Mapping the Social Across Lived Experiences: Relational Geographies and After-School Time

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Attention to after-school programs has increased over the past 15 years for a number of different reasons. After-school programming is perceived by some adults as a potential way to address the growing concern about child and youth safety in the after-school hours and as a method of using after-school time to improve school outcomes (Duffett, Johnson, Farkas, Kung, & Ott, 2004; Huang & Cho, 2009). While homework help, general tutoring programs, and science, technology, and mathematics enrichment programs have been shown to affect academic achievement, research indicates that participation in extracurricular activities—including arts, digital media, sports, community, and faith-based programs—is correlated with achievement in school as well (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006b; Shernoff, 2010).

Much of the literature about after-school programs is shaped by adult concerns, including the requirements of funding agencies and organizations, and thus reflects research designed to capture data that measures both what is easily quantifiable and what is significant in characterizing a new field. The literature accordingly includes taxonomies of the various kinds of after-school contexts and the activities that are associated with them; demographic data about children, youth, and adult participants; methodological issues, including measures of participation in terms of attendance intensity, duration, and breadth; correlational research on the relationship between learning after school and learning in school; and, less often, descriptions of mentors' and educators' practices (Chaput, Little, & Weiss, 2004; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006a; Sefton-Green, 2013; Vadeboncoeur, 2006). A central contribution of this growing body of literature has been the important reminder that learning and teaching happen across the contexts of families, schools, and "the third learning environment beyond family and school" (Heath, 2001, p. 10).

As the study of after-school time has evolved, questions have surfaced about program quality (Hirsch, Mekinda, & Stawicki, 2010) as well as about the characteristics of children and youths' after-school experiences, such as the extent to which those experiences are developmentally aligned with participants' interests and needs (Jones & Deutsch, 2013; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006). Frequently, when the term "relationship" surfaces, the relationship in question tends to be one between variables—for example, the relationship between attendance in tutoring programs and improved grades in school, the relationship between program goals and outcomes, or the interrelationships between organizations charged with the care of children and youth. Overall, less consideration has been paid to examining the characteristics of social relationships and the principles that ground them, though for Heath and McLaughlin (1994) and some other researchers, this has been an ongoing and central concern.

Several recent publications have attended to what is also our central concern: quality relationships between youth and adults (Grossman & Bulle, 2006; Rhodes, 2004; Strobel, Kirshner, O'Donoghue, & McLaughlin, 2008). A better understanding of these relationships may provide insight into why some children and youth who are marginalized in schools are connected and committed to after-school science and performing arts programs (Holzman, 2009; National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2009; Rahm, 2010); it may also shed light on why some children and youth who have at best tenuous connections to schooled environments engage, participate, learn, and grow in learning contexts that are characterized by critical and conceptual thinking, peer and adult interdependency, and rigorous public measures of the quality of their work (Vadeboncoeur, 2009).

Our response to "What do young people value about their out-of-school hours?" and "What else might after-school time offer, other than more school?" is the following: we think that children and youth engage and participate in a variety of after-school and out-of-school programming because it affords them meaningful experiences that they may not have access to elsewhere and that these experiences are mediated by quality social relationships. But what do we mean by "experience," and further, by "meaningful experience"? What are the qualities of and/or the principles upon which "quality relationships" are formed? How do these relationships develop and change over time and across contexts? In general, what does research that investigates social relationships between people look like?

This article is divided into two sections. The first offers a theoretical frame that enables these key concepts to be defined and discussed. The second reviews current approaches to methodology that enable researchers to study the movement of youth over time and across space in an effort to examine the learning that is occasioned by different relationships. Here, we offer ways to begin thinking about mapping social relationships across lived experiences. The article ends with a brief conclusion, in which we note the significance of documenting the developing experiences of children and youth, mediated by social relationships, and the necessity of research and methodologies that attend to these relationships.

On Lived Experience: From Meaning-Making to Meaningful

The work of Russian educator and psychologist Lev S. Vygotsky (1896–1934) provides foundational concepts embedded within a conceptual system for thinking about the ways that learning, development, and teaching are interrelated. Scholars and educators have used his work to conceptualize learning and teaching in school contexts, apprenticeships, mentoring practices, therapeutic relationships, and after-school programs and out-of-school contexts (Brown & Cole, 2002; Ferholt & Lecusay, 2010; Holzman, 2009; Honig & McDonald, 2005; Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003; Vadeboncoeur, 2006). English translations of the majority of his work have been made available over the past three decades, and increasingly nuanced and comprehensive ways of incorporating his ideas have begun to influence how we describe and explain what is taking place as children, youth, and adults learn and develop across these contexts.

A concept central to Vygotsky's (1994) theory is perezhivanie, translated variously as emotional experience, lived experience, and lived-through experience. Perezhivanie sits within a conceptual system that requires a unified or holistic approach to both theory and research methodology. What this means is that the concepts and the theory together are grounded in a concept of unity, or what could be called a principle of interrelations, that works against the reduction of the system of relations into separate elements. From a Vygotskian perspective, research that focuses solely on the individual or solely on the environment is inadequate; research that seeks to describe and explain learning and development must include both the individual and the environment as well as the relations between them. Perezhivanie includes the unity of the child and the social environment, the unity of personal and social experience, and the unity of thinking and feeling. For Vygotsky (1994), perezhivanie is the smallest unit of analysis for studying the social situation of development, which can be defined as the history of culturally specific social relationships and experiences that contribute to the growth of a child into a particular social environment.

Learning and development are mediated by significant social others as participants engage in social practices, or repertoires of mediated action. Cultural tools—including material tools, like objects and artifacts, and psychological tools, like speech and semiotic systems—also mediate action (Wertsch, 1985). In addition, the social environment is constituted, in part, by the history of social relations between institutional and social groups (Vadeboncoeur, 2013). Significantly, perezhivanie changes over time as a function of a child's developing conceptual system, on the basis of the development of word meaning and its influence on both verbal thinking and feeling (Vygotsky, 1994; see also Vadeboncoeur & Collie, 2013). A child's thinking and feeling are deeply connected to the social speech in which she is immersed—that is, to the words and word meanings that are used by others to describe, explain, and narrate the child's experiences, interactions, and activities. An experience becomes meaningful when it is mediated as significant, or valuable, by a social other or a more experienced peer and the significance is then internalized and transformed by the child. Over time, the child becomes more able to understand what is meaningful to others, narrate her own experiences, and construct meaning that is personally significant in the relationships and contexts within which she participates. Making experience meaningful is a practice that continues through adulthood, derived from the social relationships that constitute, in part, her social environment.

One way to illustrate perezhivanie is to link it with another concept of Vygotsky's (1987), the zone of proximal development—the interrelationship between a more experienced person and a less experienced person engaged in an activity or task. It is the assistance that a more experienced peer or adult provides for a child that enables the child to perform a psychological action, or complete a task, that is in advance of her development. The zone of proximal development is marked by the difference between what a child can do independently and the kinds of activities and tasks that she can complete with such assistance. From a Vygotskian perspective, the zone of proximal development is bidirectional. This means that both child and adult have something to

learn from and teach to each other. In teaching, the adult must learn about the child's current understanding and relevant learning history and couple this with decisions about how to mentor the child in the activity. In learning, the child must teach the adult what she currently understands and how she has developed this particular understanding and couple this with her own thinking and feeling about learning in the activity as it unfolds. In the zone of proximal development, learning is a social, cognitive, and affective practice that has the potential to pull emerging development forward. Learning is also a unified process of coming to know about the world, others, and oneself; becoming a social individual; and coming to value different ways of thinking, feeling, and acting—all of which occurs through relationships (Vadeboncoeur, Vellos, & Goessling, 2011).

The insight provided by this conceptual perspective requires that we rethink how we approach research in after-school contexts. Whether research questions address general program characteristics or seek to evaluate the success of what is currently being practiced, data to reflect the social relationships between youth, peers, and staff is and ought to be central. All social relationships are important. Because our own research has been with adults who intentionally reach out to children and youth and mediate youth experiences by building trust and forging social connections that lead to engagement and participation in programs, we tend to focus on youth and adult relationships during after-school time (Vadeboncoeur, 2009). In many instances, the adults must work through and, potentially, overcome with young people, the less successful, and sometimes damaging, relationships and experiences that constitute their learning histories.

Our goal has been to attend to youth and adult relationships in a manner that advances our understanding of the practices through which such relationships lead to meaningful experiences that enable future learning and development. As such, the research design must include an in-depth study of not only the characteristics of relationships, but also the principles upon which these relationships have developed, from the perspectives of both the youth and adult participants. Ultimately, research design should include several methods that are used to collect data that speak to the lived experiences of the relationships between youth and adults and the meaning of these relationships. Studying social relationships is central from a Vygotskian perspective, because they mediate lived experiences and become contexts for learning and development. While measures of attendance and satisfaction surveys that gather Likert-scale[1] responses of youths' perceptions with regard to staff interest, supportiveness, and care are important, they are at best weak and indirect measures of the effects of relationships with adults. The next section offers some ways of rethinking methodology.

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[1] A commonly used approach to scaling responses in survey research.

Mapping Relational Geographies: Histories of Intra- and Intercontextual Mobilities

Attention to after-school time has led to at least three significant changes in thinking about learning and development, and each of these changes also impacts the way we do research. The first is a shift from the view of learning and development as something that happens in school to a view of learning opportunities that emerge across contexts (Honig & McDonald, 2005; Sefton-Green, 2013). With this shift, research studies that move with children and youth across learning contexts come into focus. Another change has been from seeing schools and out-of-school contexts as dichotomous and disconnected to seeing them as potentially interrelated and mutually supportive (Heath, 2001). With this shift, research studies that move with children and youth between schools and out-of-school contexts with the purpose of examining how these contexts are interrelated and how learning in one may support learning in the other come into focus. The third is a shift toward considering that the way learning and development are defined is potentially more significant for research than the location of learning or the program type (Vadeboncoeur, 2006). What this means is that the definition of learning and development influences the overall logic of inquiry for the research design, from research questions to methodology and methods to forms of analysis and interpretation. With this shift, even a study that is only intended to document or evaluate a single program contributes to a larger body of research because it has explicitly articulated definitions for learning and development that are theoretically and practically grounded.

Current approaches to qualitative research—and more specifically, to ethnographic research—may enable us to better address each of these three significant changes while also centering our attention on social relationships. While potentially interesting in and of itself, the increasing attention to time and space enables research to advance in complex ways that more fully address multiple aspects of lived experience. Such studies are particularly suited to generating the kind of rich data that can not only speak to the necessity of documenting the characteristics and outcomes of after-school time, but also advance educational and psychological theory and practice in relation to the significance of social relationships in learning, development, and teaching over time and across contexts. At the moment, we can describe correlations, but we cannot explain them. For example, we can describe correlations between academic outcomes and how much time young people spend in after-school programs, but we cannot explain why the results in relation to academic performance are sometimes limited or mixed for some children and youth from some programs. In this section, we discuss several innovations in relation to expanding qualitative and ethnographic studies temporally and spatially and provide two examples of current work that offers powerful conclusions. We argue that these studies may enable researchers to address the "why" questions behind common issues like program attendance and attrition, with potentially far-reaching consequences for policy and funding.

Multisited ethnography examines the circulation of people, objects, and/or language across many sites of activity and offers a strategy of tracing—or literally following—connections, associations,

and relationships across sites as well (Marcus, 1995). Such research is "designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography" (Marcus, 1995, p. 105). From this perspective, the relational geographies of children and youth may be traced intracontextually within a program, using ethnographic methods such as participant observation, interviews, and focus groups to document engagement in zones of proximal development with adults and/or with more experienced peers. For example, the relationship between Erin[2], a 12-year-old youth participant, and Melissa, a youth worker at the community center, can be traced as they engage in different activities at and through the center, revealing the ways that their relationship evolves over various projects through which Erin becomes more engaged.

Engagement in zones of proximal development may also be documented intercontextually across sites or pathways, such as from home to school to after-school or out-of-school activities. For example, Erin's relationships with her parents at home, her teachers in school, and Melissa at the community center may be studied and documented. In this example, the ethnographer traces Erin's mobility across school, home, and community center by documenting her relationships within and across each context. In investigating Erin's mobility, both intra- and intercontextually, we might ask: What similarities and dissimilarities exist in her relationships? In what ways do these similarities and dissimilarities influence the opportunities for learning and zones of proximal development that Erin jointly constructs with her teacher as well as with Melissa? Does Erin experience the relationships and contexts as disparate containers, or are there ways in which the relationships and contexts move with Erin that allow learning opportunities to build and develop across some contexts or all of them? How does Melissa see her role in mediating Erin's experiences? What principles guide her engagement with Erin?

Although the definitions of context and/or site may initially be theorized as bounded physical locations for learning, that may not be how participants experience them. Instead of a physical location—such as a community center or an after-school program—it may be the social space of a relationship that defines the context. For example, an ethnographer may identify the relationships—or, in some cases, the zones of proximal development—as the contexts of study. The development of social media also demonstrates how relational spaces can be uncoupled from physical spaces; significant relationships that begin in a community program may be sustained in a Facebook group or a chat room. The work of organizing and developing a strategy or strategies for ethnographic work is an "open-ended and speculative course of constructing subjects by simultaneously constructing the discontinuous contexts in which they act and are acted upon" (Marcus, 1995, p. 98). Again, we would add that though contexts may appear to be discontinuous

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[2] All names used are pseudonyms.

to an ethnographer, participants may not experience them that way. Ultimately, physical location may not be what is most significant about tracing; in multisited projects, "ethnography primarily addresses tempos of change, moments in the flow of events, and is trying to produce… knowledge that is as much modulated in temporal terms as placed in spatial terms" (Marcus, 2009, p. 193). The coupling of time and space introduces a standard of sensibility with respect to the ways in which an ethnographer becomes aware of and responsive to lenses that privilege one over the other and to the dialectical work of moving between the two. In addition, this sensibility must develop epistemically, as we try "to narrate how things came to be" (Pierides, 2010, p. 190).

Advances in research also recognize the importance of differences in timescales and address the difficulty of conducting research that unfolds over them. Both Lemke (2000, 2001) and Burawoy (2003) offer innovative ways of thinking about time that, we would argue, partially remediate some of the problems with traditional methodologies that are used to understand what happens after school. Lemke (2000) asks, "How do moments add up to lives?" and, further, "How do our shared moments together add up to a social life as such?" (emphasis in original, p. 273). His work is an attempt to both highlight the problem of time as a research issue and to offer a way of addressing processes and activities that take place over different timescales. Research to date has typically studied learning and development, and the social practices associated with learning and development, over short timescales: the time it takes to fill out a survey; interventions of a few hours or class periods; observations of portions of school days, or of weekly meetings, over several months. The necessity of working this way, given grant and funding cycles, acts to legitimize such research. As a result, we know more about practices that take place over a short period, located in bounded spaces, and we know much less about learning and development over weeks, months, years, lifetimes, and even generations, as well as about the rich interconnected learning that occurs across learning contexts. Lemke (2000, 2001) encourages us to design research that enables these longer timescales to come into view as a method for deepening our understanding of complex processes like learning and development.

Another approach to addressing the issue of time in ethnographic research is offered by Burawoy (2003), who advances the idea that "revisiting" the site of a previous study may enable researchers to confront the issues involved in examining a context or site in which they are also participants.[3] He notes four different types of revisits that focus on specific ways of approaching the discrepancies between earlier and later ethnographic accounts: differences in the relationships between observers and participants; differences in the theoretical lenses used by ethnographers; differences that result from processes internal to the site; and differences that result from forces that are external to the site. Burawoy's goal in noting these differences is to move toward a form of

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[3] We were introduced to Burawoy's (2003) work and the notion of revisiting research by Jennifer Rowsell and Julian Sefton-Green in 2012.

reflexive ethnography that combines all four. Alongside this theorization, he is careful to highlight the tensions involved in approaching research from either a realist or a constructivist ontology, as well as the ways in which these research locations significantly shape what the data and interpretations of data are taken to mean. Most significant for us, however, are the potential ways that the notion of revisiting research sites may shape the relationships between researchers and participants. For example, research relationships may change as a function of attending to them as long-term commitments; they may also change as researchers and participants learn from and with each other over time.

A comprehensive review of research in education by Leander, Phillips, and Taylor (2010) offers three metaphors that expand the ways of approaching learning and space-time: place, trajectory, and network. Their work, highlighting both conceptual and empirical literature, challenges researchers to address the complex ways in which children and youth are mobile and the ways in which mobility shapes learning experiences. For example, the authors challenge the conception of space as simply physical location. Instead, they explain how research is changed when the concept of space is not equated with the concrete environment, but is instead reconceived as social spatialization: socially produced physical space and representations of space, as well as how space is lived. In addition, they include empirical research from a range of fields and disciplines— including sociocultural perspectives, educational anthropology, cultural geography, cultural and youth studies, and language and literacy research—to exemplify their organizational metaphors. This work addresses some of the ongoing, intractable tensions that Marcus (1995) discusses. Leander et al. speak to and support researchers as they engage with these issues. Most significant, the review is framed by a commitment to social equity and an attention to opportunities for learning. Leander et al. remind researchers that "learning lives are located, positioned, and emplaced in relations of power, politics, and culture. However, the locations of children, in and through which they learn, are not simple containers, are not bounded, and will not hold still" (p. 385). In addition, we note that learning opportunities—which are also opportunities for ethical engagement—exist for researchers.

If we want to study social relationships between youth and adults, as well as what makes relationships quality relationships, we need data that locates learning and development in relationships. We also need to note the results of learning—as knowing, being, and valuing—that shape experience from context to context. What is the role of social relationships in different contexts for learning? How do these social relationships lead to different learning opportunities and outcomes? In what ways do the relationships and/or contexts overlap? How do early learning histories influence later learning experiences? What are the potential benefits and limitations of particular learning histories? We see such research as significant for better understanding not only the learning histories of particular children, but also the learning histories of children more generally, and for making tentative claims regarding experiential trajectories while being ever mindful not to overgeneralize.

Two examples of current work offer important insights into the role of youth and adult social relationships in shaping learning and development, including in creating opportunities for learning intracontextually and intercontextually. The first, by Strobel et al. (2008), is a study with an intracontextual focus on five after-school centers. The authors' commitment to gathering the perspectives of children and youth is integral to the study. The general research questions were: How do youth participants feel about their involvement in the program? What attracted them to the program, and what has kept them there? Over the course of two years, data was gathered through focus groups with 120 children and youth, interviews with a subsample of youth, and a youth-led ethnography. Across the data, three features of these after-school centers surfaced as meaningful to youth. First, and most significant, were supportive relationships with both adults—mentors, confidants, and mediators—and peers. A key aspect of this feature was having a time and place to collaborate with friends and participate in out-of-school groups. Second, both physical and emotional safety were identified as significant. Third, having opportunities to learn skills that were relevant to each participant, as well as having choices about the programs in which to participate, also emerged as important.

The implications for learning and education contribute to a growing body of research that highlights the significance of social relationships, developmentally appropriate design, and the tension between social and academic goals during after-school time. However, the implications for research are potentially even more important, given the argument in this paper, for example, regarding the need to develop better methodologies for studying—and learning from—youth perspectives. As argued by Strobel et al. (2008), there is a qualitative difference between quantitative and qualitative research. This difference—and specifically the importance of the emic perspective in research on after-school time—contributes to the generation of rich data that reflect the unity of lived experience. It also enables a vantage point for identifying, reviewing, and potentially rethinking the meanings of "success" and "impact" in after-school programs. The benefits of these programs and the experiences they provide may be much broader than, and different from, the outcomes that have been identified by adults' concerns.

As a second example, Barron's (2010) longitudinal case study documents learning ecologies that include youth, artifacts and materials for learning, and family resources—including time, parental expertise, and social networks—as youth move intercontextually across school, out-of-school, and home environments. A central focus is how engagement develops across contexts, timescales, and social networks. This approach enables Barron to study and compare the different developmental trajectories of youth as they become engaged with technology. Drawing on Cole (1996), Lave (1996), and Lemke (2000), this work emphasizes the shift from designing research and outcome measures in order to study knowledge acquisition to designing research that contributes to better understanding "learning as a process of becoming that takes place across longer scales of time and within and across the multiple life spaces that a learner inhabits" (p. 114). Barron's interviews focus on creating learning histories that emphasize the meanings behind decision

making and on generating narratives of how learning unfolds across time, resources, and context. Her work highlights the benefits of a longitudinal perspective on questions of learning and development, as well as the significant results obtained from research on a particular child's learning history and lived experience.

Future Directions: Relational Geographies and After-School Time

As the field of research on after-school time has evolved, research on learning and development has evolved as well. The picture of after-school time is most complete with respect to the characteristics and outcomes of after-school programs that are the easiest to quantify. Inspired by the research that shows the potentially profound impact of after-school and out-of-school time on children and youth, and encouraged by innovations in research methodologies and perspectives, we are motivated to identify, review, and rethink gaps in the literature. These gaps include research on the role of social relationships in engagement and participation in after-school programs, on the characteristics of relationships that make them quality relationships, and on the ways that quality relationships mediate meaningful experiences during after-school time. Designing research that documents youth and adult perspectives in relationship, and incorporating qualitative and ethnographic methods to trace relational geographies across homes, schools, and after-school contexts can enable us to redress the lack of attention to the central role of relationships. Mapping relational geographies is one method for retaining the unity of child and environment, in a sense preserving the social aspects of what has conventionally been seen as "a child's" learning history.

Vygotsky's (1987, 1994) concepts of perezhivanie and the zone of proximal development are helpful in this regard for two reasons. First, they provide us with theoretical grounding for the research, including definitions for learning and development, and with a conceptual framework in which the significant mediating role of social relationships is central. Second, Vygotsky's work offers a rationale for research design and conduct that calls for a holistic approach to learning with and from children and adult participants. The methodological commitment to unity is a challenge to dissociating variables and trying to reconstitute them; instead, it foregrounds the importance of seeing how child and adult, together, create learning opportunities that potentially become learning histories. In particular, this theoretical perspective supports the ideas offered by researchers that dare us to pay attention to time and space in new ways and to conduct research across multiple activities, contexts, and timescales. Learning is not bounded by physical borders or segmented by snapshots in time; rather, it is woven across lived experience in ways that link past experiences to present experiences and imagined futures.

The relatively little research on social relationships in general can be expanded and deepened through qualitative and ethnographic studies that explore the potential of social relationships— between youth and with adults—as significant to the mediation of meaningful experiences in after-school and out-of-school time. In addition, future research is needed to examine the

connections between social relationships and the zone of proximal development. When and how do social relationships become zones of proximal development? Under what conditions, in relation to which activities and tasks, and for which children and youth? What is the effect of such relationships on the adults who participate in them with youth? What are the characteristics of adults who are most able to develop such relationships? What are their principles of interaction? What are the perspectives of adults on the costs, benefits, and infrastructure required for developing quality relationships with children and youth?

These sorts of questions, and the voices of youth and adults in response, have the potential to impact policy and funding, especially with regard to staff hiring, salaries, and retention, as well as professional development. They also may lead to the creation of better measures of program effects on learning and development. It is only in attending to these sorts of questions that we will be able to respond to the "why" of child and youth engagement and participation in after-school and out-of school contexts and better understand the significant role of social relationships in mediating these experiences. Understanding what makes a program meaningful and what kind of engagement and participation is meaningful to whom, and why, is the key to addressing the obvious problem of attrition and to understanding what is important to children and youth in ways that might enable lessons learned from after-school time to shape or inform how we approach learning, development, and teaching in other contexts. Experiences in schools are not insulated from the experiences that children and youth have in other contexts for learning. Indeed, this may be one of the reasons that having meaningful experiences in a range of after-school programs, regardless of their sometimes less-than-obvious connection to schooled environments, enables young people to develop many of the qualities linked with academic and life success.

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