids that never came. Staff created games designed to help children express their war-related aggression in healthier ways. For example, in one game called "Blitzkrieg," children swung on ropes, dropping bean bag bombs on imaginary targets (Kirk 1994, p. 27). After-school programs also joined broader efforts to reinforce American values in the face of external threats to them. Children recited oaths, sang patriotic songs, and talked about democracy and tolerance of racial diversity.

As with the question of how to help children cope psychologically, there was disagreement about the extent to which children should be expected to contribute to the war effort. Child-labor opponents argued the need to protect children from exploitation, "to make certain that the rights which only one or two generations of children had enjoyed thus far were not forfeited" (Kirk 1994, p. 58). A few leaders in the after-school field argued for a continued emphasis on "normal peace time activities in order to offset the constant impact of war" on children (UNH, Box 24, Folder 480). A few worried about the loss of childhood and of simple opportunity for play. Lambert (1944) noted that the need for play "in a world of terrific pressures, turmoil and frustrations, is often ignored or considered of small importance" (p. xi). It is through play that children "fit the incomprehensible segments of the world around them into an understandable whole" (p. 25).

By and large, though, sponsors committed themselves to the task of mobilizing children to support the war effort, not least because they believed it would help their programs secure financial support. The 1941 annual report for the Chicago Boys' Clubs (CBC, 1941, Box 1) noted that "It is boys who will defend America from its enemies." One settlement's 1942-43 annual

program report was titled “We Build America” (GH, Box 3, Folder 17). After-school programs organized scrap collection campaigns, had children make bandages and service flags, knit clothing for soldiers, and cultivate “victory gardens.” Children salvaged old clothes, rags, paper, rubber, and metal. They learned first aid and telegraphy and studied airplane design. They received military-like titles, such as “paper trooper” and cloth insignia to attach to their clothing. They could even advance in rank (Kirk 2000). Providers’ arguments for mobilizing children varied. At times they argued that it helped children feel valued, a part of the war effort, and at times that their aim was to make such tasks fun as well as useful. What was clear was that after-school programs were trying once again to reconcile conflicting instincts.

### THE POST-WAR YEARS

At one level the post-war years brought a return to traditional routines within the after-school field. The focus, as in the broader society, was on a return to normalcy. A visitor to a 1947 exhibit of children’s artwork from settlement-based, after-school programs in New York City noted that “the machinery of destruction so dominant in children’s art work during the war” was no longer present (UNH, Box 3, Folder 27). Emphases and practices continued to evolve. Program activities were gradually becoming more gender integrated. Particular activities rose and fell in popularity. For example, boxing became especially popular, and classes in social graces and manners waned. Debate about how to work with children continued. For instance, echoing a larger societal debate about authority and authoritarianism, providers debated the appropriate degree of adult structure of activities. Participants at one meeting argued about whether to “teach” technique to children in art classes or to let children express themselves freely (UNH, Box 3, Folder 25).

Program sponsors continued to struggle to lure children to their programs and to keep them coming even as they struggled with oversubscribed facilities and chronic financial insecurity. (During the 1949–1950 program year the Marshall Square Boys Club in Chicago had a staff of four plus six volunteers and an annual budget of \$20,000—\$5,000 from the Community Fund, \$15,000 raised from individual donors and other sources—to serve 600 members. The immediate neighborhood held another 5,000 unserved children; CBC, 1949, Box 73, Folder 13.) In reflecting on why it was so difficult to engage boys, one report noted that, “proud and sensitive” low-income boys were [sic] “suspicious of efforts to reform them” (CBC, 1948, Box 73, Folder 12). In a study of the reasons for the high dropout rate in one local Chicago Boys’ Club, Murao (1954) noted that they ranged from family responsibilities to bullying to parents’ concerns about foul language

and rough behavior. Children generally liked the staff but found them alternatively, and arbitrarily, too strict or too laissez faire, failing to control children who misbehaved. There were also complaints about older boys running the clubs. Erratic management was partly a reflection of erratic staffing. Between 1950 and 1952, the boy' club studied by Murao had four directors and lost four group workers, five physical education instructors, and four swimming instructors.

As during previous eras, social preoccupations and social change led after-school programs to develop new rationales for their work and compelled them once again to examine their purposes and strategies. One distinct theme emerging in the late 1940s and early 1950s was that of low-income children growing up in a world to which they did not feel they belonged. In school they were treated, and thus came to feel, like failures; their "interests wither, their enterprises fail, and sometimes their energies become diverted into undesirable challenges" (Franklin and Benedict 1943, 16). In the community, they were harassed by police, pushed off street-corners, and were unwilling to seek out organized recreational resources, which they perceived to belong to the society that was rejecting them (Interfaith Neighbors 1954). A "new" kind of child appeared in low-income communities: alienated, hard to reach, resistant, personally disorganized, and unaffiliated. This child had learned to reject opportunities before opportunities rejected him or her. Worries about low-income children eventually crystallized in the 1950s as a national obsession with juvenile delinquency. The federal government sponsored commissions on delinquency, and Congress held special hearings. A mid-1950s article in the *Saturday Evening Post* described delinquency as "the shame of America" (Clendenen and Beaser 1955). Older children and youth were thought to have staked out territory "outside the dominant social and moral order" (Gilbert 1986, 15).

As in the past, after-school programs took it upon themselves to help children feel valued and recognized, to provide an alternative to a "negative identity." After-school providers declared themselves "the first line of defense against delinquency" (UNH, Box 24, Folder 333). Because they saw some children almost every day they could catch them "on the way to trouble" (Hall 1971, xiv). They would provide children outlets—particularly through the arts—for expressing and exploring their alienation and worries (UNH, Box 3, Folder 27). They would provide a sense of security and belonging not found elsewhere in children's lives. Group work gained renewed purchase as a vehicle for staff (preferably skilled social workers) and children to examine feelings of self-doubt, alienation, and anger, and to explore issues of self, identity, affiliation, and attitudes toward authority (Bernstein 1976). Moreover, after-school programs would reach out to the growing pool of alienated children and rekindle their interests, motivation, curios-

ity, and sense of efficacy. A new kind of after-school worker, the detached or street-corner worker, would engage children on their own territory, address their fears, gain their trust, “interpret” existing community resources for children, and become a “channel for the expression of [children’s own] ideas on recreation” (UNH, Box 24, Folder 277).

#### CHANGING NEIGHBORHOODS

Ethnic and racial change had always been a fact of life in low-income neighborhoods, and after-school programs had always struggled with the question of whether their commitment was to the neighborhood itself or to specific populations. Beginning in the 1950s, this question became acute as African American and Puerto Rican families replaced white, ethnic immigrant families in scores of neighborhoods. Programs suddenly found themselves on the wrong side of invisible boundaries that children whom they had been serving would not cross, or right on the boundary between two groups, and thus at the heart of conflict. (The author of a report on children’s out-of-school lives in East Harlem noted that the degree to which children from different ethnic backgrounds “hate and suspect each other on sight alone defies exaggeration”; UNH, Box 24, Folder 277). Despite some initial reluctance, most sponsors reconciled themselves to the task of once again building trust with a new population of children and families—this time from African American and Latino, especially Puerto Rican and Mexican families—and when necessary to the task of mediating group conflict.

By the 1960s, low-income urban neighborhoods were changing in new ways, making them far less supportive and far more toxic settings for child development (Silverstein and Kratochwill 1975; Nightingale 1993). For many decades the streets and other public spaces had provided a largely positive developmental context for low-income children. In addition to providing a rich context for play, they had taught children quickness of mind, self-confidence, and the abilities to cope with all kinds of people and situations and to sort out and respond to complex demands (see Calhoun 1969). Children had been able to pursue freedom from adult authority, because they knew deep down that they were not on their own. Adults had provided “a safety net, a web of sociability and unobtrusive guidance” (Dargan and Zeitlin 1990, 170). Now critical changes included the breakdown of traditional social organization, a decline in informal social control, and a shift from turf-focused gang conflict to drug-related violence.

These changes would seem to have created new rationales and roles for after-school programs, especially in a climate of rapidly growing public funding to address poverty-related problems. Yet most of the new funding for children through the War on Poverty went to early childhood and youth

programs and schools. After-school providers had to fight for scraps from such federal programs as the Neighborhood Youth Corps and Title I compensatory education and such foundation programs as Mobilization for Youth, adapting their rhetoric and adjusting their emphases to the priorities behind those programs. The historic core of most after-school programs remained intact. The 1967 program guide to the Hudson Guild, located in Manhattan's Chelsea district, included arts and crafts, clubs and friendship groups, gym, music, dance lessons, a chess club, and ceramics, among other activities. But programs increasingly offered tutoring, homework help, and other forms of "educational enrichment" and also focused increasing resources on what was coming to be known as youth work.

#### TRANSITION TO THE PRESENT

The 1970s and 1980s brought a renewed interest in after-school programs, as a response to growth in maternal employment. The image of the fearful, worried, and neglected latchkey child was revived in the popular media. This time around, he or she was also susceptible to experimentation with drugs, sexual activity, and/or gangs (Dwyer et al. 1990). While much of the new interest and worry was focused in middle-class communities, there was growing recognition that the children most at risk resided in low-income communities (Hedin et al. 1986). By the early 1990s, some public funding was finally finding its way to after-school programs in low-income neighborhoods through the federal Child Care and Development Program, a block grant program administered by states. (About 30 percent of child care subsidized under this program has gone to school-age children.) This funding source solidified the already growing interest of child care centers in sponsoring after-school programs.

By the mid-1990s, the after-school field was experiencing a resurgence. Beyond a handful of foundation initiatives, much of the renewed growth was local and decentralized—a response to locally perceived needs. Almost all historical sponsors continued to play a role, and new ones also appeared. Libraries became a growing base for children in the after-school hours. Mutual assistance associations serving new immigrant groups, notably those from Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe, started programs. Public housing authorities, which had sponsored some programs in the 1950s and 1960s, renewed their sponsorship; and newer community organizations such as community development corporations began sponsoring programs. As the financial situation of urban school systems improved, some began setting aside funds for after-school programs.

As with programs of previous eras, those of the 1990s continued to reflect a range of emphases. In the course of research conducted by this author and colleagues, one program director noted that his main goal was

“to keep kids off the street and alive.” Another, working in an equally rough neighborhood, described her program as offering not just safe haven but an opportunity to explore interests and discover talents in the arts (through such activities as mask-making, dance, drumming, stilt-walking, puppetry, clay-making, theater, and silk screening—taught by local artists). Still another described a mission of interesting girls in sports. And a school principal noted that “We need to extend the school day. And how do you do that? This new [after-school] program is a superlative opportunity” (Halpern, Spielberg, and Robb 1999/2000).

For the most part, after-school programs tried to do what they had always done. During the 1997–1998 program year, the Ballard Boys and Girls Club in Seattle had classes in clay modeling, photography, sewing, cooking, citizenship, and sign language, as well as homework help, a leadership development club, and other informal social clubs. New elements reflected new pressures. For instance, because more low-income parents were working after-school and because changing neighborhoods make outdoor play impossible, many programs moved toward a “closed enrollment” model with a more or less fixed group of children participating daily in a more or less common program (at least for younger children; older children still came “to see what was going on” or for particular activities). For the same reason, homework help became a virtually universal element among after-school programs and began to occupy more time every day.

#### THE PAST AS PRELUDE: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS IN THE COMING YEARS

Today, public attention has turned squarely to the after-school hours of low- and moderate-income, school-age children. In part, it is simply their turn to be a source of public attention and worry. Yet there are also distinct elements emerging in children’s lives that contribute to this attention, in particular a perception that key child-rearing institutions and contexts are not providing the supports that children need. Many children can no longer play outdoors, in part due to the danger and in part because the historic “web of sociability” has disappeared in many neighborhoods, with adults less willing or able to serve a collective parenting function around children’s public activity. School, never an unambiguously positive resource for low- and moderate-income children, has become even less of one. Urban classrooms are being turned into test preparation centers, undermining the richness and pleasures of the teaching-learning experience and forcing teachers into adversarial roles with their students. In spite of (or perhaps because of) such measures, too many children are still slipping between the cracks at school, failing to consolidate basic literacy skills, developing negative perceptions of themselves as students, and becoming

psychologically detached from school as an institution. The majority of parents continue to do what they can to protect their children and provide a secure base for them at home. But some, preoccupied with family survival or their own unmet needs, do not have the capacity to focus on their children's daily lives, to monitor their well-being, to seek out external resources, and to provide important supports such as help with homework.

The stress on or diminished role of other child-development institutions gives new valence to longstanding rationales and purposes of after-school programs for low-income children—supervision and protection; opportunity to test interests, nurture talents, and express oneself through arts and sports; and exposure to both one's own and the larger culture. And it suggests new ones—an extra measure of adult attention and care; a setting providing additional help with homework and related academic tasks; an alternative setting in which to observe different standards of behavior, try on different selves without risk of ridicule, and experience success. If, as Varenne and McDermott (1998, xii) argue, schools “only have so much success to give,” after-school programs can afford to be much more generous in this regard.

Ironically, the strengthened case for and list of potential tasks for after-school programs heightens the importance of reflecting on their appropriate roles and on reasonable expectations of them. Current funders are asking after-school programs to do everything from boost children's standardized test scores to reduce juvenile delinquency, teen pregnancy, and drug use (see, e.g., Whitaker et al. 1998). One recent study notes that “When low-income children attend disorganized schools, out-of-school time offers the best hope for overcoming the negative effects of poverty” (Miller, O'Conner et al. 1996, 4). An official of the Council for Chief State School Officers argues the “need to use out-of-school time to help educationally disadvantaged students make gains in achievement” (Brown 1999, 141). And the author of a recent *Newsweek* article writes that among police, social service providers, and policy makers, there's a new awareness that structured activity during out-of-school hours is “critical” to confronting many of the country's most vexing social problems (Alter 1998).

There are both practical and philosophical reasons to be concerned about the current climate of heightened expectations (and narrowly instrumental aims) for after-school programs. Though this article did not dwell on prevailing operating conditions, after-school programs serving low-income children struggle constantly with issues of financial resources, staffing, and space (Halpern 2000). The financial resources available to the average after-school program are barely adequate to allow it to survive from year to year, let alone provide an array of sophisticated supports and interventions for vulnerable children, even assuming the desirability of such interventions.<sup>7</sup> The hourly wage of frontline staff in the after-school field

averages between \$7 and \$8, making it almost impossible to recruit, let alone retain, skilled people. The majority of frontline staff of after-school programs have a high school education; turnover of frontline staff averages about 40 percent per year; and many programs are understaffed for significant stretches each year. In the context of such constraints, it is a lot to ask that program staff serve simultaneously as arts specialists, tutors, advocates, and counselors, not to mention remedial reading teachers and surrogate parents. Recent research raises questions even about the most basic quality of many after-school programs as developmental settings (Belle 1999; Halpern, Spielberger, and Robb 1999/2000).

A second reason for concern has to do with the very fact that, as the historical experience suggests, after-school programs are both vulnerable and malleable institutions. After-school programs are finding themselves inadvertently contributing to the current preoccupation with discipline and academic standards among low-income children. In recent discussions, numerous program directors have noted pressure from funders not only to tie their activities to school learning standards but to demonstrate that they were helping to improve participating children's standardized test scores. While after-school programs certainly have a place in helping children come to enjoy and find meaning in reading and writing, it is not their role—nor is it in their interest—to commit themselves to fostering academic achievement in its narrow sense. When they do, it tends to distort their activities which then become more like the worst of what happens in classrooms rather than the best.

Not least, the current climate of heightened expectations of after-school programs is likely to further reduce opportunity for the unstructured time and unsupervised play that is so critical to development in middle childhood but that seems to be disappearing steadily from children's lives (Sutton-Smith 1997; Winn 1981). Over the past decade the historic pattern of adult worry about children's unsupervised activity has if anything intensified. Unsupervised play is described as a "lost opportunity" (Miller and Marx 1990). The sponsor of a major new after-school initiative in New York City argues that "children who spend after-school hours in unstructured, unsupervised activities are at increased risk for poor grades, truancy, substance abuse. . . ." (TASC, undated, 5). The National Governors' Association (1999) has an initiative focused on the after-school hours whose slogan is to "make every minute meaningful." Yet unstructured, unsupervised play can not only be viewed as a right of childhood but has a variety of developmental functions.<sup>8</sup>

Sociologists of childhood have asked whether any adult-controlled institution can provide the necessary psychological, social, and temporal conditions for play to thrive (Suransky 1982). Such conditions include physical and social space for spontaneity, physicality, and unrestricted movement

as well as a measure of privacy, lack of formal temporal structure (or schedule), freedom to manipulate the material environment, and at least a measure of unpredictability. The reality is that more children are now in after-school programs; and it can be argued that of all formal institutions after-school programs can most afford to be nonutilitarian about childhood, to respond to children's individuality, to create interesting and manipulable material environments, to provide opportunity for children "to seek out experience for its own sake" (Moore 1986, 231).

After-school programs certainly contribute to adult encroachment on low-income children's already limited ownership of their lives. Yet, at their best they are relatively sensitive adult institutions in which the adult agenda is relatively modest. As the historical account suggests, after-school programs have struggled, although not always successfully, to respect the importance of the peer group to school-age children and to take children's point of view seriously. They have been cognizant of differences in children's patterns of abilities and interests. After-school programs have striven to make learning and talent development fun through a broad range of experiences to children and have tried to create space for play among their activities. Over fifty years ago Lambert (1944, 58) noted that the good after-school programs she worked with allowed children to "move freely and play with other children in small groups or alone." A half century later, in describing a local Wisconsin program, Vandell, Shumow, and Posner (1997, 15) noted that one of its strengths was "the unstructured time in which children played together privately and in groups, taking advantage of the very substantial space available."

Perhaps more fundamentally, the context of low-income children's lives has changed in ways that make adult encroachment more necessary. At one level, those lives undoubtedly continue to be shaped and buffeted by the same deeply rooted (and frequently negative) societal beliefs and preoccupations that have always shaped them. Yet low-income children also face distinct risks and stresses today. Historically different children have preferred (and to some extent been able) to get what they needed developmentally from different settings—some forging their identity in the family or school, others in the streets, still others in after-school programs or specialized activities. Some children have needed and wanted more support from adults, some more freedom from them. Yet while children have not changed, the possibility of getting needs met in different ways has been reduced.

How, then, ought the role and expectations of after-school programs be defined? We are brought back to the concept of balance. The task for proponents is to construct a policy and practice framework for after-school programs that does three things. The first is to balance attention to the common developmental needs that all children share, with attention to the distinct needs resulting from the distinct circumstances of low-income chil-

dren's lives. The second is to balance different adults' (including parents') agendas with an effort to try to imagine and accommodate what children themselves may want. The third is to be sensitive to the shifting role of a variety of institutions in low-income children's lives, while respecting the qualities that make after-school programs distinct as a developmental institution.

The tasks of middle childhood—acquiring literacy, gaining knowledge of the world, solidifying a sense of competence and agency, exploring interests and discovering talents, becoming more autonomous—do require adult support. Low and moderate-income children deserve the same access to enriching organized activities as their more advantaged peers. Yet low-income children, as all children, need space—social as much as physical space—to develop their own thoughts, to daydream and reflect; to dabble and dawdle; to pretend, try on, and rehearse different roles and identities; to learn friendship and to learn how to handle interpersonal conflict; to rest and be quiet; and not least to have fun and take risks of their own design and choosing.

Not infrequently, one or another child-rearing institution has taken on a particular role out of a conviction that others were not fulfilling their responsibilities. After-school programs, like other institutions, have periodically felt themselves to be a support of both first and last resort for too many children, a counterweight to stress and difficulty elsewhere in children's lives, and an anchor for children who lack one elsewhere. Yet what is it about American social arrangements that places such enormous pressure on each institution in children's lives to be and do so much and that too frequently turns individual institutions against each other? After-school programs can work as a developmental resource and support for children only to the extent that they are allowed to work from a modest and reasonable story line. And they will only be able to fulfill some of their potential if they themselves are adequately nurtured, supported, and protected.

### Notes

BWR: *Boys' Workers Roundtable* (borrowed from Boys' Club of America, Atlanta, GA)

CBC: Chicago Boys' Clubs (located at the Chicago Historical Society)

CC: Chicago Commons (located at the Chicago Historical Society and Newberry Library, Chicago)

GH: Grosvenor House (located at the Columbia University Library, New York)

NUS: Northwestern University Settlement (located at the Northwestern University Library, Evanston, Illinois)

UNH: United Neighborhood Houses (located at the National Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis, Minnesota)

WWB: Work With Boys (predecessor to Boys' Workers Roundtable, borrowed from Boys' Club of America, Atlanta, GA)

1 After-school programs are sponsored by a wide array of community-based agencies (settlement houses, family service agencies, child care centers, etc.), youth-serving organizations (Boys' and Girls' Clubs, YMCAs, etc.), schools, and specialized organizations (e.g., arts and cultural organizations, libraries, housing authorities). They typically offer a mix of homework help, table activities (arts and crafts, table games), gym or playground time, visual and/or expressive arts, and field trips. These core activities increasingly are supplemented by tutoring, reading time, and special curricular elements such as science or social studies projects.

2 Some educators and psychologists argued for the primacy of creativity, imagination, inner direction, and experiences that respected the nature of childhood. Others focused on the need for cognitively flexible, socially skilled, and cooperative children. And still others focused on "growing up," that is, the need to learn to repress childish instincts and adjust to the often unpleasant demands of adulthood and adult society (Cavallo 1981; Cohen 1999; Dewey and Dewey 1915).

3 Underlying such criticisms was a deeper worry about the emergence of an autonomous peer culture. For the first time children were turning as much to each other as to adults in deciding how to behave, whom and what to emulate. Children's street-based play communities "were defined not only by their commitment to their own rules but by their disregard for those laid down by adults" (Nasaw 1985, 20). The new peer culture also seemed to some to be deliberately oppositional. Bellamy (1912) noted that the street activities of children that seemed to so annoy adults were partly a form of protest for being "left out" of the emerging arrangements of society.

4 Game rooms were a frequent source of stress for staff who debated what purpose they should serve, how to limit the number of children at any one time, what the rules should be, what to do when children broke rules, and how to keep children from becoming bored by the limited choice of activities and materials. A 1922 report by the game room leader to Lea Taylor, head resident at Chicago Commons, complains that the game room was serving more as a "dumping ground for surplus boys" than as a "feeding ground for our various clubs" (CC, Box 6, Folder 1).

5 One key to preventing delinquency was thought to be prevention of gang formation. In the early decades, programs tried to control the creation of and assignment to clubs in part because of wariness of reproducing "gangs." But, as with control of play, children would not have it. Eventually, staff in most programs came to see that not all gangs were bad (Woods and Kennedy, 1922). The gang, as a natural social group could even be used and directed by adults (BWR 1923, 25).

6 A book on play schools reminded the after-school staff member to be sensitive to what children might be feeling after a long day in school: "for many hours they have been obeying orders, completing definitely assigned tasks. Most of the time they have not been allowed to speak or move about without permission" (Franklin and Benedict 1943, 23). For this reason, "schedules must be flexibly implemented, staff should refrain from lecturing and telling. . . ."

7 The author and colleagues analyzed the budgets of a sample of six after-school programs in Boston, Chicago, and Seattle. They found that the full cost of a year-round, fully staffed, five-day-a-week after-school program was typically about \$80 a week (or \$4000 a year) including contributions of administrative and volunteer time and subsidized space or about \$60 a week (\$2500–\$3000 a year) without counting such contributions. (These costs were based on frontline worker salaries closely aligned with those in child care, averaging about \$7 per hour. When programs used specialists for arts or sports activities, costs increased accordingly.) In contrast to costs, revenues in the programs sampled, though varying enormously from program to program, averaged about \$30–\$40 a week per child (or \$1500–\$2000 a year). In other words, revenues typically covered about two thirds of costs.

8 Sutton-Smith (1990, 5) describes a long list of things that children are doing when they are "just playing": legislating differences, displaying power, clarifying meaning (of rules, etc.),

changing meaning, redefining situations, distinguishing pretend from real, coping with exclusion, changing roles, dealing with conflict, learning about space, boundaries, and territoriality. In a similar list, Middlebrooks (1998, 16) includes (among other things) finding refuge, exploring and developing relationships, and experimenting with authority and power.

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