



Expanding **minds** and Opportunities

Leveraging

the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success

This article is an excerpt from the groundbreaking book, ***Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success***. This landmark compendium, edited by Terry K. Peterson, PhD, is composed of nearly 70 research studies, reports, essays, and commentaries by more than 100 researchers, educators, community leaders, policy makers, and practitioners.

Collectively, these writings boldly state that there is now a solid base of research and best practices clearly showing that quality afterschool and summer learning programs—including 21st Century Community Learning Centers—make a positive difference for students, families, schools, and communities.

Together, the collection of articles demonstrates the power of quality expanded learning opportunities to:

- **promote student success and college and career readiness;**
- **build youth assets such as character, resilience, and wellness;**
- **foster partnerships that maximize resources and build community ties; and**
- **engage families in their children's learning in meaningful ways.**

For information on how to order the full book, download sections and individual articles, or explore the topic areas, visit www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds.

About the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project

The Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project is a 50-state initiative harnessing the power of networks and leaders to help schools and communities leverage the time beyond school to accelerate student achievement. A partnership of funders led by the C.S. Mott Foundation support the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project. More information about the book and the project, as well as additional resources, can be found at www.expandinglearning.org.

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With contributions from the Children's Museum of Indianapolis, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Missouri Botanical Garden, and Children's Museum of Pittsburgh

Museums as 21st Century Partners: Empowering Extraordinary “iGeneration” Learning Through Afterschool and Intergenerational Family Learning Programs

Research indicates that informal learning institutions, such as museums, zoos, and aquariums, contribute to nurturing the development of children and families through experiential educational offerings. Indeed, participation in purposeful youth museum programs can greatly enhance and foster family learning. Falk and Dierking (2010) note that 95% of a child's time learning science does not happen in school and that there are many informal learning opportunities for parents to provide their children with a sense of how the world works around them. Thus, what happens outside of school profoundly influences learning. In fact, as much as 33% of the variance in student achievement can be attributed to differences between children whose parents read to them, encourage them to go to college, and take them to the library and cultural events and children whose parents do not provide those supports (Goodwin, 2011).

As research by Weiss, Little, Bouffard, Deschenes, and Malone (2009) found, “Forty years of steadily accumulating research shows that out-of-school or ‘complementary learning’ opportunities are major predictors of children's development, learning and educational achievement.” Even more troubling is that “economically and otherwise disadvantaged children are less likely than their more-advantaged peers to have access to these opportunities” (p. 2).

Learning in the 21st century requires students of the “iGeneration” to develop a set of skills needed to succeed in the workforce and to become productive citizens in our society (Rosen, 2011). These skills cannot be developed in isolation; they depend on the social learning experiences offered in institutions like museums. Through a variety of strategies, including partnering with afterschool and summer learning programs and 21st Century Community Learning Centers, these institutions are modeling the kind of learning that will help parents support and encourage more independent thinking in their children and cultivate their lifelong interest in the world around them.

Extraordinary Family Learning Destination Consortium

A national consortium of 16 large and geographically dispersed museums, zoos, botanical gardens, and historic sites—with a combined market area of over 80 million people—has formed to improve their offerings, services, and outreach to students and schools. The Extraordinary Family Learning Destination Consortium provides the gateway to a “must see and do” collection of exceptional family learning experiences. It seeks to build the capacity of its member organizations to transform the lives of children and families while better serving the communities in which the organizations are located.

The consortium includes

- *Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum* (<http://www.alplm.org>)
- *Atlanta History Center* (<http://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/>)
- *American Folk Art Museum* (<http://www.folkartmuseum.org/>)
- *Birmingham Civil Rights Institute* (<http://www.bcri.org>)
- *Children’s Museum of Indianapolis* (<http://www.childrensmuseum.org>)
- *Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh* (<http://www.pittsburghkids.org>)
- *Colonial Williamsburg* (<http://www.history.org>)
- *Denver Botanic Gardens* (<http://www.botanicgardens.org/>)
- *George Washington’s Mount Vernon Estate, Museum & Gardens* (<http://www.mountvernon.org/>)
- *Heard Museum* (<http://www.heard.org>)
- *Kentucky Horse Park* (<http://kyhorsepark.com/>)
- *National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium* (<http://www.mississippirivermuseum.com/>)
- *National Railroad Museum* (<http://www.nationalrrmuseum.org/en-us/default.aspx>)
- *Please Touch Museum* (<http://www.pleasetouchmuseum.org/>)
- *San Diego Zoo* (<http://www.sandiegozoo.org>)
- *Tennessee Aquarium* (<http://www.tennis.org/Home.aspx>)

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Collectively, the organizations in the consortium constitute a rich resource for afterschool and summer learning programs and 21st Century Community Learning Centers throughout America. They also provide powerful examples of partnerships with afterschool and summer learning programs for other museums, zoos, and historic sites across the nation.

Exemplary Programs

The following are four specific examples that are working particularly well that involve consortium members:

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The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis – Starpoint Summer Camp and Museum Apprentice Program (MAP).

Each year, more than one million people visit the 11 exhibit galleries in the Children’s Museum of Indianapolis, featuring the arts, science, and the humanities. The museum has adopted intergenerational family learning as its signature educational theory. The interactions among family members, spurred by a visit to the museum, result in a greater sense of family connectedness (Wood & Wolf, 2008); moreover, such positive experiences also strengthen the connection of families to museums (Wood & Wolf, 2010).

Two exemplary programs for community and neighborhood youth at the museum were developed to serve children in the summer and after school. One is the 6-week StarPoint summer camp program, which targets approximately 120 underrepresented youth ages 6 - 12 each summer. The camp is structured around exhibit themes and incorporates elements of the arts and humanities, science and technology, and social awareness. The overall goal of StarPoint is to motivate children to become self-directed learners.

Researchers at Johns Hopkins University documented that access to summer learning opportunities can have a significant effect on the academic future of low-income youth. “More than half of the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities. As a result, low-income

Youth participants in MAP acquire or strengthen skills for 21st century learners. For instance, James has been a part of MAP since age 13 and now volunteers in the museum’s biotechnology lab on a regular basis.

“I have learned leadership skills and how to work on a team with people with different ways of thinking,” he says.

Two of his favorite activities include producing the MAP Music Festival as part of the “Rock Stars, Cars, and Guitars” exhibit and participating in the Lego League as part of the “Lego Castle Adventure” exhibit.

youth are less likely to graduate from high school or enter college” (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007). The StarPoint program helps to bridge this gap. Many StarPoint youth return annually, and several of their parents were once participants in the camp.

A second, more in-depth experience, the Museum Apprentice Program (MAP), is offered each year to approximately 30 youth ages 13–18. These students come from varied socio-economic backgrounds and represent urban and suburban public schools, private schools, and home-schooled students. The museum’s staff is a natural fit for afterschool and summer programs; they can facilitate learning for these youth by providing access to content and technology for research, arranging field trips and site visits, connecting youth with guest experts, and serving as mentors.

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Birmingham Civil Rights Institute – Parents Plus Program

The Birmingham Cultural Alliance Partnership (BCAP) consists of a partnership with all of the museums in the city of Birmingham, including the Jazz Hall of Fame, Birmingham Museum of Art, McWane Science Center, Southern Museum of Flight, Birmingham Botanical Gardens, the Vulcan Park and Museum, and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. In adherence to the requirements for funding through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, the BCAP is primarily reaching low-income students who are on the free or reduced lunch program. One of the key features of the partnership is its Parents Plus program that produces parenting workshops focused on addressing children’s behavioral issues, relieving stress, and establishing more discipline at home.

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The efforts of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI) provide a powerful example of connecting affiliated institutions with schools to support student learning. BCRI helps students make cultural connections in the community by spending 2 weeks at each museum. The Institute’s permanent and multimedia exhibitions provide a self-directed journey through Birmingham’s contributions to the civil rights movement and human rights struggles. With a grant from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, in a partnership with local schools, more than 200 students take part each year in on-site programs at the school and field trips to each of the museums.

On-site tutoring by museum staff at schools is focused on improving reading and math scores. In addition, the staff provides support for cultural enrichment, physical fitness, and nutrition education activities, as well as youth mentoring programs focused on teaching conflict resolution, leadership, and confidence. Students also learn about volunteering and giving back to the community through civic education and service learning.

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Missouri Botanical Garden – Community Science Investigators Project

As one of the top three botanical gardens in the world, the Missouri Botanical Garden (MOBOT) includes a 79-acre urban oasis that is a National Historic Landmark. It also serves as a center for science, conservation, education, and horticultural display, and as such, it includes sophisticated grounds and family programs. One program focuses on biodiversity and sustainability and encourages underserved children to explore nature in their local communities and in their own backyard.

Through a partnership with local schools, and with support from a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant, the institution delivers programming from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. every day for elementary and high school students within the St. Louis Public Schools. High school students provide co-teaching and mentoring for elementary students.

The afterschool program provides an intentional, rigorous connection to what students are learning during the school day in math, science, the arts, and other subjects and helps them understand the interrelationships among these subjects. In addition, instructors establish expectations for engagement that will inspire student curiosity. By holding family science nights as part of these programs, MOBOT engages families as part of their year-round programming. Parents are encouraged to ask questions and learn as a family unit so they understand how to model the kind of interaction they can have with their children on their own.

Jamiya, age 10, who comes from a single parent home with five other siblings, has shown improvement in her social skills, test scores, and overall grades as a result of her participation in the afterschool program. Prior to entering, she was very quiet and withdrawn, but she now socializes with the other students and shows strong leadership skills as a blossoming cheerleader and dancer. Without the afterschool program she would not have access to additional academic tutoring, girl scouting, cheerleading, tennis, golf, photography, storytelling workshops, cooking, and African dance through the Harambee Institute.

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Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh – YouthAlive Afterschool Program

The Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh has delighted children and families for 28 years through its “Play With Real Stuff” philosophy that asserts that hands-on, interactive learning experiences in which children create and experiment with tangible materials are essential to a child’s development.

The museum’s YouthAlive Afterschool program partners with nearby middle schools and hosts an afterschool program for sixth and eighth graders. Local artists work with students in a variety of activities that combine the arts and the sciences, such as printmaking, silk screening, pottery, stained glass art, sewing, soldering, and woodworking. The museum’s goal is to encourage students to think differently about the learning that takes place in their classroom. Exploration, discovery, and inquiry skills are emphasized throughout the program.

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The YouthAlive program is focused on African American and inner-city students. The museum offers a tiered program in which students can get paid if they continue with YouthAlive after ninth grade, or they can receive credit for volunteer hours by participating in a VolunTeens program.

As part of the program, the museum holds an open studio night and dinner for parents of participating children and provides tickets to cultural events in the area to encourage parent-child interaction in informal settings throughout the community. In addition, the museum partners with the University of Pittsburgh Center for Learning to research the life skills that students are learning in out-of-school environments and to study the rich learning that occurs when parents and children are interacting in informal exhibit settings.

Conclusion

The projects and activities described above exemplify the collaborative work produced by museums that ultimately engages youth and their families in afterschool and lifelong learning experiences. Yet, there is more work to be done to address the inequities that exist among populations with regard to access to high quality, informal learning experiences. Developing more museum partnerships with afterschool and summer learning programs in schools and community organizations is one way to overcome this gap.

Overall, there is great potential for the consortium to leverage the major investments made in afterschool and summer programs by the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, the C.S. Mott Foundation, and others to broaden access to high quality, informal learning opportunities in the community and in afterschool and summer learning programs. These programs answer the call of 21st century learning by providing children with opportunities to develop new talents, accomplish larger goals, and build a repertoire of lifelong learning skills for the future.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Val Marmillion is a strategic communications specialist and president and founder of Marmillion + Company, a firm that during the last 20 years has provided services to numerous local and national organizations, associations, and businesses.

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