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The Other 17 Hours: Valuing Out-of-School Time

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Occasional Papers 30

The Other 17 Hours: Valuing Out-of-School Time

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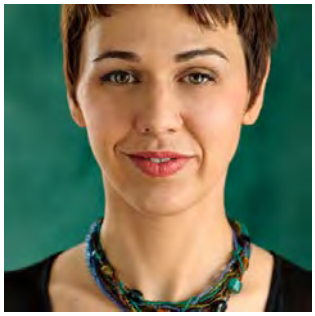
Introduction by Jennifer Teitle, Guest Editor

At 14, hanging out in a public library, I was an amateur philosopher, poet, and artist. As part of a misanthropic group of teenagers, I spent my afternoons digging though subversive texts, tracing calligraphy, and discovering secrets. I walked, black skirt dragging, from my high school to the hangout spot. Then, making a slow circle through the stacks, I would search for friends among the books. I remember lowering my chin so that my hair would fall into my face; with my thick black eyeliner, I imagined myself to be a younger version of Johnette Napolitano of Concrete Blonde. I carried a sketchbook. I wrote poetry on my fingertips. I was dramatic.



Twenty years later, as a teacher, researcher, and parent, I'm still amazed at the persistence of these hangout memories. I remember little of my life at school during adolescence; teachers and classmates' faces are a blur. In contrast, I remember dozens of moments from hanging out: designing elaborate book covers, debating morality and religion, hearing a friend explain that his dad had been sent to prison. Intense and filled with sensation, time spent hanging out—in libraries, parking lots, friends' basements, an old donut shop—made my mind jump and my pulse race. It seemed as though anything could happen in the span of an afternoon.

In this issue of the Bank Street Occasional Papers, we wanted to explore the value of these pockets of time outside of school. Current wisdom does not support this kind of unstructured, autonomous hanging out, and places that welcome or even tolerate young people are getting harder to find. While some libraries continue to create teen spaces, others have moved to lock their doors in the immediate after-school hours (Kelley, 2007). Malls increase the number of security guards and eject teens from storefronts and food courts. Some shopping centers have turned to even more controversial measures, such as the installation of "mosquito" devices, which emit high-pitched sounds, to repel teens (Crawford, 2009).

Meanwhile, after-school programs, many of which once contained an element of "drop-in" culture, are undergoing a shift toward offering formalized activities and documented learning outcomes. This change has been celebrated as a move from "babysitting to educationally enriched youth development programs" (Moje & Tysvaer, 2010, p. 10). However, it might be better understood as part of the larger neoliberal shift toward "value-added" and "outcomes-based" measurements in young people's lives. Even home spaces, the least understood nonschool geographies, are now regularly described in terms of their contribution to school achievement.

Educators have given relatively little scholarly attention to young people's nonschool lives. Ignored or valorized, nonschool spaces show up in educational research only as a backdrop, implying that school learning is the yardstick by which to measure the young people's lives. Even scholars who focus primarily on nonschool spaces are limited by their inability to theorize

nonschool learning without framing it in terms of school learning (Sefton-Green, 2012; Teitle, 2012).

Yet this myopic view of school outcomes only serves to narrow the purpose and possibilities of nonschool time. For this reason, we asked authors to expand the conversation about young people's lives outside of school. Contributing authors both engage with current literature on nonschool spaces and offer new and exciting ways to conceptualize nonschool activity and learning. Put simply, we asked our contributors, "What do nonschool spaces have to offer, other than more school?"

In answer to that question, we are proud to present a range of articles exploring young people's out-of-school activities. Skateboarding, drawing comics, engaging in Justin Bieber fandom, and participating in a library "Wrestling Club," to name a few of these pursuits, provide the context for deeper studies exploring non-school activities and learning. Our authors describe youth activities happening in homes, programs, and public spaces, from a variety of methodological and theoretical perspectives. We believe that there are many generative ways of reading these essays in combination with one another, and that they open up new conversations on young people's out-of-school lives.

Out-of-School, at Home

What (and Where) Is the "Learning" When We Talk About Learning in the Home?

Julian Sefton-Green

Introduction

In trying to address the vexed challenge of theorizing learning transfer to make sense of how we learn across social contexts and what learning might mean in more informal domestic circumstances, Stevens and his colleagues offer a series of detailed studies of gaming in the home (Stevens, Satwicz, & McCarthy, 2008). They argue that we need to look at the "dispositions and purposes" that people bring with them to experiences and then consider "what people *make* of experiences in other times and places in their lives" (pp. 63–64). Learning, they suggest, is the process of interpretation as people reach back and forth across experiences (and the meanings that have been attributed to them). Rather than focusing on the learning experience in isolation, we need to pay attention to how learners conceptualize, contextualize, and reflect on experiences and to what resources they use and draw on to do this. Stevens et al. suggest that only by developing methods that allow us to study people across and within a range of settings can we see how people actively juxtapose, reject, select, contrast, or build on experiences. The research focus then needs both an intrapersonal historical dimension, reflecting how individuals frame their experiences over time, as well as a way of describing the types of understanding involved—the language and values that circulate within those experiences.

In this paper, I will build on the proposal that we need to pay attention to both of these frames through characterizing the metadiscourse surrounding learning in the home. I suggest that this metadiscourse is made up of several elements. I will show how a number of families—the subjects of a larger research project that investigates learning across time and contexts—adopt and use folk "theories of learning," and I will consider, in particular, how such theories relate to dominant discourses around learning in school. Second, I will explore how media technologies—and in particular, how the ways that they are purchased and how they are located in the home—also contribute to dominant conceptualizations of learning and at times almost seem to stand for a proxy measure of it. Third, I will draw on observations and accounts of how learning is enacted as a discipline and as a habit within the ebb and flow of family life.

The paper begins with a brief review of the sociological and educational literature regarding approaches to learning in the home and then sets forth the context for the empirical work. The main body of the paper describes how learning is constructed, mediated, and enacted in six families. By showing that who defines learning in domestic contexts, and on what basis, is subject to a series of class-based, inherited, and aspirational discourses and social imaginaries, the

subsequent discussion and conclusions aim to question assumptions about how we talk about learning in the home.

The Home as a Site for and of Learning

The home is a hotly contested presence in educational discourse. Paradoxically, however, it is not a place that is frequently visited by many teachers or even educational researchers. We may see many representations of homes in documentaries and fiction—the lives of the kids in the HBO TV series *The Wire* are a good example of how the lives of "other people's" children can gain great currency in academic circles—and teachers in staff rooms around the world may speculate endlessly about the lives of their charges at home, but we know our own homes best and often use that knowledge metonymically to stand for the idea of home in general.

Home is both a deep and a broad concept with a high degree of emotional resonance (Brooks, 2011). It may appear just to describe the place where we live, but in effect it is also an analytic concept that needs to be distinguished from the idea of both "household" and "family." In the academic literature about the ways that media technologies are "domesticated" as they are brought into the home and given meaning and purpose through often ritualized, quotidian, and everyday use, the home becomes a key site of both consumption and contestation as it is given meaning and purpose by prevailing discourses and social actors (Berker, Hartmann, Punie, & Ward, 2005). The home is not a neutral space, nor necessarily imbued with all the qualities of retreat and security that we find in the more romantic considerations of it; rather, the home is in the front line of current debates about gender, family, and power.

Sociologists of the family have spent much time in the home watching, listening to, and engaging with family members going about their daily business. Although it is always difficult to imagine how any form of academic research could fail to be intrusive and in some ways affect the rhythms of daily life, scholars like Lareau (2003) or Pugh (2009) have found ways to show how talk within the family, the organization of everyday life, the disposition of financial resources, and the materiality of everyday practices all combine to make homes quite particular experiences and key sites for the production of identity and the investment of various kinds of social and cultural capital.

Thirty to forty years ago, educational research focused much more on children's lives outside of the school. This was for two reasons. First, the research occurred in the context of a public debate about education that was concerned as much with the whole life of the young person—including an entire set of values and capabilities that were expected to exist outside of the curriculum—as it was with formal schooling. Second, it was written from a pedagogic perspective, as a way of understanding what young people brought with them to the school, and therefore how school pedagogy and curriculum might be oriented from such starting points. Academic collections such as *Life in School: The Sociology of Pupil Culture* (Hammersley & Woods, 1984) typically focused on the

ways that the broader aspects of social life—such as housing, ethnicity, family structure, and gender identity—intersect with formal and informal curriculum and social relations within the school. In the United States, the notion of "funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) has gathered considerable traction as a way of describing the sets of practices, expectations, social relationships, and folk theories of learning in which young people's out-of-school learning is embedded and which, it is suggested, need to be negotiated by both home and school.

At the same time that educationalists were particularly interested in the sociology of young people's lives, groundbreaking work in linguistic anthropology was beginning to shed light on aspects of language use and learning in general. Heath's classic study, *Ways with Words* (1983), opened a whole series of approaches to understanding the interrelationships between language use in family and in other informal and community contexts and modes of learning. Her study of language in the family and its role in all aspects of family life helped open up the home as a site for and of learning.

However, it may also be fair to say that the gaze of educational research has moved away from exploring the texture and meaning of young people's social worlds toward a more tightly focused concern with learning transactions within the school (Ladwig, 2010). Whereas educational theory in the past was possibly more agnostic about what constituted learning, and certainly more prepared to describe and theorize kinds of learning developed outside of the classroom, the politics of educational research have moved much more into an arena concerned with standardized testing and comparative benchmarking, all of which imply a much more closed understanding of learning outcomes (Schwartz & Arena, 2013). Much has been written about this shift; it is both a political move bound up with the reconfiguration of public education (Berliner & Biddle, 1999) and also an indication of the changing nature and purpose of academic research in this field (Glass, 2008). Some of the complex shifts in the relationship of research to policy as well as in public education were well captured by Luke (2011).

Perhaps paradoxically, contemporary and recent research into learning outside of the school has therefore not started by disinterestedly trying to capture what learning might mean across social contexts as understood reflexively by participants, but has often looked at how the home can be recalibrated as a supplement or complement to the school. In a recent publication, I have explored how a range of research into learning in informal, semiformal, and nonformal learning situations—particularly in after-school and community-based settings—is hamstrung in theorizing and defining the kind of learning that might go on in these sectors by a conceptual inability not to frame learning in school-like terms (Sefton-Green, 2013). At the same time, the very nature of academic research itself plays a part in this process, as the phenomena such research defines as learning and the methods it uses to characterize such learning also define and determine learning outside of the school context. The more we are interested in finding out about other kinds of

learning beyond the school, the more we risk formalizing the informal as we subject everyday practices to the basilisk stare of the academic gaze.

These two dilemmas—finding out what kinds of learning go on in the home and discovering how they are defined as such, and by whom—underpin the substantive inquiry of this paper: what might learning mean in the homes of the 13- and 14-year-olds who were the subject of a recent research project? The rest of this paper will outline what it might mean to research learning in the home and will characterize different learning continua that we discovered. In particular, I will pay attention to how the discourses of learning as defined by the school and the immediate public set of values around education today have penetrated or are negotiated by different kinds of families in these case studies.

The Research Context

The data in this paper are drawn from an ongoing project, "The Class," conducted in collaboration with Sonia Livingstone and funded as part of the MacArthur Foundation's digital media learning initiative.[1] We worked with one class of 27 13- to 14-year-olds. We spent one academic term with them at school, getting to know them and attending all of their lessons across all of their subjects as well as observing them within the ebb and flow of the school day. We were interested in their friendship groups as well as the dispositions, motivations, and interests they displayed or talked to us about at school. We then visited them at home and met their parents. Each child took us on a media tour of the home, photographing all kinds of media and talking about the daily use of them. We became the young people's Facebook friends, and we spoke with them in particular about their uses of social media and the Internet in general. Other aspects of the project that are not developed here include following up with young people in the study who have particular hobbies or interests, such as playing a musical instrument or participating in sports, as well as considering how they all were making academic subject choices and beginning to imagine future careers at this stage of their schooling. All in all, we have gathered an enormous range of data in the study, including participant-observation field notes, focus-group discussions, digital footprints, social network relationships, as well as small-scale surveys and the schools' records of the pupils' behavior and academic progression. We also have interviews with the young people and their friends, families, and teachers.[2]

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[1] The London School of Economics and Political Science, "The Class," http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/The%20Class.aspx
For a further description of this project, see the Digital Media and Learning Research Hub, http://dmlhub.net/

[2] We are currently writing up the work as a book. For ongoing details about publication plans, see www.julianseftongreen.net

Researching the Phenomena of Learning

Our work in the home thus addressed activity across a number of domains, from interaction in the family to gaming, engagement in community activities, hanging out with friends, and solitary participation on Facebook or other websites. Determining what constitutes learning across these activities and the relationship of such learning to other more formal educational experiences is thus significantly an analytic question as much as it is an empirical one. Where and in what forms can we "see" or describe any "learning"? Since we set out deliberately to explore all kinds of learning, especially those not captured by the way that school frames it, we were inevitably entering into an opaque or fuzzy terrain.

I report here on three kinds of learning. First, there is the talk—within the family, by the young people themselves, and by teachers—about learning in the home, where what is meant by learning is given particular value. How notions of attainment and achievement as practiced in the school became incorporated in everyday family life was also crucial here. Second, we have pursued the way that talking about learning is now indistinguishable from talking about access to computers and other media technologies, including books,. This is partly a question of how resources are framed in the current era. It also expresses the mediatization of learning. Mediatization is an emerging and by no means uncontested concept that captures not simply the mediation of all kinds of experiences but the specific historical processes by which the media—including their institutions, practices, and texts—are gaining an ever-expanding grip over all aspects of human life (Lundby, 2009). While it is true that we asked the young people to take us on a media tour of the house, thus possibly biasing our focus, we were surprised by the centrality of all forms of media to the dominant conceptualizations of learning in these homes. This opened up for us a theory about the mediatization of learning in the home in general. Finally, we witnessed or heard about certain habits or disciplines involving concentration, motivation, engagement, and, above all, a narrative of development (Watkins, 2011), whether in gaming or playing an instrument. These habits or disciplines and participants' reflections on them seemed to us to constitute an embedded theory of learning, native to each particular situation; and although the observation of such habits is subject to the researchers' privilege, in that we looked for them, they seem to constitute a third dimension of the ways that learning might be said to be constituted in the home. These three phenomena—discourse, mediatization (and associated uses of technology), and habits—constitute the evidence on which our analysis here is based.

I am particularly keen on being as transparent as possible about the interrelationship of methodology to theory because in general the whole field of nonformal learning is not as scrupulous nor possibly secure as discussions about learning in more formal contexts. At the same time, the exploratory nature of theorizing nonformal learning also raises questions about what we take for granted in the contexts that we acknowledge as educational. This double perspective is an important reason to consider nonformal learning as a conceptual irritant in the day-to-day practice of normalized talk about schools and learning.

School at Home

The most explicit example of the penetration of school-based forms of learning into the home concerns the family of Yusuf[3]. He was the eldest of four children, and his family had emigrated from East Africa when he was very young. His father had been a trained nurse but was now working on the railways in London as a ticket inspector. His mother spoke very limited English but Yusuf, his siblings, and his father were fluent. The family were devout Muslims, and Yusuf attended Koran school twice a week after regular school. He talked to us about the discipline of studying the Koran, which involved a considerable amount of rote learning even when he did not fully understand the content; progression through the *surahs* (the sections or verses of the Koran) was determined by his ability to repeat them by heart. The Koran school also offered a more open, discussion-based lesson reflecting moral and social issues. In addition, Yusuf had previously attended a supplementary school—run by the local education authority—where he worked on his math, science, and English. At school he worked conscientiously in every lesson and was in advanced classes for math and science, although he received remedial attention for his English. He had been screened for various kinds of learning difficulties with a special attention to dyslexia, but no formal statement of his educational needs had ever materialized.

As in many migrant families, in Yusuf's home there was an incredible focus on formal academic attainment, with the belief that achievement at school would lead to earning qualifications and, by implication, a higher income than his parents'. To this end, his father had purchased an integrated series of math and English programs on CD for around £3000 ($4700)—a considerable expenditure for any family, and especially for one with such modest means as Yusuf's. The CDs provide a series of graded activities and tests; when a certain number of tests have been passed, the company that makes the CDs issues bronze, silver, and gold certificates. The family had received a flyer advertising this product from the primary school of one of Yusuf's siblings. One of the family's upstairs bedrooms had been turned into a "classroom" and, as demonstrated in the picture below (Fig X.1), the progress of all of the children was made visible to the entire family. Progression is defined simply by completion of the various tests, shown here as one of the cells in the charts for each child.

[3] All names are pseudonyms.

Fig X.1

Although the curriculum for these activities was equated with the ways that the national curriculum in England defined outcomes, it was unclear whether the young people made connections between this and the kind of testing that they received in school. The school did not appear to know that Yusuf was engaged in these activities at home, and even though he was given small-group support outside the classroom, the group teacher had no idea about it either.

The family was quite regimented about the disposition of time and resources allocated to supporting progression through the CD programs. When I visited, the father described himself as a sort of head teacher (school principal) within the family, and the whole family very proudly showed me Yusuf's framed certificate that he had received when he had completed the requisite number of tests to attain the bronze award. Although the upstairs room had been fitted out as a study and decorated in ways that we have seen, the rest of the educational apparatus (books, workbooks, television, and computer) were kept downstairs under the surveillance of the adults. In ways that recall the descriptions by researchers 10 years ago of where computers were situated as they came into family life (Livingstone, 2002), the sole computer in this house was shared by all the members of the family and kept under the stairs. In Fig X.2, it can be seen next to the television, facing the family seating and dining area.

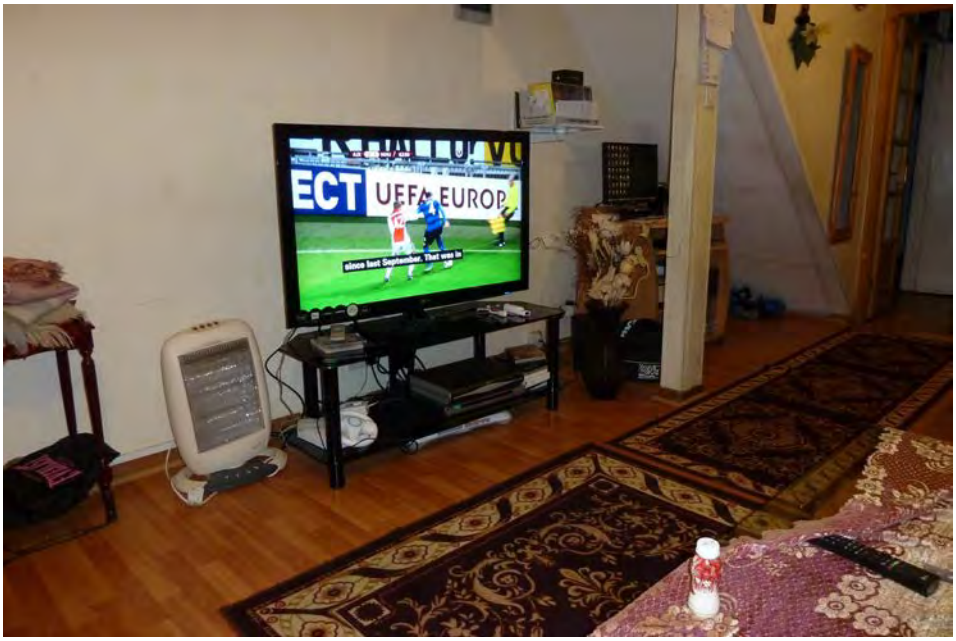

Fig X.2

The rack of the CDs for the education program can be seen on the wall between the television and the computer. Books, worksheets, and other tests were all kept in box files in the kitchen next to this room.

The overall impression from a series of interviews with Yusuf as well as from visiting the family was of a highly regulated, controlled use of time. The children's use of the computer was in an open, shared space and therefore could be scrutinized and regulated by other members of the family. Yusuf was quite an avid user of Facebook but did not express any conflicts between desires for privacy and this enforced openness. All the children were expected to complete a certain number of tests—and fill in the appropriate cells in the wall chart—on a weekly basis, and as we have already noted, Yusuf also spent time at a supplementary school and the Koran school. Given that his father frequently worked afternoon and evening shifts and that Yusuf was not that fluent in his home language and therefore in some respects was not able to completely communicate with his mother, the family demonstrated a very high degree of discipline and endeavor. All of these activities, it should be noted, either mimicked or echoed forms of school-based learning, with graded progression and formalized testing. Working your way through this highly structured, regulated system, open to scrutiny, defined learning in this context.

Looking Like School

Across all of the young people in this project, any question about learning activities in the home immediately came down to the provision of computer facilities and desk-like furniture with some kind of private space that looked like an office.

Fig X.3

Of course, many homes cannot provide this much personal space for each member of the family; additionally, the availability and use of laptops as shared communal devices also undermined this model. Whether and in what ways the singular study space was used for educational purposes (however we or the families define this) is also a key question for us.

In several homes, parents clearly strove quite hard to provide this level of study space. However, whereas Yusuf's family—and his father in particular—went to great lengths to replicate in their home an elaborated version of learning at school, we did not see this superstructure created elsewhere. Indeed, what distinguishes Yusuf's learning is not just the use of computer technology but its extension into paper and book forms, its threads and connections to a range of online activities, and its blend of discipline and the appearance of progression. In many other homes, children and parents went to great lengths to create the circumstances for learning, which—as we have explained, and as can be seen in Fig X.3—are almost generic and formulaic, but which in practice act like simulacra, imitating the superficial appearances of study without providing any content.

This phenomenon is obviously related to cultural capital (Field, 2008). In Shane's family, no expense was spared in procuring what his mother had been led to believe was necessary to support his learning. However, to all intents and purposes, the equipment lay unused. Shane's bedroom was clearly divided into activity zones. In one corner there is a bed; in another area, equipment for more physical play—a small air hockey table and a boxing punch-ball; and in another, the divided computer centers for gaming and work, with an Xbox and—placed

diametrically opposite it—a PC. This distinction between work and pleasure was repeated in a number of the boys' bedrooms: a computer is for work, but the Xbox or PS3 and monitor are for fun.

However, Shane barely used his PC. He was unable to show us any software he used beyond a browser, and (with one exception) in effect used the computer almost exclusively for YouTube, web browsing—mainly shopping—and Facebook and only occasionally for doing research for school work, although the latter was constantly cited to justify and explain using computers in the home. There were no technological extensions (books, etc.) in this house, and no discussions about participation in other focused activities; the only practices in Shane's home that were counted as learning—in that they involved discipline, progression, and a theory of development—were sports related. Shane took his soccer seriously; he was a member of the school club and also played with his friends in a semiorganized fashion during vacation. However, it was very difficult to sustain a conversation with Shane about soccer as a serious endeavor which he was knowledgeable and passionate about, primarily because he was not used to conceptualizing it in this way.

Shane did use his computer to find out information and strategy to support the games he played on the X-box. There is considerable educational research exploring gaming as learning in the home, of which the best known is *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* (Gee, 2004). Shane was a keen gamer, although as for many of the other boys in this class, gaming primarily offered him an opportunity to stay in touch socially with his friends. This is perhaps especially important in an era of enforced anxiety about freedom to roam outdoors. For Shane, learning to play games and to progress within them was absolutely limited by what he needed to know to be able to compete with his friends when they played the popular Call of Duty and FIFA games. As was the case in the discussions about soccer, Shane didn't possess a vocabulary or a language to talk about strategies he might deploy to improve his game performance, and he certainly didn't take an interest in any metatextual practices—like reading magazines or looking up game cheats—beyond those which might be necessary for him to participate at the same level as his friends. For him, gaming was very much a means to a social end, and all learning involved in developing his skills was defined in terms of performativity—that is, what he needed to be able to do to be able to beat his friends. While, as we will see below, some of the other young people were interested in more open-ended gameplay and developing knowledge about games and more complex metagame strategies, Shane's game-based theories of learning were bound up solely in can-do attainment. Ironically, I might suggest, this echoes the emphasis on performance and outcome he might have found at school.

Class and Confidence

I have suggested so far that in some ways, learning in the home cannot escape some of the forms and genres that it takes at school. Although Yusuf and Shane's cases exemplify different kinds of

continuity with school definitions of learning, both boys seemed to find it difficult to escape that paradigm. In the more middle-class households, however, some families had moved beyond the simple provision of technology as a proxy for learning and showed ways that they contextualized school-based study within other competing frameworks, suggesting that for these families there was a discourse of learning either beyond or alongside the school.

Dominic and Sara both came from affluent middle-class homes with parents in high-status professional occupations. Sara's mother's family had migrated from India, and both young people lived within a quarter of a mile of each other in large homes where each child had a private bedroom. Both Dominic and Sara enjoyed school and were doing very well academically. They both, in different ways, participated in a wide range of extracurricular and out-of-school activities. Dominic was a serious athlete and a member of both the local cricket and soccer clubs as well as of the school teams. Sara was doing an additional qualification in astronomy and was involved in Shakespeare workshops arranged by the school[4]. They both exemplified the kind of busy lifestyle with scheduled leisure time activities that Lareau describes as "concerted cultivation" (2003).

However, Lareau's analysis of what almost amounts to a form of investment by parents as a form of human capital may not be sufficiently sensitive to the ambiguities and tensions in these childhoods. Unlike Yusuf, both of these young people were given considerable freedom in how they chose to spend their time, and both sets of parents encouraged and supported a wide range of activities. These were not undertaken simply to contribute to the development of a future CV; involvement in them clearly stemmed from deeply held beliefs about the ways that engaging in other forms of learning, alongside that of school, were deemed to be important. Indeed, overemphasizing academic performance was considered in some senses undesirable.

Dominic is the middle child of three brothers, but despite the fact that his was an affluent home—and that the father worked in IT for a bank—the boys and their mother shared two computers between them as a deliberate strategy to encourage sharing, to regulate potentially antisocial behavior, and to mitigate against obsessive solitary game-playing. In fact, as we can see in Fig X.4 below, Dominic's bedroom was unique in our study in that he did not have any kind of screen in an office-like study space.

[4] At 16 on completion of statutory education, students sit examinations in England called GCSE's. These examinations are offered in subject areas, English, Maths, Geography etc etc. Typically students will sit around eight subjects but able students may sit additional subjects earlier taking up to 12 exams in total.

Fig X.4

While Dominic did have access to an iPod touch, the family was very determined keep the boys from engaging in private screen-based activities in their bedrooms. The family did have an Xbox in a dedicated playroom for the boys, who therefore had access to virtual and online lives; however, studying in this home was organized to support directed purposive work with very clear boundaries. Dominic used the laptop in his room to complete assignments, but it didn't "live" there. The technologies in this house were not simplistically and directly equated with what it means to learn, and indeed Dominic's progress in his performance in sports was considered as important as his progress as in academic study. He was encouraged to take sporting activity as seriously as anything else. Shane played as much soccer as Dominic, but Dominic took preparation for games, commitment on the field, and collegial relationships with his friends on the team far more seriously as something at which he could always improve and develop. Indeed, Dominic's club soccer coach had made him player of the year because of the way that Dominic concentrated during the game and was consistently serious in considering strategy and talking to, encouraging, or leading his team-mates, as well as in paying attention to the work rate of the whole team.

In a similar fashion, Sara was encouraged by her family to take her hobbies seriously. When we first visited, she was making a whole series of Play-Doh sculptures, and she brought to whatever activity she was engaged in the same level of earnestness and commitment that she brought to her academic studies. While the family was obviously aware of the difference between earning a qualification in astronomy and making Play-Doh figures, it was noticeable how Sara approached everything with a similar intentness. In her home, there was an emphasis on achievement and on developing skills across all domains.

I would not suggest that either Dominic or Sara's family did not take school seriously, but they both clearly had the confidence to see learning at school in concert with achievements elsewhere, and they were prepared to support their children's growth and development across all domains, possibly—although we never asked this question—because they realized that there is a transferable ability to learn across different contexts. To be sure, the idea of achievement and progression was equally important to them. However, it may be that the family discourse about learning took place at this metalevel, where doing your best, working hard, learning from your mistakes, working with others, and other more intangible character traits were rewarded and sustained by this range of family practices.

A Hierarchy of Learning Practices and Knowledge Domains

One of the features, then, of more privileged middle-class homes is that the members have a more general understanding of learning than a narrow instrumental view that only recognizes the outcomes that schools have come to measure so explicitly (Schwartz & Arena, 2013). Our observations of our final pair of young people, Adam and Giselle, begin to shed light on how participating in more marginalized but recognized communities of practice can constitute another perspective on learning in such middle-class households. Both of these young people came from relatively well-off homes, and both, as it happened, had one parent who had moved to England from another European country. Both sets of parents were highly educated.

Giselle was interested in a wide range of art-related practices. She drew, performed, and played music and had a sense of herself as an emerging artist who in some way would be able to develop a career in the arts. At home she played Minecraft on a server run by one of her cousins, and she also developed a Tumblr blog, among other things. Her parents encouraged both of these practices, and they discussed her progress in both domains with her and supported it. Besides encouraging her to practice for her music lessons—and transporting her to them and back—Giselle's mother, herself a trained artist, also worked with her daughter on her art. Giselle described to me how when they went on vacation, she and her brother used dedicated sketchbooks as part of the holiday ritual. Giselle's mother had also run a small after-school club for art when Giselle was younger. Thus, professional practices—such as using the sketchbook and criticizing and developing art together or talking about and sharing photography—were normalized within day-to-day family activities. In addition, the structure of such activities framed the development of less conventional pursuits like Tumblr and Minecraft.

Giselle's father, who did not play Minecraft himself, knew that Giselle and her younger brother were very active on the cousin's server and that Giselle also played a dominant role in supporting and advising new players and legislating about behavior and developments in the fictional universe on the server. Neither parent directly supervised Giselle's online play, although there was a certain publicness to it, in that she used her laptop in a corner of the living room, and of course her parents knew the cousin. Her father was extremely interested in talking to us about her play on

Minecraft and, without knowing about any research about gaming and education, clearly saw the activity as incorporating a range of learning processes. Unprompted, he spoke to us about how the play developed technological fluency and also about learning to behave in a virtual social world. Giselle and he talked about some of the game's design issues, such as developing customized skins for building textures. He clearly treated her participation with a certain equality and seriousness, recognizing that it involved a degree o responsibility on her part. He had no qualms about supporting her in this fashion in engaging in Minecraft.

As our year with this class progressed, Giselle actually began to lose her interest in Minecraft as she developed other social foci. She devoted a fair amount of energy to her Tumblr blog which, at that time, was predominantly driven by concern with a developing identity—expressing and sharing feelings—but which was als a way of developing her aesthetic sensibility, in that many of the images she collected were of interest to her from a specifically artistic point of view. That was how she explained why or how she chose the images for her blog. Again, her interest in Tumblr was intense for a few months, and then it too declined. In the context of this paper, I want to suggest two important features about Giselle's participation in Minecraft and Tumblr that relate to her family's conceptualization of learning. First of all, the family was agnostic about what constitutes a learning domain and was therefore quite happy to respect her participation in Minecraft as what we might term a "community of practice" (Lave and Wenger 1991) in ways that clearly identified that participation as a form of learning progression with serious and valuable but intangible outcomes. Second, she had learned to frame her activity on Tumblr as in some ways an extension and development of her other embedded artistic practices. In that sense, this hobby contained a series of types of learning that were quite explicitly related to other more formal outcomes and that drew on a wider set of formal discourses, in this case about aesthetics and taste.

By contrast, when we first met Adam, he was very keen on constructing himself as a serious games player. Unlike Shane, Adam clearly engaged with the challenge of gaming and the world of the games themselves with a high degree of affective investment; it seemed as if gaming was the most important thing in his life. Indeed, his mother certainly was very anxious about the amount of time he spent playing games and had in her own mind positioned gaming and schooling as in some ways oppositional domains within family life. From her point of view, Adam was enthusiastic, motivated, and obsessively interested in gaming, and, in contrast, uninterested and demotivated with respect to schooling. The games themselves were a source considerable family conflict, as Adam's parents found his interest in militarized shoot 'em ups problematic, and his mother talked to us about her concerns about him appearing to derive sadistic pleasure from inflicting pain and the enjoyment he seemed to take from fictional killing. Adam himself was very clear to us about his interpretation of the meaning of these kinds of games (in particular, Call of Duty). He was frustrated that his parents did not allow him to buy games that had been certified for people older than himself; indeed, he revealed a range of strategies that he deployed to get hold of such games.

He clearly found game-playing absorbing and challenging in ways that he and his family explicitly counterpoised with his experiences of school.

This is not to say that his family had conceptualized game-playing as educational in any way, although they were familiar with some of the broader public arguments about such claims, derived from the scholarship referred to above. Rather, they contrasted Adam's enthusiasm, commitment, emotional investment, interest, and focus with regard to game-playing with the opposite behavioral traits that he exhibited with regard to schooling. Unlike Shane's family and the families who had set up work/play bedrooms, Adam's family characterized this opposition, in some ways, as a conflict between modes of engagement.

It was certainly true that Adam's game-playing was qualitatively different from that of the other young people we interviewed, with the exception of Giselle's engagement with Minecraft. Adam had access to PC gaming as well as an Xbox and was as interested in more exploratory, open-ended games—like Skyrim and a skating game that allowed him to experiment with moves and sequences and to be led by the qualities of the game in a less directed fashion—as he was in more scripted games. The first time we visited Adam's home, he was less concerned with the kind of social interactions that we observed in relationship to Shane and more focused on mastering the game, rather than simply being measured by leveling or other forms of outcomes-defined metrics. He showed us a number of surrounding texts from magazines, websites, and other sources that he explored in relationship to gaming. I am suggesting here that for a variety of reasons, both negative and positive, Adam and his family had in some ways the confidence to define his interest in gameplay as a form of learning—one that, furthermore, stood in opposition to what school might offer. Yet this was a contradictory and fraught position. Did he and his family use the idea of learning in gaming as a way of justifying and giving status to what in other terms was characterized as a form of troubling and delinquent behavior? Structuring gaming as an oppositional domain to schooling at least implicitly bestowed some of the status of schooling onto Adam's achievements in the virtual world. Or do we interpret the fact that he characterized game-playing as possessing deep values that we associate with learning as a resistant insight that he generated himself as a way of marking off his adolescent identity from the childhood narrative beloved by his parents? We cannot know the answers to these kinds of questions, but the interesting thing in the context of this paper is how game-playing had become imbued with the qualities of an educational discourse, albeit one with negative connotations.

When we finally visited him later in the year, Adam had moved away from this position and was eager to stress how game-playing had become a more neutral, disinterested domain that allowed him to connect with his friends. He told us that he could often maintain parallel conversations and interactions online at the same time as playing either in competition with or alongside his friends. He seemed to have reached some sort of rapprochement with his family about game-playing, and they now had less concern around questions of violence and killing. In this interview, he strongly

resisted the idea that he was a serious gamer and was anxious to characterize his gaming as a form of sociality. Although he was still happy to show off his prowess, his interest had drifted away from open-ended exploration toward a more managed relationship with gaming as a leisure pursuit. In some ways, then, I would speculate that gaming was beginning to lose its status as a learning domain and that Adam had additionally become far more involved in his schoolwork; in particular, he took a German public examination early, as he was bilingual. It is difficult to say quite how we can configure and calibrate the interrelationship of reward and interest in formal schooling alongside the negotiation positions in the family and how much informal domains like game-playing act as the terrain for these kinds of conflicts.

However, prowess and interest in nonacademic domains were characterized by both Giselle and Adam and their families in ways that clearly embedded the young people's activities as part of a larger and longer-term trajectory of the development of what has been characterized as a learning identity (Wortham, 2005). In these homes, the child's interest and engagement was immediately framed by such a discourse, and although the story of Giselle and Adam's development shows both incorporation and conflict, respectively, what unites them is a shared family concern with the nature of learning itself. Both homes had very different attitudes about the value of constructing learning in these nonformal domains—almost with their own separate hierarchies—but the two families shared a common frame.

Conclusion

In some ways, I am tempted to suggest that the definition of learning is a bit like those elusive definitions of art—subject to opinion, personal preference, tradition, and ideology. Claiming learning in the home *as* learning almost always seems like a plausible strategy, but only if there can be consensus and mutually understood points of reference. The tensions over the value and meaning of computer games illustrate this both positively and negatively. The work that Shane was putting into developing his social relationships remained present but almost unarticulated, except to us. In Giselle's household, learning domains were extended to include art and Minecraft, while in Adam's, nonacademic activities were much more problematically acknowledged as learning. The contrast between dominant versions of schooling and learning for Yusuf, on the one hand, and for Dominic or Sara, on the other, show that any simple idea about learning in the home needs to be considered from a sociological perspective.

Building on Stevens et al.'s (2008) work, discussed in the opening of this paper, I have argued that we can break down learning experiences across what has too often been seen as the singular entity of "the home" into three dimensions. First, there is the tacit agreement among family members about what is meant by learning; second, there are the activities associated with such a definition in terms of disciplines or habits; and third, there is the role of media technology as medium, surrogate, or proxy for the learning itself. I have suggested that for any one child, these frames determine the meaning of learning in an ever-changing process of definition and redefinition.

As we explored how change over the year-long course of our research constructed particular kinds of opportunities and directions which were either taken up or rejected by, for example, Adam or Giselle, we could see this struggle for meaning within the trajectory of one young person over a period of time. The learning we observed in these homes is clearly not a constant entity. This too should counsel us against any simplistic notion of what it means to talk about learning in the home.

Finally, it is worthwhile considering, as Wegerif has recently suggested, that learning is only really enabled, constituted, produced, or made visible—there is no simple verb to choose here—through dialogue (2012). In this respect, as we probed into the lives of these young people, made enquiries about what they took for granted, and asked them and their families about both their everyday and long-term aspirations, the research process itself had to play a key role in facilitating a reflection about the very nature of learning. Adam especially—but probably all of these young people in different ways—found our interventions helpful in constructing gaming as a more serious form of endeavor than his family discourse conventionally allowed. In other words, the very act of talking about—and certainly of researching—learning in the home gives it a validity that it does not normally possess. It grants it status and constitutes it as a phenomenon. The more we are interested in expanding our understanding of learning in the home, the more we look for it, the more we bring it into being.

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Global Childhoods, Asian Lifeworlds: After School Time in Hong Kong

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Introduction

In this paper, we explore the after-school lives of six-year-old children in Hong Kong, as reported by their parents in response to survey questions. Popular discourse presents a view of Asian students as diligent and hardworking, living lives that are predominantly characterized by studying, both in school and out. Yet we were aware that while there are many studies about this that focus on Asian minorities living in western countries, there is limited empirical data about Asian students living in Asian countries. Moreover, those findings are mainly about upper elementary and high school students. Accordingly, in order to broaden the body of inquiring concerning whether Asian students do in fact spend much of their time studying and little engaged in leisure activities, we sought to collect empirical data regarding how Primary 1[1] (six-year-old) students in Hong Kong spend their out-of-school time. Increasingly, there is a recognition that Asian students perform well on high-stakes international tests, and it is widely held that this is because they allocate so much time to intensive academic study in contrast to their western counterparts, both in and out of school. Tutoring in test-taking is a multimillion dollar industry. We wanted to know if this is a widespread phenomenon. In this paper we show that the out-of-school lives of the students who were the subject of our survey include many different activities. While the six-year-olds in our study do homework after school, they also watch TV, participate in activities with computers and other new technologies, and engage in indoor and outdoor play.

As educators and parents, we want to ensure that children make the best use of their time, so we put a lot of ours into planning and preparing activities for them to take part in, both in and out of school. One of the consequences of this is that children living in the 21st century don't have much free-choice time (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001). Instead, their lives are structured in very specific ways that have been designed by adults. This seems to be particularly true for Asian children, whose excellence in performance in international tests is often attributed to their strong work ethic as well as to their capacity for studying for many hours, both in and out of school. For example, one study by Ramey in the United States, reported by *Science Daily* ("Is There a 'Tiger Mother' Effect?," 2011), found that Asian American high school students spent significantly more time studying and doing homework (on average, 13 hours) than any other ethnic or racial group. (European American students, for example, were found to spend on average 5.5 hours a week doing out-of-school academic work.) Similarly, in Newman, Bidjerano, and Ozfogru's (2007) comparative analysis of fourth-grade children in the United States, Bulgaria, and Taiwan, the

[1] Primary 1 in the Hong Kong education system is equivalent to first grade in the United States.

Taiwanese students reported spending more time in both academic and extracurricular activities than the students from both the other countries.

We frequently talk about children's lives in terms of investments of time, money, and emotional capital, and we generally expect a payoff in benefits to justify the amount of expenditure provided. Accordingly, the amount of time spent in a particular activity and in being exposed to various experiences often serves as the basis for predictions about learned behaviors that are acquired as a consequence. However, Hofferth and Sandberg (2001) contend that while we "may know the demographic and economic characteristics of children's families and the communities where they live and attend school, we rarely know how individual children spend their time" (p. 295).

Children in the West—especially those in families where both parents work outside the home—often spend time in after-school or child-care centers. In Asian countries, however, for a range of reasons that include the availability of relatively affordable foreign-born domestic helpers, after-school programs and programs during school breaks are not prevalent. In addition, the involvement of grandparents in child rearing is more widely and culturally accepted in Asian countries than in the West. The main organized out-of-school activities in Asian countries are sports and academic tutoring.

Thus, we know that children in different countries spend varying amounts of times in a range of pursuits (Chen & Stevenson, 1995; Larson & Verma, 1999). We also know that within countries, choices of activities vary based on gender and on parents' attitudes, such as their views with regard to encouraging self-regulation and autonomy (Chao, 1994; Chao & Tseng, 2002). Larson and Verma further suggest that the various contexts in which children spend their time can be regarded as "experiential niches," characterized by specific emotional and motivational experiences that follow specific rules and scripts and that have different goals. Larson and Verma equate time spent in each experiential niche with the acquisition of various behavioral outcomes. Such niches range from engaging in self-selected activities that promote self-regulation and autonomy to working in school with adults, which supports skill building and knowledge acquisition.

While practical issues (such as transportation and cost) may determine how a child spends time outside of school, Newman et al. (2007) suggest that "all societies attempt to shape childrearing to foster particular achievements and the social values of the culture" (p. 433). Certainly, there seems to be a major difference between parenting practices in the East and in the West; the former are considered more collectivist cultures, while the latter are regarded as more individualistic. Newman et al. assert that in collectivist cultures "childrearing will emphasize conformity to the group practices and values of the adult establishment so that children learn their roles and skills that are important to that group; parents will expect more obedience and attention to adult guidance" (p. 433). In contrast, in individualistic cultures, autonomy, independence, and self-regulation are valued. This resonates with our own work (Yelland, Muspratt, Chan, & Gilbert, 2012), which indicates that 10-year-old children in Hong Kong have very little discretionary time

and minimal opportunities to play with friends in activities of their own choosing. Yelland (in press) also found that 10-year-olds In Hong Kong usually go home after school and only watch television or engage in leisure activities after they have completed all their homework.

In addition, we found that the majority of children in our previous study shared their bedroom with siblings, and that it was not a common practice to play, watch TV, or use electronic devices there (Yelland et al., 2012). Computers and similar items were generally located in shared living spaces. Thus, Hong Kong students, who live in a small, densely populated city of nearly 7.2 million (Government of Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2012b) do not have access to much personal space. This presents a stark contrast to the lives of students in the United States (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010) or in the United Kingdom (Livingstone, Haddon, Gorzig, & Olafsson, 2011), who spend significant amounts of time playing with technological devices in their bedrooms.

The Context: The Millennial Kids Learning Study

This paper reports on data from a survey of parents of Primary 1 (six- year-old) children. It forms part of the data from a larger study, Millennial Kids Learning (MKL), conducted in Hong Kong over a period of two years. The MKL study sought to gather empirical information about the lives of three-, six-, and 10-year-olds. A search of the research literature had revealed that such data was largely absent.

The theoretical framework for the MKL project was derived from Bourdieu's (1984, 1993) notion of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1984, 1993) postulated that schools play a critical and increasingly pervasive role in perpetuating the advantage gained from possessing specific knowledge and skills that are valued by society across generations. Accordingly, children who have such knowledge and skills before they begin school are in a favorable position, which they maintain as those literacies and proficiencies are continually reinforced throughout the children's educational careers. Yet we know little about how this process works in Asia, or in particular, in Hong Kong.

In order to begin the investigation, we created a survey that contained direct (factual) and indirect (attitudinal) measures (Sapsford, 1999). We sought to discover how the six-year-old children of the parents we surveyed spent their time after school, on both weekdays and weekends; what new technological devices they owned individually or were owned by their families; what traditional (nontechnology-based) activities the children engaged in and what traditional items they used (we were interested in this because the use of new technologies is so widespread in the 21st century); and where in the home those electronic devices and traditional games and toys were located and used. We were interested in how this data reflected the priorities and actions of this cohort, so that we might later link that Information to classroom observations in order to understand how those findings related to the students' school experiences. We knew that because six-year-olds do not yet have a fluent grasp of time, it would have been difficult to obtain accurate data from the

students themselves. We therefore asked their parents to quantify the time the children spent on various activities, which were presented on the survey in broad groupings.

As previously stated, Hong Kong students are generally seen as being very industrious and performing well on tests (Postiglione & Tan, 2007a; Tu, 1996). It is often thought that they spend most of their time in serious study dedicated to rote learning of content and that their schooling is very traditional, with an emphasis on performing mechanistic tasks (Postiglione & Tan, 2007b). At the same time, media in Hong Kong and mainland China report that due to exposure to contemporary western music, films, and video games, and because of the ubiquity of McDonalds, Hong Kong and Chinese teenagers are becoming increasingly westernized, including in their taste in clothes (Associated Press, 2004; Tang, 2012).

So while these stereotypical views of the industrious Hong Kong or Asian student that Tu (1996) mentions persist, we wanted to determine whether they were grounded in reality and whether they applied equally to all children, including those in under researched low socioeconomic schools. Thus, the following questions guided the MKL project:

1. How do students in Hong Kong kindergartens and primary schools spend their time outside of school?
2. In this cohort, how widespread are educational practices associated with private tutoring for this age group?
3. Do students in low socioeconomic neighborhoods have home tutors?
4. What types of technologies do students have in their homes, and how are those technologies used?
5. What are the students' views about various aspects of their lives and schooling?

This paper deals primarily with questions 1 and 4, but we were also eager to find out how many of the children attended private tutoring centers (question 2) and how many had home tutors (question 3) because those factors were posited as having a major impact on the ways in which the students spent their time outside of school.

A total of 102 parents of Primary 1 students completed the survey, which was provided both online and in paper form. The response rate was 87% (102/117 parents)

Methods of Analysis

The survey contained a series of questions in which the parents were asked "how often" or "for how long" their six-year-olds were engaged in particular activities, as well as questions concerning how many toys and electronic devices those children had and where in the home those items were located. We present summaries of the parents' responses in a graphic format and discuss them in the next section. We also analyzed the data with regard to whether boys spent more (or less) time

engaged in a given activity than girls did and, whether the children spent more (or less) time engaged in a given activity on weekends than on weekdays.

Results

Background information: The families

Nearly all the parents (97 of 102) lived in the Kwai Tsing district, an area bordering the Tsuen Wan district where the school was located. Seventy-one percent (70 of 102) of the surveys were completed by the mother of the child. Most of the parents were low-income earners. Approximately 44% reported a combined household income of less than 10,000 Hong Kong dollars per month (approximately 1,300 US dollars). Forty-one percent reported a monthly income of between 10,000 and 20,000 Hong Kong dollars. Only 15 parents reported having a combined household income of more than 20,000 Hong Kong dollars per month, and only three parents reported combined monthly household incomes of more than 40,000 Hong Kong dollars. Thus, 85% of the cohort had earnings below 20,200 Hong Kong dollars, the median monthly combined household income (Government of Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2012a) and could accordingly be regarded as low-income families.

Ninety-six percent of those who responded to the survey had attended school through age 15, completing Form 5, as had 97% of their spouses. Forty-nine percent of those who completed the survey listed their occupation as "housewife," and the next-largest group (11%) listed their occupation as "clerical." Of the 77 people who answered the question concerning their spouse's occupation, 18% listed it as "driver," 16% listed it as "housewife," 10% listed it as "salesperson," and the remaining 56% listed it as one of a range of blue-collar and industrial or transportation-related jobs. Only 13% of the 77 who responded here, indicated they hired domestic help.

How much time did the children spend engaged in various activities?

The parents were presented with a list of activities and were asked how long their child was engaged in each of them after school on weekdays and on weekends. Because there was some missing data among the 102 responses, the number of valid responses ranged between 90 and 100 regarding activities engaged in on weekdays and between 90 and 98 for those engaged in on weekends.

Figure 1 shows a summary of the parents' responses in the form of stacked bar charts. To read the graph, consider, as an example, the activity at the bottom of Figure 1 ("Talk, share with parents on nonacademic matters") in the weekday column. The length of the bar with the darkest shading represents the number of parents (in this case, 4) who reported that their child spent more than four hours per day engaged in that activity, while the length of the second-darkest bar represents the number of parents (31) who responded that their child spent between one and four hours engaged in it daily. The two bars are stacked end on end; combined, they represent 35 parents. The length of the third-darkest bar represents the number of parents (55) who reported that their child

spent less than one hour a day engaged in talking and sharing with them about nonacademic matters. Finally, the length of the lightest bar represents the number of parents (seven), who responded that their child spent no time on the activity. The horizontal axis gives the percentage values of parents' responses.

The activities are arranged down the page in increasing order of the number of parents who reported that their child was engaged in the activity. The activities shown at the top of the page are accordingly those that many children engaged in only infrequently or not at all; most of those activities—which include some done with an adult helper (being read to, doing homework, and discussing reading)—are school-related. In contrast, many children engaged for longer periods of time in the activities shown at the bottom of the page, which include more leisure and recreational pursuits as well as activities that involved the parent in both school-related work and nonacademic matters.

Parents reported that their Primary 1 children spent roughly the same amount of time doing homework on the weekend as on a weekday, and many parents reported that their child used a computer to do homework on both weekdays (63%) and weekends (53%). Similarly, the majority of parents responded that their child did school-related work with them on both weekdays (87%) and weekends (80%), and the vast majority of parents responded that their child talked and shared with them about nonacademic matters on both weekdays (93%) and weekends (92%). In addition, many parents reported that their child read short stories and novels on both weekdays (76%) and weekends (72%) and read comics on both weekdays (65%) and weekends (63%) as well. However, fewer parents responded that their child read magazines, either on weekdays (32%) or weekends (34%).

In general, the patterns of responses for weekdays and weekends are similar, although there are some exceptions. According to the parents, children spent more time on the weekend than on weekdays engaged in a range of leisure activities: visiting friends and relatives, participating in various indoor and outdoor games and sporting activities, and shopping. In addition, as would be expected, children tended to spend more time travelling to and from school on weekdays than on the weekend. However, since some school events take place on the weekend, children spent time travelling to and from school then as well. Finally, the parents reported that both on weekdays and on the weekend, boys and girls spent approximately the same amount of time engaged in a given activity.

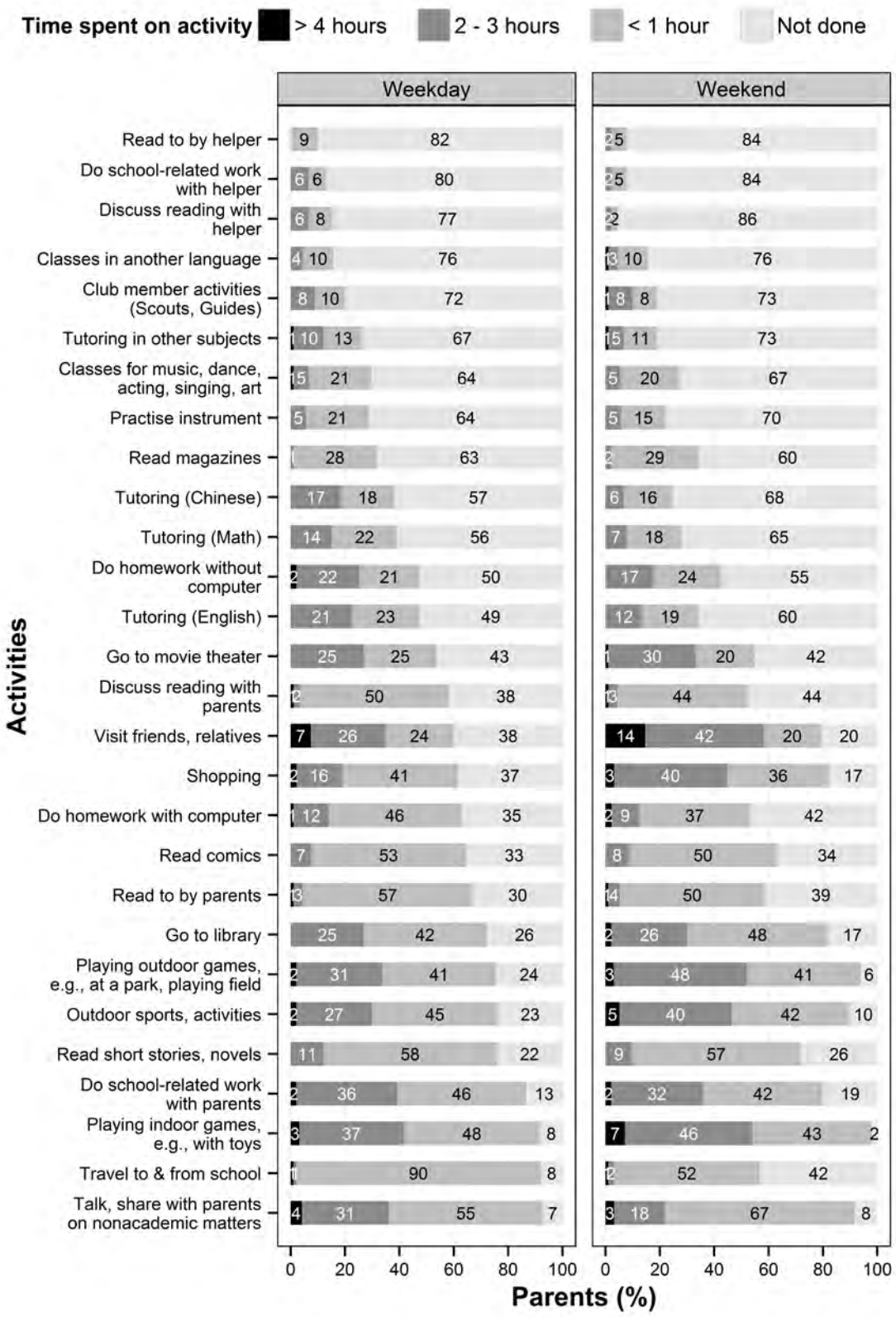

Figure 1: Parents' reporting of time their child spend on activities outside of school on weekdays and on the weekend.

How much time did children spend using various technologies outside of school?

Parents were asked about the amount of time the children spent engaged in 10 technology-related activities, which included using online, digital, and mobile devices as well as watching television. The results are shown In Figure 2. The activities are arranged down the page in increasing order of the number of parents who reported that their child was engaged in the activity. Because there was some missing data among the responses, the number of valid responses ranged between 90 and 101. All but one of the parents reported that their child watched television. Close to 75% of the parents reported that their child used a computer for either school-related work or for playing games or visiting websites for enjoyment, but only 20% responded that their child used a computer to communicate online with friends. Approximately 33% of the parents reported that their child used a mobile phone to communicate with others, but substantially fewer responded that their child used a mobile phone for connecting to the internet (5%) or taking and sending photos (17%). Very few parents reported that their child spent more than four hours on any of the activities. Fifteen responded that their child watched television for more than four hours a day, and four parents reported that their child used computers for playing games and using the internet for more than four hours a day. Parents reported that boys and girls spent approximately the same amount of time using a given technology.

What digital technologies, toys, and related items did the children have access to in their homes, and where were those items located?

In order to find out in greater detail how the children were spending their out-of-school time, we asked the parents which digital technologies and traditional play and leisure items their child had access to at home. We were also interested in where those items were located.

Hong Kong apartments are much smaller than those in many western countries, and shared spaces are also much more common in Hong Kong. Most children do not have their own bedroom. In fact, secondary school students frequently study at the library because they are unable to concentrate on their schoolwork at home. They can be seen standing in long lines every day, waiting for spaces in the individual carrels. We accordingly thought that we would find that primary-school-aged children studied and did their homework—both with and without using new technologies—in the living area of their home since there is not enough space in their bedroom for such activities

The new technologies that parents reported that their child had access to are similar to those used by children in the West. However, the Hong Kong data reveals that those devices are usually shared with siblings and kept in communal spaces, rather than in the children's bedrooms. Figure 3 shows a summary of the responses to a set of questions concerning access to digital devices and toys, including information about where the items are located in the home. The items are arranged down the page in increasing order of the number of parents who responded that their child had access to the item. Because there was some missing data among the responses, the number of valid responses ranged between 88 and 99.

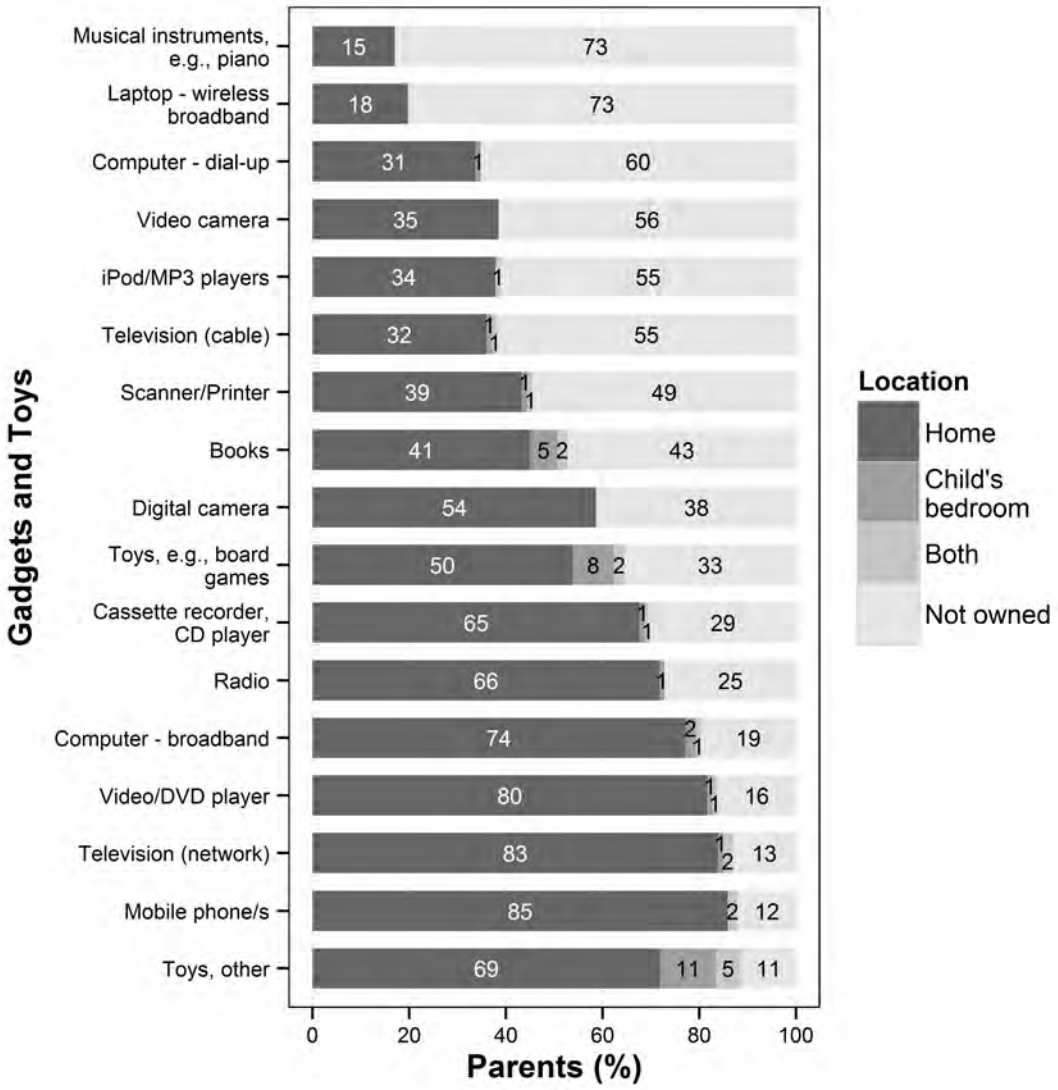

Figure 3: Parents' reporting of children's access to toys, electronic devices, and other leisure-use items in the home and the location of those items.

Figure 3 shows that overall, the items were either available in shared spaces in the home or not owned at all. Very few parents reported that the items were available either only in the child's bedroom or both in the child's bedroom and in other parts of the home. However, for a small number of households, parents responded that some belongings that children had access to—such as toys, books, mobile phones, and iPods—were located in children's bedrooms. Most of the families had mobile phones (90%) and televisions with free network channels (87%), but only 38% had cable television. Additionally, many had DVD players (84%), radios (73%), and CD players (70%). Eighty percent had a computer with a broadband connection, while fewer had computers with a dial-up connection (35%) or owned laptops (20%). There were no significant differences between boys' and girls' ownership of or accessibility to these items.

How many toys, items of brand-name clothing, and electronic devices did the children own?

We wanted to know what possessions were available to the children during their out-of-school time. The parents were accordingly asked how many toys, games, items of brand-name clothing, and electronic devices their child owned. We were interested in, not only the types of games but also in brand name clothing as Chinese culture assigns prestige to the ownership of luxury items as an indicator of success. We presented a broad response scale; the parents could report that their child owned ten or more, fewer than ten, or none of each item. Figure 4 shows a list of the

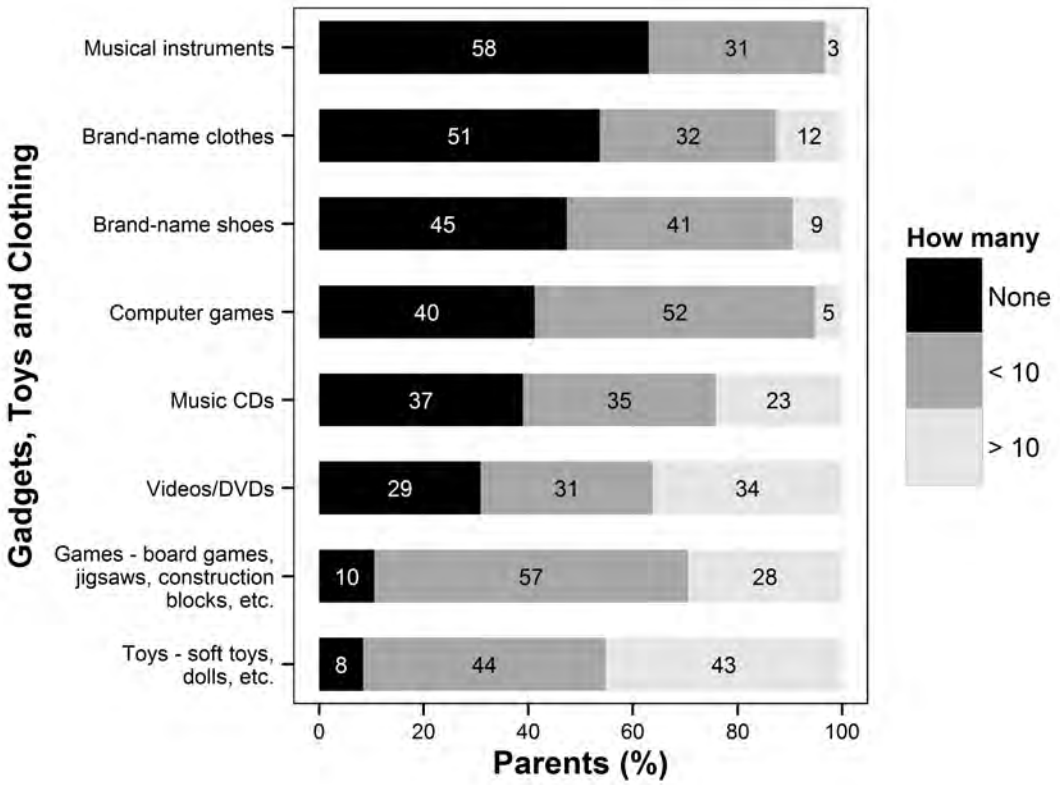

Figure 4: Parents' reporting of the number of toys, games, electronic devices, other leisure-use items, and articles of brand-name clothing their child has.

items and a summary of responses. The items are arranged down the page in increasing order of the number of parents who responded that their child had access to the item. Because there was some missing data among the responses, the valid responses therefore ranged between 92 and 97.

Ninety-two percent of parents reported that their child owned traditional toys, and 89% responded that their child owned traditional games. Somewhat fewer reported that their child owned digital devices (59% responded that their child owned computer games, 69% that they owned videos or DVDs, and 61% that they owned music CDs). Even fewer reported that their child owned musical instruments (37%), brand-name clothing (54%), or brand-name shoes (47%). There was no significant difference between girls' and boys' possession of these items.

Conclusions

The parents' responses to the survey provide a snapshot of the after-school lives of six-year-olds in Hong Kong. Overall, the responses show that the children did not spend great amounts of time (i.e., more than four hours) daily on any one activity, but rather engaged in a range of activities both on the weekend and after school on weekdays.

Thus, the commonly held view that Asian students spend most of their time doing schoolwork and little time engaged in leisure activities is not borne out by the survey results. In fact, the data shows that the children spent most of their out-of-school time shopping, visiting friends and relatives, engaging in club activities or organized sports, and playing both indoors and outdoors. Doing homework fell approximately in the middle of the 28 activities on the survey in terms of time spent engaged in each, and after homework came a range of school work related tasks.

We also found that the children in our study did not spend much time using new technologies, and did so mostly for homework-related tasks. In addition, computers and televisions were very rarely located in children's bedrooms or owned by children individually; such items instead belonged to the family and were shared. In contrast, more traditional toys and games were more often located or stored in children's bedrooms. Thus, it would seem that while the students used technology, it did not dominate their lives.

This initial exploration of the after-school lives of Hong Kong children has raised many questions, including:

- When do Hong Kong children have time to play with friends, either at home or elsewhere?
- Are their patterns of play with friends spontaneous, or does play occur in the context of organized activities, such as sports, art classes, or dance or music lessons?
- How do the children describe their lives outside of school?
- What type of organized after-school activities are provided in Hong Kong, if any, and how much do children participate in them?
- Do programs for children during school breaks exist? If not, how do children spend their vacation time?

It would be interesting to conduct the survey with parents from a higher socioeconomic group, who might hire nannies or tutors for their children. Such a survey would make it possible to ascertain whether the empirical data collected and analyzed here is unique to low socioeconomic families.

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Becoming-Belieber: Girls' Passionate Encounters with Bieber Culture

Kortney Sherbine

On sidewalks, in the backseats of cars, and behind bedroom doors, on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and many other after-school and unsanctioned spaces of girlhood, young girls across the world are in the throes of a love affair. Some might say that the object of their affection is Justin Bieber, a Canadian pop sensation whose music emerged on the scene in 2009. This affection for Bieber, or "The Biebs" as he is sometimes called, manifests itself in a variety of ways. "I just love pretty much everything about him. He's cute, he's awesome, and I just love him so much," exclaims one girl, approximately eight years old, who waits outside a concert venue in Toronto, clutching a handmade sign that reads, *"I [heart] U, Justin: I'll Be Your 'Baby' 4-ever."*[1] At a different concert, thirteen-year-old Ali wears a purple tee shirt covered in intricate puff paint; she spent the week before writing her favorite Bieber song titles in bright neon colors on the front and back. "Being a Belieber is important," Ali tells me, "because there are people [like Bieber] who when you talk to them or listen to them, they just make you feel happy."

A constant Twitter stream displays messages of unity and love from fans who call themselves Beliebers. "Why am I Belieber? He never gives up on his fans. He always has faith in us. He believes in us and we believe in him. That's why," reads one tweet. "Thumbs up if you have ever cried for Justin or wish he'd just walk into your room and hold you," reads another. These Beliebers make and use materials and technologies—including signs, posters, clothing, smartphones, and social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram—to create ways in which they may passionately engage with the ideas and objects associated with Bieber culture. In this article, I draw on French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1987) notion of *becoming* to consider the ways in which these encounters with people, materials, and technologies are productive, creating space for Beliebers to come into relationship with one another and with popular culture in ways that are new and that I never could have anticipated during my more carefully organized and school-curriculum-driven interactions with girls during my six years as an elementary school teacher. Through my current research into young girls' after-school fanaticism, I have been able to come to know girls differently than I knew them in schools. I will argue that these after-school girls are engaged in passionate interactions that enable them to experiment with what it might mean to interrelate with other bodies, materials, and ideas to create new and exciting possibilities for themselves.

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[1] The displays of fanaticism described in this paper are depicted in the opening scenes of the documentary film, *Justin Bieber: Never Say Never*, which was released by Paramount Studios in 2011 or were observed while I was conducting ethnographic research at Justin Bieber concert venues in the fall of 2012.

The focus of this article is, for the most part, conceptual. Working with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) ideas allows me to rethink the ways in which young girls encounter and come into relationship with popular culture and with the materials related to Bieber culture in particular. As May (2005) suggests, a reconceptualization of these experiences allows us to "carry thought elsewhere," (p. 19), shifting away from hegemonic assumptions about young girls' relationships with popular culture and fanaticism. I also draw from my own research at two concert venues, where I engaged in participant observation and conducted informal interviews in the hours leading up to and during Bieber concerts that were part of his *Believe* world tour. Additionally, I reflect on tweets composed to and about Bieber that I have gathered as a part of a larger research project. This data certainly influences the ways in which I think about young girls' encounters with popular culture. However, my overarching goal is to employ Deleuze and Guattari's concepts to understand the possibilities created by young girls' encounters with Bieber culture in after-school spaces.

Young Girls as Cultural Consumers

As Baker (2004) suggests, "young girls' [cultural] practices are often trivialized in contemporary cultural criticism" (p. 75); fanaticism for, with, and around entertainers like Bieber is frequently mocked by the media and discredited in schools as being distracting or unimportant. The ways in which girls interact with popular music—particularly with the genre of boy bands—is rarely taken seriously and is frequently overlooked altogether, perhaps because so many of those interactions take place in girls' bedrooms as girls listen to music, dance around uninhibitedly, and gaze longingly at posters of their favorite recording artists (McRobbie, 2000). I can personally attest to this, as my own interactions with the popular boy band of the late 1980s, New Kids on the Block (NKOTB), consisted of rolling around in my NKOTB bed sheets and pretending to make out with NKOTB dolls as their music blared from my tape deck and rattled the windows of my bedroom.

This "bedroom culture" of girls' popular music culture may be evolving into something different, however—something more explicitly collaborative, participatory, and interactive (Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2007; Jenkins, 2006). With the emergence of social networking, twenty-four-hour celebrity news channels and Internet websites, access to popular entertainers has increased significantly in the recent past. Young people who tweet about or to Bieber know that there is a chance he might read the tweet and reply. Fans can comment on personal photographs that Bieber uploads to his Instagram account, and he frequently responds to questions in comment threads on Facebook. Thus, as new ways of accessing, interacting, and coming into relationship continue to emerge through digital technologies, the distance between the fans and those whom they adore seems to decrease (Ito, 2006; Jenkins, 2006).

Despite research that suggests the complexity of interactions between children and popular culture (Buckingham, 1993, 2011; Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994; Dyson, 1997, 2003a, 2003b; Jenkins, 2006; Tobin, 2000), there remains a tendency to consider young girls' fanaticism nothing

more than the consumption and reproduction of mass culture. For example, Orenstein (2011) wrote of her concern about young girls' sexualization and commodification at the hands of popular culture; she argued that children simply cannot resist the ubiquity of stereotype-reinforcing discourses in the media. Orenstein and others (Durham, 2009; Lamb & Brown, 2006; Levin & Kilbourne, 2008) are concerned that the marketing phenomenon of "children getting older younger" or "age compression" (O'Donnell, 2007) robs children of their innocence, forcing them to participate in a culture that too quickly pushes them toward adulthood.

Those who support these reductive notions of children's engagements with popular culture write primarily for parents of young girls and might consider that young girls' participation in Bieber culture positions children as "vulnerable victims" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 18) who have little sense of agency as they engage with the marketing of Bieber, his music, and merchandise such as singing toothbrushes, video games, apparel, dolls, iPod covers, and backpacks. This rhetoric of protection emerges as parents strive to maintain a belief in innocent childhood, separate from a culture perceived to be increasingly amoral (Buckingham, 2011; Sorin, 2005). Jenkins (2006) wrote, "The figure of the child consumer is framed and constructed in specific ways which thereby marginalize or prevent other ways of thinking about the issue" (p. 6). These constructions are often reductive and fail to attend to the complexity of young girls' relationships with Bieber fan culture. In describing how marketers respond to the demands of consumers, O'Donnell (2007) writes that tween girls are "driven by imitation…want more of everything…are environmentally aware…and like attention." O'Donnell's reduction of tween girls into these categories is unsettling. Applying Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of becoming allows a reconsideration of the simplified notion that consumption is all that is occurring when young girls interact with and in Bieber culture in such emotional ways.

The participatory nature of Bieber culture "blurs the distinction between production and consumption" (Ito, 2006, p. 50). The various ways in which young girls engage with Bieber fan culture are often unanticipated, experimental, playful, and ephemeral, making these after-school encounters unpredictable and productive. When we consider what girls create in these encounters with Bieber fan culture and the ways in which girls are becoming during these experiences—rather than thinking only about what Bieber culture does to girls—we see that there is production of new relationships, interactions, affects, emotions, and ideas.

Becoming in Encounters with Bieber Culture

Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of becoming is a concept that allows movement away from a transcendent, linear understanding of being and identity and embraces uncertainty and difference. Becoming also attends to the materiality of young girls' engagements with popular culture as the girl as subject becomes decentered, and everything—including the girl—that makes up those interactions (i.e., Bieber, his music, other fans, posters, apparel, concert venues, YouTube videos, etc.) comes into consideration in what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the assemblage. Simply

put, the assemblage is the coming together of heterogeneous elements such as bodies and materials. To understand young fans' becoming is to acknowledge and appreciate the fervent connections they have with the spaces and materials they encounter. Viewing the processes of young girls' interactions with Bieber fan culture as becoming creates space for resistance to the reductive and oversimplified notions of the child consumer as victim of popular culture. Rather, I can consider what new possibilities emerge for thinking about young girls' fanaticism if I conceptualize the girls and the materials in the assemblage—including (among many others) apparel, posters, smartphones, jewelry, and song lyrics—as becoming entangled in productive ways, interacting with one another and creating new potentials for engaging with and in the world.

Becoming deals with the immanent potential of life—"what a life can do and where a life might go" (Sotirin, 2011, p. 117)—and involves the processes of encounters with another. These are such passionate processes that Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest that our becoming is actually becoming that which we encounter—the potential that we have to become something different. For example, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, Ali is simultaneously becoming-puff-paint, becoming-purple-tee-shirt, becoming-concert-venue, becoming-Bieber's-music, and becoming-Belieber. These materials comprise the assemblages of which Ali is also a part, and each assemblage—created anew as new things enter it—makes Ali different than she was before, generating new possibilities, new energy, and new excitement. In these encounters, Ali-becoming-purple-tee-shirt standing outside a concert venue becomes identifiable as a part of a crowd through which energy and excitement flow as bodies come together to sing Bieber's songs, join in choruses of chants, tweet about their experiences, and anticipate what might happen next. In this sense, Ali-becoming-purple-tee-shirt affords a sense of belonging in a group of Beliebers, an opportunity to create and participate in a public display of affection and solidarity. In Ali's becomings, she is something different than a thirteen-year-old girl anticipating a Bieber concert. She is certainly that too, but she is also one who is engaged in relationships within that anticipation—relationships with other people and materials which make and remake who she is as a fan, an adolescent, a girl, and more. Viewing Ali's experiences in terms of becoming allows us to think beyond Ali simply as a consumer of popular culture to Ali as passionately engaged in the constant assembling of fluid relationships that affect and are affected by her desires, emotions, and ways of participating in Bieber fan culture.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) are careful to clarify that becoming "is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something…becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own. It does not reduce to, or lead back to 'appearing,' 'being,' 'equaling'" (p. 239). Accordingly, reducing young girls to mere imitators of popular culture (O'Donnell, 2007) misses the mark.

Becoming is not an isolated, individual state of being, but a constant, indeterminate process that takes place in "continuously changing relationships" (Olsson, 2009, p. 194) between young girls and the materials that surround them. The after-school spaces of Bieber fan culture, such as

concert venues and girls' bedrooms, afford opportunities for young girls to engage with what is valuable to them in order to make something new for themselves. As young girls encounter materials, other people, and the technological tools of social networking, they have opportunities to live differently in the world as they experiment with making, interacting, and accessing.

Understanding girls' relationships with popular culture in this way is no small thing for me as a classroom teacher, and now as a teacher educator. It leads me to refocus my attention both on who and what children are becoming both in and out of sanctioned classroom spaces as they engage with what is valuable to them and also on the ways in which adults might value what is important to children. To appreciate the becomings inherent in young girls' engagements with popular culture requires a shift from assumptions that childhood must look and be a certain thing and away from discourses that reduce children to vulnerable victims and toward an embrace of something much more undetermined and playful. Young girls are not simply used by materials associated with popular culture; rather, they come into relationship with these materials and in those relationships experiment with productive ways in which they might live.

Children encounter things that matter to them and have passionate relationships with people and materials in complex ways that generate energy, emotional attachment, a sense of belonging, and much else. If we embrace children's encounters and becomings with popular culture, sports teams, animals, and music (among many other things) in after-school spaces, we might also begin to value all that the children bring with them to the classroom and all that children contribute to the assemblages of which we are all a part, becoming together.

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A Girl and Her Room

Out-of-School Programs

Building After-School Islands of Expertise in "Wrestling Club"

Victor Sensenig

Young children often develop areas of deep and rich knowledge before they enter school or during their out-of-school time. Crowley and Jacobs (2002) call these areas "islands of expertise." These islands emerge over weeks or even years. They are bolstered by repeated, increasingly sophisticated conversations with adults and are integrated into multiple family activities, such as museum visits or targeted television viewing. According to Crowley and Jacobs, the development of expertise has several conditions: "repeated exposure to domain-specific declarative knowledge, repeated practice in interpreting new content, making inferences to connect new knowledge to existing knowledge, and repeated conversations with others who share or want to support the same interest" (p. 337).

The concept of islands of expertise suggests that informal social activities can make significant contributions to academic development. In their homes and neighborhoods, children can accumulate substantial knowledge about academic disciplines. In particular, the knowledge accrued in advanced conversations can establish children's familiarity with abstract themes that persists when their interest in an island fades. For example, a child's fascination with dinosaurs may be displaced by another interest, but the knowledge of abstract themes related to the topic—such as a rudimentary notion of Big History or the logic of taxonomy—may remain. The knowledge networks, or schemas, built around these islands of expertise aid processes of remembering and classifying. Schema allow children to pay less attention to the structure of certain activities and more attention to content, such as when the drama of a baseball game emerges after one is familiar with the rules. When the information-processing load decreases, information acquisition accelerates. According to Neuman and Celano (2012), differential opportunity for children to pursue expertise is a major contributor to the knowledge gap between children from neighborhoods of poverty and children from neighborhoods of privilege.

The question of when and how children develop islands of expertise merits attention from educators because of these potential contributions to academic literacies. Crowley and Jacobs (2002) focus on the formation of islands of expertise at home, but the concept is useful in thinking about children's opportunities for learning in other after-school settings. In considering what kind of nonschool institutional spaces and programs promote the formation of these islands, this paper examines a public library that channeled and enhanced children's expertise through a program called Wrestling Club. It shows that by validating children's interest in a nonacademic topic, librarians can motivate them to willingly take part in authentic reading and writing practices. The

paper also suggests how a high-interest subject such as professional wrestling can become a vehicle for academic development.

Wrestling Club

Wrestling Club met on the third Saturday of every month in the central public library of Reading, Pennsylvania, and was organized by one of the children's librarians, Sam[1]. I visited four programs over the course of my fieldwork for a larger project on literacy learning in public libraries. In this study, I used ethnographic techniques to gain a rich understanding of the library setting. I observed library programs as well as informal interactions between librarians and patrons, interviewed librarians and parents, and analyzed relevant documents. According to Spradley (1980), the essential core of ethnography is "concern with the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand" (p. 5). In an ethnographic study, the researcher recruits informants who can teach about the culture, which Spradley defines as "the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behavior" (p. 5).

In 2010 the city of Reading's poverty rate was over 40%, the highest of any American city (Tavernise, 2011). Only 25% of the city's schools made adequate yearly progress in 2010 (i.e., met the targets for achievement set by the No Child Left Behind Act for reaching 100% proficiency by 2014), and many teaching positions were cut when federal stimulus money was discontinued (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2011). Almost 60% of the city's nearly 90,000 residents were Hispanic, many of them of Puerto Rican descent (United States Census Bureau, 2011).

Most of the library's story times—during which librarians typically read several picture books, prepared a simple craft for the children to complete, and often performed a puppet show—were

Figure 1: Promotional flyers for regular preschool story time (left) and Wrestling Club (right)

[1] This is a pseudonym.

for preschool age children and lasted half an hour. There was a novel club for 9- to 12-year-olds scheduled for Wednesday afternoons as well as a culture club and a chemistry club that met every month or two. Wrestling Club was scheduled for midday on Saturday and was held once a month (Figure 1).

The library struggled to generate attendance for some programs. Its preschool story times often had few participants—sometimes only one or two children—and in several of my observations, no one showed up at all. Wrestling Club was an exception. There were often 20 or more children at the regular meetings, and there was an audience of up to 300 when the club was visited by superstar professional wrestler Jeff Hardy. The regular Wrestling Club meetings were structured like a typical story time, with shared reading from a book, an opportunity to work on a craft, and interspersed activities like playing games or viewing DVDs of a televised match. In addition to having higher attendance, Wrestling Club often lasted three or four times longer than the other story time programs because of its elaborated conversations and more demanding crafts.

The librarians observed that many of the children who attended Wrestling Club did not otherwise visit the library. Recent funding reductions had decreased the library's capacity to carry programs to outside settings, such as Head Start centers and women's shelters, where there were many children from impoverished homes. Recognizing the disproportionate effects of these cuts, the library determined to create some more accessible children's programs.

Sam, the creator of Wrestling Club, was one of three full-time children's librarians at the main public library. Unlike the other two, who had come to their library work from jobs in early childhood education, she had studied journalism and then worked as a freelance reporter, covering "school board meetings and unfun things like that," as she described them. She later started teaching creative writing and journalism at the local community college and enrolled in a graduate program in English literature with the goal of becoming a professor. However, Sam told me, "It didn't work out because you can easily get a job to teach composition, but you can't ever get tenure." She then took a part-time job at the library. "It really fit and I really like it, fell into it, I guess," she said. She described the club's origin in this way:

One Saturday I had these two boys come in and follow me around as I put books away and talk about what they were doing that week, and the books they were reading, and what they saw on TV. As our staff numbers dwindled, I didn't really have time to do this, so finally I gave them books to read and asked them to write down information on things that interested them. And they would. It was just strange that they would. I was getting them to do busy work and they'd do it. They'd write facts down for me. One time I said to one of the boys, "Go read this book about [well-known wrestler] the Undertaker. I need to know this, this, and this." And he said, "Why?" And I said, "Because I'm starting a Wrestling Club." It just came out, and I realized that he would come, that he would read this book on his own, and I thought it would be a good way to say, "OK, you need my attention. I'm going to give you an hour of my attention." And the first time we did it I

was expecting just those two boys, but there was a big homeschooling family that came, and two other boys.

Wrestling Club generated and sustained participation, in part, because Sam shared the children's interest in wrestling. According to Sam, "It's easier to make a connection with a child over something like wrestling than Charlotte's Web. But it also validates their interest. It shows that another adult cares about what they're into." In leading the program, though, she had to evolve from a casual fan to a "super fan." She explained, "I have to know these things. I have to know more than what the big fans know so we can exchange something, have that conversation." Her literature background was also evident in her approach to the program. According to Sam, the appeal of professional wrestling is based on its storytelling. In Wrestling Club, the children essentially engaged in narrative analysis. As Sam explained, "It's the same sort of dramatic elements that make up a novel. Someone gets betrayed, and we get to talk about that. Is that something you would have done? There's obviously a villain. It's all there, everything that you'd want to talk about in a novel is there in a match."

Learning about luchadores

One special event featured some luchadores. The crowd of 150 people who attended it ranged in age from 5 to 60 years old and included many Hispanic children. The children were seated on and around the central rug in the children's room, while older family members sat in chairs around the rug area or stood against the wall. A grandfather of one of the children told me that he had gone to lucha libre (free fight) matches in his hometown in Mexico as a boy. The luchadore presentation provides an example of the array of concepts and the kinds of conversations that characterized these events.

The special guest, a professional wrestler named "Lightning" Mike Quackenbush, was accompanied by three other masked wrestlers from the independent CHIKARA league, Soldier Ant (Figure 2), Saturyne, and Dasher Hatfield. They sat in chairs on either side of Quackenbush, who told the audience that he was going to "do the easy version" of a talk about lucha libre.

Figure 2: Soldier Ant (used with permission from CHIKARA).

The easy version lasted about half an hour.

Quackenbush began by explaining that lucha libre is a Mexican version of professional wrestling and that the two styles are like "distant cousins." It also has a different place in Mexican culture. He said, "Imagine Batman is real and a force for good. That's how luchadores (lucha libre wrestlers) began to function in Mexican culture, like superheroes jumping into the real world." It's an art form, he told them, something beautiful.

He then talked about the history of lucha libre and of the mask as a symbol. The first masked wrestler performed in Paris in 1873. In 1932 Salvador Lutteroth saw professional wrestling in Texas and returned to Mexico to start the world's first wrestling federation. One of the central characters was El Santo, who wore a silver cape and a mask with teardrop eyes. He had a 40-year career, appearing in comic books and movies. Quackenbush explained how "bet fights" work and how the losers are unmasked. Derived from the battle dress of ancient Aztec warriors, the masks symbolize the warrior's defiance, and they are more important than the title belt. For some luchadores, an unmasking is often the end of a career; unmasking takes away the fighter's powers.

He concluded by explaining that lucha libre has evolved and has been influenced by American professional wrestling, which has a global following and recruits many international stars. Rey Misterio Jr., a current star in the United States, started in lucha libre and brought its style and symbols into his American professional wrestling career. Quackenbush asked, "Anyone know Junior?" As far as I could see, every hand went up. The audience, including the children, had been playing very close attention. "How about Alberto Del Rio?" Again, every hand went up. Quackenbush explained, "He also came from lucha libre, but now in WWE he wrestles without a mask. As a luchadore, he had wrestled as Dos Caras, or 'Two Faces.'" Quackenbush pulled out a box of masks, including Dos Caras's green mask with a two-headed red eagle, and passed them around. The children and adults in the audience looked them over, recognizing many of the masks, and several people even tried one on. Quackenbush began to take questions: "What are the differences with the Japanese version of professional wrestling?" "How do wrestlers design their masks and who makes them?" "Why do they change their masks?" The question and answer period lasted for over 20 minutes, until Sam stepped in to close the program. Many of the participants stayed to have photos taken with the wrestlers.

The most striking characteristic of the event was the depth and range of the concepts employed in both the presentation and the subsequent interaction. The presentation began as an expansive history of wrestling and moved into an exposition of rituals and cross-cultural adaptations. The speaker had the rapt attention of the audience. By the end, it was also clear—as evidenced by the questions they asked and the questions they answered—that the children as well as the adults in the audience already knew a lot about the topic. Although I was receiving an introduction to the subject, most of the people who were present were adding to their already extensive knowledge or looking for an opportunity to demonstrate what they knew.

Anticipating the school language register

Islands of expertise are most often discussed in terms of the particular academic knowledge that they promote, and the facts that students retain certainly benefit their later reading comprehension and critical thinking in related areas (Willingham, 2009). Wrestling Club would seem to have little to offer in this respect because of its subject's apparent lack of pertinence to the standard curriculum. However, the program had much in common with what Gee calls "informal specialist language lessons" (2007, p. 23). These lessons involve adults discussing topics in specialist domains that children develop a deep interest in, including popular culture topics. According to Gee, these lessons promote enhanced verbal abilities as children engage in intensive interactions with adults and enjoy sustained, cognitively challenging conversations.

To Gee (2007), becoming literate in school involves learning the school language register, which has particular features and rules for interaction, such as the use of discourse markers to show that one is "in the know." Individuals' acquisition of this register deepens their capacity to take advantage of the affordances, or learning opportunities, that will be offered in school. The protoforms of later school-based social languages can be developed through earlier socialization. As Gee writes, "Early preparation for these specialist varieties is essential. Otherwise, for many children it is as if the language of school has changed from English to Greek in the middle years and they have never taken any Greek" (p. 23).

Almost all children enter school with extensive language abilities based on rich oral language experiences, but success in school is predicated on exposure to school-based practices and genres, particularly specialist varieties of language. An event like the Wrestling Club presentation about luchadores featured one such highly specialized kind of language. The encyclopedic background knowledge and specialist vocabulary relied on in Wrestling Club interactions was not academic knowledge narrowly conceived, but the register of the talk had much in common with the registers of academic domains. Crucially, in Wrestling Club the children also encountered the register through their own deeply felt communicative needs.

Faces and heels

Unlike most of the library's other story times, Wrestling Club was not advertised for a particular age group, and children from preschoolers to early teens participated in it. However, most of the children who came to Wrestling Club were about eight or nine years old. Several parents regularly observed from the periphery, not because they felt the need to regulate their children's behavior, but seemingly out of personal interest.

Sitting in a chair at the bottom of the "Story Stairs," a half-circle of carpeted steps, Sam typically began by reading out loud to the children from a children's book that either told the story of a wrestler's life or gave a dramatic account of a particular wrestling match. The library had an extensive selection of these books, and they appeared to have a healthy circulation. The purpose

of the reading was to answer some preselected questions. Sam created a cardboard poster with the questions and another with a pool of possible answers—cutout pictures of wrestlers, images, and phrases—taped to it. As Sam read from the book, children volunteered to move the answer pieces over to the appropriate space on the poster with the questions.

At the Wrestling Club meeting featuring the then world champion wrestler CM Punk, Sam read from a biographical children's book, and the children took turns answering the questions shown in Figure 3. For instance, after she had read the first few pages, two of the children moved the figures of Rowdy Roddy Piper and Superfly Jimmy Snuka to the shaded space under the question "Who were Punk's favorite wrestlers when he was young?" Another boy correctly answered the question about what CM Punk shouts when he enters the arena ("It's clobberin' time!"—a reference to the comic book character the Thing, one of the Fantastic Four).

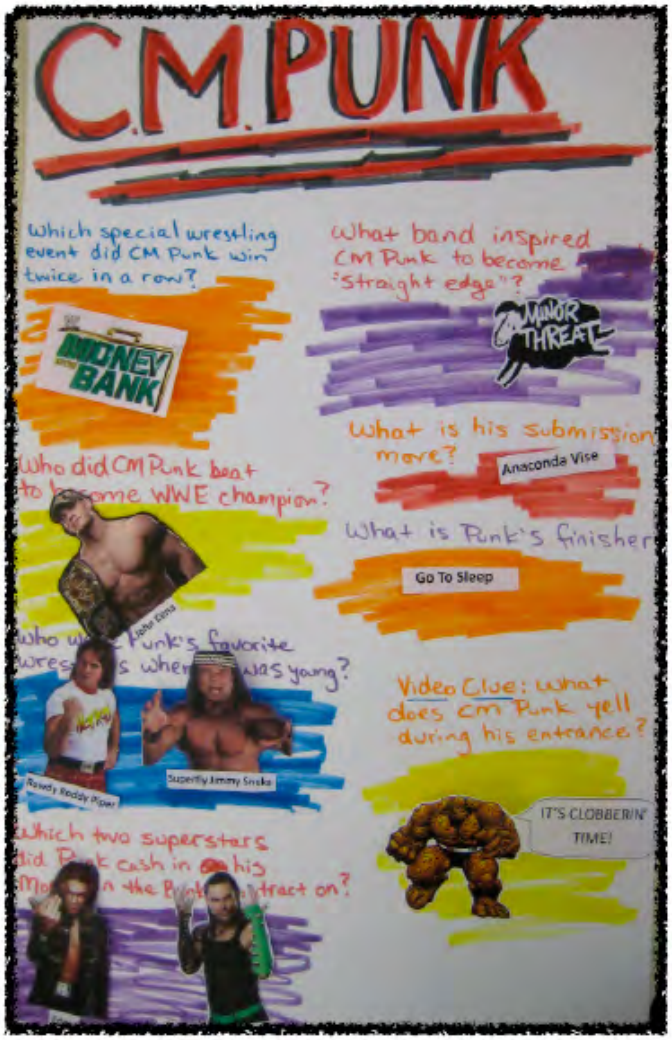

Figure 3: Answer board from the CM Punk Wrestling Club event at Fleetwood

Although the reading time was focused on finding answers for Sam's prepared questions, and the books she read were quite short, this segment of the program took over half an hour because of the talk it inspired. After reading about the submission move, the "Anaconda Vise," Sam paused to explain that it involved gripping an opponent's neck until he passed out. She showed the group a picture of this move and asked, "What's the only way to get out?" One of the girls answered, "Tap out." Sam asked, "What happens then?" "You lose the match," a boy answered. Sam explained that a vise is a squeeze, and she reread the page from the book about how the wrestler CM Punk uses it. This passage also referred to a move called "GTS," and she asked if anyone knew what that was. A boy said, "It means 'Go to sleep.'" He explained that CM Punk uses that move as a finisher and that "it's called the finisher because that's all he needs to do." Sam said, "That's right, and that's one of our next questions." The boy then came forward to answer the question "What is Punk's finisher?" Another boy began telling a story about seeing the move at a wrestling event, Raw, in Philadelphia.

Sam used a TV on a cart beside her chair to show DVDs to supplement the information from the books. The conversation in the Wrestling Club meeting featuring the wrestler Triple H was centered on his shifting "gimmicks," or wrestling personas, which determine the wrestler's appearance, moves, and role in the larger story lines. Sam pointed out that Triple H had changed his gimmick dramatically at several points in his career. According to the book, his first gimmick was Terra Ryzing, which was followed by Hunter Hearst Helmsley, a snooty "Connecticut blue blood." Sam defined "blue blood," and this opened a conversation about social class. She explained that this character thought he was better than the other wrestlers because of his money or education or family background. Then she showed them a clip of a wrestling match introduced by Hunter Hearst Helmsley dressed in a tuxedo, holding a pipe and saying, "It's high time for these wrestlers to learn a lesson in class. I'll show them how to be a gentleman." Sam explained that Triple H had started out as a "heel," and asked, "Do any of you know what a heel is?" One of the boys said, "That's a bad guy." Sam asked, "What's a good guy called?" The boy raised his hand and said, "Babyface." Another boy added, "And we say 'face.'" Sam noted, "Isn't it interesting that Triple H was a heel before he was a face?" Several of the children spoke up with other examples of wrestlers who had changed their gimmicks from faces to heels. Sam observed that some of the most popular wrestlers were considered heels. She asked why people might like heels, and one boy answered that some of them had good moves.

This kind of interaction followed almost every topic covered during the shared reading. The librarian and the children defined terms, added information, and told personal stories of matches they had seen on TV or attended. The children, and occasionally even the parents, readily answered Sam's questions and expanded on them. Sam listened carefully to what the children said and responded directly.

Parsing the Pepsi logo

The game and the craft that followed the shared reading also featured rich interactions and meaningful tasks with immediate rewards. After the book reading at the CM Punk event, Sam said it was time for the game. She handed out sheets of construction paper with colored photos of tattoos pasted on them. The tattoos, she said, were from different parts of CM Punk's body, including his chest, back, upper arms, forearms, and hands. After the sheets were distributed, with several children sharing each one, she called out questions, such as "Who has the Pepsi logo?" One boy said he had it on the photo of the wrestler's shoulder. Sam told them that in CM Punk's college fraternity, his friends got tattoos of beer logos, so he got one of Pepsi. She explained that CM Punk doesn't drink alcohol or do drugs and that the Pepsi logo symbolizes his "straight edge" persona. Sam pointed out the words "DRUG FREE" tattooed across CM Punk's fingers. Then she asked, "Who has the 'No gimmicks needed' tattoo?" After one of the children identified it, Sam explained that it was for CM Punk's friend who had died and that it represented the idea of wrestlers being themselves, rather than exaggerated characters. After the tattoo of the dice was

located, Sam told the children that one of the things CM Punk often says is that luck is for losers and that you have to make your own luck by working. Then she pointed out a koi fish tattoo, which she said was for good luck. One of the boys spoke up, "I thought he didn't believe in luck." Sam said, "Yeah, isn't that strange? He says luck is for losers, but he has all this lucky stuff."

During regular story times, crafts were often designed to follow preset construction sequences, and the children's versions differed very little from the template. However, crafts at Wrestling Club had a much richer dimension. For example, after the discussion about CM Punk's tattoos, the children decorated cardboard torsos with symbols from the photographs as well as symbols of their own (Figure 4). Many of them drew the Pepsi logo on their torsos, though they placed it in different locations.

Figure 4: Sam's prototype of a wrestler's tattooed torso (left) and children working on their own cutouts using photos of real tattoos (right) at Fleetwood

After the story time featuring the wrestler Triple H, Sam gave the children a three-foot-tall cardboard H, which they decorated with images and slogans, using colored markers as well as photos and graphics clipped from magazines. In creating their designs, children often merged their own drawings and writing with the images Sam provided. Figure 5 shows a redesign of the logo for D-Generation X, one of Triple H's wrestling alliances, by a nine-year-old boy. Another shows Triple H spewing water in the air with the child's drawing spreading out from the photo onto the poster.

Figure 5: Crafts from the Triple H Wrestling Club: a cutout D-Generation X logo (upper left), a redesigned D-Generation X logo (lower left), and a modified photo of Triple H (right)

The pleasure of knowing things

At times, the connections to school-based literacy practices were explicit. Children matched answers to questions written on the answer board. They printed on tattooed torsos and banners. They placed pennies on the names of wrestlers on their bingo sheets after the matching names were called. At its heart, though, the club featured the pleasurable group activity of sharing and demonstrating knowledge. Wrestling Club meetings often culminated in the viewing of a classic wrestling match, during which participants used their new knowledge. Sam noted, "I feel that because we read the book, the kids can see how much more we are enjoying the match. They know the names of the moves because we read about them. They know who the wrestlers are fighting because they read about them."

At the CM Punk meeting, the children watched a fight between CM Punk and Jeff Hardy, who had visited the library several months earlier. Sam set up the TV and then asked, "What moves are we looking for?" The children started calling them out: "Go to Sleep" and "Anaconda Vise," for CM Punk, and "Twist of Fate" and "Swanton Bomb," for Hardy. As the video began, the children

discussed the themes of the match buildup—why the wrestlers were mad at each other, who hit the referee at one point, and who was in the Hall of Fame.

Then Sam asked each person, including me, who they were rooting for. As we watched the match, we each person explained our allegiance, basing our reasons on personal experience, preferences for a style of wrestling, and our affinity for the personas that the wrestlers developed. One of the boys, who liked both Jeff Hardy and CM Punk, said he was going to be Jeff CM when he grew up. Sam asked him if he'd be a face or heel, and he said, "A face." Another said that Jeff Hardy was his favorite because he met Hardy at the library, while another boy said that he favored CM Punk because of his "straight edge" message. For the children, the act of watching the match thus became a process of identifying values and using their knowledge to position themselves in a social exchange.

Frequently, several children pursued conversations about wrestling after the club meeting had ended and Sam had cleaned up and moved on to other library duties. After one Wrestling Club session, Sam told the children that the next month's wrestler was Bret Hart, who would also be signing autographs after the local minor league baseball team's home game. The Reading Phillies were also sponsoring a writing contest in the library, and children could win tickets. Two of the boys went back to the crafts table to keep working on their posters, and Sam joined them to clean up. One of them asked about the contest. Sam said, "You know how he says, 'I'm the best that is, was, and ever will be'? There will be a writing contest to come up with three facts that prove that statement. For example, you could say he was a Triple Crown Champion." She explained that the facts could come from books at the library or the Internet. One of the boys asked if he could start on the paper. Sam said that would be okay, and she stayed at the crafts table for a while, chatting for another 15 minutes about wrestling. As she told me afterwards, the boys would be doing research, but doing it "painlessly."

Turning islands of expertise into worlds of knowledge

Langer (2011) describes the creation of knowledge as the process of building "envisionments," or worlds of knowledge in the mind that comprise what we know about certain topics, such as a particular principle of mathematics, the function of the nervous system, or the causes of the Trojan War. These envisionments are open to growth and testing as they are fed. According to Langer, they are made deeper and more complex as "people learn to focus on a topic, to narrow on what is relevant as they search for and consider ideas and evidence pertaining to that topic" (p. 2). It's a process of making sense of something through searching, judging, and selecting.

In Langer's view, academic literacy relies on literate thinking, which involves using reasoning abilities, skills, and strategies to reflect on the meaning of texts and symbols, gain understanding, and build knowledge. Langer (2011) argues that "literate thinking can take place around any set of signs and symbols within a society" (p. 13). The interactions around wrestling topics that formed

the core of Wrestling Club reflected such a process of gaining, weighing, and sharpening knowledge by comparing new information with what one already knows, discussing ideas with others, and reacting to their perspectives. Wrestling provided a point of reference for children to take on certain habits of mind in thinking about and using knowledge.

Wrestling Club presented challenging concepts and compelling stories. It gave the children the opportunity for sustained, intense interactions with an adult who shared their interest. Just as crucially, the club provided what Wells (2009) calls "a wider range of opportunities for meaning-making and mastery" (p. 75). Children were masters of the topic, so Wrestling Club permitted them to experience immediate and repeated success in their attempts to answer questions, start conversations, and create artifacts they were proud of. There was little fear of failure in these efforts; the children felt competent and accepted in a context of complex activities and communication. Individuals were recognized and celebrated for their often arcane knowledge and the associations they could make with new content. The rewards of this mastery were made possible by the islands of expertise that many of these children had already formed around professional wrestling.

The program provided space for more intense serve-and-return exchanges than typical story times afford, and the content of each part of the program was used as a catalyst for conversation. The responses that the children received to their questions and comments expanded on what they said and encouraged a back-and-forth interaction. Wrestling Club altered the way children participated in story time. They became members of a group who spent two hours or more together when they met, and their opinions and contributions affected how the program developed. In this way, a program like Wrestling Club counters the insinuation of the theory of children's learning that underpins standards-based reform (which is centered on the efficient accomplishment of specific tasks and focuses on assessment-driven outcomes) into library rhetoric and practice.

Public libraries in Pennsylvania are increasingly under pressure to construct their children's programs around the learning standards distributed by the state's Department of Education, which houses the Office of Commonwealth Libraries. Standards-based reform ideas have been part of the paradigm shift in American education policy since the 1980s, but they have only been a concern of public libraries during the last ten years. The Office of Commonwealth Libraries included the standards among the guidelines for determining "best practice" and sent libraries a checklist that they could use to indicate which of the standards were being met by their programs. Libraries that followed these guidelines were eligible for best practice awards, and as one administrator noted, "The money follows the measurement."

Wrestling Club demonstrates that nonschool settings like libraries can fashion programming for children that builds on their interests, honors their desires, and grants them autonomy in their learning, while at the same time contributing knowledge and tools that children can use in formal schooling. Wrestling Club gave opportunities for children to grow more curious, informed, and

skillful because the library joined the children on their island of expertise. These islands can also be used to build bridges to academic literacy. Wrestling Club promoted enculturation to forms of literacy that anticipate the specialist varieties of language and to the social and disciplinary conventions that surround schooling and proliferate in later grades.

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

Jennifer A. Vadeboncoeur & Louai Rahal

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.

[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

[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

[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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Changing Through Laughter with "Laughter for a Change"

Laurel J. Felt and Ed Greenberg

> *"I really enjoy improv…In life you normally have to plan out your decisions and actions and, in improv, you just do it right there on the spot. [Improv]…gives me a way of expressing myself in the moment. You have fun, and everyone just loves what you do."*

Bennett, 17 years old, participant in Laughter for a Change's after-school improvisational theater program at Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools

Most youths identify the fun of improvisational theater (improv) as their takeaway from participation. Improv *is* fun! But when it comes to convincing skeptical educators of the value of improv, such a testimonial falls short for two reasons. First, because fun is not the sole outcome of participation; improv instructors always witness their students develop in multiple domains. Second, because the imperativeness of fun for learning (Barab, Arici, & Jackson, 2005)—that is, the necessity of enjoying the process in order to really learn—is not universally recognized yet.

Systematic observation, research, and analysis of Laughter for a Change (L4C)'s 2011–2012 after-school improv workshop revealed the program's multiple impacts. Our data suggest that improvising creates a "safe space," a supportive context in which participants feel empowered to take risks and play freely. Such a positive affective climate—in which, according to Bennett, "everyone just loves what you do"—facilitates meaningful learning (Meyer & Turner, 2006). In the case of L4C, this meaningful learning comprised identity exploration, great understanding between different generations, development of theatrical skills, and personal and social growth.

Figure 1. A high-five following the group's successful completion of the "Conducted Story" game.

Moreover, this learning did not occur despite the fun that the participants had—it occurred precisely because of the fun.

Improvisational Theater's Relationship to Social Change

Improvisational theater occurs within a community of practice, constructs and maintains a learning environment in which safety, trust, and positive affect flourish, and operates through play. Improv's capacity to educate is embedded in its DNA. Using improvisational theater for socially meaningful ends is a well-established practice. Although improv is most widely known for its powerful influence on popular culture, it got its start in the United States as a vehicle for learning and social change.

In the early part of the 20th century, global children's game curator Neva Boyd pioneered the use of recreational games as a means to teach language skills, problem solving, self-confidence, and social skills (Bailey, 2009). Boyd's protégé, Viola Spolin, applied Boyd's learning-through-play technique in her job as drama director and social worker at Chicago's Hull House. In order to achieve her goals of both stimulating creative expression and building community among Chicago's diverse immigrant populations, Spolin expanded on Boyd's work, creating and revising theater games from 1939 to 1941 (Bailey). Spolin published her seminal text, *Improvisations for the Theater*, in 1963 and continued to explore the power of improvisational games and play for the rest of her life. She was particularly interested in how group play helps individual participants to get more deeply in touch with their own intuition and how the culture of learning spaces impacts education. According to Spolin (1963, 1999), "No one teaches anyone anything. If the environment permits it, anyone can learn whatever he chooses to learn; and if the individual permits it, the environment will teach him everything it has to teach" (p. 3).

Figure 2. Spolin with members of her Young Actors Company—including Alan Arkin and Alan Alda1—which she ran in Hollywood, California, from 1946 to 1955. (Image source: http://www.spolin.us/violabio.)

In 1959 Spolin's son Paul Sills founded Chicago's famed improvisational theater, The Second City. Not only did Sills appropriate and further develop his mother's games for use with his ensemble, but he also incorporated satire, parody, clowning, commedia dell'arte, vaudeville, burlesque, and cabaret into his comedic formula. The Second City also purposefully breaks the fourth wall of conventional theater by acknowledging and directly addressing the audience. Collectively, these theatrical techniques function as tools that can illuminate absurdities that we regularly encounter in life.[1]

Perhaps improvisational theater's capacity to speak truth to power reflects the nature of its early practitioners, many of whom were iconoclasts committed to both questioning authority and poking fun at rigid, conventional points of view. Del Close, grandfather of long-form improv and the icon of most of today's top improvisers (Halpern, Close, & Johnson, 1994), is a case in point. He is remembered today not only for his genius but also for his outrageous worldview. As Close once told his protégé, Laughter for a Change founder Ed Greenberg, "If we're not offending somebody, we're not doing our job." This interest in disrupting the status quo, however, did not signal a callous disregard for others. Close instilled in his thousands of students an ethos of respect and support that became "more nearly a philosophy or way of life than just a way of getting laughs" (McGrath, 2012, para. 37).

Brazilian theater director Augusto Boal might be considered the most overt practitioner of improvisational theater for social action and political protest. Particularly motivated by fellow countryman Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a ground-breaking sociological examination of class and education, Boal vividly conceptualized the dramatic arts as a weapon against tyranny. He reframed both the spectator as an actor and the oppressed as revolutionaries (Sierz, 2009). Boal's classic text, *Theater of the Oppressed* (1974), inspired a movement of the same name that still exists today (The International Theater of the Oppressed Organisation, n.d.). From Spolin to Boal, these masters of improvisational theater all shared a common belief: The collaborative work of players and "spect-actors," as Boal called the audience, could foster learning, action, and change.

The Educational Implications of Community, Culture, and Play

Literature from the fields of educational theory, developmental psychology, literacy, and game studies explains why improvisational theater works as a tool for education and engagement: it is because participation is powerful, learning environments influence outcomes, and play is educational.

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[1] The Second City has trained many of the actors and writers of the legendary sketch television show *Saturday Night Live* (1975–present), and scores of America's top comedy stars—including John Belushi, Tina Fey, Steve Carell, and Stephen Colbert—cut their teeth on improvisational theater.

Cognitive anthropologists Lave and Wenger famously articulated in *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (1991) that learning occurs within a community of practice. In the years following, many scholars have emphasized the importance of contextualization and community. Action researchers Rogoff, Turkanis, and Bartlett (2001) documented the rich learning that occurred when parents, students, and teachers alike pooled their knowledge and set off on educational quests together. According to literacy, education, and game studies expert Gee (2008), "Good learning requires participation—however vicarious—in some social group that helps learners understand and make sense of their experience in certain ways" (p. 23).

The culture of learning environments also influences the magnitude of their educational impact. Meaningful learning requires safety and trust; most students will only pursue out-of-the-box innovation if they feel that the environment is a safe space for spectacular failures and trust that the community will respect their unique perspectives and essential humanity. For such safety and trust to develop, all members of a learning community must support diversity in multiple forms, including diversity of experience, ability, interest, and method. To achieve that, the ways in which power, status, and cultural norms may shape classroom work need to be identified and challenged (Lewis, 2001), and "perspective-taking, empathy, and acceptance of one's own and others' responsibilities within the group" need to be honored (Reilly, Jenkins, Felt, & Vartabedian, 2012, pp. 20–21). According to educational psychologists Meyer and Turner (2006), positive affective classroom cultures encourage students to take academic risks and to work toward mastery, both of which boost student learning.

Understanding the critical role of safety and trust in fostering meaningful learning helped to inspire the creation of Participatory Learning And You! (PLAY!), a multifaceted educational research project designed by the University of South California (USC)'s Project New Media Literacies. The PLAY! project reported five key principles for nurturing an educational climate conducive to participatory learning:

1. Participants have many chances to exercise *creativity* through diverse media, tools, and practices;
2. Participants adopt an ethos of *co-learning*, respecting each person's skills and knowledge;
3. Participants experience heightened *motivation* and *engagement* through meaningful play;
4. Activities feel ***relevant*** to learners' identities and interests;
5. An integrated learning system—or *learning ecosystem*—honors rich connections between home, school, community and world. (Reilly, Vartabedian, Felt, & Jenkins, 2012, p. 4)

Similarly, affective neuroscientists Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) argue that emotion and learning are inextricably linked:

> First, neither learning nor recall happens in a purely rational domain, divorced from emotion, even though some of our knowledge will eventually distill into a moderately

> rational, unemotional form. Second, in teaching students to minimize the emotional aspects of their academic curriculum and function as much as possible in the rational domain, educators may be encouraging students to develop the sorts of knowledge that inherently do not transfer well to real-world situations. (p. 9)

In other words, as the title of Immordino-Yang and Damasio's article proclaims, "we feel, therefore we learn."

Finally, play is an important piece of the learning puzzle. According to Piaget, all children learn through play. Educational technologists Barab, Arici, and Jackson recommend evaluating educational activities in terms of the extent to which they integrate play (2005). Communication technologies expert Douglas Thomas and organizational studies researcher John Seely Brown also recognize the educational potential of play. In their review of today's "world of constant change" and prognostication of tomorrow's challenges, they maintain that "When play happens within a medium for learning—much like a culture in a petri dish—it creates a context in which information, ideas, and passions grow" (Thomas & Brown, 2011, p. 18).

Influential publication *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (Jenkins, Purushotma, Clinton, Weigel, & Robison, 2006) identified play within its evolving set of new media literacies, or "cultural competencies and social skills that young people need in the new media landscape" (p. 4). With PLAY!, USC's Project New Media Literacies closely examined play as a new media literacy, defining *play* as "the capacity to experiment with one's surroundings as a form of problem-solving" (Jenkins et al., p. 4). Language, literacy, and culture expert Wohlwend (2011) similarly understands play as a literacy and also recognizes its ability to shape identity and relationships. As famed children's television host Rogers and early childhood advocate Sharapan contend, "Play is a very serious matter... It is an expression of our creativity; and creativity is at the very root of our ability to learn, to cope, and to become whatever we may be" (1994, p. 13).

Laughter for a Change

Laughter for a Change, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, uses play to both follow and extend improvisational theater's legacy of civic engagement. Its mission is to employ improvisational theater games and comedy training to foster new forms of learning, and to contribute to healing and a sense of well-being, particularly among underserved populations. Since L4C founder Greenberg is an acquaintance of the late Spolin, a former colleague of Sills, past director of The Second City, and a protégé of Close, he is uniquely qualified to head this socially minded organization.

Greenberg established L4C in 2007, following his stint as a cultural envoy to Rwanda. Charged by the U.S. Department of State with the task of helping genocide survivors to "learn to laugh again," Greenberg introduced improvisational theater to Rwandans (McFarren, 2011). He trusted that

engaging with improv's central tenets—"playing agreement, risk taking, spontaneity, changing perspectives, opening up to moments of discovery and surprise, [and] making active, not passive, choices"—would facilitate healing (as cited in McFarren, 2011, p. 166). And it did. Rwandan participants embraced the workshop enthusiastically and continued to create comedy content even after the program was over, prompting the head of the U.S. Department of State's cultural envoy initiative to conclude, "This is the kind of program that keeps us doing what we do" (R. Keith, personal communication, November 1, 2007).

Greenberg and his staff of L4C Comedy Mentors use theater games—some invented by Spolin and others inspired by her work—to help participants build confidence and community. While L4C runs workshops with senior citizens, military veterans, and residents of homeless shelters, its primary focus is working with youths. L4C Comedy Mentors work with juvenile offenders at Pacific Lodge Youth Services, middle schoolers at Los Angeles's Koreatown Youth and Community Center, and fifth graders at five Los Angeles elementary schools. In addition, during the 2011–2012 school year, L4C Comedy mentors worked with high school students at the Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools in urban Los Angeles.

Methodology

Program Partners

In 2010 USC's Project New Media Literacies launched research project PLAY! to investigate how to integrate the tools, insights, and skills of a participatory culture into the public education system of the United States (Felt, Vartabedian, Literat, & Mehta, 2012; Reilly, Jenkins, Felt, & Vartabedian, 2012; Reilly, Vartabedian, Felt, & Jenkins, 2012; Literat, 2013; Micheli, 2013). A year later, USC's Project New Media Literacies partnered with community-based organization RFK-Legacy in Action (RFK-LA) to pursue on-the-ground research and outreach. Not only was RFK-LA's expansive digital media lab located at the heart of the RFK Community Schools campus, but RFK-LA's dedication "to fostering a more just society by training young people to use new media for social action" (RFK: Legacy in Action, n.d.) echoed the research group's own goals.

USC's Project New Media Literacies and RFK-LA offered the RFK-based media lab to L4C for running an after-school improv workshop that would extend opportunities for practicing new media literacies—particularly the new media literacy *play*—to members of the RFK community. L4C accepted the challenge and provided instructional staff and curricula as well as recruited prospective RFK participants. USC's Project New Media Literacies provided research support and also recommended the workshop to Los Angeles Unified School District educators participating in its PLAYing Outside the Box professional development program (Vartabedian & Felt, 2012).

Research Question

Through this collaborative effort, USC's Project New Media Literacies, RFK-LA, and L4C hoped to discover how, if at all, engaging in play—specifically play structured by theater games—impacts participating youths' proficiency in the new media literacy *play* and/or their development of other personal and social skills.

Recruitment

Greenberg recruited students from the theater arts classes of RFK's Los Angeles High School of the Arts. Theater educators Annie Simons and Sam Toffler also strongly encouraged their students—particularly freshmen who had not been cast in the school play—to attend L4C's program. Both teachers were familiar with improv and were able to attest to its value for aspiring actors and those seeking fun after-school engagement.

Participants

Approximately 12 of these theater students regularly attended L4C's fall sessions. However, due to both the program's open door policy and various unplanned scheduling complications (e.g., detentions, transportation problems, field trips, and test preparations), the number of attendees per session fluctuated from 8 to15.

Ninety-one percent of the 12 core participants were freshmen, and the group was balanced in terms of gender (six females and six males). The group's ethnic makeup—83% Latino, 17% African American—reflected that of the wider RFK community. RFK's students hail from Pico Union and surrounding neighborhoods that, collectively, comprise the most densely populated area in California. Eighty-nine percent of the school-age population is from low-income households, and 50% are English Language Learners. Both conversation with participants and their later scene work revealed that they were first-generation Americans and that their parents spoke Spanish at home.

Data Collection

Laurel J. Felt, a trained improviser and research assistant with USC's Project New Media Literacies, attended approximately 80% of the L4C at RFK sessions. While her primary mode of data collection was taking ethnographic field notes as a participant-observer, Felt also took photographs of the workshops' process, implemented semistructured interviews, and assisted with survey design.

Interviews

Felt conducted voluntary interviews on the last day of the fall semester. Following the final game and winter break send-off, participants lingered in the media lab, munching on popcorn, joking, laughing, and comparing dance moves. Felt invited any interested participants to talk with her

about their L4C at RFK experiences; a desktop computer running PhotoBooth, a video-recording application, was positioned toward them, transparently capturing their commentary. In addition to following up on specific comments, Felt asked four questions of all participants (see Appendix A). Five participants chose to be interviewed. Felt transcribed their remarks and applied thematic analysis.

Surveys

Although L4C had planned to offer its RFK workshop only during the fall semester, strong student interest motivated L4C to return in the spring. Felt and Greenberg designed a short survey prior to the spring semester's February kickoff. They focused exclusively on areas that theory and past experience suggested would shift – namely, identity, skill perceptions, and comfort levels. The survey sought to discover whether participants identified themselves as imaginative, playful, comedically insightful, creative, self-confident, risk-aversive, and/or tolerant. It also inquired about participants' perceptions of their skills in problem solving, persevering, relationship building, listening, communicating, and focusing. Finally, the survey asked about participants' comfort with working in groups and public speaking. For the complete survey instrument, see Appendix B.

Greenberg and L4C Comedy Mentor Kat Primeau, who attended 90% of the L4C at RFK sessions, offered this paper-and-pencil survey to every participant who walked through the door from February 21 to March 6, 2012. Over this three-week span, 15 participants—3 new and 12 returning—completed surveys. But as the semester continued, only about 6 of the program's previous 12 participants returned regularly. The steep attrition rate is mostly explained by counterprogramming—five of the six students who departed were cast in the spring play, and one student joined a music appreciation club. Even after Greenberg switched L4C at RFK's meeting day from Monday to Tuesday in order to accommodate the spring play's rehearsal schedule, cast members rarely, if ever, returned; L4C attendees reported that their actor friends needed to catch up on homework on Tuesday afternoons. Due to these modest attendance rates, the survey was not readministered at the end of the program, and therefore pretest/posttest comparisons of identity, skill perceptions, and comfort levels could not be made. Instead, thematic analysis was applied solely to the instrument's open-ended items,

Photographs

Finally, participants themselves often chose to snap photographs of their friends' scene work; these images, along with Felt's, also became part of the corpus.

L4C at RFK

Students were excited about improvising from the get-go. During his recruitment talks, Greenberg had informed attendees that he had worked with such actors as Dan Castellaneta (who voices

Homer Simpson on the popular animated show *The Simpsons)*, and had directed at the comedy theater where Tina Fey and Steve Carell—stars of the hit movie *Date Night*, which many students had recently seen—had learned their comedy craft. Rather than just name-dropping to impress the students, Greenberg was illuminating improv's relevance and showing how it connected to their own pop culture.

Building Trust and Safety

Greenberg built on this initial excitement by creating a safe space where participants could play. The establishment of a safe space is critical for improvisation. Participants must trust that their fellow players will respect their contributions and support their journeys. This bedrock of safety empowers participants to imagine and enact their ideas boldly and supports them in accepting their peers' ideas appreciatively. In order to create a safe space, Greenberg had to confront participants' perspectives on discipline, shifting their pejorative views of it so that they saw it as a necessary ingredient for their growth as actors and citizens. Greenberg also needed to show participants that, rather than being based on a lone teacher dispensing "knowledge" in a top-down fashion, this program's pedagogy involved everyone discovering and sharing lessons together through participatory engagement.

Greenberg started the first session of L4C at RFK the same way he introduces all new students to improv: with a round of "Mirror." In this game, students work in pairs and, using simple movements, create mirror images; one student initially leads while the other follows, and then they switch. As Greenberg circulated among the pairs, offering comments (or "side-coaching"), he reminded the players, "You do your best work by making the other person look good." This exercise in focus, teamwork, shared responsibility, caring, and fun imparted an immediate understanding of what the program was all about. Greenberg and his team of L4C Comedy Mentors model this game and others on the L4C website, http://www.laughterforachange.org/videos/games-we-play/.

Next, Greenberg sat down on the floor alongside his students and modeled a game that requires focus, observation, and creativity. In this game, each player interacts with imaginary (or "space") objects—a common device in theater games. Object work provides a fun opportunity for players to share their own imaginings, support others' ideas and, consequently, build connections. As Spolin explained in "Space Objects Commentary (Making the Invisible Visible)," a section in the handbook accompanying her *Theater Game File* (1975):

> The teacher who has goals to reach and subjects to teach rarely has time or energy to allow inner feelings or thoughts to emerge. Workshop space object games/exercises assist in uncovering the hidden self. Objects made of space substance should be looked upon as thrusts/projects of this (invisible) inner self into the visible world. In effect, then, the invisible ball thrown to a fellow player … is an aspect of a player's sharing and connecting

> with the fellow player who accepts and catches the invisible ball. When the invisible (not yet emerged, inside, unknown) becomes visible, seen and perceived—theatre magic! Recognition of this added dimension of the world brings excitement and refreshment to all (p. 25).

Greenberg asked each student to create a small space object (such as a watch or a hat), place it in an imaginary box, and then pass the box along to the next player. In order to minimize fear of failure as well as express the ethos of improv, Greenberg repeated at that time (and throughout the program—as he had ever since the beginning of his career in improvisation) that "There are no

Figure 3. Participants listen to Greenberg on the first day of L4C at RFK.

mistakes."

Each member of the group embraced the exercise, introducing such space objects as ear buds, a necklace, and a used tissue. In rapt silence, the whole group watched intently as one by one their peers took their turns. After everyone had had a turn, Greenberg added a challenge: Open the box, remove a fellow player's object, interact with it, and then throw the object to its owner. The cumulative efforts of four volunteers resulted in 100% completion of the exercise—every object was recalled and returned.

Across every game, Greenberg invited participants to try things out, praised them for their efforts, and encouraged them to support their peers through attentive listening and appreciative applause. As the participants acclimated to L4C's method, Greenberg also asked participants for their help in managing discipline and realizing the program's full potential.

Sara, a strong leader and passionate actor, commented on the workshop's culture of trust and safety during her end-of-semester interview. "Well, I've enjoyed how everybody is nice in their way and you work together, cuz pretty much what improv is, you know, is just going along with what comes up," she said. "And I learned that it's not only you that makes the improv work but also teamwork. You're supposed to work as a team and make your partner look good as well. And it's very nice, working with a bunch of people." Then she smiled.

In her interview, Kim, whose timidity seemed to dissipate over time, also spoke to the trust and safety that she experienced. But rather than emphasize the support between players as an example of that, Kim focused on the respect that instructors showed their students:

> I enjoy working as a group, working with the teachers, how they help us with acting, how they talk to us. They're not like, 'No, you have to act this way,' no. They let us be, but in a way that you're supposed to be, like, in the process… It's different cuz here it's more like a free place, a place where you can sit, chill, and also act, have fun, have a laugh, work. And in other classes it's more like, 'This, this, this,' and 'Stop laughing,' or 'That's not funny.' And here it doesn't have to be funny, you just have to improv and just make it happen.

Figure 4. Helena, Grant, and Bennett cut loose. (Helena was delighted when Greenberg informed her that the symbol on her sweatshirt came from a movie created by improv-trained actors, writers, and directors.)

Taking Risks, Being Themselves

Greenberg consistently encouraged the students to bring their whole selves into their play. He invited students to investigate imaginary spaces through recreating playground games and sports activities that were familiar to them and to set improvisations in the environments they knew best, such as their homes and neighborhood stores. He requested that they create characters based on relatives, neighbors, and friends. As they played roles from parents speaking rapid-fire Spanish to clerks checking their cell phones, participants represented their community.

The results of this identity-driven work were always valuable. Most of the students' scenes were funny and entertaining, and even the less successful scenes demonstrated courageous risk-taking and created teachable moments. Because praise rather than criticism was emphasized during the workshop, the students enjoyed themselves as they learned. They also were empowered as the creators and definers of the playing/learning space.

At the end of the fall semester, Bennett reflected, "When I first began, I was more reclusive, but doing improv has brought out the natural side of me that's just fun and out there, that just likes to have fun." Said Helena, "I just liked the games we played because they just take your shyness away, cuz you have to just get up, just be yourself, and just let it out. And it feels good."

Over time, the students practiced and became more adept at the use of space objects, articulating objects' dimensions with more precision and respecting the integrity of immovable features, such as counters or doors. More importantly, with this regular opportunity to freely share their imaginations, they began to take more risks with what they chose to share. For example, during the second month of the program, Greenberg asked the students to demonstrate what they wanted most by engaging with a space object. Shy, quiet Kristina hugged a phantom figure in space, disclosing that the thing she yearned for most was a best friend. This was a brave admission, especially because her peers had expressed desires for material items such as consumer electronics and plane tickets.

Kristina again displayed her newfound bravery when she chose to play a male character, and a sexist macho man at that. That was especially remarkable because improvisers of all ages and experience levels commonly choose to play characters of their own gender, and the precedent set by other students in the workshop certainly followed those norms; only when compelled by the structure of a game would participants "gender bend."

Figure 5. Stacia grins from the car's passenger side as Kristina, playing the role of a macho male driver, blatantly "checks out" Helena's character.

It's not hard to understand why improvisers tend to make this choice; not only is it easier to identify with characters more like yourself, but when you play them, you also avoid appearing "unattractively" and/or "inappropriately" masculine or effeminate. For adolescents in particular, who have a pronounced need for peer acceptance (Erikson, 1959), jeopardizing image is a serious matter. Yet in her guise of a chauvinist behind the wheel, Kristina boldly ogled Helena's character,

Figure 6. L4C Comedy Mentor Kat and participants Grant and Katie crack up.

a girl working at a car wash. Whether Kristina's choice solely indicated her self-confidence or also expressed an interest in gender hierarchies, sexual power, or identity exploration is impossible to say. It may even have demonstrated what she had learned about comedy performance—specifically, that playing the opposite sex virtually always amuses the audience. In any case, Kristina reaped the rewards that her originality deserved: appreciative laughter.

At the end of fall semester, Kristina said, "I used to be a lot more shy and then with this program—this is actually like extra help for me, to get out my shyness and to help me with my classes. Because of the games, I'm like one step ahead… I feel more confident."

Figure 7. Leon and Greenberg improvise together in an imaginary car.

Colearning

Throughout the program, Greenberg would often participate in activities alongside the participants, joining them in the joy of play. Once the students had gained confidence and sufficient trust in the group dynamic—crucial steps in the creation of safe space—he allowed outsiders to observe the program's process. Greenberg encouraged these visitors to learn by doing rather than sit in judgment from the audience; perhaps motivated by the ethos of the program or the energy in the room, every visitor accepted his invitation. Their participation decentered traditional power structures as the youths were the experts and the adults were the novices. In these contexts, attendees of all ages learned on their feet, treated scene partners as equals, and played together, embracing permission to be silly and just have fun. This destruction of traditional hierarchies, particularly where teachers and students are concerned, can be liberating for both parties. For adults and youths alike, this experience can also facilitate great understanding of a generation other than one's own.

Figure 8. L4C newbie Flora, veteran Stacia, and adult visitor/improv novice Rick wait for their trio's turn to perform.

Figure 9. During their visit, two members of USC's Project New Media Literacies play a pair of bank-robbing mice.

Figure 10. Biology teacher Larry works with L4C improv peers, all of them high school freshmen.

Figure 11. RFK students, along with theater arts teacher Toffler, energetically play improv game "Bunny Bunny" in L4C's improv workshop.

Spooky Stories: Showcasing Identity and Interrogating Safety

As confidence and trust continued to grow, students increasingly chose to share their own stories, recalling ghosts they had seen or voices they had heard. The storytelling also may have been a method for working through feelings about fear and safety, as the neighborhood where the participants live is a high-crime area. Greenberg encouraged them to use these spooky stories as the basis for improv scenes and skits. In the program's safe space, they could transform their anxiety into laughter.

Figure 12. Three participants reenact a peer's ghost story. Katie looks on from the wings as Tina, upstage, laughs at Helena's exaggeratedly dramatic death.

Figure 13. Participants Bart and Karlos share a grin during a scene.

Results

Becoming More Proficient in Improvisational Theater

In terms of their desired take-aways, most survey respondents articulated theatrical goals, e.g., learning to project their voice, obtain a broader view of acting, and master the craft of improv. The nature of the participant pool (all theater arts students) might explain this technical focus.

Karlos, a faithful participant (see Figure 13), had gained a reputation for regularly dissolving into giggles, speaking with his hand covering his mouth, and struggling for prolonged periods to find the "perfect" thing to say. But to the survey question "If you were part of the program last semester, what have you gained already from participating in this improv class?" Karlos wrote, "I've been able to actually go up and do things in front of an audience." Although he still had not wholly conquered his tendencies to laugh or to stall when all eyes were on him, Karlos revealed his own pride and progress. In her end-of-semester interview, Kim also explained the advances she had made toward this goal. "I think that now I could stand in front of an audience, even though it's scary, but I could actually talk and not be, like, fainting there, and I could actually speak, and act, and have a good time."

Applying Their Learning Beyond the Program

In their end-of-fall-semester interviews, several participants described how their behavior had changed since the start of the program in what Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) term "real-world situations" (i.e., those outside of improv class). Said Helena, "I think I participate a little more. I used to be like this [tucks her chin and hides her head behind a curtain of hair]. Now in class I can actually speak up for myself." In addition to describing himself as "more confident" and confessing, "I like to participate more now," in his interview Bart identified cognitive gains. "It [improv] helps me when I'm in the middle of something, like when I'm stuck, it helps me to think quicker, think of whatever I have to think of … It's taught me to think outside—I use the same strategies outside."

Some participants also disclosed a desire to own and apply these skills more broadly—for example, by becoming more comfortable with speaking in public. In her survey, Helena echoed her sentiments from the end of the first semester, writing, "I am more involved with group discussions." This response suggests that Helena used the program's safe space to practice airing her thoughts and then transferred this expressive skill to a relevant context. Such an outcome is precisely what L4C hopes to support.

Personal and Social Growth

Still other survey respondents revealed their deeper understanding of improv's gifts. Three returning students identified "self-confidence" as their goal; another wrote that his was "creativity." Three other returning participants mentioned combating shyness or fear. The

responses of two participants concerned the social implications of personal growth. For example, in his interview Bennett said simply, "I feel like an example." One of the new students wrote in his survey that he hoped "to become better at what I do as a person and know I react to what others do."

Finally, other participants focused solely on their social gains. Returning improviser Tina hoped to gain "a broader view of teamwork." In his end-of-semester interview, Bart said that one of the things he enjoyed about the program was meeting new people. Returning participant Stacia wrote in her survey, "I really like the way I can work with my friends like Helena, Leon, or Kristina because it makes the scene much MORE COMFORTABLE! :D"

Fun Forever

Importantly, throughout this rich experience, the fun was never lost.

Figure 14. PLAY! research assistant Felt claps for Katie, Tina, Helena, and Leon, caught giggling at their own antics.

During their respective interviews, Bart mentioned "the fun—the games are fun," and Kristina said, "Some things I've liked about it [improv workshop] is the games, like Freeze Tag and those games, and how we perform our little skits. And I like how we're always together and we have fun." To the survey prompt "Please share any additional comments or feedback on this improv class!" participants almost universally chose to respond and, in their answers, mentioned fun:

I love this class, the members, and the whole concept of it. A great experience.

I like improv Class !!! ^.^

It is really fun.

This improv class is very fun and I hope they keep doing it.

I love it, great class and shown me many things.

I think it's a good class (:

I love improvisation! Keep it going guys. You're the BEST!

Awesome!

I like improv class!

THIS IS AWESOME! Much more to learn :)

In her interview, Kim summed up this sentiment by saying, "I want improv class to be more long."

Conclusion

L4C at RFK provided youths with a safe space to build trust, explore identity, learn along with peers and adults, develop theatrical skills, and grow as individuals and citizens. Crucially, this learning occurred within the context of play. In the current climate of high-stakes testing, labor and funding battles, and perceived peril (real and imaginary) around every hallway and virtual corner, providing space for play is perhaps the most subversive—and rewarding—gift we could offer youths.

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Appendix A

1. What have you enjoyed about improv workshop?
2. How, if at all, do you think you've changed from the first day of improv workshop to today?
3. What goals do you have for next semester in improv workshop?
4. What would you change about improv workshop—to improve it or just to switch it up—next semester?

Appendix B

	0 Not at all	1 Slightly	2 Somewhat	3 A good deal	4 Extremely
1. Do you have what you consider an active imagination? Do you consider yourself to be a shy person?					
2. Are you good at using your imagination in an active way to solve problems?					
3. Do you find it easy to speak or perform in front of a group?					
4. Do you consider yourself to be a playful person?					
5. Do you tend to see the humor in things?					
6. Do you consider yourself to be a creative person?					
7. Are you good at finishing things that you start?					
8. Do you consider yourself to be self-confident?					
9. Does fear of failure make you avoid taking on tasks or challenges?					
10. Do you make friends easily?					
11. Are you comfortable working in group situations?					
12. Do you consider yourself to be a good listener?					
13. Is it easy for you to communicate your ideas with others?					
14. Are you accepting of others' ideas and opinions, even when they are different from your own?					
15. Do you find it easy to pay attention, even when the subject is not interesting to you?					

16. What do you hope to gain from this improv class?

17. If you are a returning student, what have you gained already from participating in this improv class?

18. Please share any additional comments or feedback on this improv class!

Thanks for your help! Now let's play!

Enhanced Participation: Creating Opportunities for Youth Leadership Development

Clara Waloff

The term "leadership" appears frequently in the language and literature of youth development, and for many after-school programs it is one of many expected developmental outcomes for youth. What characterizes youth leadership development? What do youth participants identify as its key elements? Turning to youth who have been identified as leaders, this article looks at what they have to say about their own experience as emerging leaders.

Working in the youth development field, I saw many examples of participation in after-school programs that involved more than merely showing up, and I began to think about youth development and leadership in terms of enhanced participation. Through interviews, focus groups, and one in-depth arts and research project, youth and alumni from a community-based organization in New York City shared their ideas about leadership development, which are supported by a body of literature about youth development. These young leaders were in high school or college or were out of school altogether. For many, their status as older youth allowed them some perspective on their experience as emerging leaders. One older alumna could compare her current views on leadership development to those she had held several years before. As I listened to her and the others, a number of questions arose for me regarding the implications of leadership for youth in community-based settings:

- What is the potential and what are the challenges for community-based youth organizations in fostering and sustaining youth leadership development?
- What experiences do youth have in the process of emergent leadership development? What can the adults around them learn from those experiences?

Research Notes

The research for this essay was conducted at a community-based organization in New York City ("El Centro")[1], where I worked from 2005 through 2013. El Centro is rooted in the people, culture, and issues of the mostly Latino neighborhood in which it is embedded. Its mission is to develop leadership in a context of community development and social justice.

[1] The names of all organizations and individuals used in this essay have been changed. Many of those interviewed chose their own pseudonyms.

Youth Development and Youth Leadership Development

For many organizations, development is a goal that is part of a range of expected outcomes[2] for youth participants. The Search Institute's "40 developmental assets" model provides youth development practitioners with a common language and is divided into internal and external assets and subcategories such as "support," "empowerment," "boundaries and expectations," "constructive use of time," "commitment to learning," "positive values," "social competencies," and "positive identity" (2007). Often, youth development is often framed as growth on a personal level, as young people move "further along on the spectrum from where they started" (J. McGoughlin, director of Youth Programs at the Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services, personal communication, November 5th, 2010). For many youth leaders, alumni, and mentors, the aim of youth leadership development is connected to the aims of youth development. If development is an overall goal in working with youth, so that every young adult experiences personal growth and change, then leadership can be understood as the ultimate goal of that development.

Beyond Showing Up—Enhanced Participation in Leadership Development

Out-of-school organizations are uniquely positioned to cultivate leadership development among their participants because their programs can offer opportunities for enhanced participation, a concept that refers to the deep involvement that youth can experience in programs like El Centro. In their own words, the youth I spoke with described it as participation involving more than "just showing up." This can take different forms and will be discussed further below. Common elements include participation that

- develops voice and identity;
- allows for development of relationships with peers and adult mentors;
- provides opportunities for decision-making and problem-solving; and
- encourages involvement in real-world settings and connection to community.

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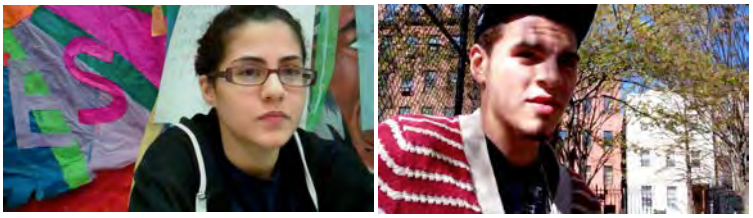
[2] In the *Afterschool Youth Outcomes Inventory*, the Partnership for After School Education (PASE) published a set of expected outcomes for out-of-school youth programs. Included in the "Social and Emotional Outcomes Inventory" section are outcomes such as "improved communication skills," indicated by both "effective expression of thoughts and feelings" and "increased assertiveness in social context" (PASE, 2013, p. 8). Another expected outcome is "increased leadership and civic engagement," indicated by both "increased ability and interest to lead others or activities" and "increased awareness of issues that impact life and community" (2013, p. 10). In "Confronting 'The Big Lie': The Need to Reframe Expectations of After-School Programs," Halpern, a staunch advocate for such programs, makes the case that their appropriate role is to provide opportunities for youth to grow in developmental tasks in such areas as "creativity, aesthetic sense, self-expression, interpersonal skill, sense of agency and voice, identification with home and community culture, individuality and relatedness, compassion, and physical vitality" (2006, p. 112).

When the youth who are discussed in this essay reflected on being deeply involved and having ownership over their experiences, they began to talk about themselves in terms of leadership.

At organizations like El Centro, becoming a leader is embedded in a context of community and social development. This idea is not unique. In Experience and Education, Dewey wrote about education that provides "continuity" to a wider community (1938). While youth development can focus on individuals, the larger goal of youth leadership development at organizations like El Centro is preparing young people to tackle real-world problems and create change in their communities. At El Centro, many youth characterized their leadership development in terms of community activism, referring to marches, rallies, political hearings, and campaigns in which they had taken leadership roles. Many spoke of participating not only in activities organized by adults, but also in initiatives based on issues that they and their peers had identified.

Developing Leadership Through the Arts

For many youth at El Centro, the arts are an entryway to leadership development. They made the case that participation in the arts can lead to personal and social transformation when it provides opportunities for the exercise of one's voice, creativity, original thought, imagination, and power. They illustrated that through high-quality and high-engagement experiences in the arts, they could develop their voices and identities, connect their own experiences to those of others, imagine realities beyond what they saw before them, and ultimately find opportunities for leadership.[3]



Alicia and Ben in the winter of 2012

I interviewed Alicia and Ben, two recent alumni of El Centro, together in the fall of 2009 and separately in the winter of 2012. The arts provided solid ground for both of them to develop a positive self-image and their identity as leaders in a program where they had the freedom to do so and where adults had high expectations of them. Both Ben and Alicia had returned in different capacities to the organization, but—like many of the youth I observed at El Centro—essentially neither of them ever really left it. Both started a youth dance crew when they were members and have continued with the group. Alicia became a paid staff member in a program at El Centro that she attended when she was younger. She and Ben continue to be members of arts ensembles that put on productions at the organization, and both

[3] Shernoff is an excellent resource for looking at youth experiences in terms of participation; see "Youth Engagement in After-School Programs: A Perspective from Experience Sampling," which describes research on middle school participants' experiences in after-school programs (2008).

describe their leadership development as unfolding hand-in-hand with their development in the arts. Alicia commented, "When it comes to me, El Centro basically started it all. I came when I was six, that's when I started with the arts. As I got older, that's when I started learning about leadership."

Thriving as a Path to Leadership

In my interview with Alicia and Ben in 2009, Ben described his experience with theater. He was working intently with the drama instructor, ultimately writing and performing a one-man play. In 2012 he described several experiences that contributed to his ability to thrive in the arts. The concept of thriving, especially as it relates to success in school, is frequently discussed in literature about youth development (Benson & Scales, 2009). Through the arts, youth leaders at El Centro made clear connections between being able both to thrive in areas of their own choosing and to find opportunities for leadership in them. In the course of a year, Ben was cast as the lead in El Centro's annual professional production in celebration of Three Kings Day, won a citywide championship with his dance crew, traveled to South America to present his work in dance with a group from El Centro, and wrote, directed, and starred in a play about the death of his uncle in the World Trade Center attack on September 11, 2001. In each of these experiences, Ben positioned himself (intentionally or not) in a leadership role. In organizing and mentoring younger members of his dance crew, galvanizing his peers into performing in his play and then coaching and directing them in it, being a role model to his peers and younger performers in the Three Kings Day celebration, and representing youth and community in a delegation to South America, Ben was identified as a leader by adults and his peers, and ultimately by himself.

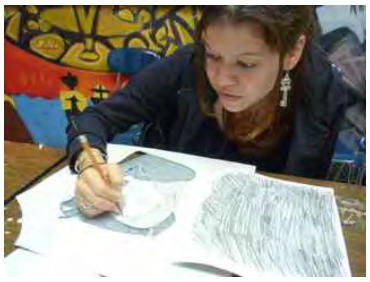
Opportunities and Outcomes of Enhanced Participation

What does it take for someone like Ben to develop into leadership roles? This next section looks at the conditions that enable such a trajectory. In the literature and databases of out-of-school programs, youth are often referred to as participants. This status is easily achieved; youth can sign up for a program or be signed up for one and then simply show up. But they may also have opportunities for enhanced participation, where they invest in and have power over their development. The youth I interviewed referred to many outcomes of enhanced participation that contributed to their leadership development, including experiences of speaking up, voicing opinions, and feeling that they are or have become "outspoken." They also pointed to opportunities for enhanced participation in public speaking and facilitation of workshops and presentations and speak of having a choice in activities and programs and power in decision-making and problem solving and over their experience in general.

Opportunities for enhanced participation are facilitated by adults who work with youth. Outcomes of enhanced participation are recognized by youth and adults as the results of those opportunities. Opportunities for and outcomes of enhanced participation that contribute to leadership

development both depend on effective youth-adult partnerships (Petrokubi & Zeldin, 2006)—relationships between youth and adults where power is shared (Eames-Sheavly, 2007).

For many of these youth at El Centro, becoming a leader entailed losing some of the self-consciousness associated with putting themselves "out there." Several I spoke with described moments when they stopped worrying about what their peers and adults thought of them. They referred to occasions when they were faced with deciding whether to speak up in the midst of a conflict and ultimately did so because of a feeling that, as one said, "If I don't do this, no one else will." This perception is exemplified in Anastasia's comment:



Anastasia in the art class, 2010

After I started participating more and speaking more, that's where everything started happening a little more. It's okay to be the quiet person, but if you're not really in there, and you're just in your own world, and not really expressing yourself, also to get ideas—but sharing ideas, you're kind of in a closed block. You're blocking yourself from a lot of things at the same time.

Anastasia is another recent alum of El Centro who became part of its internship program.[4] She has not always been recognized as a leader, and she has had a long journey in identifying herself as one. She joined El Centro's after-school program as a freshman in high school. She was quiet and kept to herself, talking only to her small group of friends and finding an outlet in visual art. During high school, she became recognized for her artistic skill and the contributions she made through her visual art. More recently, she had become increasingly recognized for her leadership capacity, emerging as a strong voice in group discussions and decision making, respected as a counselor among her peers, relied upon by adults to inspire other youth and accomplish the tasks she sets out to do, and participating avidly in visual arts opportunities both within and outside of the organization. How did Anastasia transform from a quiet observer into an active initiator? What conditions enabled her to develop as a leader?

El Centro Interns at school closings rally and hearing, winter 2012

[4] El Centro interns are high school, college, and out-of-school youth who take leadership roles in various activities and community-organizing intitiatives.

And what can her perspective on her personal trajectory tell us about the nature of youth leadership development? While her journey is unique, it has similarities and connections to the stories shared by a number of youth leaders. "I can't keep waiting and depending on somebody else to do something. Sometimes you're just gonna have to step in and do something yourself," Anastasia said; Alicia stated, "My opinion does matter. That's what I learned here. And I would think, if my opinion matters here, it matters anywhere."

Many youth described coming into leadership reluctantly. Ben commented:

> Everybody sees me as some type of a leader. I find it hard to believe! People look at me and say Ben…they put me on such a high pedestal, I'm not gonna say I don't understand why, I can see, but I don't think it's such a big deal. As far as [my dance crew]…there's no established leader…But for some reason, when it comes to decision making, it always comes down to me and Alicia. Everybody relies on me and Alicia… It's crazy…I'm like, we're a group, we're a family, we're supposed to make decisions together. But they feel like when they're stuck, they have to rely on me and Alicia. Inside it feels good, but at the same time, I want them to progress as leaders as well. That's why with some situations that come up, I try to ask them what they would do. And I try to get their opinion and I try to get them to lead, instead of just having me and Alicia. If they just rely on me and Alicia, they're not going to learn for themselves.

Ben's recognition of the responsibility that comes along with leadership is significant. His desire to foster leadership in his dance crew members was shared by many emerging youth leaders. Mulan, another intern at El Centro, also reflected on her leadership development:

> El Centro has helped me be more expressive…As a leader, you need to be able to express yourself. We do a lot of public speaking…That was a real point when I felt growth. I don't know if that is leadership? But I know it was definite growth…[M]y mentor, she put me through a lot of tough situations…I would say, "I don't want to do that, I don't want to speak, get someone else who likes to talk." Because of that, I taught myself, you gotta do it. Now I'm not afraid to talk in public, I don't hold back when I feel like I need to say something.

Mulan's recognition of her own growth and development is reminiscent of other youths' reflections. For the entire group of interns, using their voices, especially in public speaking, has been a core indicator of leadership development.

Working on issues with real-world implications is another powerful experience for youth. Alicia referred to a campaign against a nuclear waste site that posed a severe threat to the community. Alicia recalled going to rallies as youth and said, "[W]e spoke from our experience." Asked whether they were received differently because they were young, Alicia responded, "Yes, I think we made

more of a statement. It's not only the adults showing concern, it's also the kids. That should say something." In describing her dance crew's involvement in a citywide competition, Alicia talked about connecting the arts to issues that affect people personally. The crew started out with a focus on dance but ultimately saw the possibility of using dance to bring attention to gang violence an issue that affected everyone in the crew and many young people in the community:

> If it doesn't affect you personally, you're not really going to strive to make [it] happen. We all felt like we needed to discuss what was going on around us, what we feel like is a big issue. Because if we all want to change it then, in agreement we can make it work. People will see that we really want to change this. And seeing how serious we are, they will be serious as well, and support us.

Imagining a different world is not always enough. For Alicia's crew, embodying the conflicts and issues they were addressing and expressing those images in dance, and connecting to an audience were important steps in taking a lead in making change in their community.

Peer Support and Safe Space to Develop as a Leader

How do youth get to the point of being able to use their voices and make important decisions? Having a safe space to participate fully, express one's ideas, and speak freely is big part of leadership development. Anastasia described how peer support helped her become more outspoken:

> When you start to participate, start talking about things, and start helping out, start doing a lot of other stuff, you're getting your ideas out there but at the same time, you're getting new ones from other people…When you do that you get to know other people, you get support from people. And this is how a big circle of trust or friendship [is formed].

Rose, an alumna of El Centro and a site director in the organization at the time of my study, described the experience of having a safe space when she was a youth as something that occurred on a regular basis, which created a unique culture for emerging leaders:

Rose in the spring of 2012

> And before you know it, we're having a safe space…So much came out of those meetings. People would cry, half of those people I'm still friends with because of the relationships and the openness that we had with each other, because we had space for that. We always did activities to have compassion for each other. We had all of those experiences every day. It all helped me figure out what I wanted to bring to the programs when I came back to El Centro.

In a focus group conducted with El Centro interns, Adam, a new intern but a longtime El Centro member, emphasized the peer support characteristic of the group:

> One thing I like about being a leader in a group is that we all support each other. You see Zero is always trying to be in the background, but one day we are going to push her up there! Go speak Zero! It's gonna happen! It happens to all of us. One thing a leader should do is encourage other leaders to lead.

Montgomery, in his second year as an intern, was hesitant to label himself as a leader. But while speaking in the focus group, he identified aspects of his leadership training that he had already used in the dance crew he was in with Alicia and Ben:

> In a way, El Centro supplies me with these...tools to keep my crew together. We use the same sort of techniques that interns do. Like in my crew, everyone's a leader. But there's no one set leader. Everyone has an opinion and we give them that chance to voice it, the same way we do in the interns group...Being a part of the interns group is slowly helping me develop my skills as far as becoming a leader. I don't feel like a leader sitting here, but I guess I am in my own little way.

It was often difficult for these youth leaders to describe themselves in those terms. And in many ways, they talked around that idea—identifying moments when other people looked to them as leaders (Ben), identifying moments when they felt challenged and moved outside their comfort zone to voice their opinions (Mulan and Anastasia), and identifying moments when they used those leadership skills in other contexts (Montgomery, Alicia, and Ben).

Magdalena in the spring of 2012

Magdalena, the director of El Centro's internship program, pointed out that many in it do not readily see themselves as leaders:

A lot of them, they don't identify themselves as leaders, they haven't even taken an opportunity to reflect that, "Oh, I've had this growth from when I used to be like this," until someone else points it out to them.

When interns exemplified leadership, Magdalena would explicitly call their attention to it. While many were hesitant to call themselves leaders, they could nonetheless clearly identify and talk about times when they spoke up, used their voices, expressed their opinions, facilitated a program, and stepped up when it was uncomfortable to do so—all elements of enhanced participation that lead to youth leadership development. Magdalena's point that it often takes someone else to point out one's leadership development is consistent with the reflections of many youth.

The Nudge Factor: Mentoring Relationships as Opportunities for Enhanced Participation

> *They need a BIG imagination. They need to have high self-esteem, and put their mind to it, because if they don't—see, El Centro just gave us that push. And it brought us there. But people that don't have programs like this, it's hard…they need that extra push. (Ben)*

A recurring theme expressed by youth at El Centro (which is also supported in much of the literature about youth development) was the impact of relationships with caring adult mentors. The words the youth used in speaking of the adults' actions—like "push," "nudge," "support," and "challenge"—all indicate the importance of mentoring in establishing and upholding expectations. At organizations like El Centro, mentoring relationships are developed intentionally by adult staff members and sought out by youth. In interviews with youth, alumni, and mentors, the idea of growing as a leader with the support and encouragement of a mentor emerged as quite significant. Several youth described experiences of taking on mentoring roles as a part of becoming a leader, and indicated that mentoring itself was strong evidence of leadership. Anastasia commented:

As a leader you have to have an open mind about things. Sometimes you have to sit there and listen. Sometimes it's OK to let other people make their mistakes. Because by being a leader you have to let them learn to make their mistakes, but also, how to fix them. I think that is a big part of being a leader, and for someone to teach someone else how to be their own leader. A leader is not just about being a leader for everyone, but also helping others to be their own leaders, and to figure their own steps.

Alicia described the mentoring relationship she started to develop with the young people she worked with this way:

> They have a little [dance] crew, and…they were going through some problems. They asked me how [my crew] does it, and I said that "You guys are picking a person who is in charge," Even when someone steps up to do certain things, we all come to an agreement. I want to be there for them, because I want to see their group progress. They were talking about quitting, and I said, "Together you are a family, and you guys shouldn't quit on each other."

Essentially, Alicia was coaching this next group of leaders in the skills of collective leadership. In Alicia's experience, leadership entailed mentoring leadership in others, listening, and synthesizing a community's desires.

Many youth commented that they felt cared for and supported by adult mentors. Alicia noted that being at El Centro felt like being in a family and contrasted that with her experience in school, saying, "In school, teachers are teachers, you can have a relationship with some of them…when you come to El Centro, everybody knows everybody [and] [e]verybody is looking out for

everybody." In *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*, Noddings describes the importance of such relationships: "At every stage we need to be cared for in the sense that we need to be understood, received, respected, recognized" (2005, Page xi). She also writes about caring being "relational" and "mutual" (2005).

The youth also acknowledged that they felt accountable to their adult mentors. For Rose, developing strong relationships with adult mentors when she was a young person at El Centro was an arduous process. It took a lot of positive reinforcement for her to see leadership qualities in herself.

> [Y]ou don't know it when you're in it. I didn't think, "I'm a leader." If you asked my mentor, she would agree. One day, all the young people were complaining about something, but they were only complaining to me. I was upset because then I would be the only one to say something, and I would get into trouble. I told my mentor, and someone else pulled me to the side and said, "You know, you have leadership skills. You are a leader here." I said, "I don't want to be the leader, I didn't ask to be a leader!" They just told me, "Rose, you might not think you are a leader but you are. You can either use that power to do something good, to promote justice, or use it to persuade negativity." That stuck with me after that. I guess leadership and people looking up to you is not your choice. And sometimes you have to embrace that responsibility. From then on I looked at things differently. When my peers did complain to me, I tried to figure out with them how we could voice our concerns and negotiate certain things. So when growing up, people may tell you "You are a leader," but you really won't understand what that means until you go through your own experience.

Magdalena emphasized that part of the role of mentoring in leadership and in all youth development is providing opportunities for reflection and assessment:

> If there are different levels of leadership, then how far someone gets and having the awareness of it—"I'm emerging into something"—knowing that versus not knowing that, will either [encourage] you, or you'll resist…I think unless the leadership is guided and there are opportunities to assess and reflect, like, "Oh I did that, or how could I do that better? I didn't do that so great. That's a weakness, how do I work on that?" it doesn't allow the enhancement to be as enhanced as it could be in regards to their participation as a leader or a bystander.

Putting Enhanced Participation into Practice

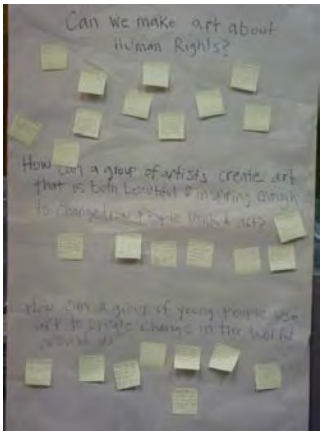
How can after-school educators provide opportunities for enhanced participation? The following is an account of a project that engaged young people not only in the creation of art and expression of their voices, but also in the ongoing reflection and study of the work they were doing and the effect it was having on themselves and others. In the fall of 2010, curious about young people's

perspectives on their experience of creating art, I brought the idea of a participatory action research[5] project to high school students in the visual art class at El Centro. I was particularly interested in how youth saw themselves developing as leaders (something that the adults around them recognized and aimed for) and as the creators of art for social change (another goal of the organization).

The participatory character of the project emerged naturally from a class discussion. Andre, one of the members of the visual art class, mentioned that the video class had worked on a project about human rights and asked, "Can we make art about human rights?" What follows is a paraphrased account of the discussion that ensued:

> Andre: We should do something like that in here.
> Jessenia: You're trying to make this like social studies! We're not in school!
> Anastasia: That sounds like history.

I then asked the group why they thought we had started the semester by making maps about our lives. If this was an art class, why didn't we just start by drawing?

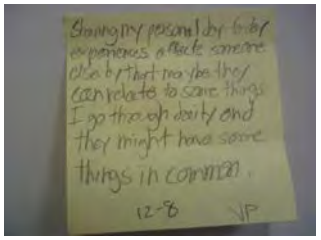


Post-it note Inquiry Wall, fall 2010

Anastasia: So we can learn from others' experiences and understand our own better.
Clara: So El Centro is not just about making pretty art.
Jessenia: It's about social art.
Clara: Can we do both?

By the end of the class, we had generated three questions and written them on a large piece of paper on the wall:

1. Can we make art about human rights?
2. How can a group of artists create art that is both beautiful and inspiring enough to change how people think and act?
3. How can a group of young people use art to create change in the world around us?



Post-it note response to question # 2, fall 2010

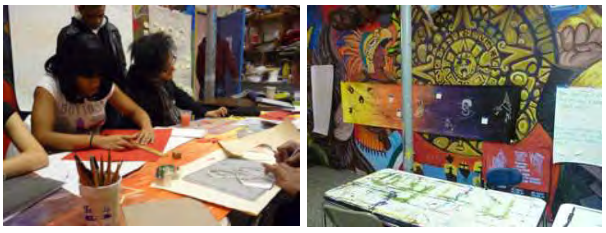
[5] Social psychologist Orlando Fals-Borda was one of the creators of participatory action research (PAR). He and others used PAR as an "alternative paradigm" to classic subject-object research (Fals-Borda, 1987). They aimed to turn the power imbalance of subject-object research on its head in their quest for social justice and transformation. PAR relates directly to the principles of the Education for Liberation Network and the work of Paulo Freire, whose "see, analyze, act" methodology was a cornerstone of Catholic liberation theology in Brazil in the 1960s (Freire, 1970). The work of Augusto Boal (who built upon Freire's work) and of Luis Moll is also connected to PAR (see Boal, 1979 and Moll, 2010).

As the semester continued, students added Post-It notes with responses to these questions to this ongoing "inquiry wall," which reflected significant changes in the participants' thinking. The wall served as a group journal, with ideas developing for everyone to see.

Individuals who initially answered "no" to "Can we make art about human rights?" later described how their answer changed to "yes." They pointed to changes in their responses on other occasions throughout the semester and explained how various experiences had altered their thinking. From October to December, members of the art class visited museums, art galleries, and community murals around New York City to see examples of art that inspired social change. They also created their own artwork with that same goal. Providing support for ongoing reflection, engagement in posing and answering questions, and discussions among the class members—all part of the PAR process—is one model for involving youth in enhanced participation in an arts class.

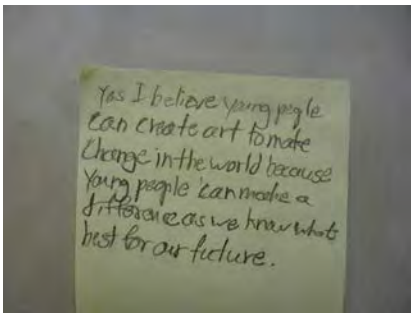
Starting with Self, Connecting to Others

One of the most salient ideas that emerged from the youths' research was that to inspire change, they had to create artwork that people would relate to. The identification process started with youth in the class making art that told stories about their everyday lives. Sharing "what they went through" every day, members created works of art that examined their own lives and made connections to each other. They highlighted this as a critical step in creating transformative work. Aesthetics educator Greene writes that finding meaning in artwork is a collaboration between artist and audience that creates a personal and shared experience (2001). Essentially, she argues, we can understand our own experience better by learning and understanding the experiences of others.



Members of the art class at El Centro, fall 2010.

In "Mobilizing Culture, Language, and Educational Practices: Fulfilling the Promises of Mendez and Brown," Moll refers to "funds of knowledge," a concept with pertinent connections to sharing one's life experience (2010). He describes the "mobility of knowledge" acquired informally at home and in neighborhoods, through families, language, and culture and characterizes these "funds" not as liabilities but as assets that are part of the makeup of the whole individual. The youth's engagement in participatory action research revealed similar funds of knowledge. Responses to the questions that the class had generated at the beginning of the study included "We can use art to create inspirations, emotions, expressions that people can see and feel and want to be the reason of change and support it," "They can draw what they see going on in the world around them," "Create from your heart. Draw about things that are really important to you and that you yourself want to see changed," and "It starts with the message that you are trying to send into the world. If the message is powerful enough, people will listen." The youth increasingly referred to the use of their voices as the project continued.



Post-it note response to question # 1, fall 2010

In "Curriculum as Window and Mirror," Style describes students becoming windows and mirrors to each other—sharing and understanding personal experiences as well as identifying with what is shared, as the youth in the visual art class did. "If the student is understood as occupying a dwelling of self," she writes, "education needs to enable the student to look through window frames in order to see the realities of others and into mirrors in order to see her/his own reality reflected" (Style, 1996, Page 35).

In "Critique: Where Art Meets Assessment," an article about a youth audio documentary program that used in-depth, youth-led assessment processes, Soep discusses the importance of youth having control of their experience and describes the "commitment to creating conditions that allow students to serve as producers and judges of their own development" (2005, page 40). She underscores the significance of youth taking part not only in the creation of work but also in analyzing the impact of the experience on themselves personally, as a community, and as a society at large (2005).

In this inquiry project, it was critical to engage youth not only in creating art but also in research and reflection. Both aspects contributed to powerful revelations about youth leadership development. As artists, authors of a study, and the ones who pose the research questions, young people are put in decision-making and problem-solving positions. In "From Voice to Agency: Guiding Principles for Participatory Action Research with Youth," Rodriguez and Brown address the significance of providing youth with opportunities to participate in action research: "[T]he realities of their lives were used as bases from which to investigate and build more complex theories about their own and others' schooling experiences" (2009, page 26). The authors also write that the youth participants began to see "their own experiences as worthy of serious investigation and their knowledge as legitimate" (Rodriguez and Brown, 2009, page 26).

Artwork created by youth in the visual art class, fall 2010.

Conclusion

What a simple and powerful idea: to work with youth toward the notion that their experiences are "worthy of serious investigation" and that "their knowledge is legitimate." In essence, that is what providing opportunities for enhanced participation means. Out-of-school organizations cannot create youth leaders, but they can create spaces and opportunities for youth to come into their own power and potential.

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Witnessing the Power of El Sistema in Urban Communities: Sister Cities Girlchoir

Erika Kitzmiller

On December 5th 2013, the Sister Cities Girlchoir members gathered for a performance at the Union League, a famed elite social and philanthropic club in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The girls wore their school uniforms to identify their respective schools and sported white carnation boutonnieres to show that they were all members of the same ensemble. Several family members were there to see the performance. For many of the girls, this was the first time that they were performing in such an austere space with choir members from another school. When the girls entered the building, with its crystal chandeliers, hand-carved mahogany staircases, and antique silk curtains, many of them remarked that they had never seen anything so beautiful. Moments later, they settled into the room where they would be performing and enjoyed a snack that the Union League members had prepared for them.

When they finished eating, the girls gathered to warm up their voices as the Union League members quietly filed into the room to mingle with their social peers and observe these young women. At 6:00 p.m., the members of the Sister Cities Girlchoir lined up in their designated places, fixed their boutonnieres, and prepared to begin their program. Under the careful guidance of their conductor, Alysia Lee, the choir sang a medley of several African American spirituals, including "When the Saints Go Marching In" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," and then a Christmas classic, "Dona Nobis Pacem," in the original Latin. Lee's high standards were evident to everyone who watched these young women perform. The members of the choir had memorized the music. They watched for the conductor's cues. They remembered the various hand movements that accompanied the songs. When the concert was over, several of the Union League members commended the girls on their performance and applauded their musical talents.

Afterward, the girls posed on the steps of the Union League for a photograph to commemorate this moment. Their families looked on with pride at what their children, nieces, and grandchildren had accomplished that evening. After their performance, the members of the Sister Cities Girlchoir and their families walked to the Kimmel Center to listen to the Simón Bolivar Symphony Orchestra rehearse for their concert under the direction of Gustavo Dudamel, the famed El Sistema prodigy. For many, this was the first time that they had ever been to the Kimmel Center or heard a professional orchestra in person. They were in awe of the beautiful space, but what made even more of an impression on the young women was hearing Dudamel speaking Spanish to his Venezuelan orchestra. Several of the Latina girls turned to me and remarked, "Miss, he is speaking Spanish." What these young women remembered the most from that evening was that the man who led this famed group spoke in their home language and came from the culture that was most familiar to them.

Before the performance at the Union League, I interviewed several family members to understand why these youth joined the choir, why they continued to participate, and what benefits they received from being in the program. One mother told me that her daughter loved to sing and perform, but that she really enjoyed being in this choir because they "learn about different cultures and sing in different languages" (parent 1, interview, December 5, 2012). Another woman stated that she had been trying to save money to give her granddaughter singing lessons at a local music school. When the grandmother heard about the Sister Cities Girlchoir, she immediately enrolled her in the program; without the choir, her granddaughter might not have had the opportunity to receive training as a singer (grandmother 1, interview, December 5, 2012).

In the past decade, researchers have published several studies that promote the importance of quality after-school programs as a means of improving school attendance, helping children develop social skills, encouraging physical activity, and reducing youth violence (Active Living Research, 2012; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Despite the support and availability of these programs, research also shows that youth of color from low-income homes are still much less likely than white youth from middle- and high-income homes to have access to and participate in after-school programs (Lee, Borden, Serido, & Perkins, 2009; Riggs, Bohnert, Guzman, & Davidson, 2010; Roffman, Pagano, & Hirsch, 2001). In addition, studies point out that female youth are less likely than male youth to participate actively in after-school programs and that middle and high school youth are also less likely than elementary school children to participate in them (Goerge, Cusick, & Guiltinan, 2009; Roth, Malone, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010).

History of El Sistema and the Sister Cities Girlchoir

In 1975 José Antonio Abreu, an economist and musician, gathered 11 young musicians in his garage for the first rehearsal of his renowned El Sistema training program. Many of these original members remained with the organization to manage its growth, provide musical training, and spread its message throughout the world. From the founding of El Sistema, Abreu remained committed to his belief that rigorous musical training and performance had the potential to reduce poverty, stem violence, and promote social justice among Venezuela's most impoverished youth. According to Abreu, "poverty is not just a lack of a roof or bread. It is also a spiritual lack—a loneliness and lack of recognition. The vicious cycle of poverty can be broken when a child poor in material possessions acquires spiritual wealth through music" (Tunstall, 2012, p. xii).

Venezuelan youth usually start to attend an El Sistema center, known as a nucleo, in their local town when they are small, sometimes as young as two or three years old. Most of the members stay with the program as teenagers and rehearse with their local nucleo six days a week for several hours each day. In addition, they attend retreats and workshops with members of other nucleos. Participation, instruction, and supplies are free. Currently, Venezuela has over 60 children's orchestras, nearly 200 youth orchestras, and over 30 professional adult orchestras and choirs. Abreu and his El Sistema graduates, including Dudamel, Edicson Ruiz, and the members of the

famed Simón Bolivar Symphony Orchestra, continue to advocate for the organization's mission and help develop new El Sistema programs. When Dudamel, who was only 28 years old at the time, accepted the position as the musical director the Los Angeles Philharmonic starting in the 2009–2010 season, he pledged to bring El Sistema to the United States (Lubow, 2007); as of 2013, there are almost 100 El Sistema programs operating there (El Sistema USA; see also Booth, 2009; Majno, 2012; Tunstall, 2012; Wakin, 2011).

One of these US-based organizations is the Sister Cities Girlchoir in Philadelphia, under the direction of Alysia Lee. Lee is a classically trained singer and founder of Opus Nine, a chamber ensemble based in New York City that is actively engaged in musical outreach. Lee and the members of Opus Nine have been searching for ways to make their own musical outreach and educational efforts more meaningful for urban youth. During a brainstorming session, Lee stumbled upon a video of the Simón Bolivar Symphony Orchestra performing Shostakovich's Symphony Number 10[1] and, as she recalled, she was impressed with the "way the music sounded and that all the kids were brown" (A. Lee, interview, December 27, 2012). As a classically trained African American singer, Lee knew that students of color in the United States rarely have exposure to classical music or the training that she had enjoyed in her youth. Even though she knew about Dudamel's work, she had never heard of El Sistema. So she researched it, reading articles about its success and listening to recordings to understand what made it unique. After she learned more about it, she realized that the El Sistema philosophy matched her own desire to provide more meaningful musical education to urban, underserved youth. In September 2011 she became an El Sistema fellow at the New England Conservatory[2] and spent the year learning more about El Sistema and visiting El Sistema-inspired programs in Juneau, Alaska (Juneau, Alaska Music Matters), Los Angeles, California (Youth Orchestra LA [YOLA]), New York City, New York (Harmony Program), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Play On, Philly! and Tune Up Philly), and Boston, Massachusetts (Boston Conservatory Lab Charter School), as well as several El Sistema programs in Venezuela.

As a fellow, Lee began to reflect more deeply about her own experiences as a young musician and how they had shaped her youth and her future aims. Lee believes that musical organizations, particularly her choir, helped sustain her childhood despite the challenges that she faced. There were times, she argues, that she often felt a sense of obligation to the members of her choir, which in turn helped her make healthier choices for her future. According to Lee, it was the relationships that she made in these organizations, not the music, that mattered. She argues that music on its own does not have any power; rather, the power to enact social change rests with the communities

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[1] This performance can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKXQzs6Y5BY&feature=youtube_gdata_player

[2] For more information about the New England Conservatory's Sistema Fellows Program, see http://necmusic.edu/sistema-fellowship

and relationships that are created through musical training and performance. In addition to believing in the importance of relationships, Lee wanted to start an organization that offered disadvantaged youth the kind of classical training that she had received as a young woman. When she began her vocal studies, Lee, like many adolescents, wanted to focus on Broadway show tunes. But her voice teachers insisted that she study classical music and promised her that with such training she would be able to sing any kind of music she wanted. While she was initially a bit skeptical, she quickly learned to love this approach because she "had this tool that other kids didn't have" (A. Lee, interview, December 27, 2012). As a classical singer, she soon realized that she had the training and skills to sing a wide variety of genres— jazz, Broadway, and gospel—in addition to classical. She appreciated the versatility that her training afforded her and continued to believe that her studies gave her the ability to pursue her own musical path. Over time, she realized that classical music offered another advantage: it has a rich history. Lee appreciated that there was a timeless quality to classical music; it was full of emotions that individuals felt centuries ago but that were still relevant to contemporary audiences. The more she studied classical music, the more she enjoyed "tapping into this eternal sense of emotion that was running through time" (A. Lee, interview, December 27, 2012).

Music educators Allsup and Shieh urge other educators to reach beyond performance and leverage music education as a way to combat the various injustices that artists observe in the world. Drawing on feminist and critical pedagogy (including Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Greene's Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change, and Noddings's Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education), they refer to this orientation as public music pedagogy (Allsup & Shieh, 2012). In their article, they argue that music educators must reach out beyond the traditional audiences for "when the audience becomes a community different from parents and teachers, and the performance is conceived as a response to that community, the work of performing and making music takes on a larger purpose and action" (Allsup & Shieh, p. 50). After reflecting on her own musical training, visiting other El Sistema programs, and thinking about the inequities in her world, Lee did exactly what Allsup and Shieh urge musical educators to do: she deviated from the typical El Sistema format and told her fellowship committee that she wanted to create a choral program rather than an orchestra ensemble. Lee believed that a choir reflected the importance of community over individuals, which for her was an essential component of her experience and the program that she hoped to create. In addition, after reading an influential World Bank report on the economic and social impacts of investing in girls' education and thinking about injustice in Philadelphia and Camden, Lee told her fellowship committee that she wanted to create an all-female group (Cunningham & Chaaban, 2011). Initially, some of the leaders of the El Sistema program were concerned that a single-sex program excluded male youth, but Lee leveraged research on the benefits of all-female programs and her own understanding of the inequities in the community to convince others to let her proceed (A. Lee, interview, December 27, 2012). In September 2012 Lee founded Sister Cities

Girlchoir to provide a safe space for disadvantaged female youth to build resilience and connections, strengthen academic and social skills, and develop healthy habits as participants in a world-class choral training program (A. Lee, 2012). Currently, the program operates in three low-income middle school charter schools that primarily serve students of color, two in Philadelphia and one in Camden. Lee selected these schools for two reasons: the student demographics reflected program aims and the school administration supported her goals.

As a classically trained musician, I have been interested in El Sistema for several years and asked Lee about observing rehearsals and speaking with the Sister Cities Girlchoir members and their families about their experiences. The qualitative data presented in this article were collected in a nine-month study of the Sister Cities Girlchoir. I gathered these data through observations of seven choir rehearsals and two performances as well as through semistructured interviews, surveys, and small focus groups with 16 choir members, five of their families, and Lee. After observing several rehearsals, I decided to focus my research around three questions: Why did the girls in the choir initially decide to participate? What made them continue? What benefits did they receive as participants in the program? I used traditional ethnographic methods—writing observational fieldnotes and coding the data from these observations as well as from the semistructured interviews, choir surveys, and small focus groups—as well as my own classical music training to collect and analyze the data included in this article.

Sister Cities Girlchoir: An Engine for Social Change in Low-Income Communities

At the beginning of every rehearsal, the members of the Sister Cities Girlchoir gathered in their school cafeteria to enjoy a small snack. Lee—or Ms. Alysia, as the girls know her—calmly reminded them that they had five minutes to finish their drinks and clean their trash. After five minutes, Lee grabbed two six-inch sticks and began to tap a rhythm over the girls' incessant after-school chatter. One by one, the girls quickly cleaned up their spaces and lined up two by two. Lee told them that they were going to the music room to use the piano and that since they are moving, they might as well be singing. As I stood there during one of my visits, watching the girls walk two by two through their school hallways to the music room, they immediately started singing a West African folk song, in its original language, that they had been studying for several weeks. When they were finally in the music room, the young women quietly took their seats in a neatly arranged circle and listened to the agenda for the day's rehearsal. After that, they stretched their bodies and proceeded through several different vocal warm-ups that any classically trained musician would immediately recognize, but with a twist. Lee began with a run up the scale, singing, "warming up our voices," and the girls immediately echoed her, following the exact run and using the same words. She continued with another run, singing, "ready, set, let's go." The choir repeated it, and then she sang, "do-re-mi-fa-so" and said, "let's try that." The girls imitated her sound and continued to warm up, moving up a half step every time they repeated the phrase. After they had

run through these exercises, they practiced watching Lee conduct a short phrase down the scale, singing, "May we follow you?"

When the girls started their vocal training, Lee had them rehearse songs without accompaniment. Because they were singing everything a capella, the girls could not hide their voices behind any instruments, which Lee believed encouraged them to learn how to listen and control their own voices (A. Lee, interview, December 27, 2012). During the rehearsals, Lee directed the first few runs and then, in true El Sistema fashion, asked the girls, "Can I have a volunteer come here and stand in the conductor's spot?" Four of them eagerly volunteered to replace Lee temporarily as director of the Sister Cities Girlchoir. Each time, Lee reminded these brave volunteers to make eye contact with Mr. Jon, their accompanist, to use strong gestures, to stand up straight like a leader, and to set the musical tempo and vocal dynamic that they wanted. As the girls attempted this, Lee coached the new conductors on how to use proper arm gestures and reminded the choir that they needed to follow their peers in the same way that they followed her. The volunteers beamed as they tried to outsmart their fellow choir members by making various tempo and dynamic changes. Even if they never became famous conductors like Dudamel, this conducting exercise gave these young women the opportunity to try something new, to take a learning risk, and to practice their leadership skills.

When the girls finished their warm-ups, Lee picked up the sticks one more time. The girls lined up and started singing the same West African folksong as before as they moved into the auditorium for the rest of the rehearsal. Lee reminded them about their upcoming performance at the Union League. For the remainder of the rehearsal, they practiced the songs—which they had memorized—that they would be performing at that event. They started with "Dona Nobis Pacem" in the original Latin, and eventually switched to singing several songs—"Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "When the Saints Go Marching In," and "Up Against the Sky"—in rounds. As the girls practiced, Lee gave them a number of reminders about vocal technique and stage presence. Before they sang "Dona Nobis Pacem," she urged them to get into their "stage-ready bodies"; almost immediately, the girls moved their shoulders and straightened their backs to show their conductor that they understood how to use their posture to improve their singing. When they finished each song, Lee used a mnemonic device to teach them how to bow. As the girls acknowledged the audience and practiced their bows, she had them whisper "Did I shine my shoes? Yes, I shined my shoes" to themselves. They laughed lightly as they practiced this, and eventually they learned how to bow without relying on the phrase. These activities reinforced the tenets of classical vocal training and reminded these young women that as members of the Sister Cities Girlchoir, they were part of something larger than themselves: they were members of a first-rate ensemble that rested on the commitment of individuals to ensure its success.

When I asked the choir members what prompted them to join the Sister Cities Girlchoir, the girls, like many adolescents, immediately boasted about their natural talents or their desire to be a

superstar. As one girl wrote on her survey, "I joined choir because singing is my passion and my life" (student survey, #3). Another echoed these sentiments and said that she joined the choir "because all of my friends said that I had a lovely voice" and because her mother suggested that she join since "I love to sing at home a lot." This student remarked that she enjoyed the various trips that the choir took and that her participation in the choir will "make me a superstar" (student survey #4). Others noted that they decided to participate in the choir because "it releases my inner talent" (student survey #6) and because "it's fun to use your voice in different places" (student survey #5). In most cases, the girls joined the choir simply because they thought they had good voices and wanted to find a way to improve their skills and sing with others. But as arts educator Nathan points out, "creative work as an actor, musician, dancer, sculptor, or graffiti artist gives students bragging rights and credibility, both critical to healthy adolescent development" (Nathan, 2013, pp. 47–48). The members of the Sister Cities Girlchoir have developed the "bragging rights and credibility" through their decision to join the choir and the experiences that their membership has afforded them.

When I asked these young women to explain why they continued in the choir, they offered a variety of answers that reflected their own personal connections to the musical selections, the choir staff, and the other members. One of the Latina students remarked that "when you sing you feel that there is a connection, a personal connection between you and the song" (student 4, interview, April 13, 2013. When I asked her to clarify what she meant, she told me that as a member of Sister Cities Girlchoir she got to sing in Spanish, which she never did before. She explained, "when I think about singing in Spanish, I just love it" (student 4, interview, April 13, 2013. The Sister Cities Girlchoir has given this young woman an opportunity to celebrate her linguistic heritage, her cultural background, and her ethnic identity—a rare event in many communities, but particularly in ones, such as hers, where racism and xenophobia affect youth of color from low-income homes (Pascale, 2013). Her membership in the choir reinforced her own personal experiences and identity. Moreover, it offered her a way to perform works that reflected her own passion and interests, which—as Nathan (2013) suggests—may transform schooling into a more meaningful experience.

The girls also stressed that their relationships with their fellow members and with Lee were a critical reason for their decision to continue in the choir. One African American girl suggested that she kept participating because "I love the group that I'm in…and Ms. Alysia" (student survey, #1). Another Latina girl echoed these sentiments and told me, "I still participate in SCGC because I just can't leave my team hanging" (student survey. #2). Others noted that their choir friends often differed from their peers in school (student survey, #5 and student survey, #6). The time that these young women spent with one another and with Lee offered them a space to develop their artistic talents, make new friends, and share the challenges and joys that they experienced in their lives. In the rehearsals and performances, Lee routinely encouraged them to use their voices and articulate the connections that they had with the music and one another.

Lee wanted to do more than build an ensemble of musicians; she wanted to create a choir for urban youth that provided a different experience than such organizations typically offered. According to her, when musicians consider ways to educate inner-city youth, they generally form choirs like the one in Sister Act 2, where youth sing gospel music or traditional African American spirituals. While there might be advantages to this approach, Lee knew that she could not follow it because it did not reflect her own journey as an artist and her own beliefs about the power that music might have for these young women. Instead, she selected music from a variety of genres that made the youth feel that they could transport themselves to a different time period or world culture but at the same time allowed them to identify with the emotions or feelings there. As Lee remarked, she wanted the youth to realize that there was still someone like them in those other places (A. Lee, interview, December 27, 2012). To reinforce these points, Lee used "circle time," which resembles a morning meeting format, and rehearsal breaks to discuss the themes, stories, and emotions in the songs that the choir performs. For example, when the girls rehearsed "Dona Nobis Pacem," Lee paused to ask them what peace meant to them. One girl immediately said that it meant quietness. Another thought it meant stillness. Still another argued that it meant joyousness. Lee told the young women that that they should think about peace means to them when they performed the song, particularly when they were singing it in Latin.

Lee leverages this idea not only in connection to singing, but also in other aspects of the program, such as the dance routines that the girls learn during rehearsals. During one of my observations, she told the girls to line up in their "queen" positions. The girls immediately formed four lines of couples across the stage and prepared to practice their queen walk, an English madrigal line dance that transported these Sister Cities Girlchoir members to the Elizabethan era of monarchs, palaces, and pageantry. During circle time, Lee had a discussion about queens with them and asked them to describe what being a queen and doing the dance meant to them. While they each had their own view of what this routine meant, Lee chose it because she wanted the girls to remember that they were royalty, either to themselves or to someone else, and that they could channel their queen persona at any time to be a strong and powerful leader for social change. But participation in the dance had other benefits because it forced these young women to interact with a partner who might be younger or older or from a different racial group, which was a new experience for these adolescents. Often, as one girl told me during rehearsal, the members of the choir tended to socialize with individuals from their own ethnic group. Puerto Rican students congregated with other Puerto Rican students while African American students gathered with other African American students. Lee deliberately made the girls interact with people who they might not choose to spend time with during regular school hours. This approach helped these youth move beyond their social comfort zones and work together with their peers to achieve a common goal. Under Lee's direction, the members of Sister Cities Girlchoir are encouraged to question their own choices as well as the racial stereotypes that often fracture their schools and communities (Pascale, 2013).

By working as an ensemble and performing together throughout the Philadelphia metropolitan area, the members of the Sister Cities Girlchoir forge relationships that might not develop otherwise. As one of the members told me, participating in the choir—which enrolls girls in grades 5 through 8—provided an opportunity for these young women to make friendships across grade levels, which she had done (student 1, interview December 15, 2012). Other girls pointed out that their snack period and circle time at the beginning of every rehearsal gave them the chance to get to know their peers differently. This young woman argued, "people are totally different in choir…they open up more because there are not many people around them" (student 3, interview, December 15, 2012). Several other girls agreed with this statement, suggesting that the choir created a space where they could talk to other young women about their school and community and the challenges they faced there (student 2 and student 5, interview, December 15, 2012). Finally, the youth argued that their participation in the Sister Cities Girlchoir allowed them to "cool down" and took away the "stress of doing a lot of work" in school and at home (student survey, #8). In one interview, one of the members said that her involvement in the choir "made a difference in my life when I had really difficult problems…when my grandma died" (student #4, interview, April 13, 2013). The Sister Cities Girlchoir provided this young woman with a way to cope with her grief among a group of individuals who cared about her deeply. Her relationship with Lee and the other members of the choir afforded her an opportunity to escape, at least for a few hours, from her personal loss.

Watching the members of the Sister Cities Girlchoir practice the same vocal techniques that I had practiced as an adolescent reminded me of the power of the arts to enact social change and challenge inequities in low-income communities. By holding these young women to high standards and encouraging them to support one another, Lee has crafted an ensemble that exposes the Sister Cities Girlchoir members to the joys of classical music and allows them to develop talents that many may not even have realized they possessed. However, the arts by themselves cannot end injustice. This became readily apparent to me when I asked the young women to complete a short survey about their experiences in the choir. After I distributed the survey and explained its purpose, the girls spread out in the auditorium to answer the questions. However, as I looked around the room, I noticed that one of the young African American women seemed distracted. She was doodling hearts and the word "love." I tried to refocus her attention on the questions and encouraged her to think about her answers. However, when I walked away, Lee told me that the girl could not read or write. Despite the benefits that the choir provides, participating in it does not guarantee that these young women can develop the skill set they need to be leaders for social change in their communities. While the Sister Cities Girlchoir provides a space where they can learn to unleash their hidden talents, release their personal stress, and develop new relationships, it does little to alleviate the gross educational inequities that these low-income youth of color have experienced for decades.

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Out-of-School Hangouts

Playing Outdoors: The Importance of the City as a Playground for Skateboarding and Parkour

Michael Jeffries, Sebastian Messer, Jon Swords

The city, its streets, and its buildings make an ideal playground for skateboarders and freerunners. At the same time, the mostly teenage, mostly male participants in those activities are regarded by civic authorities as a problem. That attitude is part of a general antipathy to young people out on the streets, who are often assumed to be causing a nuisance. We present insights from working with skateboarders and freerunners in Newcastle upon Tyne and Tyneside, an urban conurbation in North East England, that reveal the significance that playing outdoors has for these young people. We also show how they value the city and the autonomy, friendships, and feel-good experience they enjoy there. Playing outdoors is a vital, positive part of their lives that cities should embrace.

Introduction

Playing outdoors in the city is increasingly difficult for young people. Heavy-handed laws, private security guards, and media-inspired moral panic all conspire to get youngsters off the streets where they are considered an unruly nuisance at best. At the same time, young people are now subject to the infinite allure of the Internet, which they access largely indoors and often alone and which is full of virtual friends they may never meet. These pressures only intensify a growing concern that contemporary children and teenagers are more isolated and sedentary than those of previous generations (Play England, n.d.). Karsten and Vliet (2006), for example, document that urban streets are increasingly inhospitable for outdoor play. And while children respond positively to attractive, well-equipped playgrounds, they also chafe at the restrictions of limited space (Veitch, Salmon, & Ball, 2007). The idyllic world where every child played outside all day long with their friends and came home just in time for supper is probably a nostalgic myth. Nonetheless, young people do still play outdoors, and for some—such as skateboarders and freerunners—being outside and exploring, reworking, and reinventing the city for their own purposes is at the core of their lives. For participants in those activities, the city can be one big playground. But while they are out playing there, such young people—mostly teenage boys tearing around in hoodies and T-shirts liberally decorated with skulls, zombies, or incomprehensible band logos—seem like the very worst kind of trouble to everyone else.

Skateboarding became firmly established in the UK in the 1970s, although its popularity varies as fashions change. Elements of skate culture, such as clothes and shoes, permeate widely into youth culture as a recognizable style. A majority of boys are likely to have tried skateboarding, and the skate scene's image as alternative, easy going, and cool (Borden, 2001) make it an attractive

teenage subculture. Note that that image may be more apparent than real: the skate scene supports a substantial corporate industry, and the core aspects of skate culture—physical prowess and risk taking—make it in many ways a traditional arena for young men, from which girls are excluded (Borden, 2001.

Freerunning and parkour arrived in North East England and in the UK in general more recently. Parkour developed in Paris in the late 1980s, combining a focus on discipline, skill, and gymnastic training to create a particular style of movement in urban space. Participants often have a background in gymnastics and similar sports. Parkour also has a distinct philosophical underpinning, emphasizing holistic well-being and noncompetitiveness. Freerunning is closely allied to parkour, perhaps best understood as a slightly more relaxed, individual expression of movement through the cityscape. To those not closely involved in parkour and freerunning, the two are probably indistinguishable, and we use the terms interchangeably here because the participants we met did so. There is no parkour equivalent of the ubiquitous skate culture. While young children may have seen some parkour on television, it is unlikely that they have had any active experience with it.

In-line skating and riding BMX bikes[1] and microscooters[2] are also popular street sports, but our commentary is based on the skateboarders and freerunners' worlds, which have been the focus of our research.

Since 2009, we have worked with skateboarders and freerunners in Newcastle upon Tyne and the surrounding conurbation of Tyneside, exploring the young people's cityscapes and helping them represent and show off their versions of the city. The project grew out of an interest in urban places and space and in how architecture can be reinvented and subverted. We rapidly learned that the spatial and physical imaginations of skaters were complemented by sociable, creative local cultures, rich in folklore and mutually supportive (Jenson, Swords, & Jeffries, 2012). From 2011 we also teamed up with North East Parkour (NEPK), the umbrella group for parkour and freerunning in North East England. NEPK reinforced our growing understanding of a positive, self-disciplined, inventive, sociable street-sports culture and of the value of informal play spaces both to the participants and, perhaps, to the city as a whole—especially to a city where the mainstream alternatives to street sports are shopping and drinking.

[1] BMX bikes are fat-wheeled, low-slung, stunt bikes that originated in the early 1970s as home-customized bikes to ride in imitating dirt-track motocross racing. They are widely used for both acrobatic stunts and flatland balance tricks.
[2] Microscooters are light, compact, folding scooters with the same size wheels as in-line skates. They were invented in the 1990s as general childrens' scooters. However, after the initial craze subsided, they were increasingly used for street sports and stunts, primarily by elementary-school-age or younger teenage boys.

The Newcastle Context

Newcastle upon Tyne (Newcastle) is the historic capital city of North East England. Within the UK, Newcastle has a powerful, distinctive identity, and its residents are known for their boisterous, friendly culture, which retains many of the traits of the working class that once served the coal mines, shipyards, and allied industries in the area. The mines and ships have gone, and the main contemporary economic drivers are shopping, nightlife, and the public sector. In the early 1990s the city suffered from riots and depopulation and reached its nadir, but it has since undergone a startling regeneration and become a mecca for culture and partying. This process has been dominated by corporate and civic institutions whose main focus is commercial, providing a host of opportunities for people to spend money but creating homogenous cityscapes that lack any authentic civic culture. For example, Daskalaki, Stara, and Imam (2008) provide a detailed case study contrasting parkour's energy to the blandness of corporate civic culture.

Youngsters often do not have much money, so instead of shopping, they hang around Newcastle, often in noisy, shifting groups, sometimes getting in the way of the customers whom stores wish to attract. That situation has generated negative newspaper coverage, focused on a square in the center of the city, where young people traditionally meet up on Saturdays. Participants in street sports are perceived to be an even worse problem. In Newcastle, as in many cities in the UK and throughout the world, skateboarders and freerunners are routinely told to move along by police and private security guards, and street sports are prohibited outside of designated areas by bylaws; in Newcastle violations carry a heavy fixed fine of £500. ($ 790 US) The building of a skate park on the periphery of Newcastle's city center was as much a way to get skaters out of that area as it was an effort to accommodate them.

The reasons usually given for such regulations are a mixture of fear of the possibility of injury to passersby and damage to buildings and concern that injuries to the urban games participants themselves might result in litigation. In Newcastle, this negative attitude toward those who engage in street sports may also be linked to the city's role as the regional corporate retail epicenter. Teenaphobia is another contributing factor (Taylor & Khan, 2011). Rogers and Coaffee (2005) provide a detailed exploration of the management of youngsters in Newcastle's city center, including a discussion of the exclusionary policy aimed at skateboarders.

However, attitudes to skaters are not uniformly negative. East of Newcastle, in adjacent North Tyneside, the local council has constructed five skate parks in accessible locations; that program was championed by staff from the council's health and community team who saw outdoor play as a great asset to youngsters. In addition, south across the River Tyne from Newcastle, Gateshead Council has spent £11,000 ($ 17,400 US) developing an outdoor skate plaza, Five Bridges, because the presence of the skaters was credited with making the space feel safer for other passersby (Jenson et al., 2012). These positive attitudes to skaters appear to be largely contingent on local events and the attitudes of individual employees.

Newcastle and Tyneside have a thriving skateboard culture, covered by bloggers and in web videos.[3] A distinct Tyneside scene has been sustained since the opening of the Native Skates store in 2003, with a strong emphasis on the street rather than the skate park as the main playground. Big local events, such as professional touring contests, can attract more than 200 skaters from the area. Parkour became established in Tyneside in the early 2000s by a handful of participants who were inspired by television programs (such as *Run London*, which first aired in 2005) or ads featuring rooftop chases and stunts. In addition, for several years "Juice," a local youth festival, organized some parkour sessions. NEPK coalesced in 2007 and now meets regularly on Saturdays in Newcastle, attracting up to 50 participants from across North East England, and also organizes days of parkour activities in other cities. Young people join the Tyneside scene primarily by actively searching the Web for NEPK and then going to local training sessions organized by core NEPK members or by participating in NEPK events elsewhere.

Exploring the Importance of Informal Street Sports: Our Methodology

The commentary presented here is based on several sources of data: (a) informal interviews with skaters and freerunners, conducted at street skate spots or during NEPK Saturdays, (b) participatory observation of skaters and freerunners' activities and of their behavior toward each other and the public, (c) over 200 psychogeographic maps[4] created by skaters, portraying their days outdoors, and (4) skaters and freerunners' photographs and videos.[5] The great majority of the participants were boys and men in their teens and early 20s. Girls were conspicuously absent: we encountered at least 300 male skaters but only three female skaters and only one girl among a core group of 50 freerunners. North East England is much more homogeneously white than much of the UK, and the participants were predominantly white as well. However, the few participants of color we observed seemed entirely at home.

We advertised our project on local skate and parkour blogs, having rapidly established links with core members of the Newcastle and Tyneside scene through Native Skates. We also made connections with NEPK through Solar Learning, a Newcastle-based youth learning and enterprise

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[3] Digital Deekies (www.digitaldeekies.com/) and Four Sight (www.4-sightskateboardzine.com/) are long-standing Tyneside skate blogs. NEPK's Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/104344919656775/) has links to many of their videos.

[4] Psychogeography is the study of how the physical environment affects emotions and behavior. It emphasizes the personal, subjective, divergent, and often playful reactions to and knowledge of place. One of the powerful things that has resulted from this approach is the creation of highly individual maps revealing diverse and idiosyncratic versions of a given place. The majority of the skaters' psychogeographic maps can be seen at http://www.flickr.com/photos/31185521@N02/sets/72157623237346084/ .

[5] A selection of photographs of skateboarding and freerunning taken during our work and concentrating on the participants' use of space and on the social context are on Flickr: http://www.flickr.com/photos/31185521@N02/sets/72157623876832634/ (skateboarding) and http://www.flickr.com/photos/31185521@N02/sets/72157629072812189/ (freerunning).

company. We set up our own Facebook and Flickr photography groups to spread the word about the work, receive feedback, and share images as our record of the local scene built up. Everyone we approached was given handouts with information about the project, contact addresses, and invitations to send us images and videos for exhibitions we arranged as a thank-you to the participants and as a more general commitment to participatory research. Everyone who took part in the project was asked if we could use their first name or tag, and all willingly agreed, often delighted to see their words and outlook represented. We have quoted all their comments verbatim. Many of the psychogeographic maps were made as the skaters hung out in Native Skates; others were drawn at skate spots. The skaters we approached were very happy to participate in our project, especially after a few weeks when word about it had spread.

As part of the project, we gave skaters felt-tip pen and big sheets of paper and asked them to doodle psychogeographic maps. This approach worked well across all ages and in different locations and was every bit as effective as interviews. It was a relaxing and entertaining way for the participants to provide information about the Newcastle skate scene. Friends featured in many of the maps. The example below (Figure 1), shows a day out that includes a bit of skating, getting food (at Greggs), popping into Native Skates, and meeting up with a friend ("Biscuit").

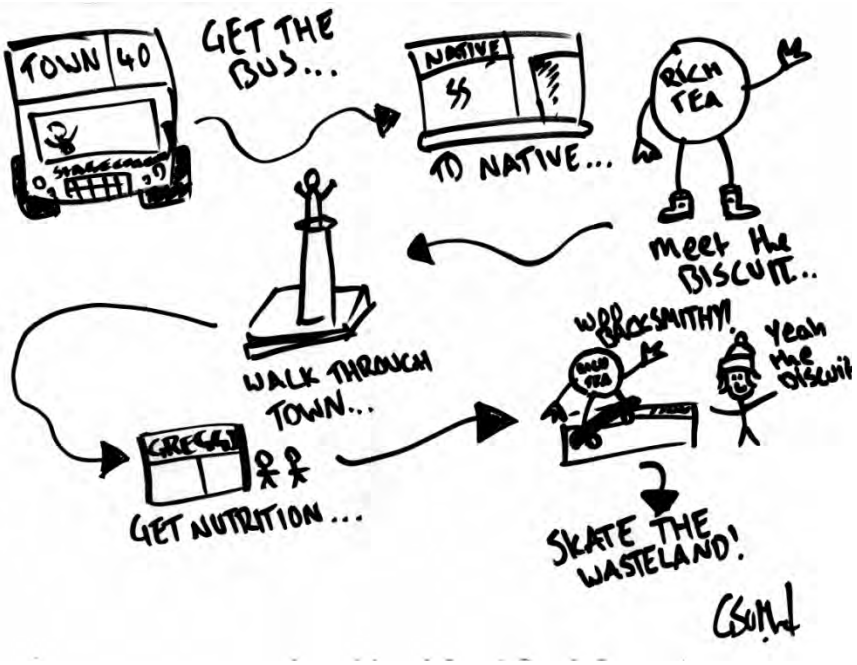

Figure 1. An example of a skateboarder's psychogeographic map. Note the mix of content which includes favorite sites, e.g., the Wasteland, food, e.g., Greggs bakers and friends ("Biscuit" is a friend's nickname).

The projects were disseminated to a wider public audience showing the skaters and freerunners videos, images, maps, and other artifacts at public galleries. PlaySpace, held in 2010 at Dance City in Newcastle, was a one-day show of photography and maps, which about 150 people attended.

PlayToon, held in 2012 at The Holy Biscuit in Newcastle, included a weeklong exhibition of photography, videos, artifacts, and texts as well as a day of live events; over 1,000 people came through the gallery that day (Messer & Jeffries, 2012). Although many of the participants had taken arts courses, apparently this was the first time that any of them had access to such spaces or events.

Valuing Place: "Countless Summer Days Here"

Skateboarders and freerunners have their own versions of their city. They are not indifferent to it or thoughtless about it; they value particular spaces, and local lore about good spots is spread by word of mouth. What these young people value in a space is partly its precise mix of buildings, open areas, and street furniture as well as how that arrangement allows them to perform; partly the likelihood that they won't be harassed by authorities or the public there; and partly its sociability. The opportunity to just hang out with friends is very important. A lot of time is spent not skating or freerunning but instead sitting together, chatting, eating, taking videos and photographs, and swapping stories. Left to their own devices, skaters and freerunners tend to do a circuit of the city, lingering at favorite spots, and moving quickly through conspicuously public spaces often not making any effort to skate or jump. Far from being out to cause trouble, they tend to be cautious, not wanting to draw attention to themselves.

The result of this unofficial use of the city is that each street-sports group has its own mental map of it and its own urban lore. For the freerunners, the map includes spots such as "Discovery," "Solicitors," "Library," "Quayside," and "Flats," while the skaters' spaces include "5-Bridges," "Pig and Whistle," "Queens Banks," "Gap to Ledge," and "Leap of Faith." Other local residents could probably guess where a few of these places are, but the location of most of them would be a mystery. Many of the sites also have skate or freerunning lore attached to them. For example, the Newcastle law courts are one of the much-used skate sites; the design of the exterior entrance terrace and steps there represents an ideal challenge. However, the skaters were well aware that it was one of the most unlikely venues to tolerate kids hanging around, and therefore they skated the site when it was closed. A sympathetic security guard once told them what these times were and said that they wouldn't get into any trouble skating then. The skaters also have a great eye for detail. For example, Max commented:

How long Law Courts been around? Years. If you look at the floor all you see is a couple of scratches, what happened the day before, a few little dents, there's so much different stuff, the 8s, the 3s, just like the ledge to mess about, the rail, pretty epic, that's just like a god's rail it's got a bit of everything. (Max)

Skaters have invested time, energy, and money improving some of the sites. The prime spot in Newcastle was the "Wasteland," the old floor of a demolished factory. It was not an area frequented by the general public, but it was only a ten-minute stroll from the city center. For at least 15 years prior to 2012 when developers moved in, it was used by skaters and other youngsters as a place to hang out and to hold self-organized skateboard or BMX events. Over the years, skaters repeatedly built blocks and ramps there. The picture below (Figure 2) was taken on a typical day at the site; most of the skaters and BMXers were just hanging out chatting. The concrete floor is clean of debris because the skaters kept it clear. Given the chance, skaters, BMXers, freerunners, and other street-sports participants will not only create their own version of a city—they will also build and nurture space.

Figure 2. The Wasteland site in 2010, used by skaters, BMX and micro scooters. Note that most of the present are sitting chatting and watching rather than skating; the social side of the playing out is paramount. (photo credit: Michael Jeffries)

How much these spaces are valued often only becomes clear when they are lost. Just before the Wasteland was dug up, BMXers painted a message there: "Farewell our fairweather friend" (Figure 3). The "countless summer days" quote which heads this section also refers to the Wasteland. Given that the participants are primarily teenage boys—not a group known for its public displays of sentiment—these reactions reveal the powerful meaning that the skaters, freerunners, and others attach to their informal cityscape playground and their deep engagement with those spaces.

Figure 3. The Wasteland in 2012 days before being demolished by developers. The "Farewell our fair-weather friend" message was painted by local BMXers as a final salute to the site.(photo credit: Michael Jeffries)

There is creativity to this use of space. Local skate parks are often regarded as boring, or perhaps okay as one part of a circuit of sites, but not as somewhere to stay all day. Freerunners don't use formal skate parks at all. All these street-sports groups are therefore on the lookout for the potential in city spaces. Bryan noted,

"You can just find something no one wants, no use and you can turn it into something that you can do something really good which makes you feel good about yourself because of how you land the trick."

These young people's use of informal play space represents a significant, positive part of their lives. They invest time, resources, and energy into the city; in other, more conventionally acceptable contexts, we would be quick to praise such behavior. Their activities also build self-respect and self-confidence, evident in Bryan's comment above, as well as in Aaron's:

Parkour... you don't need anything with you, you don't need an object. if you're doing flipping, if you're [doing] the jumps, if you're doing the movement it makes you feel better. I free run to relax and chill out. I've got lots of stuff to sort out but when I'm free running, I don't think about all my work and stuff, I just think about this.

Bryan and Aaron's statements also reveal a euphoric, carefree reaction to their immediate experience, echoing findings by Seifert and Hedderson (2011), who emphasized this very upbeat psychological benefit of playing outdoors.

Not Being Valued: "Before We Skated, When We Quit, We Got into Loads of Trouble"

Risk taking and breaking the law have been considered part of what some youth groups, such as graffiti artists, find appealing about their activities. The skaters and freerunners we met were well aware that, as a result, they were also perceived negatively, and they resented it. More surprisingly, in several cases they credited their involvement in street sports with keeping them out of trouble. Spinney (2010) worked with BMX bikers in London. He noted that their activities were not intended as a challenge to authority and that their run-ins with officials were instead a hazard of wanting to ride the cityscape. Tales of such confrontations with security guards and others are commonplace:

People have a go at you if you're just riding down the streets, but that's what they were built for, to ride on. They think they were built just to ride in skate parks, but skate parks were made loads after the first boards. (Willy)

A horde of security guards came and kicked us out. Suspicious. What were we doing, suspicious of what? What were we going to do wrong, what are they suspicious of? (Max)

However, most security guards tend to be polite—even a little apologetic—and explain that they have to tell the skaters or freerunners to move along because of bosses' orders. On all the occasions that we witnessed such situations, the young people acquiesced quickly and without directing any antagonism at the guards:

We went down the Quayside and we met the nicest security guard you could ever meet, he had a proper conversation with we, he said he wouldn't mind us skating here but we gotta move you on because my supervisor wants me to. (Long Board Man)

The value of getting out and playing in the city—and in particular the role of such play in keeping young people out of trouble—is explicit in several interviews:

What was most important to me was that my BMX had got nicked and I'd been walking the streets at the age of 14 thinking is this what it's all about. This is shit. So boring. Then this one time I was on the roof of the cinema where my auntie worked. I went to check out the city from the roof. And my attention was sidetracked because there was this guy pushing down the street but the roar that was coming from his wheels…turned round…looked down, followed him all the way down. Then in a week I'm sat on my own down at the river and a couple of skateboarders [were] across the road, and one of them came over and that was it. I was hooked. I told my auntie about what I'd seen and she got me it [a skateboard]. Magic. (Jimmy)

Before we skated, when we quit, we got into loads of trouble, we had nothing to do for fun. Went into the industrial estate, smashing windows. Packed it in, started skating again. (Bryan)

Got told off for doing stupid things, doing dares, then we started skating and we don't do all that rubbish anymore. (Bryan)

I didn't really have any interests before skateboarding. Mainly just being a little bit of a terror out on the streets. Nothing else to do just running around, doing nothing, causing grief to people. What did I see? I seen a competition on telly one night and I said I need to get into that, more fun than what I'm doing. I could see where I was going. (Sean)

Being able to get out in the city with friends was core to the lives of many of the participants. Having to stay inside because of injuries or rainy weather was the cause of great resentment and grief. "I haven't left the house in ages, haven't had anything to do, it's been horrible, I just want [to go] out to do something," Max complained when he had been hurt. When we started the project, we assumed that the physical use of space would be the key to these young people's worlds. Being indoors just does not work, as the following example from a freerunner graphically demonstrates:

Me mum doesn't want me going on school nights, especially because she'll be oh no you need to stay in and do this and this, it gets really annoying. I want one night a week, one night, is it too much to ask to do what I love and practice with other people? If I can't go out I admit I will try one or two tricks just around the house. My mum isn't really impressed about that. There's the door, there's the couch, I thought, right, I'll move the dining table that way and try a huge dive. My mum comes down and said "what was that big bang?" I looked around; "nothing." (James F.)

Injured skaters and freerunners routinely turned up at popular spots, even when they couldn't physically participate in the activity, so that they could hang out with friends. However, we soon realized that the power of friendship was at the heart of the skate and freerunning scenes.

Valuing Friends: "Top Marras[6]...Top Lads"

In interviews, photographs, video, blogs, and doodled Psychogeographic maps, friendship comes through as a key element of the skate and freerunning scenes.

The lot I skate with will skate with pretty much anybody, thirty, forty people and there's also young kids if they're off school and they're skating and we're skating and [they] come along with us. Why not? It's like good manners. You should treat people like you expect to be treated. You look after your own, same as anybody would. (Sean)

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[6] "Marra" is North East England slang for an especially close friend.

Free running by myself is not that good, it's just horrible, I like doing it with my friends. Top marras, enjoy it too much. Gets you out of the house. Top lads. (Jamie)

There's so many people we skate with, we know… all of us, all of us, it's always good crack.[7] (Max)

Sociability turned out to be the one consistent factor among skaters' favorite spots. For many youngsters, whatever their particular interests, the psychological and physical space to hang out with a friend is important; a key difference for skaters is that they adopt not just one but many locations around the city.

In the more than three years we spent working primarily with skaters and freerunners, we never witnessed any aggression or violence within the groups. However, we are aware of friction between participants of different street sports, notably between some skaters and BMX bikers. In addition, the recent advent of microscooters, usually ridden by conspicuously younger children, draws criticism from young people involved in all the other wheeled sports. These tensions can be a problem at skate parks, partly because there are too many people trying to use the space at the same time but also perhaps because of the differences between participants in the various groups. Skateboarding has been characterized as an activity for more affluent youngsters (Karsten & Pel, 2000), while there is a perception that some BMX bikers come from less wealthy families, although that has not been properly explored.

When passersby did stop and watch the street action, they were often both surprised and impressed by what they saw: the level of skill, positivity, and friendliness. The following field notes were jotted down in January 2012, as NEPK started showing their circus skills at a favorite site, "Solicitors," which is the front yard of a legal firm in the center of the city:

> lots of people slow and watch, small kids join in, out come juggling balls and batons, they are on top of each other, on/in space, affectionate, friendly, hugs and handshakes. A posse of skaters pass by, stop to watch and say hi.

The freerunners were adding to the cityscape. Far from causing trouble, they were a source of interest and they inspired respect.

Valuing the Informal Playground: "My Perfect Day"

It is easy to see the street-sports gangs hurtling past or scrambling over buildings and think the worst of them. For example, Figure 4 shows NEPK all over the front of Solicitors, which is private property. In Figure 5, boys are doing some aerial gymnastics on the scaffolding on a building—the sort of behavior likely to attract criticism and perhaps attention from the police. But look closely at Figure 5 and notice the *Chronicle* headline on the bottom part of the doorway on the right-hand

[7] "Crack" is North East England slang for fun.

Figure 4. North East Parkour, Saturday morning at "Solicitors", 2012. This favourite spot is the front of a local law firm, but the offices are not open on Saturday. The site is on a main road so the free runners are conspicuous (photo credit: Michael Jeffries)

side of the photo, "CITY BOOZE DEATHS SHOCK REVEALED." It points to a dark side of the economy of youth party culture. Like many British cities, Newcastle suffers from binge drinking, alcohol abuse, and attendant violence. In contrast, NEPK members are conspicuously healthy. As far as we know, none of them smoke. They bring wholesome food to their events. Many of the participants are trained gymnasts, and several are developing businesses as personal trainers or parkour instructors. Parkour has been characterised as a positive mix of martial arts discipline and "playful, childlike curiosity" (Ameel & Tani, 2012), and its outdoor group sessions are a powerful form of collaborative learning (O'Grady, 2012). It is hard to imagine a group more different from the stereotype of unhealthy, sedentary, antisocial youth. All that parkour participants need is the city to play in.

Conclusion

Skateboarders and freerunners place great value on the city, their sports, and above all, their friends. Days spent outdoors participating in these activities and the cultures that have grown up around them are at the core of these young people's lives. The informal playground of the city beckons them when school is out. Far from banning and demeaning the youngsters' use of the city, the civic authorities might do well to appreciate what a positive use of space skaters and

freerunners create. In any case, despite others' disapproval, it is clear that Jamie and the many others like him are not likely to stop any time soon:

My doctor advised me not to train anymore… but the idea of it… no free running… it makes me happy… it's like telling a fish to stop swimming. It's silly, it's a silly idea. (Jamie)

Figure 5. NEPK using scaffolding for gymnastics in the city centre on a Saturday, 2012. This may look like a nuisance but their active, sociaable days out are in stark contrast to the city's major problems shown by the local newspaper headline on the poster in the shop door "City booze deaths shock revealed". (photo credit: Michael Jeffries)

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