

A STUDY OF ELEMENTARY STUDENT VOICE IN A SCHOOL-BASED  
AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM

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SCHOOL PROGRAM

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my wife Abbey, my three girls Harper, Vivi, and Jolie, and my little man John Rhodes. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to fulfill my personal goals. I was lucky enough to find someone that sparks my inner drive and makes me a better, more well-rounded human being.

A special thank you to all my family members, specifically my parents for instilling in me that work ethic, determination, and grit are more valuable than anything else in life.

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## ABSTRACT

After school programs have been around for many years and play a role in the lives of many elementary age students. Although the makeup of programs is vast and differing, so many of them impact students on a daily basis. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate how participants describe and experience their after school program. Specifically looking at one elementary after school program and what parts of the program students enjoyed along with what they believed to be less favorable.

Participants of the study included elementary students within the after school program. The students were in grades pre kindergarten through fifth graders. There were 27 students interviewed within the six student focus groups. There was one adult focus group containing two staff members. In all, observations along with seven focus group interviews were conducted in order to cover the makeup of an after school program.

The data were analyzed using Mitra's (2004) student voice framework. This micro-structure refers to Carver's (1997) ABC's of youth development. These concepts help give a better understanding of the foundation of student voice. The three concepts are agency (decision making), belonging (relationships), and competence (what they learned). They are all important to the structure, focus, and outcomes of this study.

Implications of the study included moving after school programming from traditional to student-centered. In addition, after school programs incorporating student voice per Mitra's (2004) framework of agency, belonging, and competence.

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## Chapter 1

Approximately 1.7 million children and youth in the United States attend after school programs (Afterschool Alliance, 2015). After school programs play an important part in many communities and elementary schools (Apsler, 2009). They provide a multitude of services ranging from childcare and academic enrichment to community involvement and recreational activities.

The first reported after school programs in the United States were established about 100 years ago to enrich the lives of children through provision of recreational activities (Halpern, 2002) and to provide extended child care for working parents (Apsler, 2009). One of these was the Woodcraft Rangers Program, which was established in Los Angeles during the 1920s. The Woodcraft Rangers is still in operation, is offered in over 60 Los Angeles schools, and places specific emphasis on interest based programs focusing on growth and development (Woodcraft Rangers, 2014). When after school programs were initially started, many were not affiliated with schools but were offered at community centers, churches, and day care centers (de Kanter, Williams, Cohen, & Stonehill, 2000). Over time, after school programs connected with public schools for a variety of reasons ranging from sharing facility use, to staffing, to assisting and supporting all types of caretakers (Earle, 2009). Funding sources and specific programs such as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers provided large amounts of financial support to public schools willing to stay open past regular school hours (Dodd & Bowen, 2011). Other reasons for utilizing schools as the location for after school programs stemmed mostly from convenience, as students were already at the location, the space was usable and conducive to housing many children, and was a familiar location to individuals within the community (Afterschool Alliance, 2015). These school-based after school programs have continued the tradition of helping

students further develop their academic, physical, and recreation skills via extracurricular activities such as tutoring, bike riding, and singing lessons (Andreassen, 2013; Grogan, Henrich, & Malikina, 2014).

During the 1990s, the academic, behavioral, and social benefits of after school programs were recognized and as a result, federal and state funding dramatically increased (Afterschool Alliance, 2012). More recently, however, after school programs have faced varying obstacles such as budget and staffing constraints (Apsler, 2009). Despite these struggles, researchers have recognized the positive effects of after school programs on elementary students and the potential for these programs to assist students in a variety of ways (Wade, 2015).

### **Research Problem**

Participation in extracurricular activities can enhance students' creativity, increase learning, and improve their attitudes toward school (Miller, 2011). At the elementary level, after school programs have been identified as one avenue for offering these extracurricular activities. During after school programs, students can demonstrate their creativity by solving problems and overcoming challenges. Students are encouraged to come up with creative solutions to problems such as enhancing the environment, reducing poverty, eliminating childhood obesity, and improving low academic performance (Acker et al., 2012; Bruyere, Wesson, & Teel, 2012; Keck, 2015). For example, one program addressed poverty and childhood obesity by using gardening to enhance the aesthetics of the school while increasing student nutritional knowledge and promoting healthy eating (Keck, 2015). A similar program worked with peers to create healthy family style meals with a focus on good manners (Martinez, Gatto, Spruijt-Metz, & Davis, 2015). In an effort to lessen their impact on the environment, another school started a volunteer school-wide recycling program, which also increased student service while helping the

entire school (Brown, 2014). While after school programs give students the opportunity to use their creativity, these programs can also be academically beneficial (Sellers, 2010).

After school programs are another way of supplementing and increasing academic ability and test scores (Lauver, 2012). Some after school programs have been shown to increase academic instruction by as much as 30% (Black, Somers, Doolittle, Unterman, & Grossman, 2009). Other studies have found students who participated in after school reading programs showed significant improvement compared to those that had alternate after school arrangements such as extended day childcare or daycare (Davies & Peltz, 2012). A study by Gardner, Roth, and Brooks-Gunn (2009) found participation in after school programs can improve academic performance along with student learning behaviors and attendance.

When looking specifically at behavior and attitudes toward school, Miller (2011) found students who took part in after school programs had an increase in positive attitudes toward the school and academics (Gardner et al., 2009). Developing relationships and working collaboratively with peers is an important part of every elementary student's academic experience (Sellers, 2010). Working together can help students develop healthy peer relationships and many after school programs allow students the opportunity for collaboration among peers (What's Working, 2015). Examples range from making healthy meals, to conducting music, to creating gardens and natural spaces (Andreassen, 2013; Bruyere et al., 2012; Clark, 2009).

However, if after school programs are to enhance elementary students' creativity, increase their learning, and improve their attitudes toward school, students need to have a voice in decisions made about the programs, whether academic or social. Grogan et al. (2014) found elementary students who participated in after school programs made the greatest academic and

social growth when they felt involved in some of the decision-making along with the activities being organized and structured. Therefore, creating after school programs for students at the elementary level and encouraging students to participate in these activities is simply not enough (Friend & Caruthers, 2015). Mere provision of after school programs, no matter how sophisticated the activities, does not mean students are actively engaged or getting anything socially or academically valuable out of them (Shernoff & Vandell, 2007). In many programs, students are passive participants receiving specific directions of what to do during the activity (Afterschool Alliance, 2012). That is, elementary students enrolled in relatively ineffective programs are being told what to do, when to do it, and how to do it, which does little to enhance their creativity, learning, and attitudes toward school. One explanation for this is students at the elementary level are not always viewed as worth listening to (Miller, 2011). In addition, like many elementary programs, these programs may have good intentions but often focus on adult chosen topics and what adults think would most benefit the community, the school, and the students (Ward & Parker, 2013).

Research indicates elementary students are more interested in activities when they are given the opportunity to participate in decision-making about the particular activity, especially when it concerns their education (Bron & Veugelers, 2014). Although high-quality student-centered programs have been implemented in U.S. schools, they are few in number and often hard to find (Miller, 2011). For the majority of elementary students participating in after school programs, the educators designing and coordinating the programs students never invited their input about the after school programming (Cook-Sather, 2006).

Allowing more student voice into elementary educational programs can enhance a student's learning experience but more often than not, student voice is minimal to non-existent

(Serriere, Mitra, & Reed, 2011). Even with the importance of after school programming with elementary students, students are often told what to do based on what the adults think is best for them (Cape, 2014). Encouraging student goal-centered agendas into after school programming could benefit elementary students' perceptions of the program and thus their willingness to participate in them. Yet, students are not being consulted about what they want or what they are looking for in these programs (Viadero, 2007). If after school programs are to be effective supplemental supports for elementary students, then more needs to be known about these programs from the participants' perspectives. This study will examine the relationship between after school programming and student voice. Both areas are often overlooked although they are potentially valuable resources for children (Apsler, 2009; Miller, 2011; Mitra, 2006). By speaking directly to participants of an after school program, I gave them an opportunity to describe the program and what they were looking for, using student voice as a determinant into how much input and decision-making these students were allowed (Mitra, 2004).

### **Theoretical Framework: Student Voice**

Hatchman and Rolland (2001) used the term student voice to support the argument that it was time for adults to listen to students and take action to create positive environments where students can learn to the best of their abilities. Inviting formal input from students at the elementary level to create more collaborative school environments is beneficial practice for all (Miller, 2011). Implemented in other studies to describe the input given by students, the concept of student voice started becoming more prevalent during the 1990s and has continued into the 2000s (Mitra, 2004). Student voice served as the macro framework in this study.

The microstructure for the study is the components of Mitra's theory of student voice. Mitra's theory of student voice is not specific to elementary after school programs, although its

focus is on educational programs involving students. A typical elementary student’s day has many parts but few adults allow student input into the structure of after school programs (Kuby & Vaughn, 2015). The student voice framework emphasizes the importance of adults taking the time to not just hear but also listen to participants in these elementary school activities such as after school programs. Agency, belonging, and competence are three important pieces of Mitra’s student voice and are referred to as the “ABCs” of youth development (Carver, 1997). Although the “ABCs” of youth development originated with Carver (1997), Mitra’s study utilized the “ABCs” of youth development while combining them into her own student voice framework. Mitra demonstrated how student voice can lead to gains in youth development. These three concepts to understanding youth development in student voice, and the parts are fluid for level of importance because programs are diverse, as are the students who participate in them. Table 1 is based on Mitra’s framework and provides a brief definition of each of the three concepts. The table is followed by more detailed descriptions.

Table 1

*Definitions of Agency, Belonging, and Competence*

Agency	Acting or exerting influence and power in a given situation.
Belonging	Developing meaningful relationships with other students and adults and having a role at the school.
Competence	Developing new abilities and being appreciated for one’s talents.

**Agency**

Agency means allowing students the opportunity to show ownership through exerting influence and power during a situation. A major focus of agency is giving students the

opportunity to control their own lives while empowering them to be the generating source of power (Fredricks, Bohnert, & Burdette, 2014). Empowering students does not mean giving them complete autonomy but the ability to make decisions in a structured setting (Grogan et al., 2014). Students can demonstrate varying levels of agency during after school programs from choosing what type of academics to work on to selecting a school or community project. Allowing students to demonstrate agency can range from giving them more than one choice, to structured guidelines for the student to follow, to complete decision making freedom (What's Working, 2015). Students who demonstrate agency within an after school program make inclusive spaces for themselves and others, which can produce leadership opportunities and inspire ownership of the program (Marquez Kiyama, Guillen Luca, Raucci, & Crump-Owens, 2014).

Some after school programs have allowed students to demonstrate agency with the amount of agency differing. To illustrate, Andreassen (2013) allowed students to demonstrate agency by giving them a choice when selecting what type of musical instrument to study and play during the after school program. Hill, Milliken, Goff, Clark, and Gagnon (2015) showed another example of agency by focusing on an after school program that opened up opportunities to less fortunate students through Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) field trip experiences. Students were given the opportunity to choose between a variety of professional experiences such as health care, nutrition, gardening, and swimming. Allowing students to provide input into their education created enthusiasm and excitement toward learning (Miller, 2011). When students were given the opportunity to have their voices heard by demonstrating agency, participation created a positive environment for all (Bron & Veugelers, 2014). Student voice can present opportunities for ownership and participation in any elementary-level program. In addition, giving elementary students decision-making opportunities, especially about the



conditions of their education, yields future educational benefits (Bron & Veugelers, 2014). Of the three “ABCs” of student development, agency is often the toughest to study, to notice, and to implement because it involves giving some type of power to children (Mitra, 2004).

I applied agency in this study in several ways. First, those involved in the study were participants and workers of the after school program. Allowing them the opportunity to share their personal perceptions constitutes a form of empowerment. Second, I had specifically written the research and protocol questions to prompt feedback on the types of empowerment and decision-making evident in the program. Although the study did not ensure that agency was there, the perceptions of my elementary aged participants and staff members helped determine if students believe they have agency or not, and how much agency was present. The main data source while listening and allowing students to talk about how much, if any, agency they are permitted to exercise in the after school program.

### **Belonging**

Relationships are an important part of any successful organization or program (Finn-Stevenson, 2014). This is true of after school programs, where building relationships can assist elementary students in many respects such as feeling appreciated. Bruyere et al. (2012) found relationships are an important part of every elementary student’s educational experience. Carver (1997) defined belonging with the following statement, “Students must share a sense of belonging by sharing rights, responsibilities, and power” (p. 8). In Carver’s study, each member’s individual interests were accounted for and decisions were based on what was best for the group as a whole.

Belonging means students feel appreciated and part of a specific program (Mitra & Serriere, 2012). There are several types of relationships to consider when looking at an after

school program, such as those between students and those between students and adults (Miller, 2011). In my study, I asked students about their opportunities to interact with peers and staff members within the program. Additionally, I inquired if students have a sense of belonging or feel an important part of an after school program (Osterman, 2000).

When looking at developing mutually beneficial relationships, Carver (1997) stated, “Developing relationships that are supportive and respectful; allows them (students) to deepen their understanding of how they can become a friend, mentor, teacher, student, mentee” (p. 33-34). I asked participants of an after school program to share their experiences about feelings about belonging. In addition, the staff members of the program were given the opportunity to talk about the relationships they had created with students in the program. The focus group interviews with student participants provided insight into what kinds of relationships exist and whether students feel a sense of belonging. The research and protocol questions focused on relationships between participants and their peers, as well as the relationships participants have with the staff members involved in the program.

### **Competence**

Competence is the ability to learn and develop new skills while knowing individual strengths. For this study, competence was used to represent student ability and teacher ability. Competence is the development of cognitive skills, physical skills, and social skills. Competence sets the foundation for after school programming because one of the reasons elementary students enroll in these programs is to acquire new skills and knowledge (Carver, 1997). In addition, during many after school programs, students are recognized for individual strengths and attributes while guided and coached to work through areas of weakness (Street, 2014).

Competence can exist in a variety of ways in after school programs. In some programs, student participants receive extra assistance on daily homework to support academic achievement (Black et al., 2009). I asked the study participants what they learned during the program and what they retained after the program ended (Mitra & Serriere, 2012). With elementary students often being told what to do, when and how to do it (Miller, 2011), competence was one area where students can give input and voice into what they learned and felt was relevant from an after school program. Although the staff members in charge of the after school program had certain goals for students, student perceptions were the main determinant of what information or skills are acquired and the competencies assessed.

Agency, belonging, and competence were the focus of the research and protocol questions. The participant perceptions were used to determine the presence of student voice within an after school program. All participants were directly involved in the after school program. This process allowed participants the opportunity to share their personal perceptions, which constitutes a form of empowerment. The research and protocol questions were used to prompt feedback on the types of empowerment and decision-making evident in the program. Although the study did not ensure that student voice was there, the perceptions of participants and staff members of the program helped determine how much student voice was present. There was evidence of student voice, varying amounts of student voice, and the type of student voice.

### **Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate how participants describe and experience the after school program while specifically looking at how much voice students had in influencing their after school program. A student voice framework comprised of agency (decision-making), belonging (relationships), and competence (what they learned and

remembered) helped provide insights into how participants experience and describe their after school program. In addition, student participants were asked to give input about what they were looking for in an after school program as well as what they enjoyed and what parts of the program they considered less favorable. This study gave elementary students an opportunity to be heard and listened to while exercising student voice. The staff members of the program were also given the opportunity to describe the after school program and give any other information they saw as relevant. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. How do participants describe the after school program?
2. How do students in an after school program demonstrate voice?
3. How does student voice influence the after school program?

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of Literature**

In this chapter, a review of literature is presented concerning after school programs. For this particular review, many studies of after school programs were read and referenced, but school affiliated programs at the elementary level are the central focus. Most of the after school programs researched provided adult supervision, offered a safe environment, and presented a central theme or goal-centered focus. There are a variety of after school programs the following study researched, but researching the goal-centered and focused programs were priority. The themes of the after school programs were wide-ranging from academics to outdoor activities, but in many cases academic assistance, social-emotional growth, and behaviors played key roles (Apsler, 2009).

The review of literature begins with a brief history of after school programs. It then focuses on the different types of after school programs. Next, the literature looks at how there are a number of ways after school programs have benefited students in the past and present. Finally, there is a section about the importance of student and parents' participation in after school programs along with valuable and relevant research to go with it.

#### **Brief History of Elementary After School Programs**

In the United States, after school programs have been in existence in some form for over 100 years (Apsler, 2009). In the late 1800s and into the early 1900s, the number of after school programs began a slow, gradual increase. Most of the active programs of these times were created to enrich the lives of elementary students and were staffed by volunteers from the local community (Afterschool Alliance, 2016b). Although after school programs were in their early stages in the United States, many of the goals and outcomes of helping elementary students have

remained the same and these trends would continue for years to come.

From the 1920s to the 1950s, child labor laws became more prevalent and school attendance rates among students significantly increased especially among lower-class children (Rauscher, 2015). The growth of after school programs at this time was attributed to the increased number of students attending formal schooling along with the decrease in child labor. Students, specifically at the elementary age, experienced a noticeable increase in discretionary time. After school programs allowed students the opportunity to have organized and supervised recreational time with peers during their free time (Halpern, 2002). One specific program during this time was the Woodcraft Rangers in Los Angeles, California, which started in 1922. Woodcraft Rangers is still a working program today and assists many elementary students. Although the program has evolved over years, its core values remain the same. Most of the Woodcraft Rangers programs are school-site based, with an agenda focusing on 45 minutes of homework, followed by fitness activities, snacks, and activities designed to meet the needs of individual students (Woodcraft Rangers, 2014). Interest in after school programming has happened at several times throughout history and the Woodcraft Rangers is one example of a successful program that emerged at the right time.

From the 1950s through the 1970s, interest in after school programming fluctuated, but overall, this was a time of slow growth, as after school programs struggled with problems ranging from funding to staffing (Apsler, 2009). In addition, most after school programs evolved into center based programs away from elementary schools (Afterschool Alliance, 2016b). In many circumstances, the main focus of these programs was providing childcare during out-of-school times with less emphasis on enrichment activities.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, after school programs started to slowly increase in

number. The lack of after school care available for children of working parents extended the number of students needing a safe place until parents were finished with the workday (Halpern, 2002). One of the main issues hampering the growth of after school programs during this time period was funding. The declining U.S. economy and rising inflation made budgeting for after school programs difficult. The recession affected most of the developed world while unemployment was on the rise until 1985. This recession was the worst since the great depression (Feldstein, 1994) impacting education and any educational programs which required funding. Once out of the recession, the late 1980s was a time where many started to question certain prevention and intervention approaches, including after school programs, because many of these programs were deficit oriented and trying to “fix” youth instead of supporting their needs (Afterschool Alliance & MetLife Foundation, 2013). Instead of trying to fix the youth, advocates argued for looking at how to support the development of youth through nourishment, support, and guidance (Naughton, 2003).

In the early 1990s, the United States Congress authorized the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Afterschool Alliance, 2015). The 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program was created to fund community learning centers that provided academic, artistic, and cultural enrichment opportunities for children. The program emphasized low performing and high poverty schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Since this time, the number of school-based after school programs has continued to grow along with the funding meant for them (Apsler, 2009) (James-Burdumy, Dynarski, & Deke, 2007). 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC played a significant role in the transition for after school programs to return to the schools. Students were already there, and most of the facilities were constructed to support the students, so in most situations it was an ideal location. Although the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grants did

not require programs to be located at the actual school, most of them were and still are.

The number of elementary students participating in after school programs continues to increase (Gardner et al., 2009). Parsad and Lewis (2009) estimated approximately 20% of elementary schools had one or more after school programs in 2008. In addition, approximately one out of every four elementary students participated in some type of after school program, whether school-based or at another location (Parsad & Lewis, 2009). In 2009, approximately 15 million students went home to an empty house or were left unsupervised until legal guardians were home. Out of these students, 6.5 million participated in some type of after school program (Earle, 2009).

In 2014, almost 25% of elementary students were participating in an after school program, which translates into over 10 million K-12 students being served in some type of after school program. Moreover, when looking to the future, if the current demand was met for students wanting to participate in after school programs, the number of 10 million would double to 20 million (Afterschool Alliance, 2015). The evolution of after school programming helps to explain the current state and gives insight into where programs could be going.

### **After School Grant Opportunities**

There are a variety of grants to help aid after school programs. One funding opportunity provided by the federal government is the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC described above. Currently, a large amount of the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grant money goes toward after school programming. The 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC initiative is the only federal funding source devoted entirely to before and after school programs (Phillips, 2010). In order for programs to be considered legitimate they have to meet certain criteria to demonstrate they are beneficial to students. The statistics are impressive when looking at the benefits of 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC for elementary students.



The 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC initiative was changed in 2002 because of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. During the next decade, the focus of 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC was on improving standardized test scores so schools could meet adequate yearly progress (AYP). Since then, there has been a slight movement away from high stakes testing. Along with many schools, after school programs have started to broaden their scope and to focus on more than assessment scores (Grogan et al., 2014).

The Kansas Reading Roadmap (KRR) is a public-private partnership sponsored by the Kansas Department for Children and Families. The Roadmap grant focuses on integrating supplemental student supports that drive student achievement, with after school programs being one of the supplemental supports. In one particular case study, after implementing the KRR, within a two year span, one elementary school was able to show a 96% decrease in students who were substantially below grade level (Reading Roadmap, 2016). Another statewide grant option is the Kansas After School Enhancement Grant (KASEG), a Kansas State Department of Education initiative. The KASEG is similar to the KRR because it was meant to target low-income students. The KASEG differs from other grants because it funds after school programs already in place and matches dollar for dollar the amount of money already used to facilitate the after school program (KSDE, 2016). Although there are certain criteria for each grant, after school programs have the opportunity to apply for and receive numerous grants to help budget and manage the wide range of after school programs, but with each grant comes more requirements to meet.

### **Types of After School Programs**

After school programs differ from other childcare arrangements because they offer structured activities and have different emphases. The following section looks at a variety of

after school programs, including goal-oriented programs, student-centered programs, and community or citizenship centered programs. Each type of after school program is explained, connected to successful examples, and followed by a description of how effectiveness is measured.

### **Goal-centered Programs**

Goal centered programs often take the approach to fixing a particular prevalent problem in the school or community. These programs are wide ranging and can encompass many issues. Some areas these types of programs have attempted to improve are academics, physical activity, and healthy living. Most after school programs are goal-oriented and the focus can vary depending on the areas each program decides to work to improve. For example, during the times of high stakes testing and No Child Left Behind, many after school programs were looking to improve academic scores in reading and math, especially in higher poverty areas (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Students who participated in challenging and demanding programs showed the greatest improvement in standardized scores. One after school program case study looked at 30 students who received tutoring in reading (Nelson-Royes & Reglin, 2011). This after school program is one example of a goal-centered program where participants in the program, along with the facilitators, had a specific focus of improving reading scores among students. Fluency and comprehension reading scores helped guide and determine if the program was working. Based on measurable reading scores, almost every student made improvements in reading fluency and comprehension. Other after school programs showed students with good attendance have improved scores on standardized tests (Davies & Peltz, 2012). Another study placed a specific goal-oriented focus on raising reading scores. In this study, using one area of standardized

reading scores, students involved in the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program had improved scores when comparing participants to non-participants at the same grade level (Towler, 2016).

To help with childhood obesity and enhance healthiness among students, many after school programs promote healthy eating or physical activity (Afterschool Alliance, 2014b). One program investigated the nutritional value of food while creating home cooked meals and eating them family style (Burrows, Lucas, Morgan, Bray, & Collins, 2015) with hopes of students remembering lessons they were taught and later utilizing the information at home. Other programs have organized physical activity times or place a specific emphasis on physical activity. Some programs use sports, play, or recreation to increase physical activity during after school programs (Herrick, Thompson, Kinder, & Madsen, 2012). Another study looked at increasing the physical activity levels of students during after school hours (Behrens, Wegner, Miller, Liebert, and Smith (2015). Both students and parent perceptions showed interest and enjoyment increased when there was meaningful physical activity. An inner-city program centered around music activities provided students with academic and social enrichment (Andreassen, 2013). The goal of this program was to introduce inner-city students to music and instruments they would otherwise never come in contact with. The founders of the program implemented a daily study time and were successful not only with music, but also with other academics.

There are several ways of looking at the effectiveness of goal-oriented after school programs. Most federal and state grant funded programs require some form of quantitative data showing certain gains for students (KSDE, 2016). This is oftentimes easier to do when the goal-centered after school program is to improve academic test scores. One can examine quantitative scores at the beginning of the program and then again at the end. Other goal-centered programs

use more qualitative measures such as participant perceptions and observations. Other programs used a survey method in order to receive input from participants and parents (Afterschool Alliance, 2014b; Behrens et al., 2015; Park, Lin, Liu, & Tabb, 2015). In addition, many after school programs, which receive either federal or state grant funding, are required to follow certain criteria or guidelines in order to gain funding. These steps were taken in an attempt to verify the research conducted came from after school programs considered high quality or beneficial to students (Apsler, 2009).

### **Student-centered Programs**

Student-centered approaches to after school programs are similar to goal centered programs. Instead of trying to fix a certain problem, however, these programs emphasize supporting student growth and development along with fixing a problem. In addition, student-centered programs allow student input or voice into the types of activities participated in, along with the direction of the program. Many elementary after school programs are based on certain outcomes with specific goals in mind (Apsler, 2009). Looking at these diverse programs there has been a shift away from past practices such as repetitive learning during academic times and adult driven extracurricular activities. Modern after school programs are instead moving toward constructivism, which is a student-centered educational learning theory and approach to teaching. Constructivism emphasizes how students make meaning of what they are learning during the after school program and how students connect the after school program to real life. Instead of rote memorization, these types of programs focus on higher-level thinking and problem solving. Hatchman and Rolland (2001) used student voice via individual interviews to find out what motivated elementary students participating in such a program. During the study, questions focused on student perceptions in different areas, but one main area was support and

connectedness. Nearly half the participants identified a teacher or mentor who cared for them and helped them.

Another student-centered after school program emphasized healthy living and making good choices with eating and physical activity (Burrows, Bray, Morgan, & Collins, 2013). The students were given a variety of options when compiling different dishes and were allowed input while working collaboratively to purchase, prepare, and eat what they had created. The use of student voice along with the collaborative goal setting is what makes this a student-centered program. In another study, Engelen et al. (2015) looked at an after school program that allowed students the opportunity to set their own goals and agendas while engaging in active pursuits such as climbing, hiking, running, organized sports, or active free play. Although these outdoor activities were pre-arranged, the students were given autonomy when choosing which one they wanted to pursue. One program in particular emphasized student voice above all. Ward and Parker (2013) focused on the notion that students have strengths and assets to be promoted instead of problems that require fixing. Responses directly from individual participant interviews and focus groups were used to measure the effectiveness of the program. In conclusion, the data reported there was a positive learning environment. In addition, fostering student needs worked best when goals, activities, and assessments were all aligned, and the best programs found a way to include all three.

Quantifying the effectiveness of student-centered after school programming is challenging due to differing resources. The needs of an after school program are often dependent on the neighborhood, the location of school, and students' socio-economic status (Hynes & Sanders, 2011). In addition, many of the grants earned by after school programs require quantitative data showing student improvement in some area (KSDE, 2016). The effectiveness

of student-centered programs is oftentimes measured the same as goal-oriented programs. One specific area can be identified in order to measure success. For example, if improvements in reading were the focus, testing the participants reading fluency and comprehension before and after the program would be appropriate. Many student-centered programs used surveys, interviews, and observations to evaluate effectiveness. These methods allowed input from participants, and because student voice is one aspect separating goal-oriented programs from student-centered programs, these methods are an important piece.

### **Community and Citizenship-based Programs**

Community and citizenship-based programs are wide ranging. In some situations, after school programs can be community and citizenship based, as they turn to the community to find citizenship opportunities for students. For example, some programs use resources in the community such as Boys and Girls Clubs, colleges, YMCAs, and community centers. Many after school volunteers come from these entities of the community (Yaffe, 2016). Other community and citizenship programs are like other goal-oriented after school programs, but with a focus on volunteering and helping address different issues in the community. All of these community and citizenship programs are intertwined and connect in many ways. An after school program can be goal oriented, student-centered, and community and citizenship based, but might focus more specifically on one area over another. These three areas were specifically discussed because many of the researched programs considered high quality and effective contained these characteristics, or aspects of each one (Afterschool Alliance, 2016a).

One citizenship based after school program gave participants the choice of a hands-on group project that focused on environmental education and how to make a difference in the local community (Bruyere et al., 2012). First, the students collaboratively worked together to choose a

problem area within the community. Once chosen, the team of students moved onto the goal-oriented part of the program, which was trying to figure out how to make it better. During this time, students were able to give direct input into the project; this is highly student-centered.

Community and citizenship-based after school programs draw upon resources outside the school, such as utilizing local colleges and other agencies. A particular example of this was a study that looked at rising truancy issues, rising dropout rates, and mounting disciplinary problems with local community youth (Hill et al. (2015). These issues were negatively impacting the type of relationships being developed within the community, businesses, and stakeholders. With an approximate poverty rate of 18% in the surrounding community, and budget constraints statewide, addressing the problems via community youth partnerships was vital. With the concerns noted, Hill et al. (2015) developed a program that promoted and taught students how to learn important skills for future success. Utilizing Character and Resilience Education (CARE) as the source of curriculum for the youth, along with volunteers from the community, donations from local agencies, and in collaboration with the public schools and the local university, the program was developed. The program was not only beneficial for the participating youth, but also strengthened the relationships among agencies within the community. Another study in a rural school looked at a 22-year partnership between a local school district and university (Magiera & Geraci, 2014). The program has been sustained by collaborative efforts between the community, the local school district, and the local university. With funding taken care of by the community, the constraints imposed by state and federal grants were not required. The program facilitators were able to set parameters based on what benefited students most. One of the main reasons this program has remained viable is because the stakeholders realize the value it brings to the community.

Community and citizenship-based programs are difficult to measure when evaluating their effectiveness. Most of these programs are measured based on their benefit to students. If possible, students can take pre- and post-tests to show how much they learned during the program. Another way is obtaining perceptions from participants. With one program, surveys were sent home to parents, along with follow up focus groups with students. The qualitative data collection and analysis helped Magiera and Geraci (2014) draw conclusions. In the end, two of the most important pieces for the success of the 22-year long program were buy-in from the local community, the organization at the ground level, and the professional development, which allowed the staff to feel well equipped to work with any of the students.

### **Benefits of After School Programs**

Regardless of a program's central theme or focus, students involved in elementary after school programs have and are benefiting in a variety of ways (Davies & Peltz, 2012). At a minimum, these programs provide a safe and a secure place for students to go after school is over for the day (Dryden, Desmarais, & Arsenault, 2014). In addition, after school programs give elementary students the opportunity to build relationships with peers and with adults while learning to be proactive and to make healthy life-choices (Engelen et al., 2015). The research indicates that after school programs are beneficial to elementary students academically, behaviorally, and socially. Furthermore, after school programs provide safety for students, enable building relationships, and can involve parents in the experience (Apsler, 2009). Each of these is discussed below along with research-based examples.

#### **Academic**

Supporting academics has been a part of after school programs for many years (Afterschool Alliance, 2016b). After school programs have been utilized to supplement



academics at the elementary level and have been shown to help students be more successful with certain subjects. Involving elementary students in after school activities can have benefits such as improving grades in many subject areas (Johnson & Moulden, 2011).

Supplemental academic supports can look different throughout after school programs. Some programs have a set academic time each day where homework support is provided for students whereas other programs may have a central focus of raising academic scores in certain subject areas such as reading, math, or science. In many of these programs, student academic performance has increased and improved due to implementation of academic supports (Davies & Peltz, 2012). Many of these supplemental academic supports students do not, or would not have the resources to make happen without the after school program (Andreassen, 2013). Many after school programs use a set homework study time not only to help students with homework, but as a way to prevent students from falling behind in certain subjects (Afterschool Alliance, 2015).

After school programs often provide opportunities for students to finish homework they otherwise might not have adult help to complete (Afterschool Alliance, 2009). Students can finish their homework in an environment they consider safe, secure, and structured (Bruyere et al., 2012). Many students who participate in after school programs have expressed they are more committed to academics and more optimistic about their futures when compared to students not participating (Davies & Peltz, 2012; Pence & Dymond, 2015). According to Afterschool Alliance (2015), students who attend an after school program on a regular basis show great improvement in grades, reading proficiency, homework completion, and class participation when compared to non-attending students. More specifically, out of the students who participated in an after school program, 72% improved on homework and participation, 68% improved their behavior, 38% improved English grades, and 37% improved math grades (Afterschool Alliance,

2015). There are numerous reasons for supplemental support at the elementary level, and many after school programs have been utilized in this way.

After school programs have been associated with academic improvements for students of all ages (Davies & Peltz, 2012). In one elementary after school program, Viadero (2007) gathered data for over three years and found that disadvantaged youth who regularly attended after school programming ended up academically ahead of peers not using the programs. Research has indicated elementary age students in after school programs showed the greatest academic gains among all of the age levels (Sherman & Catapano, 2011). To illustrate, Sherman and Catapano found an after school mathematics program helped elementary students improve their math skills in concepts, application, and computation. Elementary students who participate in after school programs have shown increased academic performance as measured by standardized tests along with pre-tests and post-tests (Afterschool Alliance, 2012). Students who participate in high quality after school programs can increase their classroom grades (Lauver, 2012). An analysis of 35 research studies found that after school programs had a significant effect on reading achievement and mathematics achievement among students (Lauver, 2012). In another study, Viadero (2007) found that students who attended high quality after school programs were academically superior to their peers after two years in the program, especially at the elementary level. Lauver (2012) found that student participation in after school programming led to lower dropout rates, particularly among low-income students. In addition, Andreassen (2013) focused on an after school music program for disadvantaged youth. The after school music program played a significant role in every child's life, particularly an increase in cognitive skills, school connections, positive behaviors, and friendships. Academic progress is

one way of measuring the value of an after school program and it makes the data easier to maintain and monitor (Leos-Urbel, 2015).

### **Social-emotional Growth, Development, and Behavior**

Many recent academic studies have emphasized the importance of adolescent growth and development along with the behaviors of students. The way students behave, and other valuable social skills have been defined as soft skills, which are beneficial when they become working adults (Snyder, Vuchinich, Acock, Washburn, & Flay, 2012). Transitioning from childhood to adolescence, learning social skills and behavior, improving school attendance, and developing positive attitudes are all equally important parts of social-emotional growth, development, and behavior, especially for elementary age students.

**Transition from childhood to adolescence.** After school programs can play an important role in the transition from childhood to early adolescence. Students who participate in after school programs are introduced to a variety of people who help them through the transition from childhood to adolescence (Parsad & Lewis, 2009). These human resources can become supports systems for individuals as they work their way through the elementary years. After school programs are one way to provide elementary students with a culturally enriching environment that helps guide them through an important time of life. According to Ashley (2016), positive relationships with peers and adults within programs can help build a trusting support system for individuals participating in the program. Overall, after school programs offer further resources for students to add to their support networks and can help them develop long lasting and meaningful relationships.

**Learning social skills and behaviors.** School quality and the learning environment can improve when appropriate social-emotional programs are in place (Snyder et al., 2012). One

study found students who take part in extracurricular activities such as after school programs are encouraged to use social skills that help them throughout life (Johnson & Moulden, 2011). More specifically, social skills students use when interacting with peers in an appropriate manner. Some after school programs can give students the extra adult attention needed for boosting confidence (Magiera & Geraci, 2014). Positive perceptions of students along with positive self-concept are several qualitative outcomes derived from studies looking at after school programs.

Citizenship, behavior, and social skills are a focus for many after school programs and result in positive outcomes. These skills are often overlooked, but now each trait comes up in conversation as important for social-emotional growth and development. Teaching these skills is becoming more prevalent at the elementary level (Afterschool Alliance, 2016a). Engaging elementary students in after school activities can enhance their social growth and development (Gardner et al., 2009). In one study, an after school program focused on enhancing positive social behaviors. In this meta-analysis, participants were compared to non-participants of the after school program. Desirable and significant changes occurred with feelings and attitudes along with behavior adjustment. In addition, increases were observed in youths' self-perceptions and positive social behaviors while significant reductions took place for problem behaviors (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010).

Developing social skills and appropriate behavior are part of many after school programs and the focus of many high quality programs (Wade, 2015). Therefore, a benefit of participating in after school programs is students learn to make better life choices. For example, students who participate in after school programs are less likely to commit crimes and more likely to make better personal choices (de Kanter et al., 2000). In addition, student behavior has recently been identified as an important area for elementary students, when previously academics was the

central focus for student achievement (Wade, 2015). Some school districts now assess social skills or soft skills, which are emerging as an indicator of success for 21<sup>st</sup> century learners (Kamenetz, 2015). Acquiring positive social skills and behaviors are emphasized in after school programming at the elementary level (Afterschool Alliance, 2016a). When looking specifically at behaviors, after school programs are an important part of development and these programs have been shown to positively influence participant behavior. These include an increase in positive feelings, increase in desirable behaviors, and increased abilities to make good choices. Some programs can monitor behavior data to see if the after school program is having a positive impact on behavior whether the desired behaviors are during the regular school day or during the after school program time.

**Improved attendance and attitudes toward school.** After school programs have been shown to improve attendance for participants (Viadero, 2007). Students participating in after school programs showed higher rates of attendance at school, improved attitudes and perceptions of school, and lower dropout rates when compared to peers not participating in any after school programs (Gardner et al., 2009). There are several ways to look at attendance when it comes to after school programming at the elementary level. Research has indicated after school programs impact attendance for students who participate in them (Afterschool Alliance, 2016a). In other situations, programs have been shown to effect attendance during the regular school day. One study found when students participate in after school programs, their program attendance and school attendance both increased (Davies & Peltz, 2012).

Student perceptions and attitudes toward after school programming and school are a part of the important foundation for learning. In addition, both are another important piece of social emotional growth. Students' perceptions of their school and of their after school program can

affect their present learning and their future success (Kruczek, Alexander, & Harris, 2005). One study found that involving students in service learning activities fostered engagement and motivation to succeed (Mitchell & Soini, 2014). The positive perceptions students had toward the after school program often carried over into the regular school day to impact learning. Per Gardner et al. (2009), “After school programs can increase elementary students’ positive feelings towards school” (p. 16). Along with positive feelings toward school, students who participate in after school programs are more optimistic about their future (Davies & Peltz, 2012).

### **Safety and Security**

Many after school programs provide students with a safe environment that allows them to be with peers in a positive social setting. After school programs are a way for elementary students to become involved in structured activities with peers while ensuring they are in a safe and secure environment (Gardner et al., 2009). After school programs can be a supplemental addition or extension of the day while keeping students safe and secure (Andreassen, 2013). Therefore, after school programs play an important role in providing a safe environment for students until parents are able to pick them up (Afterschool Alliance, 2016a).

After school programs are an effective means for keeping students safe and secure during out-of-school times (Earle, 2009). Instead of students causing problems, after school programs can provide them with adult supervision in a safe and structured environment with peers (Parsad & Lewis, 2009). Participating in after school programs can help students make better choices with how to use their free time (Behrens et al., 2015). Some elementary students need a safe place to hang-out that provides a healthy snack during after school hours (Noam & Bernstein-Yamashiro, 2013). High quality after school programs can provide all of these for students. In

another study, Ward and Parker (2013) found students reported having fun during after school programs as long as they felt safe. The study showed the significance of providing a safe place for students, along with a warm and welcoming environment. In 2016, three out of four parents agreed after school programs gave them peace of mind while at work knowing their children were in a safe and positive environment. In addition, for every dollar invested in after school programming, over two dollars was saved in crime prevention (Afterschool Alliance, 2016b).

### **Building Relationships and Belonging**

Relationships are an important part of every elementary student's educational experience (Ashley, 2016). Building a positive relationship with other peers and with staff members can help elementary students make significant gains socially (Gardner et al., 2009). Positive relationships are an important part of creating an environment where every student can feel comfortable and welcome while including all stakeholders in the educational experience (Sherman & Catapano, 2011). After school programs can help create peer-to-peer and peer-to-adult conversation and relationships; which can contribute to student success (Mitchell & Soini, 2014).

While relationship building is an important part of elementary life for students, after school programs can assist with relationship building too (Apsler, 2009). Students who participate in after school programs are often looking to build positive working relationships with adults and with other peers in the program who can be mentors as well as good role models (Bruyere et al., 2012). Ward and Parker (2013) found both students and teachers benefited from the positive interaction and relationships created during the after school program. These interactions often led to feelings of enjoyment during after school activities. Student relationships with peers and with staff also influence their academic achievement and attitudes

toward learning (Ullah & Wilson, 2007). If the after school program staff is connected to the regular school day setting, the relationship can have the opportunity to grow and positively impact the everyday education of the student involved in the program (Shaul, 2004).

Relationships between after school programs, schools, and parents of the students participating in the program can be enhanced. After school program staff can develop relationships with parents by including them in programs, communicating with them, and promoting a welcoming environment (Afterschool Alliance, 2012). Creating positive relationships with parents and with the surrounding community can result in a better learning environment for students (Zetlin, Ramos, & Valdez, 1996). High quality after school programs have staff who can foster positive working relationships with parents (Afterschool Alliance, 2012). In a recent study, Ryan et al. (2013) examined how school supports affected working parents and families. Parent involvement was an important part of the study, which examined work-family conflict. Throughout the study, a variety of ways to lessen the stress between parents' work, family schedules, and school interference were reported. The findings of the study suggested the importance of making school-based programs user friendly.

### **Importance of Parent Participation**

While student participation is important for after school programming, involving parents and other family members can also have positive implications (Dodd & Bowen, 2011). Involving parents can be beneficial to students especially when parents set expectations and goals for their children. These expectations can be within school, within the after school program, and within the family household. According to Warner (2002), involving parents is a key component to student success no matter what type of program it is.



Many parents with lower incomes are less likely to utilize after school programs, although some programs are structured and directed specifically for these students and parents (Afterschool Alliance, 2016a). Money constraints, taking care of younger siblings, and transportation issues were some of the main reasons for non-participation from low-income elementary students. According to Nitecki (2015), parental involvement has been linked to future success in schools, with attendance as one of the biggest predictors. All these issues are important to keep in mind when establishing an after school program and trying to make it user-friendly for parents and students (Gardner et al., 2009).

All the areas presented above have proven beneficial for students attending after school programs, especially at the elementary level. There is research verifying positive outcomes can happen if a solid infrastructure is in place along with the after school program outlining many of the areas discussed above in order to authenticate the programs are in fact high quality (Afterschool Alliance, 2016a). Each section is important, and one is not more important or vital than any of the others. There are parts of each section that have played roles within after school programming. Some areas are emphasized more based on the focus of the after school program. This does not mean a high quality after school program must contain each one of them but keeping them in mind could help guide with future decision making particularly for a high quality program.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The research design selected for the proposed study was qualitative case study (Merriam, 2009). The qualitative method was appropriate for revealing information about a specific after school program using participant perceptions while helping understand how the participants and their perceptions are influenced by the context in which they are situated. Thus, a case study ensured the study remained reasonable in scope. This qualitative method was chosen in order to gain information directly from the source, which were the elementary students and staff members participating in an after school program, hereafter referred to using the pseudonym After School Program.

The case in this study was a specific after school program located in central Kansas and employed three staff members. Utilizing after school participants as the subjects of the study worked well for describing and analyzing their perceptions of the program while allowing student voice to frame the study. Both observations and participant focus group interviews were used. The observations took place before the focus group interviews. The main reason for this was to build rapport with the participants of the After School Program along with allowing time for the researcher to become familiar with the setting (Soffer & Ben-Arieh, 2014). In addition, an emergent design was a key factor for the focus group interviews. This allowed for ongoing modifications or additions if more data was needed (Mark, 2008). Using these methods allowed me to capture the in depth description I was looking for, which worked well for ensuring the quality of research (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

## **Research Site**

Several criteria were used to select the best option for an after school program for this study. A site-based after school program was an important aspect of the program selected. In addition, I was seeking a program that claimed to be student centered. It was also important the after school program had a daily schedule with planned activities for students. While many programs were considered, one program was chosen for this study. The After School Program was the site chosen because it met many of the qualifications and criteria discussed for this study. The physical location of the After School Program was within an elementary school. In addition, the After School Program placed emphasis on being student centered. Furthermore, the After School Program offered students the opportunity to make choices and become involved in the community with service projects, while building lifelong relationships with peers and staff members. This all happened while the staff members in the program created a safe and secure environment for all students involved. Most importantly, looking at the student voice framework, agency, belonging, and competence were found and analyzed repetitively within the After School Program. A more detailed description of the research site is included in chapter 4.

## **Participants and Sampling**

This case study investigated how participants described and experienced the after school program. All the focus groups except for one with the staff members of program were student participants of the After School Program. There were two reasons for this decision. One, the decision signifies respect and treating children as people, involving them in the decision-making process. The second reason was the opportunity to receive valuable information straight from the source. Students are the most knowledgeable when it comes to aspects of their life such as an after school program (Soffer & Ben-Arieh, 2014).

Purposeful sampling was used to select the After School Program participants for the study. These participants gave the thick, rich information about their experiences in the program (Patton, 2002). For this study, in order to best answer the research questions, child participants within the program were selected for the majority of the focus group interviews. There were 112 Pre-K-5 students enrolled in the program, but generally about 50 students were there at one time. Some students attended every day, while others attended part time. The After School Program kept track of two types of participants when documenting attendance. There were the regular attending students and the drop-in students. When looking at attendance for one of the months during the 2016-2017 school year, the breakdown by grade level of regular attending students was 15 kindergartners, 10 first graders, 18 second graders, 12 third graders, 10 fourth graders, and 5 fifth graders. The After School Program just recently started accepting pre schoolers, and five pre-kindergarten students regularly attend. The objective when choosing participants was selecting certain days when the attendance was similar from week to week. In addition, I invited students who attend consistently. If numbers were higher and more consistent, students attending on those days were invited.

I had initially planned to conduct five focus groups with approximately 4-6 students in each. I ended up conducting six student focus groups. Each student focus group had at least four students. There was one focus group of two people for the staff members working in the program. One of the staff members was unable to make the interview. The number of focus group interviews provided me with sufficient data for this study. At any time, if more information was needed, the emergent design allowed me to conduct additional focus groups. I utilized this by conducting an extra focus group because I needed more information from students in the primary grade levels. The emergent design was also used to move from non-

participant observations to participant observations. For the focus group interviews, I had reached the point of redundancy for the intermediate grades, but I needed more from the primary levels. In addition, I noticed the younger students responded with deeper information when older role models from the program were present. Therefore, for the final focus group I utilized both of these during the interviews. Looking at the number of possible participants, there were additional student participants to select from if needed (Givens, 2008; Mark, 2008). This was with the understanding only about 50 students attend the program at one given time.

The sample I planned for was appropriate because it was similar to the overall makeup of the school and closely represented the population of the town, school, and after school program (Creswell, 2012). Additionally, the sample size was heavily focused on the student participants, the group most knowledgeable about the After School Program. The appropriate rich information was obtained through the number of students being interviewed. Resampling could have taken place if more rich information was needed after the initial observations and interviews were complete (Patton, 2002). In addition, using emergent design allowed the data to guide the study (Mark, 2008). After the sixth student focus group I felt all grade levels had reached the point of redundancy with their responses.

In total, 27 students participated in the focus group interviews. 14 were females and 13 were males. Although it was not a question asked for data collection, the demographic makeup was similar to the makeup of the school with the majority of students being white and middle class. There were three preschoolers, three kindergartners, six first graders, seven second graders, three third graders, two fourth graders, and three fifth graders. The first focus group had four students, two male students and two female students. This focus group contained third, fourth, and fifth graders. The second focus group contained five total students. Four females

and one male. Two were in pre-k, one kindergartner, and a second and third grader to help. This was one area where the emergent design was used, as I had originally planned to organize the groups by grade and age. The younger students felt comfortable with older members of the program, I recognized this and used it to the study's advantage. The older students were excited about helping with the younger student focus groups. The third focus group consisted of four students, two males and two females. The students ranged from second to fifth grade. The fourth focus group consisted of five students, three girls and two boys. Four of the students were in first and second grades, and there was also a fifth grade helper. The fifth focus group had five students, one female and four males. All the students were in pre k or first grade. The sixth and final student focus group had five students, three girls and two boys ranging between first and second grades. This flexibility illustrated the value of using an emergent design (Givens, 2008). Age was a determinant when considering focus groups. In order to help students feel comfortable, I attempted to create the focus groups with student participants of the same age range (Dalli & Te One, 2012), while also including older students of the program with younger members. In addition, gender was considered when dividing students, as I wanted the number of boy and girl participants to look similar to the ratio within the program,

The staff members in the program were in a completely separate focus group, with a separate set of protocol questions created for them. Two out of the three staff members participated in the adult focus group. One of them was unable to make the focus group, so two of them were given a chance to give input during a focus group, along with a later opportunity to clarify any information. All three of the staff members were involved in observational data.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through two qualitative methods: participant observations and focus

groups. The observations took place during the After School Program. The focus groups were composed of after school program students, along with one focus group of the staff members. Speaking with students and giving them voice was an important part of this study.

**Participant observations.** I had originally planned to conduct non-participant observations. Then, when I showed up for my observations, on most occasions the After School Program was short staffed. Utilizing my expertise with elementary age students, I was able to assist as another volunteer staff member within the program. I was able to help supervise students without dealing with any behaviors or issues. I was strictly just a resource to help with the ratio of workers to students. This moved the non-participant observations to participant observations. The participant observations were part of the data collection and entailed observing students in their natural environment (Patton, 2002). The needs of the program along with the emergent design used for this study guided this change. A main focus during the observations was building rapport with the After School Program participants in order to familiarize myself with the children and the program. In addition, this familiarity helped gain the confidence of participants while enhancing interaction (Danby, Ewing, & Thorpe, 2011). The observations allowed me time to respectfully observe the practices of the children, after school program, elementary school, and community (Dalli & Te One, 2012). I observed students and staff during the After School Program time of 3:15pm - 6:00pm. There were 5 observations, and further observations were not needed. The five observations were during a two week time period, I was unable to attend every day, but I observed three days during one week, and two days during the other week. On most days, I observed the After School Program from start to finish between 3:15 and 6:00 pm. A variety of students, staff, and activities were observed. Not all the students were a part of the focus groups, so the observations gave me an opportunity to

observe all students in the program. Marshall and Rossman (2011) stated that observations are an “essential element of all qualitative studies” (p. 140). Since I was seeking to answer research questions, the observations allowed me to see the daily routine of the after school program and what the students experienced on a daily basis. In addition, the observations allowed insight into the agency, the belonging, and the competence students experienced during the After School Program.

Field notes taken during the observations were utilized in conjunction with data collected during focus groups. The field notes served several purposes. First, the observations were used to build relationships and rapport with students. These observations helped guide the protocol questions during focus groups. The second type of notes were in the form of a reflective journal in which my personal thoughts and ideas were recorded (Schwandt, 2015). Conducting observations allowed me the opportunity to become a familiar face before inviting students to talk during the focus groups. I used the observations to adapt focus group questions. In addition, based on my experience and relationship with the students and staff of the after school program, program staff were able to use my experience to help when needed during staffing shortages.

**Focus groups.** I used focus groups for a variety of reasons. First, in preparation for this study, I consumed much scholarly research about working with and interviewing children. One example of this research was the protocol questions which I specifically drafted for interviewing children (Danby et al., 2011). In addition, with the importance of student voice in the study, encouraging peer interaction among the students involved in the After School Program helped shed some light on their experiences. Next, the focus groups made some students more comfortable with the conversation and with sharing their true thoughts and feelings about their after school program experiences. The adult focus group allowed the leaders of the After School



Program to give their descriptions of the program while also allowing them time to clarify other aspects of the program which could come up. I was hopeful that the focus groups would draw out descriptions that might otherwise not be recognized during observations (Merriam, 2009).

The focus group protocol was constructed utilizing a variety of resources to ensure appropriate questions were asked. For instance, I avoided questions that allowed a simple yes or no answer. In addition, it was recommended to avoid asking “why” questions because these types of questions tend to lead to speculation and dead-end responses. Open-ended questions allowed students to discuss other relevant information throughout the interviews (Merriam, 2009). I believe my experiences as a teacher and elementary school administrator were beneficial when working and interviewing elementary students. There were many important aspects to keep in mind while interviewing students. For instance, it can be difficult at times to get elementary students to fully answer specific questions and knowing this prior to entering the field helped with preparation. In addition, the predetermined protocol questions were meant to directly answer the research questions (Merriam, 2009)

For each focus group interview, there was a brief introduction and protocol review followed by a pre-determined set of questions for the focus group interviews (See Appendix A). I asked approximately 10-12 open-ended questions that were directly connected to the study’s overarching research questions (Merriam, 2009). Due to the fact the study was dealing with younger elementary students, the length of the focus group interviews were approximately 25-30 minutes (Soffer & Ben-Arieh, 2014). In order to get all 10-12 questions completed, I planned to schedule two sessions if needed. There was only one focus group that needed a follow-up session. With the other five groups, I was able to get the data needed with the first session. The adult focus group had the same amount of questions but took about 35 minutes. The interviews

were important for interpretation of the individuals' world and their conscious experiences during the After School Program. When deciding what questions to use during the interview, I kept six types of questions in mind: experience and behavior, opinion and values, feeling, knowledge, sensory, and background/demographic questions (Merriam, 2009)

When interviewing young children, it is important to allow them to give voice to their own interpretations. In many situations, student interpretations are actually adult interpretations of their responses and feelings, so it was important for me to keep in mind the dynamics between adults and children. In addition, especially in western culture, age is often viewed as an indication of power. I originally intended to keep the students within certain age ranges, as doing so could help avoid detrimental power struggles among students (Eder & Fingerson, 2002). After observations, this was not a concern, and the older students helped with the younger students. Most of the younger students looked up to the older students. I networked with other professionals to solicit input on question asking during the interview process. In regard to the importance of asking good questions, Merriam (2009) states, "Asking good questions takes practice. Pilot interviews are crucial for trying out your questions" (p. 95). I piloted the interview questions with students attending an after school program in a different school district, but similar aged students. Piloting the interview questions was beneficial when the actual interviews took place. The actual focus group interviews took place at the elementary school where the After School Program was housed.

The Superintendent, principal, and the After School Program director approved the use of the After School Program as the site for this study. Five documents used during this study were the student protocol questions (See Appendix A), the adult protocol questions (See Appendix B), student assent form (See Appendix C) for student participation and the parental consent form

(See Appendix D) for the parents of participating elementary students, and adult focus group consent form (See Appendix E) for adult participation. All the documents communicated important information to anyone participating in the study. I submitted all necessary documents to the Wichita State University IRB for approval. All signed consent/assent forms were collected before the commencement of the focus groups. There was a thorough review of the informed consent and assent forms with participants before beginning focus group interview sessions and I advised participants they could skip questions if they were uncomfortable and they could withdraw from the study at any time. Focus group transcriptions and observation notes were kept in a password-protected computer for later use.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The data collected during the observations assisted me in preparing for the focus group interviews, making modifications or additions to protocol questions. In addition, the observations helped guide and develop relationships with participants, helped me as a researcher get a feel for the organization and become accustomed to their processes. There were questions posed directly from the observations for the participants of the focus group to answer (Kawulich, 2005). The observations helped organize and prepare the focus group interviews.

Transcription was one of the first steps in analyzing the interview data. Transcription occurred when the audio recordings from the focus group interviews were typed verbatim into a Word document. Once all the focus group interviews were completed and transcribed, it was time to move onto the next step of data analysis. I looked for themes throughout the entire transcription process because qualitative data analysis starts during data collection (Merriam, 2009). When all the interviews were completed I unitized the data from the transcriptions. Throughout this entire process I was still looking for themes. Themes are similar codes

aggregated together that form a complex idea (Creswell, 2012). I reviewed and constantly referred to the transcriptions to develop codes and identify themes (Merriam, 2009). Merriam stated, “The challenge is to construct categories or themes that capture some recurring pattern that cuts across your data. It should be clear that the categories are abstractions derived from the data, not the data themselves” (p. 181). Codes were a source of organization throughout the research project.

A constant comparative method was used during the entire process (Creswell, 2012). Themes and patterns were monitored, changed, and added to when necessary. During the entire process, I maintained an understanding about including, applying, and revisiting student voice theory. Theory derives directly from any social unit and in this case, the social unit was the After School Program. The initial list of themes was tested throughout the data analysis phase of the study and the list remained fluid to accommodate new data as they emerged. The data determined which themes, patterns, and codes stemmed from the observations, the transcriptions, and the unitized interview data. This worked well with the emergent design I used during the observations and focus group interviews. As I became more familiar with the data through every stage of analysis, I carefully compared the list of themes and codes to the research questions, the framework, and the literature review (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Reimer, 2012).

### **Research Quality**

For this study numerous steps were taken to ensure the research was of high quality. Merriam (2009) stated, “What makes experimental studies scientific or rigorous or trustworthy is the researcher’s careful design of the study” (p. 210). In order to ensure research quality, the following areas were addressed: ethical considerations and confidentiality, dependability and

reliability, transferability, confirmability, and positionality. Each area is described in the sections that follow.

### **Ethical Considerations and Confidentiality**

Ethics, confidentiality, and protection of the participants were important parts of this qualitative study. Because the study mainly dealt with children, participant rights were one of the most important parts of this study. Due to the value and importance of student voice and gaining information directly from the source, children were vital to this study. The student participants know the most about their lives. Children have the right to participate and to be actively involved in decision-making. Any time children participate in a study, their safety is most important. For this study, there were only a few potential risks anticipated to the participants' safety and well-being (Soffer & Ben-Arieh, 2014).

I completed various courses on the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) website that emphasizes the importance of safety within the social sciences in terms of confidentiality and the IRB process. As stated earlier in the methodology section, all students participating in this study were required to give personal assent and their parents were required to give signed informed consent. The assent of the student and consent of the parent were in hand before the start of any focus group. Student participants retained the right to withdraw from the study at any time. They were given multiple opportunities to opt out. Parents were informed about the options of having their child withdraw at any time. If parents chose not to give consent, that particular student was not included the study. All students could still participate in the After School Program without participating in the study.

## **Credibility**

It is imperative to any qualitative study there is confidence in the conduct of the study and in the findings (Merriam, 2009). Lapan et al. (2012) stated, “Research is valid when community members agree that it is an accurate presentation of their reality” (p. 386). To strengthen the credibility of this study, careful consideration was taken when composing the research questions and identifying a theoretical framework to guide the study. Another form of credibility came from the study’s emergent design. There was constant reflection and evaluation of the overall study and data collected. This allowed modifications and changes to be made throughout the entire process. The information derived from the data collected was a good indicator of the experiences of the students involved in the After School Program (Haller & Kleine, 2001).

## **Dependability and Reliability**

Dependability parallels external validity. According to Merriam (2009) , “strategies that a qualitative researcher can use to ensure consistency and dependability or reliability are triangulation, peer examination, investigator’s position, and the audit trail” (p. 222). As stated previously, triangulation was applied consistently throughout the entire study to determine agreement among the research questions, theoretical framework, literature, observations, and focus group interviews. I used peer examination during the entire process, which allowed for other analytical perspectives on the study. Peer examination was conducted with doctoral program colleagues who had already finished the process, so I was able to discuss the process and findings with several of them. In addition, I have other professionals I have networked with, they are part of other doctoral programs, so I was able to discuss the process and findings using them as neutral resources. Lapan et al. (2012) asks the following question about credibility:

“Does the researcher keep a journal or notes about his or her own beliefs, biases, perceptions, and changes in thinking” (p. 29)? I kept a journal during the study for a self-reflection piece that included my beliefs, my biases, and my perceptions during the entire study.

### **Transferability**

According to Lapan et al. (2012), transferability is accomplished by the provision of sufficient details about the research participants and setting so the readers of the research could make a determination as to how a finding from the study might transfer to their own context. Thick, rich description enhanced the possibility of transferability so the setting and participants described in detail to help guide the reader.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability parallels objectivity. Confirmability addresses how the researcher plans to minimize personal bias. There must be evidence readers can see in order for them to reach conclusions. I did this by including triangulation of data, peer reviewing, and a self-reflective journal. For this study, I used a well-known theoretical framework to guide data analysis. A variety of studies utilized student voice along with agency, belonging, and competence. There are many examples of educational programs using student voice and many of the programs are encouraged with the results (Miller, 2011).

### **Positionality**

All people are positioned based on current beliefs and past experiences (Moore, 2012). I reflected on my personal attributes that could affect the data and worked to bring them to the surface. Throughout the study, I visited and revisited a reflexive journal to help organize my thoughts and feelings about the data. I used several processes within this reflexive journal. One example is called worksheet technique where participants’ actions and words are placed into one

column and the researcher's interpretations placed along the other side. This technique was beneficial when trying to set aside assumptions (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). The reflexive journal allowed me to position myself with respect to participants of the study. Keeping the reflexive journal was a way of helping myself be more self-conscious, self-aware, and critical towards my research and work (Chiseri-Strater, 1996).

As an elementary student, I participated in numerous after school programs. Due to these first-hand experiences, I have some knowledge and recollection of what my own after school programs consisted of. Along with my first-hand personal elementary experiences, I currently work as a principal in an elementary school, which has provided me with a variety of experiences working with elementary students. I went into this study with many preconceived notions when it came to after school programs and I am passionate about this topic. I conducted this research because of my deep interest in after school programs and understanding how they factor into the lives of elementary students. My interest in after school programming at the elementary level makes it important that I continue to remain aware of my preconceived notions about after school programs during data collection and analysis. I have remained vigilant because I looked to produce reliable information that could help elementary educators with after school programs.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate how participants described and experienced the after school program while specifically looking at how much voice students had in influencing their after school program. The following sections provide a description of the After School Program, as well as themes related to student and staff views of the After School Program. While the most of the findings fit within the framework of student voice and agency, belonging, and competence, discussion of the findings in relation to the student voice framework are presented in greater detail in Chapter 5.

#### **The After School Program**

The After School Program was housed in a rural school district located in central Kansas. Enrollment for the entire district was approximately 2,200 students. The district was made up of approximately 54% male and 46% female students. When looking at the socioeconomic status of the district, 39% of students were considered economically disadvantaged, while 61% were non-economically disadvantaged (KSDE, 2015).

There were three elementary schools in the district with each having a similar after school program. One Pre-K-5 elementary school with approximately 361 students participated in the study. The school housing the After School Program was largely white and affluent with about 90% of the school's student population identified as white, 3.5% as Hispanic, 2% as African American, and 4.5% as other. Looking at data from 2016-2017, approximately 20% of students at this school qualified for either reduced or free payment for lunch.

The After School Program was housed within the elementary school building. For security purposes, there was one main entrance to the elementary school. Upon entering, there

were two choices after having checked in with the secretaries at the office: either enter the wing filled with all the classrooms or enter into the gymnasium. The After School Program was located on the gymnasium wing, which was used throughout the school day for physical education and recess. The gymnasium also served as the cafeteria during the regular school day, but tables were cleaned and put away by the end of the day, so this space could be used for activities during After School Program hours. On one sideline of the gymnasium were stands for students to sit in, and on the other sideline was a stage, which was used for assemblies and other programs. A curtain separated the gym from the stage. The stage was large enough that half of it was set aside for school day use and the After School Program used the other half. This half of the stage had tables set up for After School Program arrival, storage of back packs, and snack time. Along with the gymnasium and half the stage, the program also had a full-size classroom. The classroom was dedicated to the After School Program and was located next to the PE teachers office. All the rooms were designated for use by the After School Program but could be utilized during the day if needed. The classroom was nothing out of the ordinary; there were many books, several dry erase boards, circular tables, chairs, markers, crayons, computer, television, etc. The staff members of the program used the classroom for homework, quiet reading or working time; it was also the pickup location for students. The After School Program classroom had a door leading directly outside. This gave parents easy access to parking and picking up their child. In addition to the gymnasium, half the stage, and classroom, the students also used the playground. The playground and outdoor space were located on the other side of the building. The staff members made this work by using cell phones to communicate with one another. When offering activities, the After School Program gave a variety of choices to

students such as which games they played inside and outside. The program employed three staff members. The hours of service were Monday – Friday from 3:15pm to 6:00pm.

The After School Program served a mix of students between 4-10 years of age. During the time of the study, there were 112 students enrolled; however, only approximately 50 students attend the program on any given day. The student participants were selected from among the students who attended the program most consistently.

The program was partially funded by the school district and did not receive any additional federal or state grant funding. Numerous donations from the community were made to the program each year as supplemental support. Most of these donations were for material goods and resources used throughout the school year. One specific donation was from the local zoo, which helped fund an education program every year. During the 2016-2017 school year, however, the local zoo funding was cut. During the data collection of the study, the staff and community were working diligently to try to earn it back for the 2017-2018 school year. In addition, at the beginning of each school year, a note was sent home to all the families and many of the surrounding communities seeking donations for items such as board games, puzzles, movies, Clorox Wipes, etc. The After School Program received these types of donations on a yearly basis, and sometimes during the year when materials were getting worn down or old, and needing replaced.

The student's cost for the program was \$6.50 per day. If a student had a parent who worked for the district, the cost was reduced to \$4.50 per day. Through staff member focus group interviews, it was discovered that the After School Program had previously received a Department of Children and Families (DCF) grant that allowed students on free or reduced lunch to pay a lower fee. However, that option was eliminated after the 2015-2016 school year due to

statewide budget cuts. The cost included a daily snack when students arrived at the program. With student participation fees and donations, very little funding was needed to support the program and the district picked up any additional costs. The After School Program had impacted enough students that the school district found it appropriate to help fund a program within every elementary school in the district. The district acknowledged its importance by continuing to supplement and expand the program, even with the loss of grants and other state and federal funding. The After School Program had a daily schedule, which was flexible depending on events within the local community and school (See Table 2 for daily schedule).

Table 2

*The After School Program Daily Schedule*

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<u>Time</u>	<u>Activity</u>
3:15 – 3:20	Arrival, put bags away, get ready for snack
3:20 – 3:50	Check – in, nutritious snack time, clean up
3:50 – 4:15	Homework
4:15 – 4:40	Outside Exercise
4:40 – 5:10	Gym / Enrichment Activity
5:10 – 6:00	Bingo, puzzles, toys, games

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The remainder of this chapter presents findings from the themes that emerged from the data. The first section looks at student views of the After School Program.

**Student Views of the After School Program and Observations**

The student participants talked about and were observed enjoying many aspects of the After School Program, which fell into the main themes of free play and unstructured activities, structured activities, and relationships forged during those activities. These themes are followed by a discussion of what students wanted, disliked, and learned during the program. Then, student attitudes and feelings along with views of the choices they had.

## **Enjoyment for Free Play and Unstructured Activities**

Most students expressed free play and unstructured activities where they could do what they wanted were what they liked best about the After School Program. Within all six student focus groups there was at least one student who expressed enjoying playing outside or going to the gym as their preferred activity. Unstructured free play, both inside and outside, was popular with students. For example, one student stated, “I enjoy playing outside.” Other students simply responded with one word answers such as “outside,” “recess,” and “playground.” In one focus group, every student within the group said going outside was what they liked best about the After School Program.

Unstructured gym time was another answer many students gave during focus group interviews. For example, when asked what they liked most about the After School Program, one student said, “Playing in the gym.” Gym time looked different every day during the week of observations. On most days, gym time consisted of free play as long as the students were able to handle it behaviorally. In addition, there was a tub of games, hula hoops, and balls for students to use in the gym, but it was their choice if they used these items or not. The staff members in the program said there were times when students played structured, whole group games in the gym but I did not observe that during my week of observations. The days I observed in the gym, it looked similar to recess time outside, except the free play took place in the gym. For example, one day I observed students for about 15 minutes in the gym. Some students were shooting baskets, others were sitting in the stands, some were talking to friends, and others were coloring or drawing on pieces of paper while seated on the side of the gym, while one group was playing four square.

During the second day of observations, one of the staff members was unable to make it to work. Due to the lack of staff, the students had a choice of staying inside or going outside. The students who chose to stay inside then had the option of either play and/or do homework in the gym. The students who chose to go outside had free play. During this observation, I started inside helping with homework, but after a while, the staff member sent me outside because the majority of students were outside. In addition, when the students found out they had a choice of not doing homework, there was an eruption of cheers from 3/4 of the students. Then, when they found out they had a choice of going outside or staying inside, they became even more excited. During this same day of observations, the principal was outside playing with the students because of the shortage of staff.

### **Structured Activities**

Structured activities were less preferred than free play, but students did mention several structured activities they enjoyed. There were many examples of structured activities throughout the After School Program. Structured indoor activities were homework, snack, board games, coloring, etc. In most situations, a structured activity was led by a staff member. On most days, students spent time doing homework and classroom activities indoors and in the classroom. If they did not have homework, the staff members had other activities for them to participate in such as problem-solving workbooks and educational games like Boggle and Noggle, along with coloring pages, silent reading, etc. Boggle and Noggle were brain teaser word and number games created by the staff members. During observations, the staff members had students work on these activities when they finished homework. These activities were there in case the students needed something extra to do.

The structured activity students enjoyed the most was the snack portion. One student commented, “I really like the snack.” Other students simply said “snack” or “snack time” when asked what they liked best about the After School Program. When asked to explain what they liked about snack time, a student elaborated, “I come here hungry after school and I am ready for a snack.” Other students gave specific examples of snacks they enjoyed while attending the After School Program. One student said, “They have cookies,” while another student talked about “Cheez-Its, animal crackers, and graham crackers.” The student focus groups in which snacks became a discussion topic were mostly older students from second through fifth grade. Both male and female students talked about it, and once the topic was brought up by one student, another student would agree and also engage in conversation about snack time.

Snack time was the first activity students participated in when they arrived and was a transition from the 7.5-hour school day to the After School Program. The students made the transition to the After School Program, and then sat at tables dedicated for snack time. The students did not start eating right away, they sat down together and talked with each other while waiting for the rest of the students to arrive. At approximately 3:20 pm, the staff members called tables by number in order for students to get a snack and drink. It was evident the staff members were choosing the tables where students were sitting quietly and following the rules. In most circumstances, the students had no issues getting quiet so they could earn their turn to get a snack and drink.

The majority of students were observed enjoying snack time. They used this time to communicate with each other as many conversations were going on. The students were observed smiling, giggling, and everyone appeared to have someone to socialize with. Along with being a time to transition from school, the students were able to gather, socialize, and enjoy a drink and

snack and each other's company. During the days I observed snack time, there were no behavior issues and although the noise level got a bit loud, it was never excessive.

Students were offered a choice during snack time. Although there were never more than three choices, there was never a time the students only had one choice. One particular day the students had a choice of crackers, fruit snacks, or a granola bar. Along with the snack, students were given a small carton of milk, and some days the student had an option of extra juice. During the snack portion, one of the staff members interacted with the students while the other staff members prepared for the day's activities. During observations, the students were excited to talk to the staff members about their school day. I witnessed one staff member of the program carry on conversations with four students during the snack portion. I also talked with several students about their school day.

### **Relationships Were Important**

Many students discussed enjoying the relationships they had developed as a result of attending the After School Program. Students talked about two main types of relationship: peers and friends and the staff members associated with the program.

**Relationships with peers.** First, students expressed enjoying spending time with each other, but especially with friends. One student stated they enjoyed, "Getting to spend time with my friends." They also liked the fact the program was inclusive of all students, and no one was left out. To illustrate, a student said, "I like when people go together. When they don't leave anyone else out." In this situation, the student was referring to including all students in activities. This was an important part of the program's relationship goals, trying to include all students in the activities. Through observational and focus group data, the students clearly



enjoyed spending time together. During interviews, the students talked about relationships with other students within the program and the observations provided some concrete examples.

I observed the older students interacting with and helping the younger children in an effort to create a good environment for all. During one day of observing, it became clear to me how important the help of the older students were to the program. While on the playground, I observed an older student assist taking a younger student to the nurses' office when she got hurt on the playground. The younger student hurt her leg as she was sliding down the slide on the playground equipment during unstructured free play. The older student made the decision to help the injured younger student without being prompted. The older student approached the staff member supervising the program and explained the situation, how the younger student was hurt, and what was needing attention. Then, the older student asked if they could take the younger one into the nurses' office. The staff member supervising was able to continue monitoring approximately 30 students playing while the injured student got the medical attention needed.

In another example, while the students were outside, I observed students playing a game of basketball. The students participating in the game ranged from Pre-K-5th grade. It was obvious the 5th graders could have scored any time they wanted or could have stopped the younger students from scoring whenever they wanted, but they did not. This was evident because the older students were over a foot taller in height and outweighed the younger students by a lot. I observed older students allowing the younger students to shoot the ball when they could have easily blocked them. In addition, I witnessed the older students going a step further and trying extra hard to include the younger students by letting them shoot the ball, passing them the ball, and not being stringent about rules like traveling or double dribbling. At one point, I witnessed an older student call traveling on another older student. On one of the next plays, a

younger student had an obvious travel/double dribble and the older student simply turned a blind eye.

That same day, I observed two 5th-grade students helping younger students with math during homework time. It was more than the way the older students were helping; they were teaching the younger students how to solve the problem instead of merely giving them the answer. A goal of teaching is helping students become problem solvers so they can figure out answers on their own. It was as though the older students had been trained on how to guide the younger students. I later talked to the staff member of the program to see if they had trained the older students when assisting with homework. They told me they allowed only a few students to help during homework time and I had been observing two of the best. The staff member also told me both of the older students spent extra time during homework rotation because they enjoyed it so much. It was completely voluntary and done by student choice. In general, the older students of the program set the tone for the type of experience the younger members received. The older students acted as role models and mentors for the younger students. This was shown by including the younger students in activities, assisting them with homework, and, at times, playing the role of an additional staff member in the program.

**Relationships with program staff.** The students felt relationships with the staff members of the After School Program staff were important to their wellbeing. When asked whom they talked to when they had concerns, the majority of students answered “the teachers” (students referred to the After School Program staff as teachers). The program staff also expressed the desire to spend time and talk with each student. During observations, the staff members showed a genuine caring for the students through their positive interactions, which started during snack time with staff members checking in with students. During the 4th day of

observations, I witnessed a staff member sitting at a picnic table with a group of four intermediate aged students. I walked over to see what they were doing. The staff member was helping the students with math homework. The homework time was already over so I asked the staff member why the students were still working on homework. The staff member told me the students did not quite finish during homework time and needed extra help. Since the weather was nice, she offered to help the students if they would come outside while she monitored the other students on the playground. The students working on homework chose to do so and to seek out the assistance of one of the program staff. Program staff acted interested in the students by asking them questions about work they were doing and playing tag, soccer, basketball, and numerous other games on the playground or in the gym.

### **What Students Want from the Program**

The student participants had several ideas when asked what the After School Program would look like if they were the boss. The typical answer was more outside time and gym play. One student stated, "I'd like to go outside for the rest of the day." Another student said, "I'd have three recesses." Some answers given by the student participants suggested adding onto current items already included in the program. For example, one student talked about enjoying building with Legos, and how he wished they had more Legos.

Other students came up with completely new ideas for the After School Program. Although some of them were not feasible, they were still creative. For example, one student stated he thought they should have, "Monster trucks at the After School Program." Several other students talked about bringing back aspects of the program that had been discontinued. One group suggested displaying artwork created during the After School Program while another focus group talked about how much they missed field trips. Both displaying art work and field trips

were currently not part of the program. However, the staff members recognized the value in both of them and was in the process of trying to get a field trip grant in place.

### **What Students Disliked about the Program**

The student participants within the focus groups were not shy about discussing what they disliked about the After School Program. The two topics that came up most frequently were their dislike of the academic portions of the program and the consequences for not following rules. The most popular answer about what they liked least about the After School Program was homework time. One student said, “Homework time,” while another said, “Homework and reading.” When asked if there was anything good about homework time, most students were unable to come up with an answer.

Another aspect of the After School Program students disliked dealt with rules and the consequences for not following them. Several students talked about how they did not like getting into trouble during the After School Program because getting into trouble often meant being separated from their friends by the staff members. One student said he disliked, “Being separated from my friends” when he was in trouble. When asked what they disliked most, one student said, “Getting into trouble.”

Students disliked when others did not follow directions because everyone was penalized. As group punishment, everyone had to stand quietly with their backs against the wall. One student shared, “I don’t like when they are not following directions. I don’t like when we have to stand against the wall at recess.” Another student shared frustration with the consequences when not everyone followed the rules. He noted, “Getting into trouble, having to sit in the gym when I’m in trouble, and even if we’re telling our friends to be quiet, they won’t be quiet.” During my observations, I never witnessed the entire group having to sit out for not following

directions but I was able to observe staff intervening with several individuals who were not following rules. These students were observed having to sit out against the brick wall outside. On both occasions, the staff members appeared to be fair to the students. After a reasonable amount of time, less than 5 minutes, students were able to rejoin the activities or return to free play.

### **What Students Learned During the After School Program**

The students shared having learned many topics during the After School Program, although two were predominant in the data. When looking at what the students learned, this was closely connected with competence and student voice (Mitra, 2004). I have organized this section into two main sections, academics and good behavior and character.

**Academic learning.** Even though they expressed a general dislike for academics and homework, students gave several examples of academics they were learning during the After School Program. They talked about numerous subjects such as spelling, reading, and math. One student talked about studying spelling words during homework time. When referencing academics during homework time, she mentioned working on “Spelling words and math.” Another student stated, “I enjoy reading during school and during the After School Program.” One of the younger students in the program stated the following when asked about what he learned, “I learn about math. I learn about plus or addition.” The students gave examples of academics included in the After School Program even though they did not particularly enjoy them. Although academics was an important part of the After School Program, it was not the most referenced topic when students were asked what they learned during the After School Program. Students did most of the academic work during homework time, and as already noted,

homework time was their least favorite time. Although students learned some academics during the After School Program, most of the data suggested a focus on good behavior and character.

**Good behavior and character.** Good behavior, character, and following the rules were the main topics students indicated were part of their learning in the After School Program. For example, one student said he learned, “To always be kind.” Another student said he learned, “To behave.” Several students talked about why it was important to behave. One student said, “You listen or you’re in trouble.” Another student talked in depth about the expectations to be obedient, noting, “Don’t disobey the teachers because, like they said, we want to be good role models for the little ones.” Being a good role model meant listening to their teachers and following the rules.

During interviews and observations, students understood and articulated the rules and behavioral expectations, which they related to what they learned in the program. When answering the question about what they learn during the After School Program, students often gave specific examples of the rules. One student said, “Follow directions, raise your hand, keep your hands and feet to yourself.” Another student got up out of her seat and walked over to a poster hanging on the wall, which contained a set of rules and expectations. While pointing to the poster she said, “Speak when called on, respect your teachers and other students.” She read exactly what was on the poster. During observations, I realized right away the students knew the rules. Not only were students aware of the rules, they knew the consequences for not following them. For example, one student talked to me about the importance of following rules and getting along. She specifically talked about a student who was barred from returning to the program because they would not follow directions. Evidently, someone in the program had gone over the rules numerous times and emphasized their importance.

Students also talked about learning to demonstrate good character. For example, a student responded he learned, “Character skills.” The students were aware they were expected to collaboratively work with others within the After School Program, or at least be friendly with everyone. One student understood the expectation that they “Be able to work well with others.” For the older students, being of good character also meant mentoring the younger students. One student stated, “We want to be a good role model for the little ones.”

Students talked about how they were going to use information learned during the After School Program at different times in their lives. Students referred to these as life skills but behavior and character were the focus. One student elaborated, “We learn life skills, what we are supposed to do and not supposed to do.” Another student elaborated they were learning, “How things work in life and some things can’t always go your way.” The fact that not everything will work or go in their favor was an important life lesson. Furthermore, some older students knew the expectations not only that they work well with others but help be a leader within the program. The next section focuses on student attitudes and feelings towards the After School Program.

### **Student Attitudes and Feelings about the After School Program**

I have organized this section into how student participants felt about the After School Program. The first section looks at students believing they were an important part of the After School Program. The second section addresses student perceptions about being listened to along with future benefits of the program.

**Feeling like an important part of the program.** Most of the students said they felt like an important part of the After School Program, which they defined in numerous ways. When asked this question, some students responded with a simple “yes.” One student explained, “Yes,

because I have to be a role model for these two” and pointed at the younger students in his focus group. Another student stated, “I feel like an important part because everyone is nice to me.” In both cases, perhaps because the way the question was phrased, the students emphasized how important they felt instead of expressing a sense of belonging, which the question was intended to capture.

There were many positive responses when students were asked if they felt like an important part of the After School Program. What stood out for me was what went unsaid: no students said, “no.” There were a few hesitant answers such as “Kinda,” and “Sorta,” but no student answered “no” when asked the question. When I probed further, the students always ended up finding reasons they felt they were an important part of the program. Several students who responded “yes” were unable to give specific examples. Instead, they gave answers like, “I just do.” In addition, some other students went into more detail on why they felt like an important part of the program. When prompted, one student said, “I feel like an important part because I have friends.” Two other students explained they had to be role models for the younger students.

In many of the observations, students were playing outside with other peers. Sometimes they were the same grade levels and ages, other times it was a mix of ages and grade levels. One specific example of students being included occurred when I was observing an adult playing with students on the playground. The adult was playing a game of soccer with a group of about 12 students during outside time. While watching the soccer game, the adult tried to involve all the students in the game. He called them by nicknames, passing the ball to everyone on the team and creating a fun and inclusive atmosphere. The teams were split in an unfair advantage in that the older, larger students were playing against the younger, smaller students. The adult was with



the younger, smaller students, and doing everything he could to include every student and help them have fun. While playing with the students, the adult was not overly competitive but engaging enough that the students witnessed the adult's energy and enthusiasm. This did not appear to be a one-time occurrence, as the students knew the adult and were used to having him interact with them. The interactions between the adult and students looked to be the status quo for after school program time. There were only a few occasions when students were completely on their own and from what I observed, this was by choice.

**Feeling listened to.** Part of feeling an important part of the After School Program was feeling listened to by adults. There were times when the students in the program felt more listened to than others. When asked if they felt the adults listened to them, most of the students answered "yes" but again, some were not able to give specific examples. One student said she was listened to "Almost every time" while another added, "Yes, I'm listened to." Some of the students shared specific stories about times they were listened to. One example was, "We went around the classrooms, and we had a project, and we presented it." Students shared several examples of times when they were able to present projects in front of other people. One student talked about working hard on a project for a class and then being able to present it during the After School Program. "It was a project at school, but they let me present it here. It was about Alex Gordon." Alex Gordon was a professional baseball player for the Kansas City Royals at the time. This experience and memory were good for this student and they enjoyed presenting what they had worked so hard on. It should be noted these responses were times students had a listening audience for their presentations and were not about having the staff members take their views into consideration. In a departure from that kind of response, one student shared an experience with a complaint he had about the milk. He explained, "I was listened to because I

thought the milk was not good and Mrs. Karis helped me. This has happened twice, and not even in the same day.” Instead of dismissing his concerns about the milk, the staff member took them seriously. In another example, a student talked about students not following directions and how staff members could be helpful in that situation. The student stated, “The adult will listen to you because they’ve usually already figured it out. That the student has been doing something that they shouldn’t have been doing.”

Hearing the students tell stories about being listened to showed they were able to reflect and recall numerous examples of times when staff members within the program listened to them. However, answering the question about being listened to was difficult for many of them. The students also felt listened to when they were able to make choices or if they were not forced to do something. For example, some students were not comfortable with performing in front of the other After School Program students and were allowed to opt out if they objected. One student explained, “Last year when we got a choice if we wanted to sing in front of the After School Program and a lot of us didn’t, and I feel like they listened to us.” This student felt listened to when the staff members allowed the students not to sing the following year and made sure all students who wanted to sing were able to.

**Looking to the future.** The student focus groups were also asked how the After School Program will help them in the future. Similar to asking what students learned at the After School Program, most of the students talked about behavioral expectations they learned as helping them in the future. When asked how the After School Program will help his future, one student said, “To know and follow directions.” Another student emphasized, “To know how to get stuff done in life and how to respect yourself and others.” Along with talking about behavioral impacts on

their future, students gave specifics on other future benefits to attending the After School Program.

When asked how the After School Program would help them in the future, some talked about immediate plans whereas others took a longer view. For example, one student talked about going to middle school the next year and how, “Since I’ve been here for years, it teaches me to know other people, how to work with them.” Other students answered with specific future goals the After School Program could help them with. One student said, “Help me become a teacher.” Another student said, “It will help me get to a college.” Through six focus group interviews, there was not one student who responded that the After School Program would not help them in the future.

### **Student Views about Choices**

In general, the student participants of the After School Program had little understanding about the choices they were able to make. They often attributed choices to what they were not supposed to be doing during the after school program. In addition, many of them talked about choosing good behaviors. Most of the students talked about making specific choices like choosing to stay inside or choosing to go outside. For example, when asked about making choices at the After School Program, one student answered, “We have a choice, I usually choose outside because I like sports and you have a choice to stay inside if you want.” Most students did not see they had other choices within the After School Program.

In several instances, the students initially did not realize they were able to make choices while attending the After School Program. Then, once they started answering the question, they realized they made many decisions during the After School Program. For example, when asked whether they got to make choices during the After School Program, one student said, “Not

really,” while another student simply answered, “No.” Both of these students went on to list different choices they were able to make while attending the After School Program. For example, after originally answering, “Not really,” one student said, “We get a choice like when we play outside.” Another student initially answered, “Nothing,” but then went on to say, “We get to choose what we do outside.” Students often felt there were not choices when the choice was already pre-determined by the staff members. For example, they had snack choices, but the snack choice was limited to choosing among the choices already made by the staff members.

Other students talked about making decisions when it came to behaviors, which indicated they felt their behaviors and actions were a personal decision. One student said, “There are things we shouldn’t do.” This specific student was talking about what students were allowed to do and not allowed to do during the After School Program. This particular student gave numerous examples of what the students were not supposed to do, such as “not crawling on the table” or “not ripping up a nametag.” In another example, a student stated, “Throwing stuff on the ground, you shouldn’t do that.” This was another example of students having been schooled on what they should and should not do. Although the students understood the expectations when it came to rules, students shared examples of behaviors they believed staff members wanted to see and others they did not want to see during the program. Students gave specific examples of desired behaviors during the program, which were shared in the context of making choices. One student said, “Getting to make examples about our behavior. I learned that last year.” Upon further investigation, this particular student had some behavioral issues from the previous year. Through collaborative efforts with parents and re-teaching expectations, the student was doing much better behaviorally in the current year. When asked about making choices, one of the younger students stated, “If you don’t do the right thing, then you will get in trouble.” The

students referenced the four rules within the After School Program, even pointing out the poster at times. It was evident the rules were reviewed, referenced, and followed within the program and the students recognized it was their choice to follow them or not. The next section looks at program staff perceptions.

### **Program Staff Views of the After School Program**

There were three staff members working for the After School Program. Two of them had worked there for a number of years and had a variety of perceptions about the After School Program. These were the two staff members able to participate in the focus group interview. One of the staff members had worked at the program since 2015 while another staff member started in 2016. The third staff member had recently been hired because of enrollment growth in the program and worked three days a week. This section presents the findings from the staff member focus group, in addition to what was observed. This section starts with relationship building with students. Followed by creating a safe environment. Then, by what staff members believed the students learned during the After School Program, and then by what the program staff disliked about the program.

#### **Caring Relationships**

Program staff cared first about the students within the program. They were relationship centered with a focus on student needs. Caring had multiple facets within the program such as helping students, being involved in activities with students, and keeping them safe.

When asked what they enjoyed most about the After School Program, staff responses were overwhelmingly driven by the relationships they had developed with the students through helping them. One stated, “I try to make an effort for those one on one relationships.” Another staff member stated, “Simply spending time with the students is what I enjoy most.” And another

program staff talked about the joy of working with students and, “Continuing to encourage kids.” The program staff talked a lot about helping students, such as trying to help them overcome adversity and problem solve, whether with homework or a conflict with a peer. Staff showed interest in helping students such as checking in during snack time, assisting with homework, and playing physical activity games with the students.

Based on statements during interviews, the program staff wanted the students to have a good experience through their involvement in enriching activities. For example, one staff member stated about the After School Program, “I hope it’s a good experience for the students.” Program staff also gave examples of wanting to give students a good experience by having “opportunities for the kids,” as one put it. When I delved further into this topic, the staff member wished they could offer field trips for students, which the students also desired. In addition, the staff member wanted to have community partners come to the program and make presentations. The program once had a partnership with the local zoo but the funding had been cut.

I observed the staff interacting with students to create a good experience for them. Interaction took place between staff members and students within every area of the After School Program, from snack time to homework time, gym time, and outdoor free time. Staff members facilitated sports or games outside on the playground equipment. Usually this happened while the staff members were part of the activity. I also observed program staff eating snacks with the students at the beginning of the after school program.

Students were treated like an important part of the after school program. The way staff members communicated with students during snack was welcoming and inviting. One staff member used this time to gauge how students were feeling in order to help them transition from their school day to a good start during the program. I watched the staff member go from student

to student. The staff member would start a conversation with a student, and if the student had a good day at school, the staff member would ask about it, and the student would explain their day. After a brief conversation, the staff member would move on to another student. It was clear the staff members were willing to put forth effort to develop relationships with each student in the program.

### **Creating a Safe Environment**

Safety was a priority for the program staff. One staff member said the first step in helping a student feel they were an important part of the program was making sure every student felt safe. One stated, “We are trying to keep every student safe.” Staff members gave examples of times they reached out to go beyond meeting the needs of students in order to make them feel safe, secure, and comfortable. The staff had procedures in place to make sure students were safe during program hours. Safety started at snack time when the program staff took attendance to know which students were there. All pick-ups took place in the same classroom every day. There was also a sign-out process that parents followed. This helped build relationships with parents and allowed program staff to develop some type of working relationship with each caregiver. For example, one talked about “keeping students safe” and the importance of this during the program. During the interview, a staff member gave a specific example of the importance of safety. She talked about a time a parent came to pick up a student at the end of the After School Program time but the child had not attended the program that day. The parent was upset and wanted to blame the staff. The program staff stayed calm and found out a relative had come to pick up that student from school that day.

## **Student Learning**

When I asked staff members what students learned during the After School Program, the conversation revolved around the same ideas as the students. They were relationships, character building, behavior, and academics.

**Relationships.** The staff members encouraged healthy relationships among the students. When asked what they liked best about the program, the response given during the adult focus group was, “I am hoping they can build relationships and become friends.” Along with the students, the staff members had expectations of older students demonstrating leadership throughout the After School Program. One specific example was shared:

We had two kids that got into it at the beginning of the year. Then, one student had to leave for a week because of his actions. So we talked to the other one because he was older. We talked to him about the situation. What could you do because you were the older child? It made him more of the role model. And the relationship did a 360.

The program staff desired to make every student feel like an important part of the after school program. This was seen during observations and responses given about student needs coming first, building relationships, and creating a good environment for all. In another example, a staff member felt it was important to be “Finding those students that may be having a bad day and need a little extra support.” The program staff gave examples of working with the elementary school staff in order to find out how to help students within the program.

**Character building.** The program staff spent a lot of time focusing on the importance of character building. One gave an example of watching students grow throughout the year: “It’s encouraging when I see them grow along with their character.” Overall, the program staff enjoyed working in a setting with elementary age students while trying to help them grow as



children, people, and learners. One staff member stated, “We don’t expect the students to be friends with everyone, but we do expect them to be friendly to everyone.” This was an example of how they taught good character to the students. The program staff emphasized character building in their responses and through observations. For example, one stated, “I hope they learn how to be responsible and take responsibility for their actions and what they do.” Another staff member shared the students learned, “Character stuff such as being kind.” One of the program staff talked about, “Encouraging bucket fillers and not bucket dumpers.” When asked what she meant by bucket fillers and bucket dumpers, she explained it was a saying used among staff members and students that meant giving others positive instead of negative comments. This was a way of encouraging positive interaction among students and staff members.

The staff emphasized how the character traits learned in the program could help students in the future. For example, one said, “I’m hoping that they learn how to be responsible adults. Learning the character traits.” Another stated she wanted to see, “Students treating others the way they want to be treated.” They went into detail about how the program built good character skills for the future. To illustrate, one staff member remarked, “As they get older the character traits will begin to become more and more important. Hopefully they can take lessons they’ve learned here and apply it.” During the staff focus group, there was a clear focus on what the staff members were trying to have the students take with them for years to come. Although the responses were different, they circulated around character skills and appropriate behavior.

**Behavior.** Related to character building, the program staff spent a lot of time focusing on student behavior. They discussed issues they had with parents and how hard it was when parents thought their children did no wrong. Program staff also talked about procedures they had to implement because of behavioral challenges. Some of the boys were having trouble getting

along so the staff came up with a seating chart to separate the boys who were struggling. Although this strategy helped, it was evident the staff did not want to implement the seating chart, preferring students to sit where they wanted. The staff did not like to take activities away as punishment and tried to be proactive with behaviors by setting rules and expectations. Once students did not follow the rules, the staff had to decide how to discipline students appropriately. This was difficult for some of the workers because they were simultaneously trying to set boundaries, develop appropriate relationships, and make students feel comfortable and safe. The staff demonstrated the type of behavior they wanted to see from students and were good role models. There were multiple times stress levels were high because of an incident with students or parents but the staff always stayed calm and handled the situations. I never witnessed program staff showing frustration toward students of the program.

**Academics.** Academics played a small role in the After School Program. Academics were rarely referenced by program staff and only in the context of the work students did during homework time. The program staff realized that homework was not most students' favorite activity. They felt, however, homework time was valuable enough that it needed to be a part of the daily schedule. One staff member talked about having intentionally set up the daily schedule so outside time and gym time were after homework time. She said, "The students have 20-25 minutes of structured homework time. Although this is not their favorite time, we find it to be worthwhile." The scheduling and structuring of homework time fit well when dealing with behavioral issues because students could earn free play outside or in the gym by demonstrating good behaviors and work ethic during homework time. There were few examples given of what the students learned during the homework time but I observed students working on math problems, reading books, and studying for spelling tests. Staff members gave examples of the

joy of watching students understand something for the first time. One staff member said, “I enjoy watching the lightbulb come on for the first time.”

### **What Staff Disliked about the Program**

The staff were largely positive and found it difficult to come up with anything they disliked about the program. They talked about human aspects of the program they disliked, such as uncooperative parents and students who did not follow the rules. One person talked about difficulties with parents by saying, “Usually, problems are with parents and not students.” Another talked about a situation with an upset parent when the parent had not read information sent home. In discussing the situation, the staff member said, “Some parents don’t read the notes or pay attention.” During one of my observations, a parent did not come to pick up their child until well after 6:00 pm. When the parent finally arrived, the parent was noticeably upset and would not make eye contact with any of us. The parent was red faced and appeared to be rushing around. The staff members never found out why the parent was late but they let me know tardiness was generally not an issue since implementing a policy of charging by the minute after 6:00pm.

Next, program staff expressed frustrations with students who do not follow directions. One said, “I dislike when students don’t listen, then I have to make them sit out.” During the focus group, they collectively told the story of a student who was not allowed to return to the program because of behavioral issues. These staff members became visibly upset when telling this story, with tears in their eyes, as the situation was difficult for them. One shared, “It was hard to watch a student be unsuccessful in our program.” This type of situation happened only one time during the entire tenure of the staff members. It was evident the impact this experience had on the staff.

Another frustration we discussed was the growing number of students in the program while the number of staff stayed the same. One stated, “Now we have 70-80 kids” who attend regularly, which is an increase from the usual 50 attendees. During observations, I noticed times when another staff member was needed. When a staff member was absent from the program, there was no one to fill in for them. From time to time, I filled in as a substitute for a missing staff member, but this was obviously not a permanent solution. On almost every occasion I was at the After School Program, I was placed with a group of students to provide support. Still, there were times when the student-staff member ratio was 30 to 1. When one staff member was in charge of so many students, managing them could become a challenge.

To summarize, this chapter started with a description of the program, showing the traditional extension of the school day format for those involved. When looking at viewpoints, students in the After School Program clearly voiced their preferences, which was unstructured activities over structured ones. They did not like academics, or the emphasis on rules and behavior. Relationships with peers and staff were important and they felt a sense of belonging and felt listened to. Their understanding of these concepts, however, was narrow and limited. They had few choices within the program, and at times did not recognize these as choices at all. Their sense of agency within the program was very limited. Competence was largely linked to learning about compliance of rules. The potential for competence existed within the opportunities for mentoring and leadership among the older students, which did give them some power within the program, even though that was not the intent. The program staff shared similar emphasis on relationships, but also talked about the importance of creating a safe environment for all. Most of the information fit well into the student voice framework and agency, belonging, and competence. Moving into the next section of conclusions and implications, there is even

more of a shift towards the student voice framework and agency, belonging, and competence (Mitra, 2004).

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusions and Implications**

In this section, I discuss conclusions derived from the findings. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate how participants described and experienced the after school program while specifically looking at how much voice students had in influencing their after school program. Mitra's (2004) student voice framework comprised of agency, competency, and belonging was used as a lens to interpret the findings and draw conclusions.

#### **Conclusions**

The conclusions are presented in the following sections. The first part looks at the After School Program compared to the types discussed in the literature. This is followed by the conclusions focusing on building relationships, student choices, good behavior and character, along with leadership and mentoring. Some of the conclusions fit nicely into one of Mitra's (2004) student voice framework categories, while others fit into multiple categories. The categories are agency (decision-making), belonging (relationships), and competence (what they learned and remembered). In addition, agency, belonging, and competence were all present within the After School Program but at varying levels (Carver, 1997; Mitra, 2004).

#### **Type of Program: Traditional Day Care**

The After School Program had a traditional setup and the overarching goal appeared to be an extension of the school day. A traditional setup meant the students were able to interact with peers, have a snack, and participate in structured as well as unstructured activities. Adult staff members were present to supervise students at the site. There was nothing particularly innovative or out of the ordinary happening for students in this after school program. The After School Program provided a structured, safe environment that allowed parents to have affordable

childcare after school hours. The program granted students time to work on academics, participate in physical activity, and socialize with peers and staff members within a framework that emphasized following the rules, behavior, and character development. Currently, it would be difficult for the program to make changes because they think they are doing well and with the exception of the staffing issue, are satisfied with how things are going.

One reason I chose to study this After School Program was it claimed to be student centered. With a focus on caring relationships, choices within the traditional setup, and emphasis on rules and behavior, program developers perceived it to be student-centered. Yet, compared to the literature, the After School Program does not fit neatly into the student-centered category. Relationship building is an important part of student-centered programs and the emphasis on relationships was evident in this program. However, one characteristic of student-centered programs is involvement of students in important decisions that affect the program. Students were not important decision makers and drivers of the After School Program. Students who took initiative, sought help, or made suggestions were listened to but few student decisions influenced the overall makeup of the program.

I cannot consider the After School Program a goal-centered program because there was not a specific community or environmental problem the After School Program tried to fix. Nor can I consider it a community and citizenship-based program because the students were rarely, if ever, involved in community activities. Some aspects of citizenship were emphasized such as good behavior and character but these never appeared to be the overarching mission or goal of the program.

Resources were an issue as it concerned having adequate staff and funds. The program cost to families was reasonable but the revenue generated was insufficient for staffing the

program or having the funds to do anything in the community, even community-based field trips. The shortage in staffing was evident during data collection, as the program relied on older students to assist with tutoring and supervising younger students. On the one hand, this practice empowered them to be independent and responsible. But on the other hand, students were not paid staff and this raises questions about their role within a traditional framework in which student voice was not a deliberate part of the program.

### **Student Voice in the After School Program**

The student voice framework is comprised of agency, belonging, and competence. I observed aspects of these components in the After School Program but the traditional day care orientation of the program muted their effects, particularly when it came to agency and competency. Each conclusion presented below represents one or more component of the student voice framework and I discuss them in terms of how these components were manifested, elaborated, or constrained.

**Building relationships.** Caring relationships between staff and students and among students was a strength of the After School Program. Caring relationships contribute to the sense of belonging in Mitra's (2004) student voice framework. Belonging means students feel appreciated and included in a specific program (Mitra & Serriere, 2012). Part of belonging is helping individuals feel they are a valued part of the program. The data suggested most of the students' positive perceptions of the program revolved around a sense of belonging and positive relationships with other students and program staff. Belonging was the aspect of the theory at which the After School Program appeared to excel because of the emphasis on staff members caring for students and students caring for each other.



Program staff's emphasis on developing relationships coincides well with the literature suggesting relationships are the foundation of any successful program (Finn-Stevenson, 2014). The staff members discussed trying to reach every student on some level and this goal was largely achieved. Staff members took notice of as many students as possible and tried to make every student feel safe and comfortable. This task was becoming more challenging because of the growth in the number of students within the program without additional staff. Student population growth and the large staff member to student ratio may explain why there was so much emphasis on behavior and management.

It was important to students of the After School Program to develop relationships with other students as a way to express and experience belonging. Students had expectations their peers would listen to them when they gave input. For example, the staff members expected students to solve problems themselves before coming to them for assistance. If a conflict between students continued, then staff members intervened. Students had expectations others would follow the rules. If certain students did not listen, students within the program expected staff members to enforce the rules. Enforcing the rules helped students who voiced concerns feel listened to. Feeling listened to is an aspect of belonging in Mitra (2006) framework. As noted, students recognized when staff members of the program listened to their issues with peers such as not complying with the rules of the program. Even if it was a slight modification or change, the students took notice when staff members not only listened but made changes that benefitted the student.

Some students discussed different opportunities to present their work in front of peers and staff members. For these students, the presentation was important and made the experience memorable. They equated this experience with being heard. This was one of the few examples

of agency I observed or heard discussed in the focus groups. Although the students might have felt some agency, it was not intentional on the part of the program staff. Instead, allowing students to present during the After School Program was a way to build relationships. While building relationships was an emphasis of this after school program, it perhaps constrained student agency. For example, several of the questions designed to get at a sense of agency did not elicit many robust responses, which is perhaps indicative of students lacking agency. Students tended to give concrete, basic answers to questions about concerns they voiced to program staff. There could be several reasons for the basic responses. It could have been the way the questions were posed or the way the traditional style and setup of the program factored in. All of this, along with the lack of enriching experiences and students not feeling empowered to express themselves freely, could have been factors. The examples students gave of staff members listening were not examples of staff members listening in order to empower students to make changes or have input into the program. Instead, staff members listened as a way to develop trusting relationships with students and create an environment they believed was conducive and good for all elementary age students.

At times relationships with some of the parents were a struggle for the staff members. There appeared to be a disconnect between staff members of the program and parents who were blamed for not reviewing or following through on information sent home. Parent involvement is important for any educational program (Afterschool Alliance, 2016a). However, parents did not help facilitate this program but were asked instead to help with donations at the beginning of the year. Parents' role was limited to making donations and picking up their child on time. Much like the students, they were supposed to do as they were told. In addition, staff members

understood they enriched the experiences for students when they reached out to resources in the community. But during the time I conducted the study, I observed minimal community outreach.

**Student choices were constrained.** Students had a minimal amount of agency within the program as evidenced by the few choices available to them. Students enjoyed making choices and often did not realize the choices they had in the program until I asked them. The student perceptions suggested they had few decisions that impacted their experience during the After School Program in any significant or meaningful way. Along with few choices, the data also suggested most of the decisions and choices made by students were already narrowed down by staff members in the program, giving students the perception of having no choices at all.

As noted above, the After School Program was primarily a traditional after school program where the staff members made the decisions and students were expected to conform and follow expectations. The staff members established the schedule, planned the activities, and created the program rules but did not seek student input to make changes within the program. The students had to take initiative, make their concerns known, and then the staff members would look into how they could best address the student concerns. Most of the time the concerns were individualized for each student such as conflict with a peer, something wrong with snack, or a physical need like using the bathroom. Thus, while the staff members of the program listened to concerns, they allowed students limited opportunity to exhibit agency by giving them little input into the general makeup of the program.

**Good behavior and character.** When looking at Mitra's (2004) student voice framework, good behavior and character fit mostly into competence although some of the staff members used it as a relationship builder to ensure every student benefitted from a good environment. But the majority of the time, good behavior and character were examples of

competence as the students learned much about good behavior and demonstrating good character. Ultimately, most of what the students learned during the After School Program was complying with the rules set by the program staff. If students did not comply, they were punished. Otherwise, there was not much new knowledge being obtained by the students. The students were given time to work on homework, but ultimately, the focus of the After School Program was controlling and managing student behaviors.

Students were taught specific rules and expectations in order for the adults to reasonably manage them. Many of the responses about choices came back to behavior, expectations, and following rules. Much of the research literature highlights the importance of adolescent behavior, growth, and social skills within an after school program (Snyder et al., 2012) In contrast, the overriding theme of this study was how students viewed the After School Program as being about exhibiting appropriate behavior, following rules, complying, or getting into trouble for not following the rules. Most of the students had an understanding of the rules and the rules were conspicuously posted in different areas of the After School Program. Some of the positive aspects of competence students gained during the After School Program were being kind to others, treating people the way you want to be treated, and being a good role model for the younger students of the program. But overall, there was not much understanding on the part of student or staff members on why character development was important.

**Leadership and mentoring.** Leadership and mentoring were two more examples of competence within the After School Program. As students became older, there were expectations for them to become mentors and serve as good role models for the younger students. At times, they filled in for staff members when there was insufficient adult supervision. The After School Program incidentally created leadership opportunities for many of

the students and the students not only enjoyed this part of the program but also created an enjoyable environment because of it. Although there was no formal mentor program, the older students set the stage for how smoothly the program ran. This was at times unfortunate because the older students were put in the position of being quasi-staff members. There were numerous examples talked about and observed of the older students assisting with younger students. Research suggests that placing students in these leadership roles is socially beneficial (Wade, 2015). When older students took leadership roles, it helped create a safer and more secure environment for everyone involved. During interviews, the students and the staff members discussed how important the leadership of the older students was to the After School Program.

In conclusion, the staff members of the After School Program attempted to create the best environment possible with insufficient staff to supervise the program. Looking specifically at Mitra's (2004) student voice framework, agency was minimal within the program. Belonging was the strongest part of the After School Program because the staff members worked hard at developing meaningful relationships with each student. When it came to competence, a majority of what students learned during the After School Program focused on compliance of rules, demonstrating good behavior, and showing good character.

### **Implications**

The implications section is presented in a way that looks at what can be learned from this case study and is organized around two main implications. One is moving from traditional after school programs to student-centered. The second implication is incorporating student voice into after school programs per Mitra's (2004) framework of agency, belonging, and competence.

## **Moving from Traditional to Student-centered**

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, after school programs that wish to become more student-centered will first need sufficient resources. After school programs would also do well to ensure meaningful parent involvement and community outreach in order to achieve their goals.

**Resources.** For any elementary after school program desiring to be student-centered and have student voice central to the program, sufficient resources such as staff and funding are needed. The research literature stresses the importance of knowing the funding source, the sustainability of funding, and the ability for growth of funding (Afterschool Alliance, 2015; Reading Roadmap, 2016). After school programs that desire to be truly student-centered and provide innovative programming will require adequate funding and staffing while also remaining low cost for parents. Program administrators would do well to explore funding options such as grants that allow for hiring of adequate staff and the provision of sufficient resources.

**Parental involvement.** Successful student-centered after school programs emphasize meaningful parental involvement. After school program staff need to find ways to involve parents in meaningful collaborative decision-making that impacts their child (Gardner et al., 2009). In order to create a successful after school program, staff members should emphasize the importance of parental involvement in the program (Warner, 2002). Inviting parents in, encouraging them to volunteer, and helping within the program are ways to begin involving them as equal partners. Along with building relationships with parents, after school programs can look to receive valuable parent input (Afterschool Alliance, 2015). This input could happen many different ways including parental surveys, interviews, or creating a parental site council for the specific after school program. The collection of parental input is important, but what is done

with the input is what truly matters. Program staff should seek input from parents and make changes that make them feel valued, similar to the students. Empowering parents and giving them voice is the first step to empowering the students.

**Community outreach.** Many of the after school programs that have been researched emphasize the significance of involving students in the surrounding community or involving the surrounding community within the after school program (Afterschool Alliance & MetLife Foundation, 2013). It was evident the students in this study enjoyed field trips and the opportunities for community entities to visit the After School Program. Although this could circle back to resources and available funding, the research indicates the importance for figuring out how to make this happen. Another option is reaching out to local communities to see how students could give back to their community. Several after school programs discussed in the literature review did a great job of this, especially Bruyere et al. (2012) and Hill et al. (2015). Doing so would provide a more relevant way to develop character and instill citizenship values than simply focusing on an abstract notion of “building character.” Obvious examples are volunteering with a local food bank or pantry or picking up trash at a local playground or park. Better yet, students could identify a real-world problem within the local community and collaboratively problem solve possible solutions (Afterschool Alliance, 2016a).

### **Incorporating Student Voice: Agency, Belonging, and Competence**

The sections below address the second implication of the study and looks at possible ways of incorporating Mitra’s (2004) student voice within an after school program. If an after school program had adequate resources, addressed parent and community involvement, and genuinely desired to make a shift from a traditional after school program to a student-centered program, what might agency, belonging, and competence look like?

**Agency.** Encouraging and allowing students to demonstrate agency during an after school program can feel threatening in a program where adults are traditionally in charge and where students are expected to follow the rules and do what they are told. There is a need to work on developing a common language around notions of agency and empowering students. Feeling listened to and heard is an important construct in Mitra's definition of agency, thus there is a need to develop a common understanding of what these words mean. For example, what listening meant to the students was not what I meant when the question was asked during interviews. I wanted the students to talk about having their thoughts validated or taken into consideration, and that is not how they understood or interpreted the question. The students were interpreting the question as being listened to, or having their needs met. Furthermore, the staff received no formal training or professional development before assuming their roles. Based on this, the staff and students in the after school program had no conception of student voice or its components of agency. The adults working with students need to be educated about student voice and what it entails, what students are capable of, and why it is important to develop agency. A place to start is with a structured, well thought out plan to educate all involved, beginning with the staff members and leaders of the after school program. This would help to give all involved a solid foundation. Eventually, all stakeholders involved in the program will need to be educated, including parents and teachers, verifying they receive ongoing professional development, and practice the components of agency. Students need to expand their opportunities to demonstrate agency in more than one small part of their daily lives, otherwise, it will be difficult to sustain. When student voice and agency have been intentionally incorporated, they have been shown to be successful and drive improvement (Clement, 2015; Mitra, 2004).



Another way to increase student agency is allowing them to have more meaningful decision making and choices within the program (Mitra, 2004). When students are given more power to influence a program, then they have more agency. When students are able to make decisions which impact an after school program, they have more agency. There are several methods which could be used for increasing or improving agency in any after school program. One is to include students in important decision-making opportunities. For example, students could be involved in the creation of different aspects of the program. Programs could adopt a focus that empowers student to make decisions regarding the program's schedule, activities, and overall direction, as appropriate for their maturity levels. Some of the more successful programs have had students select the program focus, identify the goals, or determine how to achieve the goals (Mitra & Serriere, 2012). Many of the successful after school programs cited in the literature have taken a similar approach, particularly Hatchman and Rolland (2001) and Burrows et al. (2015). In addition, to ensure agency and involvement, an after school program could create a student council that represented all peers. This student site council could be selected by the participating students of the program. This could lead to a more in-depth understanding for students, further educational benefits for them, and increase their ownership and buy-in.

Another important piece of agency in Mitra's student voice framework is making sure students have meaningful choices (Mitra, 2004). Many times, students are given choices from already narrowed down choices dictated by adults. Oftentimes the student perception is one of having none or very few choices. Much of the literature and research emphasizes the importance of making sure students understand the choices they have. Student awareness of their ability to make decisions can create ownership towards a specific program (Marquez Kiyama et al., 2014). To ensure this happens, after school programs can make students more aware of their current

choices. Furthermore, these choices could be assigned more weight, importance, and relevance to students. Along with understanding the choices, make sure students are given more and more choices (What's Working, 2015). Express the importance of making a transition and move towards significant changes in agency and the amount of power given to students. Agency is one component of student voice when implemented with fidelity, the ideas above could help increase agency within an after school program.

**Belonging.** The belonging component of the student voice framework focuses on how relationships can be expanded during after school programs. Assuming other resources are met, positive relationships developed between the staff members and students can be helpful for all involved (Gardner et al., 2009). Spending more time with students, asking more questions to students, acting interested in students, and listening to the students are several characteristics that can benefit staff members when dealing with students (Mitra, 2006). In addition, expanding relationships with stakeholders such as parents, which was emphasized in the parental involvement and community outreach section earlier in the implications section. An after school program could consider having a formal mentoring or buddy program to ignite relationships between older and younger students. This could improve mentoring and leadership opportunities for the older students without viewing them as quasi-staff member while also being beneficial to younger students (Phillips, 2010). Programs and adults tend to be more successful when they have an understanding of the students they are working with (Afterschool Alliance, 2014a). Therefore, ongoing assessment, self-reflection, and professional development for staff members could be beneficial to incorporating belonging into the program.

**Competence.** This implication focuses on opportunities for competence to be built into an after school program. Based on the extant research, students learned more during after school

programs when several important aspects were in place. First, students should have input and agency in the after school program. Students able to make decisions about the type of activities they participate in during programs demonstrated higher levels of competence (Apsler, 2009; Hatchman & Rolland, 2001). When receiving input from students, a general focus and goal setting are important. This could be a good opportunity for certain programs to assess strengths and use good research and data to guide them towards innovation and success. The literature review noted many after school programs that demonstrated what students learned during the course of the year. Data was a valuable asset for these programs. Some programs used academic data and scores Johnson and Moulden (2011), some used improvement in attendance data Viadero (2007), while others emphasized social skills Snyder et al. (2012). Whatever the focus, many of the student-centered programs used data and had specific goals. Student centered programs must produce data that show growth for the students (Apsler, 2009). Implementing these ideas could spark interest from students, parents, and possible future staff members that are incredibly valuable. Setting a vision and goals for each individual student and the program can help guide what students are learning. Whether the focus is academics, behavior, or community involvement (Davies & Peltz, 2012; Snyder et al., 2012; Viadero, 2007), the vision and goals and how they are implemented can dictate what and how much the students learn during the program. The scope of after school programming is so large, perhaps the focus should be narrowed to one particular type of program would be beneficial. Looking at the strengths of the current program and building around those is a place to start.

The spectrum of elementary after school programming is vast and varied. It is difficult to imagine a systematic approach which would work for every program. Keeping this in mind, there are always ways of improving the current status. In conclusion, student voice along with

agency, belonging, and competence can help guide a program toward change and perhaps other improvements (Mitra, 2004).

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## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

## **Appendix A**

### **Student Focus Group Interview Protocol and Questions**

Hello, my name is Cody Rierson and I represent Wichita State University as a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program. I appreciate your willingness to participate in my dissertation research. The study will look for students to describe their experiences during the After School Program.

Before we begin, I would like to share some information. With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview to help with reporting the findings of this study. I would like to give all participants an opportunity to provide feedback. Although we will be on a first name basis, no names or identifying comments will be used when I report the results of this session. You can be assured of complete confidentiality. This focus group session will last approximately 25-30 minutes. Again, thank you for your participation.

#### **Student Focus Group Questions**

1. What do you like most/least about the After School Program?
2. If you have concerns, who do you talk to?
3. If you were the boss of the After School Program, what would it look like?
4. What choices do you get to make about what you do during the After School Program?
5. Do you feel like an important part of the After School Program? Why or why not?
6. Tell me about the adults in charge of the After School Program?
7. Give an example of a time when you were listened to.
8. What are you learning at the After School Program?
9. What do you feel your role is during the After School Program?
10. How do you think the After School Program will help you in the future?
11. Is there anything else you would like for me to know about your experience attending the After School Program?

## **Appendix B**

### **Adult Focus Group Interview Protocol and Questions**

Hello, my name is Cody Rierson and I represent Wichita State University as a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program. I appreciate your willingness to participate in my dissertation research. The study will look for participants to describe their experiences during the After School Program.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for our conversation. With your permission, I would like to audio record our conversations for response clarity and accurate analysis of data when reporting the findings of this study. We will try to keep the same order when answering questions; this will assist in following the flow of the conversation during the transcription process. After the initial transcription, the names will be replaced with pseudonyms and subsequent analysis will result in text without identifiers. Although we will be on a first name basis, no names or identifying comments will be used when I report the results of this session. You can be assured of complete confidentiality. This focus group session will last approximately 30-45 minutes. Again, thank you for your participation.

#### **Adult Focus Group Questions**

1. What do you like most/least about the After School Program? What do you feel the students like most/least about the program?
2. If there was anything you could change about the After School Program what would it be?
3. What choices do students have about what they do during the After School Program ?

Give an example of a good experience one of your students had during the After School Program?

4. Tell me about the students in the program?
5. What are students learning at the After School Program?
6. What do you feel your role is during the After School Program?
7. How do you think the After School Program will help students in the future?
8. Is there anything else you would like for me to know about your experience attending the After School Program?

Appendix C

**A Study of Elementary Student Voice in Their School-based  
After School Program  
Student Assent Form**

I have been informed that my parent(s) have given permission for me to participate, if I want to, in a study about my perceptions of an after school program. My participation in this project is voluntary and I have been told that I may stop my participation in this study at any time. If I choose not to participate, that is my choice.

Name\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Adult / Parent Consent Form

**Purpose:** Your child is invited to participate in a research study *A Study of Elementary Student Voice in Their School-based After School Program*. I hope to learn how participants describe their experiences during the After School Program.

**Participant Selection:** Your child was selected as a possible participant in this study because of his or her enrollment in The After School Program.

**Explanation of Procedures:** If you decide to allow your child to participate, he or she will be a part of a focus group. There will be approximately 4-6 students per group. The participants will be placed into groups according to age. There will be an attempt to have all pre kindergarten with kindergarten, kindergarten with first grade, first grade with second grade, second grade with third grade, and third grade with fourth grade. The focus group could meet several times with each meeting lasting about 25-30 minutes. With your permission, the researcher would like to audio-record the focus group and transcribe the information, in case further examination of the content is needed. A few example questions we may ask your child: What is the best part of the After School Program? Describe the activities you do during the After School Program?

**Discomfort/Risks:** There are minimal anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. Your child is allowed to opt out at any time, and can skip questions.

**Benefits:** The study is being conducted at your child's school and after school program. If your child is allowed to participate, his or her perceptions could help the district, school, and after school program better understand the After School Program.

**Confidentiality:** Every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, in order to make sure the study is done properly and safely there may be circumstances where this information must be released. By signing this form, you are giving the researcher permission to share information about you with the following groups:

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Wichita State University Institutional Review Board;

The researchers may publish the results of the study. If they do, they will only discuss group results. Your name or your child's name will not be used in any publication or presentation about the study. The focus group discussion will be confidential to the group, and participants are asked to please not share what was discussed during the interview, outside of the focus group. Audio-recordings of the focus groups will be kept confidential to the Wichita State University researcher, and will be downloaded from recording devices to an external drive that will be kept in the office for a period of five years. After five years, the recordings will be erased and the drive reformatted.

**Refusal/Withdrawal:** Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether to participate or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State

University and/or the elementary school or after school program. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

**Contact:** If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at: Cody Rierson 620-755-1081; [cjrierson1@shockers.wichita.edu](mailto:cjrierson1@shockers.wichita.edu); You can also contact my advisor, Jean Patterson (316) 978-6392; [jean.patterson@wichita.edu](mailto:jean.patterson@wichita.edu); If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research and Technology Transfer at Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that:

- You have read (or someone has read to you) the information provided above,
- You are aware that this is a research study,
- You have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to your satisfaction, and
- You have voluntarily decided to participate.

You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

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Printed Name of Child

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Printed Name of Parent or Guardian

---

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Date

---

Printed Name of Witness

---

Witness Signature

Date

## Appendix E

### Adult Focus Group Consent Form

**Purpose:** You are invited to participate in a research study *A Study of Elementary Student Voice in Their School-based After School Program*. I hope to learn how participants describe their experiences during the After School Program.

**Participant Selection:** You are selected as a possible participant in this study because of your involvement in the After School Program.

**Explanation of Procedures:** If you decide to participate in the study, you will be a member of the adult focus group. The adults working in the program will be interviewed in a similar fashion to the students. The focus group will contain approximately three adults. The focus group could meet one time and take 30-45 minutes. With your permission, the researcher would like to audio-record the focus group and transcribe the information, in case further examination of the content is needed. A few example questions we may ask you: What are students learning at the After School Program? How do you think the After School Program will help students in the future?

**Discomfort/Risks:** There are minimal anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. You are allowed to opt out at any time, and can skip questions.

**Benefits:** The study is being conducted at the site of the After School Program. If you decide to participate, your perceptions could help the district, school, and after school program better understand the After School Program.

**Confidentiality:** Every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, in order to make sure the study is done properly and safely there may be circumstances where this information must be released. By signing this form, you are giving the researcher permission to share information about you with the following groups:

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Wichita State University Institutional Review Board;

The researchers may publish the results of the study. If they do, they will only discuss group results. Your name or your child's name will not be used in any publication or presentation about the study. The focus group discussion will be confidential to the group, and participants are asked to please not share what was discussed during the interview, outside of the focus group. Audio-recordings of the focus groups will be kept confidential to the Wichita State University researcher, and will be downloaded from recording devices to an external drive that will be kept in the office for a period of five years. After five years, the recordings will be erased and the drive reformatted.

**Refusal/Withdrawal:** Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether to participate or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University and/or the elementary school or after school program. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

**Contact:** If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at: Cody Rierson 620-755-1081; [cjrierson1@shockers.wichita.edu](mailto:cjrierson1@shockers.wichita.edu); You can also contact my advisor, Jean Patterson (316) 978-6392; [jean.patterson@wichita.edu](mailto:jean.patterson@wichita.edu); If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research and Technology Transfer at Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that:

- You have read (or someone has read to you) the information provided above,
- You are aware that this is a research study,
- You have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to your satisfaction, and
- You have voluntarily decided to participate.

You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

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Printed Name of Participant

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Signature of Participant

Date

---

Printed Name of Witness

---

Witness Signature

Date