

SCHOOL TIME

by Eric Schwarz

AMIDST THE ESCALATING DEBATE about *No Child Left Behind*, and on the 20-year anniversary of *A Nation At Risk*, most educational commentators are missing what could become the mega-story of education reform in the next century: learning out of school.

After-school time – or, alternatively, out-of-school time, since it is comprised of afternoons, evenings, weekends, vacations, and summers – is the nation's great untapped educational opportunity, a true new frontier. Done right, out-of-school learning offers more of what we all want from schools: discovery, small learning teams, real-world skills, character development, and wonder.

A recent public opinion poll commissioned by The After-school Alliance indicated that 80 percent of all Americans believe quality after-school programs are “an absolute necessity.” And, in Congress, support for after-school runs strong, with bipartisan majorities boosting federal funding for the 21st Century community Learning Centers program from \$40 million in 1998 to \$1 billion in 2002.

Yet despite growing public interest in after-school programs, the broader opportunity for out-of-school learning remains largely unrealized. Too often, after-school is simply “more school,” delivered by tired teachers at the end of a long day; or sometimes it is

little more than babysitting, animated only by the low goal of keeping kids safe and off the street.

After-school is at a crossroads, wracked with internal debate about its proper focus and buffeted by cross-currents of often conflicting demands. Kids need after-school to be fun, and different from school. Parents need after-school to provide safe care. Schools need after-school programs to help with homework and skill-building. And the broader community wants after-school to instill strong values, build leadership skills, and help prepare young people for success in school, work and life. It's a lot to do, and hard to do well.

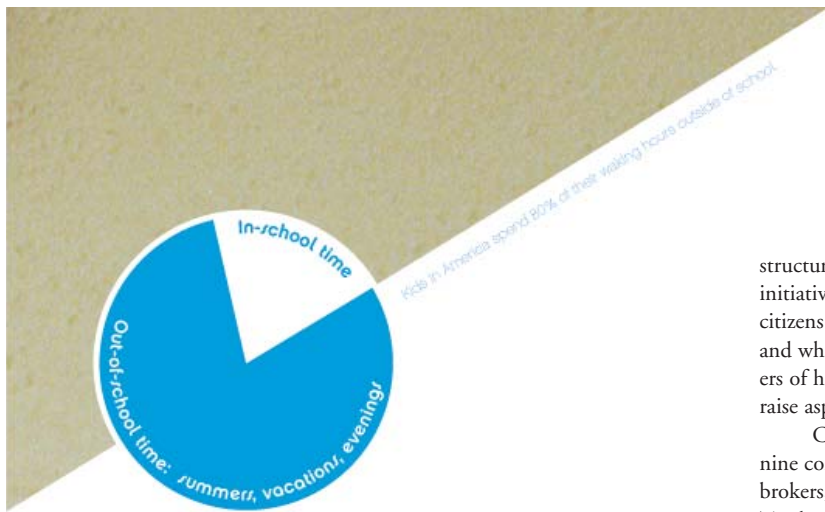
As a result, in the past few years, after-school programs have found themselves on the defensive. A study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Centers program found that many programs do not make a positive difference in participants' school performance. Commonly referred to as the “Mathematica” study, it found that attendance was low, staff turnover high, curriculum weak, and management ineffective. After-school advocates have attacked the methodology of the Mathematica study, and other program evaluations have found positive impacts of after-school programming. But the underlying message of the Mathematica study and the debate that followed is clear – after-school programs need to clarify their purpose, improve their quality, and demonstrate their impact in order to fulfill their promise.

To reach its potential, I believe the out-of-school field needs to adopt three broad goals: 1. focus on hands-on, real-world learning that is different from – and therefore complementary to – traditional school-based instruction; 2. engage the broader community – the “village” – in directly supporting the learning of young people; 3. professionalize the after-school workforce.

Focus on hands-on, real-world learning

John Dewey is the patron saint of project-based learning and it could be argued that he got his start in an after-school program. In the 1890s, when Dewey was chairing the School of Education at the University of Chicago, he became a close friend of Jane Addams, who had just opened Hull-House, a soon-to-be famous “settlement house” serving immigrant families in Chicago's nine-

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teenth ward. Dewey had a close association with Hull-House and it was there – amidst after-school clubs, drama and choral societies, and skill-building classes – that Dewey began to develop his progressive educational philosophy focusing on the marriage of knowledge and experience. Dewey sought to activate the inner motivations of the learner by embedding learning in real-world tasks like cooking and carpentry.¹

The best out-of-school programs today would make John Dewey, and Jane Addams, proud. In West Virginia, elementary school participants in an after-school program have collected vital data tracking pollution levels in local streams and written to lawmakers with suggestions for how to address the problem. In Chicago, high school students design web sites, and host well-attended art openings as part of a citywide initiative called After-School Matters. And in Boston, middle-schoolers litigate mock trials in front of federal judges and work with architects to develop child-inspired designs for the city's new Rose Kennedy Greenway through downtown Boston, created by the massive "Big Dig" highway project.

After-school programs should crackle with excitement and creativity, and turn young people into producers, not consumers, of knowledge. After-school will remain an after-thought if it is simply "more school." Instead, after-school advocates should stake their claim on building real-world skills through the type of arts and music projects, field trips, apprenticeships, science experiments, and other informal learning adventures that standards-based "reforms" have squeezed out of the traditional school day. At a time when public schools are narrowing their purpose to focus relentlessly on basic reading and math, after-school can fill the breach, building deep understanding through real-world learning experiences that truly engage students.

Engage the broader community

We have let education become a spectator sport. Citizens critique public schools but rarely visit them. Membership in the PTO or PTA, which reached a high of 47 percent of parents of school-age children in 1960, plummeted to 18 percent in 2000, according to Robert Putnam in his book, *Bowling Alone*.² Adults without children are even less connected to student learning, whether in-school or out-of-school.

It's time for ordinary citizens to re-engage. Volunteers can play important roles in fostering the learning and healthy development of our nation's children. But traditional school settings,

structures, and schedules are often resistant to individual volunteer initiatives. By contrast, after-school programs offer an avenue for citizens to enter the lives of young people, sharing what they know and what they love. Whether as tutors, coaches, mentors, or leaders of hands-on learning activities, they can broaden horizons and raise aspirations.

Citizen Schools, which operates 20 after-school programs in nine communities, has engaged film-makers, seamstresses, stock-brokers, and even funeral home operators as volunteer "Citizen Teachers," teaching from their life and career experiences.

After-school can also serve as a vital bridge between parents and schools. The Edge, an after-school program in rural Maine, deploys "swing shift" staff who work alongside teachers in the latter part of the school day, run after-school from 2:00 to 6:00, and then visit with or phone parents in the evening.

Professionalize the after-school workforce

When people think of after-school programs as "graham crackers and basketball," they naturally think of after-school staff members as little more than babysitters. Indeed, with an average hourly wage hovering near \$8, and little prospect of benefits or a career path, employment in after-school programs has usually been something to squeeze in while working part time somewhere else or attending school.

Yet as we raise expectations for what after-school programs can achieve, many organizations are recruiting, training, and retaining dynamic educators and community builders to lead these programs. The YMCA is a national leader in professional development, and other out-of-school educational programs small and large are paying more attention to developing their workforce.

In Tucson last year, the district's "teacher of the year" left the classroom to become director of the local Citizen Schools program. In a Philadelphia program run by Foundations Inc., after-school staff pursue their teaching certificates by day in the same building.

Lesley University is also playing an important leadership role, piloting with Citizen Schools a promising master's degree in out-of-school education (see inset article). This innovation and many more will be needed to elevate the stature of after-school employment and, correspondingly, to improve the quality and impact of after-school programs.

A glance in the rear view mirror

Out-of-school learning is not a new thing. In fact, historian Lawrence Cremin suggests that two centuries ago most Americans learned more out of school than in. Learning, including book learning, happened more at Sunday School and through home schooling programs such as those propagated by the American Home Missionary Society and the American Education Society, than in fledgling public schools.³ A half-century later, Mark Twain popularized a Romantic vision of education outside the school-house door. In the words of historian David K. Cohen, Twain found on the river a "collision between untamed impulses and real experiences...a risky, adventurous, quirky learning."⁴

By contrast, the first half of the 20th century saw the development of the large “factory-model” public school. The leading out-of-school initiatives – programs like the Girl Scouts, 4H, and the YMCA – focused primarily on building character and leadership skills and were fueled by parent volunteers.

In the second half of the 20th century, tectonic shifts in our demography and economy radically changed the need for more comprehensive out-of-school programs. The first of these was the movement of mothers into the workforce, and the second, the transformation to an information economy requiring more advanced workplace skills.

When I was born in 1960, America had a dominant delivery system for after-school programming. It was called Mom. Only one in four mothers of school-age children worked outside the home, and mothers were the primary (though far from universal) providers of homework help, informal learning, snacks, and recreation. Today the numbers are reversed; three of four mothers of school-age children are active in the workforce, making the after-school program of my youth obsolete. For better or for worse, the advance of American women into the workforce has made Ward and June Cleaver’s household an artifact of a bygone age; June has gone to work.*

Just as significant has been the shift to a service-oriented, information-based economy. Two generations ago, a new worker needed a good work ethic and an 8th-grade education to get a decent job. Now employers require what academics Richard Murnane and Frank Levy call the “new basic skills.” In their book, *Teaching the New Basic Skills*, Murnane and Levy found a severe mismatch between the skills high school graduates possess and the skills they need to get and hold a middle class job. Specifically, they found that employers prioritize the ability to communicate clearly, to use data to solve problems, to work well on diverse teams, and to use technology as a tool – but many schools do not.⁵ When it comes to developing “new basic skills” for the 21st Century economy, after-school programs can lead the way with small group size, informal settings, and opportunities for project-based learning.

A journey still unfolding

When Ned Rimer and I founded Citizen Schools almost 10 years ago, we believed the after-school hours were rich with opportunity. Today we are convinced. And we are not alone.

Across the country, including at Lesley, creative and savvy educators are re-imagining after-school and propelling it toward a bright future. Building on lessons learned and program successes, we are seeking to blend the best of what’s been done with bold new ideas. All of us are looking for the path that will lead us from today’s crossroads to the destination of authentic learning and healthy development for all children.

Until recently, after-school has been an afterthought. To achieve our highest national aspirations we need after-school to become a full partner in American education. I believe we’re on our way.

Eric Schwarz is president and cofounder of Citizen Schools.

INNOVATIVE MASTER’S PROGRAM

Developing outstanding teachers and leaders is widely acknowledged as the foremost challenge facing the after-school field. Lesley and Citizen Schools, a national network of after-school programs, have taken up the challenge by creating a new professional pathway for after-school educators. Last summer they launched a new master’s program in Curriculum and Instruction with a specialization in Out-of-School Time, enrolling a pioneer class of 23 Teaching Fellows from Citizen Schools.

William Dandridge, vice president of urban initiatives at Lesley, sees after-school as a compelling opportunity: “Programs that reach students out of school represent an increasingly important part of the puzzle of student success,” he says. “This partnership is a promising approach to ensure that the adults who work in such programs are well-qualified.”

Each Teaching Fellow works as a teacher and team leader in a Citizen Schools after-school program in Boston. They lead apprenticeships and community explorations, recruit volunteer “Citizen Teachers,” and tutor and mentor middle-schoolers. They also engage community organizations through morning placements at nonprofits and reach out to parents to engage them in the school community.

Integrated with their service is a two-year, 10-course sequence leading to a master’s degree from Lesley. Some courses have been adapted from Lesley’s core offerings. Others, such as Facilitative Leadership and Community Building, are brand new and are tightly focused on the unique conditions of after-school education. All coursework is linked to the front-line experience and future leadership opportunities of the Teaching Fellows.

Founded in 1995, Citizen Schools develops its students’ academic and leadership skills through hands-on learning apprenticeships. Students design solar cars, publish newspapers, litigate mock trials, compile oral histories, test water quality, and knit blankets for newborns. Many apprenticeships are led by volunteer “Citizen Teachers” from the community and from local corporations. Citizen Schools operates in 20 schools across nine cities and five states. Lesley and Citizen Schools are now working to expand the master’s program through distance learning technology to welcome after-school educators from across the Citizen Schools network and, eventually, from other organizations.

1. Menard, Louis. (2001). *The Metaphysical Club*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
2. Putnam, R.D. (2000). *Bowling Alone*. New York: Simon Schuster.
3. Cremin, Lawrence. (1980). *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876*. New York: Harper & Row.
4. Cohen, David K. (1988), “Teaching practice: Plus ça change,” in Phillip W. Jackson (ed.), *Contributing to Educational Change* (pp. 27-84). Berkeley: McCutchan.
5. Levy, F., Murnane, R.J. (1996). *Teaching The New Basic Skills*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

* a reference to television show “Leave It To Beaver,” a situation comedy that depicted an idyllic suburban family. It aired from 1957 to 1963.