



This Learning Brief is part of a series emerging from the After School Game Changer Symposium held on the 16th and 17th of February 2017.

LEARNING BRIEF 1: Bridge the Gap with After School Programmes



The Western Cape government of South Africa has identified catalysts to bring about major improvements in people's lives, especially the lives of young people. These are known as "game changers". To expand access to quality after school programmes is one of the seven Western Cape Game Changers. The aim is to get 112 000 learners from poor schools into after school programmes by 2019.

A wide sector of our society shares this purpose of improving young people's lives through delivering quality after school programming. Non-governmental organisations, schools, tertiary institutions, and different levels and departments of government are committed to finding new ways to share learning and resources and to deliver excellent programming where impact is measured.

HELP LEARNERS ACHIEVE BETTER RESULTS WITH AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMMES

In the Western Cape, there is a big difference between the results of learners coming from fee paying schools and those from no and low fee schools. Our learners from privileged schools can compete with the best in the world and we want the same for our learners at schools in low-income communities.

Bridge the gap through offering opportunities

The difference in academic achievement between socio-economic groups is sometimes called the "achievement gap". Lucy Friedman from the ExpandedED Schools programme in New York says they realised that it is not really an achievement gap, rather it is an "opportunity gap". With this shift is the understanding that we are not providing the same opportunities for all learners and that we need to bridge this gap. We can do this with after school programming.



Address foundational aspects that stop learners achieving

The term the “experience gap” is preferred by Ramon Gonzalez, principal of a school in a poor area of New York.

Says Gonzalez: “Society values middle class experiences and not those of poor folks. By 6th Grade, less advantaged kids have 6000 hours less of learning”.

Quality after school programming can help to address the foundational issues that stop learners from achieving. Primarily there is the experience of the after school space as safe and nurturing. This is a basic requirement for any kind of learning to take place. Then, as Tyler Howard of Thanda describes, through the experiences of after school programming learners have been shown to heal from trauma, develop self-esteem, and to learn socio-emotional and other skills that they can use in the world. This paves the way for them to achieve academically.

In the five years since Gonzalez’ school rolled out after school programming on five days per week, test scores doubled, suspension rates are less and attendance rates are up. Students who graduate from the school are now admitted to top courses at tertiary institutions.

Model for learners a path out of poverty

After school programming can show learners what is possible and that they are not limited by the areas where they live. Angus Duffett, principal of Silikamva High School tells the story of one of his students who had been a gangster. It was only over time and through relationships with school staff and service providers of after school programmes that this student began to see beyond a life of gangsterism to what was possible for him. He changed his life, becoming deputy head boy, and is now an exchange student in Germany.

Many practitioners have emphasised how the presence of role models through after school programming inspires learners and models a way to be successful. These role models are people they can relate to, who have come from similar circumstances and who kept trying until they succeeded.

Janet Jobson from the DG Murray Trust says there are three factors which allow learners to thrive despite living in poverty. These are a caring caregiver (someone looking after them), one other caring adult, and a modest connection to opportunity at the right time. After school programmes can provide 2/3 of these factors.

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- 3 A MODEST CONNECTION TO OPPORTUNITY AT THE RIGHT TIME

AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMMES CAN PROVIDE 2/3 OF THESE FACTORS.



Leverage existing resources to expand learning time

Schools are natural sites for after school programmes and enable us to better use these existing resources, resulting in extended time and opportunity for learning. After school programmes are a way to identify and bring existing community initiatives and resources into the school, including parents. They are also a way to bring resources and expertise into the school that may not have been there already. Without the bureaucracy and the pressure of delivering a curriculum, after school programmes can be spaces to innovate.

DEVELOP DIVERSE AND QUALITY PROGRAMMES

In developing programmes that do bridge the gap, experienced after school practitioners make clear that consistent, diverse and quality programming which engages the learner in play is essential.

Engage the whole person

After school programming needs to offer opportunities to engage the whole brain and the whole child: cognitively, physically, socially, and spiritually. In one after school programme for example, they wanted groups small enough so that learners could speak and engage without having to put up their hands. At least half of after school experiences should be about play, recreation, creativity and joy. Gavin Keller, Principal of Sun Valley School, says that neuro-scientific research shows that when learners have these playful experiences, formal learning becomes easier.

Enable learners to choose

After school programmes include arts and culture, sports and recreation, e-learning, life skills and academic programmes. It can be tempting to offer academic support only for struggling students, or a programme of just three or four offerings. Learners have asked us to “bring more things, like things we don't know”. It is important that learners become knowledgeable and demanding and get to choose from a range of different after school experiences. Programmes should be designed to be appealing and demand-driven. In this way learners become agents of their own learning.

Enable learners to compete

After school programmes need to develop an ethos of excellence. Learners need to realise that it is not enough to get by on their natural talent. We need after school programmes that offer opportunities for learners to get to a level of mastery and to compete. In this way they learn commitment, hard work, sacrifice and excellence.

Learners experience ‘after school’ as an expansion of the school day

The strongest after school programmes have active connections, collaboration and intersections with the school day and programme. In fact, the Expanded Schools Programme started out 20 years ago as the After School Corporation. They changed their name because they wanted to convey that there was a continuum between the school curriculum and the after school programme, and that not only are the hours that children learn expanded, but so are the ways in which they learn.



Learners know the programme will stick around

A quality programme is consistent and predictable. It takes time for learners to trust and appreciate after school programming and take the opportunities offered. For learners and schools to engage with programmes it is essential that they are sustainable. One tutor to one student will bring results but it is not sustainable. We need to look for scalable interventions with the same impact.

STRENGTHEN COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

To develop diverse and quality programming that bridges the opportunity gap we need to continue to work together and find ways to measure our impact. Especially we need to engage our principals and our schools.

Work with our schools

Schools in our poor communities are some of the only institutions available for accessing these communities. We need to recognise that the school day is packed for an intense curriculum and should not be disrupted. In many schools there are no after school programmes. Neither is there a norm or culture of after school programmes amongst staff or learners.

We need to find ways of working closely with and within schools and integrating our after school offerings within the school curriculum. The role of a site coordinator for daily hands-on coordination of after school programming could be considered.

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Engage our school principals

There is recognition that substantially more work needs to be done to build relationships with principals and have them share the vision and purpose around after school programming. Active planning around after school programming cannot be done without school leaders. We also need to be sure we are easing principals' burdens and being explicit about how after school programming contributes positively to the ways that the school is measured. Principals also need the support of their circuits and districts to work actively in after school programming.

Professionalise our practitioners

Role modelling is a key part of the success of after school programming. After school programme co-ordinators need to take great care to recruit and train passionate young people to act as after school practitioners. Both Rutgers University and the University of Cape Town have courses planned to help professionalise the role of practitioners.

Keep learning

Monitoring and evaluation must be built into after school programming so that all stakeholders can keep learning about what makes quality programming and so that the impact of after school programming is measured. High attendance and engaged and involved learners are two key ways to start identifying a quality programme. Later, systemic results can help to measure impact. It is important that different stakeholders work together on monitoring and evaluation and keep things simple.

Conclusion

Quality after school programming can boost the results of learners from low income communities and link them to opportunities while making use of the existing resources of schools. The After School Game Changer Symposium on 16th and 17th February was one of the ways of getting learning and collaboration happening in the after school sector and this needs to continue. The way forward is to professionalise after school practitioners, bring school leadership into visioning and planning, and strengthen ways to measure quality programming.

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