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A Case Study Of A School-Based Expanded Learning Summer Program

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A CASE STUDY OF A SCHOOL-BASED EXPANDED LEARNING SUMMER PROGRAM

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Abstract

For the Expanded Learning Summer Program (ELSP), at a midsized public school system in the Northeast, providing high quality programming that engages student interest and fosters active learning by all children was a top priority. This case study, undertaken during the summer of 2017, provided insight into how the ELSP aligned with the relevant literature on high quality programming for youth-focused summer learning programs and suggested improvements to improve quality. Using a case study research design, I sought to understand how the ELSP, funded through a federal 21st Century Community Learning Center grant, aligned with benchmarks of high quality short-term programming for afterschool and summer learning youth programs. This research utilized interviews, informal observations, ten formal observations, and analysis of program materials. I concluded that the ELSP was effectively administered, had adequate resources, and was held at facilities that created a safe and appropriate space for all short-term learning activities. For the most part, the administration employed strong adult activity leaders, and resulting activities aligned well to the foundational domains of the Durlak and Weissberg (2007) SAFE model for high quality youth programs. The ELSP filled a need in the community, and for the first time, the administration made efforts to provide full access for youth with disabilities. Several areas where improvement has the potential to strengthen the program overall are identified, thereby providing youth participants with a more successful experience.

Dedication

I dedicate this finished work to my Dad, David Graham Scott. I started this journey while he was still with us, however, I was unable to finish it before he passed away. He was always so supportive of the path I chose throughout my life, and I am sure he is now.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Working families value afterschool and summer learning programs that keep their children safe and nurtured while exposing them to enriching activities that complement the traditional school day or year program (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). In this state, an estimated twenty-four percent of children in grades K-12 are currently enrolled in afterschool programs, summer learning programs, and other out-of-school time activities on a regular basis (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). Nationally, students participating in afterschool and summer learning activities are more engaged in learning, while demonstrating improved school attendance, grades, and rates of homework completion. These students reveal a deeper understanding of the relevance of school curriculum, and exhibit stronger problem-solving skills (Durlak et al., 2010). Afterschool and summer learning programs strive to increase learning outside of the classroom through formal and informal opportunities for inquiry and discovery (Kataoka & Vandell, 2013).

Summer learning opportunities, such as the expanded learning summer program (ELSP), are provided by public schools as one way to combat learning loss that happens over the summer break, especially for those students who lack other opportunities during that time. Summer learning loss became an interest of educational researchers in the latter part of the 20th century. Researchers attributed school-year academic progress lost over the summer break to several factors, including lower socio-economic status, fewer opportunities for engaged learning, and lack of community resources (Cooper et al., 1996; Entwistle & Alexander, 1992; Heyns, 1978; Raudenbush & Eschman, 2015). While some have called for a rigorous remedial approach to narrowing this gap over the

summer (Ascher, 1998; Cooper et al., 2000), other researchers acknowledge the connection between student motivation, engagement, student voice, and the importance of cultural context when assessing the quality of summer offerings (Coomer et al., 2016; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). For the ELSP, understanding how their program offerings motivate and engage their own participants is the first step toward program improvement.

Purpose

Using a case study research design, this dissertation research study sought to understand how the Expanded Learning Summer Program (ELSP) at a midsized Northeastern public school system aligns with benchmarks of high-quality programming for afterschool and summer learning youth programs. Utilizing the assessment tool Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) from the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality (a division of the Forum for Youth Investment, in Washington, D.C.) and using relevant research on the components of youth programming, this case study sought to understand the degree to which the programs offered by the ELSP, funded through a twenty-first Century Community Learning Center federal grant, met those benchmarks. During the five weeks of the summer program, I collected qualitative data from several sources using formal and informal observation and semi-structured interview techniques. As a method for triangulating the data, I collected program documents, previous research, and other items developed by the program administration and analyzed for corroborating themes (Creswell, 2013). The observation data was analyzed for patterns (Yin, 2014) and how well the data supports the existing general conceptualizations through a deductive analysis strategy (Patton, 2015). The interview data was analyzed qualitatively for themes

utilizing HyperResearch software. Findings were identified and described, implications for practice and program development addressed, and future areas of research considered. A case study approach, utilizing the multiple sources of data as outlined above provided a richer, more robust picture of this summer program than would have been possible with the use of only one source (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

Research Questions

The research questions this case study sought to answer are:

1. To what extent are components of high-quality programming evident in the ELSP program?
2. Based on the evidence, what improvements are suggested?

This dissertation research started with an exploration of what is understood about youth development, especially the movement toward positive youth development in the latter half of the 20th century. From there, I drew from experts in the areas of student engagement, motivation, and moved into a discussion of the impact of afterschool and out-of-school programming, summer learning, and summer learning loss on student achievement. I then reviewed the components of high quality out-of-school youth programming as identified in the literature. Next, I discussed the use and development of the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) tool as a measure of high-quality programming and practice. Through this research, I identified two conceptual frameworks, one that describes characteristics of youth program quality (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Figure 1) and one that presents a framework for engagement by ELSP participants (Figure 2). I explain why a case study design was used to illuminate the

characteristics of ELSP from a program perspective and how this research design led to a greater understanding of program quality.

Research Approach

For this dissertation research study, I applied a realist qualitative epistemology. A realist perspective assumes the existence of a single reality that is independent of the observer (Yin, 2014), an important consideration when engaging in an observation protocol such as the one used in this research. A qualitative epistemological assumption refers to the belief that knowledge is developed from subjective evidence based on the participants in the research (Creswell, 2013). Thus, as the researcher, it was important for me to be as close as possible to the people engaged in the ELSP. Time spent onsite and in close contact allowed me to develop a greater understanding of the challenges and successes of administrators and teachers as they implemented the summer program activities and classes. Additionally, the engagement of the summer program participants, their experiences, and response to the programs were more deeply understood the more I was able to observe by spending time in their presence (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell, "the longer researchers stay in the field or get to know the participants, the more they 'know what they know' from first-hand information" (2013, p. 20).

I used a deductive data analysis strategy to assess whether or not the data supported existing generalizations and explanations of high quality programming, a strategy appropriate for single case studies (Patton, 2015). Deductive analysis refers to the process of building themes that are constantly checked against the data (Creswell, 2013). Concurrently, I applied a pattern matching data analysis technique to uncover

patterns across the formal observations, informal discussions and observations, program artifacts, and semi-structured interviews. Pattern matching between collected data and predicted patterns evident in the literature strengthens the internal validity of the case study (Yin, 2014).

Significance

The ELSP lacked valid data that provides a clear understanding of whether programming strategies have resulted in positive outcomes for their participants. In preparation for an eventual outcome evaluation, this research illuminated the quality of the programming when assessed against recognized benchmarks evident in the relevant literature. Using a case study research design, this study sought to understand the degree to which the programs offered met those benchmarks of high quality youth programming and illuminate where quality may be improved. This research examined program offerings from an adult perspective through observation, interviews, and artifact review. The result of this research is information that could lead to program quality improvement and provide the basis for the development and implementation of an outcome evaluation (Patton, 2015).

Summary

This introductory chapter provided an overview of the research study undertaken, it's purpose, the selected research questions, and the study's significance. In Chapter 2, I discuss the current literature pertinent to this dissertation research study. In Chapter 3, I describe the methods used in this study, the procedures used for data collection, and the steps of data analysis. Chapter 4 provides context of the setting, programs, and

participants. In Chapter 5, I present findings from an in-depth qualitative analysis for each research question. In Chapter 6, I proffer a discussion of the themes from the research findings and implications for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Research has concluded that low-income students are more at risk of falling behind their middle and upper-class peers during the summer, an occurrence referred to as the "summer loss" (Cooper et al., 1996, p. 265). Unequal access to high quality summer programming contributes to this chasm, adding to the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth. This may be one contributing factor to the fact that low-income youth are less likely to graduate from high school or enter college (Alexander, 2007).

During the summer months when school is not in session working parents often struggle to find high-quality childcare resources. Finding a safe, enriching, and educational program for their children during summer break from school provides parents with peace of mind and often allows them to continue working (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). For the children, the level of engagement in the summer program is directly related to what they gain (Hinton, et al., 2012; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Engagement is what happens when students are motivated to actively learn. They are capable of generating the interest, focus, and attention required to build new knowledge and skills. Students, therefore, can be self-regulated and goal-directed, and exert control over their ability to focus — effort needed when engaged in a learning activity. They are motivated by a sense of competence. With improved self-regulation, students gain the increased ability to control their own behavior under a range of conditions and circumstances (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

As a pathway toward understanding the ELSP, I have drawn from areas of learning theory, student motivation and engagement, positive youth development, and youth-focused program quality. From these fields, I developed a preliminary conceptual framework that guided the case study through its planning, implementation, and subsequent analysis. During the research phase of this project, the preliminary framework evolved in several ways. A clearer pathway emerged with the inclusion of positive youth development as the foundation for this study is discussed at length, and why it serves as the building block for subsequent consideration of more recent research into brain development, motivation, engagement, and student voice. Consequently, the results lead to a greater understanding of how youth are motivated to make choices in the ELSP and how the activities can be structured to assure youth extract the greatest benefit from the choices they make.

An additional area of literature is the concept of high quality youth-focused programs – how the activities developed by the ELSP and observed during the summer intersect with what we know from the literature on high quality youth-focused programs. Characteristics associated with these programs form the foundation of the observational tool for this case study – the Youth Program Quality Assessment – which was used to elicit extensive data regarding youth-focused activities provided by the ESLP.

Positive Youth Development (PYD)

The positive youth development (PYD) perspective is a strength-based conception of adolescence (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). Derived from developmental systems theory, the positive youth development perspective stresses that

PYD emerges when the potential plasticity of human development is aligned with developmental assets (Lerner et al., 2005). However, for most of the early part of the twentieth century we considered youth development from a very different perspective– one that focused on the shortcomings, or deficits, of youth.

Hall (1904), the first president of the American Psychological Association, built the case for approaching this tumultuous time in the lives of youth from a standpoint of "storm and stress" and vulnerability (p. 73). Research into youth development continued to consider adolescence from the perspective of "deficits in their behavior" for a large part of the twentieth century (Lerner et al., 2005, p. 6). In the seventies and into the mid-eighties, reports from the Carnegie Foundation of New York, the Kellogg Foundation, and the William T. Grant Foundations started to change the discussion. These reports challenged the prevailing notion that youth needed to be "fixed." Together, along with efforts from state and federal government entities, they brought about a marked change in thought among youth development and education experts (Benson, et al., 2006; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011) that shifted to one of thinking about developmental assets (Benson, 2004) and a focus on adolescent strengths (Lerner et al., 2005).

In the latter part of the twentieth century, with the focus shifting from preventing disorders toward promoting positive youth development and protective factors, youth development researchers became more aware of the importance of identifying those factors that lead to positive youth outcomes (Catalano et al., 2004; Gillham et al., 2002). Research focused on resilience factors that led to a youth developing in a socially constructive way, able to enter adulthood with a set of positive coping strategies

important to a wide range of positive outcomes (Catalano, et al., 2004). Aligned with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecology theory of development which acknowledges the impact of the forces of community, environment, and social interactions in the form of a system larger than the sum of its individual parts, positive youth development helps to "identify what competencies, skills, values, and self-perceptions adaptively self-regulated persons need to successfully shape and navigate life over time" (Benson, et al., 2006, p. 933).

Positive youth development is both a field of research and an arena of practice (Benson et al., 2006). For youth, positive development is both caused by and indicated by whether the young person experiences adequate support and opportunities consistently, in multiple settings (Benson et al., 2006) through participation in healthy relationships, experiences, and opportunities (Bruyere, 2010) that promote positive development. These activities enhance a child's evolving capacities and encourage growth of functionally valued competencies and behaviors across time that empower children to assert their right to participation in healthy growth. This process is known as positive youth development (Bruyere, 2010).

In their meta-analysis of research on positive youth development, Benson, et al. (2006) identified six concepts and principles where there exists consensus in the literature. As a set, they represent a common understanding for the field, and serve as a guideline for program development going forward:

1. All youth have the inherent capacity for positive growth and development.

2. A positive developmental trajectory is enabled when youth are embedded in relationships, contexts, and ecologies that nurture their development.
3. The promotion of positive development is further enabled when youth participate in multiple, nutrient-rich relationships, contexts, and ecologies.
4. All youth benefit from these relationships, contexts, and ecologies. Support, empowerment, and engagement are, for example, important developmental assets for all youth, generalizing across race, ethnicity, gender, and family income. However, the strategies and tactics for promoting these developmental assets can vary considerably as a function of social location.
5. Community is a viable and critical "delivery system" for positive youth development.
6. Youth are major actors in their own development and are significant (and underutilized) resources for creating the kinds of relationships, contexts, ecologies, and communities that enable positive youth development (p. 896).

The connections of these six principles (Benson, et al., 2006) are numerous to the work of the ELSP. Summer programs are built on the premise that all youth can learn and benefit from experiences in rich contexts, in their community, in activities that support, empower, and engage their interests and imagination. The sixth principle acknowledges the untapped potential of youth voice as an integral ingredient in creating those rich contexts.

As a movement, the field of positive youth development research and practice influenced typical prevention programs of the later quarter of the twentieth century to

refocus on aspects of strength in troubled youth (McCammon, 2012). According to Gillham et al. (2002), up to that point traditional prevention programs focused on the elimination of or improvement in an identified psychological disorder that was being studied such as depression, substance abuse, or a behavioral disorder. The movement toward positive youth development interventions and programs have highlighted the fact that there are many outcomes beyond those focused on the improvement in a disorder (e.g., graduation rates, reduction in violence) that are equally important to the youth or their community, and that a factor (e.g., self-efficacy) likely influences a variety of outcomes (Benson, et al., 2005). McCammon (2012) notes that while use of the deficit model in social work has been criticized and educators and practitioners talk of building on client strengths, most actual therapeutic practice does not. The author argues that incorporating a focus on strengths in assessment and therapy has been shown to have numerous benefits, including promoting wellness and reducing dysfunction. By focusing on the development of all youth, regardless of risk status, community members and school partners can be more effectively mobilized to help youth build strengths that contribute to their developmental well-being and thriving, while promoting civic engagement (Benson, et al., 2006; McCammon, 2012).

Conversely, Sukarieh and Tannock (2011) point to the positive youth development movement as a time of replacement of negative youth stereotypes with a set of positive youth stereotypes, moving the focus away from the societal causes of disorder to that of personal individual deficits and accomplishments. The challenge for critical analysis is not simply to replace negative stereotypes of youth with positive ones (or vice

versa). It is, rather, to understand how and why particular kinds of positive and negative stereotypes of youth or, indeed, invocations of the youth label in the first place are mobilized by different groups in changing social and economic contexts over time (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011, p. 689). In their discussion, Sukarieh and Tannock (2011) align positive youth development with human capital theory – when society is focused on free trade markets (neoliberalism), its youth are seen as assets for economic growth, and the development and alignment of that asset to the corporate vision of the future is critical to the economy. As a result, the development of individual attributes becomes more important than conquering the underlying societal problems of poverty and other ills that drove the deficit theory of earlier prevention and developmental psychology strategies (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011).

While the cautions heralded by Sukarieh and Tannock (2011) are noted here, the underlying contribution of the research on positive youth development provides the opportunity to consider how youth benefit from structured activities (Benson et al., 2006; Lerner et al., 2005), and are thus critical to this case study. As such, to build upon the components of positive youth development identified by Benson et al. (2006), I next dive more deeply into the construct.

To gain a deeper understanding of programs that focused on positive youth development and prevention, Catalano et al. (2004) undertook a review of 77 evaluations of program interventions in which the concept of positive youth development was embedded. From these programs, the researchers identified 15 distinct positive youth

development constructs (Catalano et al., 2004, pp.101-102). These constructs are identified and defined below.

Table 1

Positive Youth Development Constructs

Positive Youth Development (PYD) Construct	Definition
Promotes bonding	The emotional attachment and commitment a youth makes to their family, school, community, culture
Fosters resilience	The individual's capacity for adapting to change and stress in healthy and flexible ways
Promotes social competence	The skills that are needed to integrate feelings, thinking and action to achieve specific social and interpersonal goals
Promotes emotional competence	The ability to identify and respond to feelings and emotional reactions in self and others
Promotes cognitive competence	Developing academic, intellectual, and a wide range of positive attitudes to life and the future
Promotes behavioral competence	Ability to communicate nonverbally, verbally, and taking action in a manner conducive to effective operation in society
Promotes moral competence	Ability to respond to ethical, affective, or social justice dimensions of a situation
Fosters self-determination	Developing the ability to think for oneself and to take action consistent with that thought
Fosters spirituality	Having the nature of spirit; concerned with or affecting the soul
Fosters self-efficacy	The internal perception of a youth that he or she can achieve desired goals through one's own actions
Fosters clear and positive identity	The internal organization of a coherent sense of self
Fosters belief in the future	The internalization of hope and optimism about possible outcomes
Provides recognition for positive behavior	The positive response of those in the social environment to the desired behaviors by youth
Provides opportunities for prosocial involvement	Events and activities that encourage youth to participate in prosocial actions
Fosters prosocial norms	Encouragement for youth to adopt health beliefs and clear standards for behavior through a range of approaches

Catalano et al. (2004) identified program evaluations that addressed at least one positive youth development construct and employed a rigorous design that examined evidence for both positive and negative outcomes. They concluded that while a broad range of actual program strategies produced positive results, there were several themes common to the successful strengthening of social, emotional, cognitive, and moral competencies in youth. The interventions with the greatest evidence of positive outcomes provided a clear structure and consistency in their program delivery and intervened with youth for at least nine months or longer (Catalano et al., 2004). These positive youth development interventions and activities provided evidence of improved self-efficacy**,** affected the understanding of prosocial behavior among youth by shaping and providing clear and consistent messaging from the family and community, and increased healthy bonding of youth with adults, peers, and younger children.

This view aligns with research undertaken by Balsano et al. (2009), who identified a clear difference between typical youth programs and those identified as positive youth development programs. Lerner et al. (2005) found that competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring will emerge when the strengths of youth are aligned with the resources in families, schools, and communities that can enhance positive youth development. For example, out-of-school youth activities that are community-based, contain structured and organized activities, are supervised by adults, and contain developmentally appropriate skill-building opportunities have an explicit positive youth development-driven theory of change built into their program development structure. As such, they are specifically designed to foster positive youth development

attributes as noted in the research (Balsano, et al., 2009; Lerner et al., 2005). These programs use activities to specifically promote positive youth development, and ultimately, to foster better citizenship and responsible adulthood. Other types of youth programs (e.g., organized sports) do foster some of the same attributes but do so as a consequence of youth involvement in contrast to programs explicitly designed to enhance positive youth development (Balsano, et al, 2009).

When considering the ELSP, the importance of melding the resources of the community with the strengths of the youth involved provides an optimal foundation for successful youth programming. While Catalano et al. (2004) note the importance of longer term (nine months or more) interventions, the nature and scope of a time-limited summer program will never allow for that specific component to be met. However, if the summer program is developed and valued as one piece of a larger, comprehensive yearlong learning experience within an education system based on positive youth development strategies with a clear theory of change, the research suggests youth will benefit (Catalano et al., 2004). Those organizations that intentionally design programs that intertwine the "5 C's" — competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (Lerner et al., 2005) are more likely to provide positive benefits for the participants.

By identifying key positive youth development constructs, Catalano et al. (2004) documented the potential power of interventions that were built on strengths and provided a pathway for greater integration with the field of prevention research (Gillham et al., 2002), that can ultimately influence the design and delivery of youth programs. More recently, intersectional research between brain development, motivation,

engagement, and the importance of student voice have called for honoring less structured, enrichment-focused informal learning (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Integrating the concepts of positive youth development into our understanding of learning from a context that includes school, family, and community (Coomer et al., 2016), research has advocated for engaging learners in meaningful, culturally and socially relevant content and experiences all year, both in school and during out-of-school time (Ault, 2011; Dohn, 2010; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Neuroplasticity and Learning

Over the past several decades, research into the mysteries of the brain has progressed with the development of technological breakthroughs that allow it to be studied while in action. This research has examined the intersection between the mind, brain, and education, and has dramatically increased our understanding of how students learn and what environments allow learning to thrive (Hinton et al., 2012). One of the most important gains in our understanding of the brain as it develops and ages is the concept of neuroplasticity. The brain is highly adaptable. It is always changing, whether the child is at home, in school, or any other setting. The physical architecture of the brain is being sculpted by the activities and learning children are involved with every day (Hinton et al., 2012). This contradicts the longstanding belief the ability to learn is fixed at birth (Blair & Raver, 2012; Hinton et al., 2012). To the contrary, learning experiences are translated into electrical and chemical signals that gradually sculpt the connections among neurons in certain areas of the brain, resulting in significant reorganization of the learning areas of the brain (Hinton et al., 2012).

For educators, the realization that learning happens out-of-school as well as in-school has a profound impact on "business as usual" in the classroom. It is no longer appropriate for students to sit in chairs and be expected to absorb information. While content knowledge is important, students best learn this knowledge through active learning experiences that are relevant to them, whether it is in a formal or informal learning environment (Hinton et al., 2012). Student-centered learning approaches, that acknowledge the brain's neuroplasticity and continuously develop, seek to engage students in active learning experiences are becoming the primary focus of teaching (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). If the learning experience is relevant to a student's life, there is a greater chance that they will develop new interests and the curiosity needed to seek new learning opportunities (Hinton et al., 2012; Mitra, 2009; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Student-centered Learning

Student-centered learning approaches are capable of challenging the growing brain as it develops. These approaches work to help students build self-confidence and motivation through learning experiences that align with the abilities and interests (Hinton et al., 2012). Students can learn emotional self-regulation and executive function skills, such as connecting past experiences with present action, planning their own learning strategies, and how to assess the outcome of their efforts (Hinton et al., 2012).

Student-centered strategies provide the opportunity for youth to develop their own voice and agency; the belief in their ability to shape their own future and to advocate for themselves in service of individual values and goals. When a student is given the

opportunity to share their voice by influencing decisions that shape their lives and those of their peers either in or outside of school settings, they are given an opportunity to develop executive functioning skills (Mitra, 2009, Stafford-Brizard, 2015).

Student-centered learning requires a commitment by all stakeholders to the facilitation of authentic student voice in the pursuit of strengthening their understanding and development of agency, best undertaken through the creation of policies, practices, and programs that revolve around the students interests and needs (Fielding, 2001; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). The ultimate goal of student-centered learning experiences is to foster the ability to be self-directed learners (Hinton et al., 2012; Stafford-Brizard, 2015). Understanding how short-term, high interest, and high-quality student-centered activities (e.g., in a summer program) can lead to greater curiosity and a stronger sense of agency provide the framework for ELSP staff as they seek to develop programming that encourages curiosity, student engagement, and active, student-centered learning.

Metacognitive strategies – how one regulates one's own thoughts – directly contribute to how a person thinks about their own ability to learn. Willingham (2007) identifies three primary metacognitive skills that provide the framework for improving the possibility of thinking critically; (a) the availability of "chunks" of knowledge that students have or can learn to use to steer their thoughts in productive directions, (b) the transfer of previously gained knowledge to new problems, and (c) developing an understanding of how a problem is structured. If a young person has scaffolded opportunities to engage each of these primary metacognitive skills in succession across a wide variety of topics, over time they will develop a stronger sense of their own ability to

solve problems, and greater comfort with and ability to engage in their own learning (Willingham, 2007).

Student engagement is generally understood to be the primary mechanism that enables the processes of motivation to contribute to learning and development (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Being engaged in learning means a student has generated the interest, focus, and attention to develop the metacognitive strategies to build new knowledge and skills (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012; Willingham, 2007). The learner experiences an emotional connection to what he or she is engaged in – either positive or negative, or somewhere in between. Emotion guides the learning, influencing motivation and engagement (Hinton et al., 2012). Engagement is strongly linked to motivation, the strategic knowledge one brings to a task, how one is able to construct meaning from the activity, and the social interactions involved in the task process (Protacio, 2017).

The desire to provide student-centered learning opportunities are the driving force behind Act 77, which required schools to institute personalized learning plans for all students in 2017, starting in the seventh grade. Currently, schools are moving toward proficiency-based graduation requirements and providing flexible pathways to graduation for all students (State Legislature, 2013). Afterschool and out-of-school expanded learning opportunities are poised to become key components of this newly-envisioned educational system.

Expanded learning opportunities are only effective if they are high quality. High quality refers to programs that are creatively designed based on the needs of the learner,

are aligned with what the field considers to be best practice and are developmentally appropriate for the learner. They allow a child to engage in activity while remaining physically and emotionally safe (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Peterson, 2013). As the role of summer learning continues to evolve within the educational framework of schools, the importance of defining the elements of high-quality programs becomes more critical for those tasked with developing, administering, and assessing such an offering. In the next section, I explore the elements of high quality expanded learning opportunities and present a model that will assist the ELSP as it moves toward its goals.

Expanded Learning Opportunities: Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs

There continues to be a growing appreciation of the importance of how time out-of-school is spent and its powerful potential to serve as a mechanism for positive youth outcomes (Durlak et al., 2010; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Increasingly, afterschool programs and out-of-school time are considered a critical portion of a child's day. Free of the structured boundaries experienced during traditional school time, high quality afterschool programs and summer learning opportunities have the potential to quickly adjust to changing student interests (Peterson, 2013). The idea that expanding learning opportunities (ELOs) during out-of-school time have positive effects on children is not a new one (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Kataoka & Vandell, 2013). Research has shown that regular attendance in a high-quality out-of-school time program benefits children educationally, socially, and behaviorally (Bennett, 2015; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007), creating opportunities for interaction with caring

adults in community-based settings (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Additionally, creative learning environments in an afterschool or summer learning setting have shown to have a positive effect on achievement scores in math for students who participate on a regular basis (Bennett, 2015).

Expanded learning opportunities are intentional, creatively designed programs serving children and youth outside of the school day, including before school, after school, and during the summer. Programs seek to create opportunities for learning, exploration, and growth that expand the traditional classroom and school day, often involving experiential, project-based learning activities that are directly relevant to students' interests, and in the presence of a caring adult (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Harvard Family Research Project, 2008; Peterson, 2013). Programs that use ELOs have the potential to assure equal educational opportunity through project-based learning for all students, regardless of their academic skill level. They have the flexibility to schedule bigger chunks of time to "dive in" to content deeply, allowing for greater exploration and processing (Peterson, 2013).

High quality afterschool and summer learning programs have been shown to have a positive effect in combating summer learning loss (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007; Augustine et al., 2016; Cooper et al., 1996). Research into summer learning and summer learning loss as a branch of study has its roots in equity of opportunity. Heyns' (1978) research into disparate opportunities revealed that when school was in session, advantaged and disadvantaged (defined as low-income and ethnic minority) children gained cognitive skills at roughly the same rate. During the summer, disparities in

academic progress grew. This led her to conclude that schools have an equalizing effect, as school year achievement growth was more similar for both higher and lower-income students, and for both African-American and White students (Heyns, 1978).

This assertion was confirmed by Entwistle and Alexander (1992), who studied a large dataset from the Baltimore Public Schools, concluding that socio-economic status influenced the retention of learning over the summer, with schools again being an equalizing force. Cooper et al. (1996) performed a meta-analysis of thirteen studies post-1975, supporting Heyns' (1978) and Entwistle and Alexander's (1992) contention that socio-economic inequities are heightened by summer break. Cooper et al. (1996) referenced a lack of learning opportunities for low-income youth and advocated for summer enrichment and remedial instruction. Alexander, Entwistle, and Olson (2007) took this a step further and concluded that early achievement gaps due to socio-economic status increased during the summer, compounded year to year, even with evidence of the equalizing force provided by the school year. The gaps carry over and translate into less opportunity for those in the lower socio-economic strata when compared to their classmates in higher income brackets by the time students finish high school. Alexander, Entwistle, and Olson (2007) make the case that early achievement gaps have an impact on college attendance rates, graduation rates, and other achievement dependent outcomes.

In explanation, the authors put forth a "faucet" theory - when school is in session, the resource "faucet" is turned on for all children and all gain equally. When school is not in session, the "faucet" is turned off. They surmise that families from lower socio-

economic strata cannot make up for the resources of the school, while middle class families can and their growth continues (Alexander, Entwistle, & Olson, 2000).

Over the past twenty years, this summer education gap and summer learning loss has been confirmed by several studies, all pointing toward a lack of opportunities and resources that led to a continuing and deepening achievement deficit faced by those in the lower socio-economic strata (Downey et al., 2004; Raudenbush & Eschman, 2015). Some blamed the summer programs they studied for having too little academic rigor and low academic expectations (Ascher, 1988; Cooper et al., 2000), and for being too focused on recreation and diversion (Burkam et al., 2004).

High Quality Programs for Youth

While safe, reliable childcare is extremely important to working families, summer learning programs have an educational aspect where the quality of its offerings is critical (Bennett, 2015; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Out-of-school time programs can positively influence developmental and learning outcomes in children. However, those outcomes are dependent upon program access, quality, and participation (Bennett, 2015; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010).

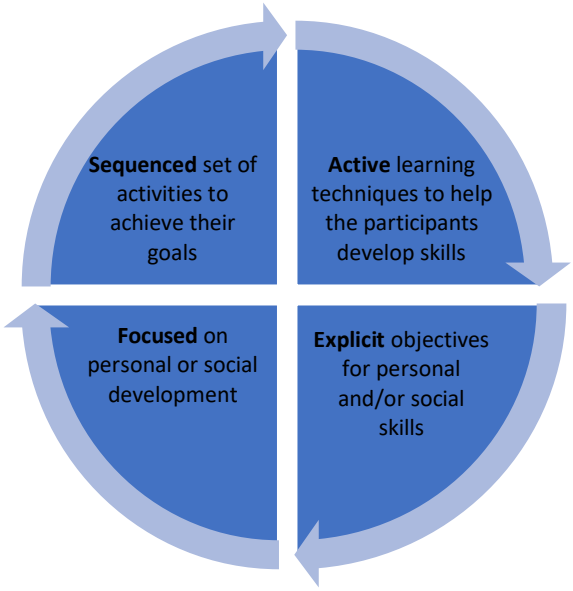
Positive youth development research has provided a set of robust ideas of how youth, when able to interact with their environment in structured and intentional ways, can develop along a trajectory toward a thriving future (Benson et al., 2006; Catalano et al., 2004; Lerner, 2005). More recently we have gained a greater understanding of how youth are motivated to make choices, and how those choices influence engagement in areas of interest and activity (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012) and how important relationships

are to learning and development (Strafford-Brizard, 2016). In order to bring those concepts together to provide a conceptual framework for considering the characteristics of high quality programs for this study, I chose a model utilized by afterschool program developers, and the developers of the observation tool I used for the ELSP.

In a comprehensive meta-analysis of sixty-five previous studies on youth program quality, Durlak and Weissberg (2007), identified four specific characteristics of high quality programs (afterschool and summer learning) that have a positive effect on student outcomes: (a) activities must be sequenced with a specific goal in mind, (b) activities must include active learning techniques, (c) activities must meet explicit objectives for personal and social skills, and (d) activities must be focused on personal or social development. The Durlak and Weissberg (2007) SAFE Model is widely shared as a "best practice" in the out-of-school and youth program literature. Figure 1 provides visual context to these principles.

Figure 1

Characteristics of High Quality Youth Programs



According to the Durlak and Weissberg model (2007), the most effective skill development activities are intentionally developed with a meaningful sequence in mind. Each activity leads to the achievement of a skill at one level, leading to the next level, with each providing a new, developmentally-appropriate challenge. These activities employ active learning techniques, focused on exploring, involving, and experimenting (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Such engagement in learning helps to develop the competencies needed for academic learning, including concentration and motivation (Shernoff & Vandell, 2008). Programs that intentionally incorporate learning objectives for personal and social skills provide the opportunity for youth to develop stronger peer relationships (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Vandell, 2013), reduce incidences of misconduct in school, and decrease potential for use of illegal substances (Vandell et al.,

2007). Youth programs that use a comprehensive framework such as this have a higher potential to create positive outcomes for the children they serve (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007).

The Durlak and Weissberg model is a recommended framework for federally funded afterschool programs by the U.S. Department of Education through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21CCLC), the one federal funding stream for afterschool program development. This initiative has provided the field with a learning laboratory in which to develop high quality programs using the components outlined by Durlak and Weissberg (2007). More recently, 21CCLC federal guidance (2003) has encouraged the development and growth of summer learning programs. This connects directly to the ELSP, as funding for the summer program that is the subject of this study is partially drawn from a federal 21CCLC grant awarded to the supervising public school system.

Conceptual Framework

Along with the Durlak and Weissberg model for characteristics of high quality programs (2007), I developed a conceptual framework for participant engagement in the ELSP. The importance of this separate, complementary model is the recognition that there are multiple components that influence the experience of the youth participant on an individual basis. While the quality of the programs a youth attends is certainly of prime importance, how they internalize that and what they do with that experience have a greater influence on lasting impact (Dohn, 2010).

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework of Participant Engagement in the ELSP

The conceptual framework for this study draws from research into the mind, brain, and education theory (Hinton et al., 2012), situational interest development (Dohn, 2010; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2009), student motivation and engagement (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012), and youth program quality (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). It shows the ideal cyclical relationship that can develop when children are presented with opportunities to explore and discover new areas of interest. Exploration and discovery can lead to participation in a high-interest, high-quality activity presented by a program, such as the ELSP. This promotes greater motivation to learn by the young person, leading to a satisfying experience, ultimately stimulating increased curiosity. This feedback cycle has the potential to be repeated if the opportunity for exploration is presented numerous times during the summer program. This conceptual framework closely aligns with the goal of the ELSP program staff to provide highly engaging, interactive activities for their

participants. They seek to engage the curiosity, interest, motivation, and active engagement in learning by youth through a wide variety of short-term activities, thus aligning with current brain and education research (Hinton et al., 2012). This conceptual framework is set within the context of a short-term, enrichment-focused educational environment such as the ELSP.

21st Century Community Learning Centers

Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, afterschool and summer programming was the responsibility and realm of the family, community, and school (Phillips, 2010). That began to change in 1994, when Senator James Jeffords (R-VT) introduced S.1990, the "21st Century Community Learning Centers Act" based on work he witnessed at a small elementary school (Phillips, 2010). The introduction of the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21CCLC) was an effort to expand the role of public schools in the community by providing services through the development of local centers and partnerships (Federal Register, 1994). This legislation focused attention on the role high quality expanded learning opportunities (afterschool, before school, and summer learning) might have for working families and student achievement (Phillips, 2010). As previously mentioned, it is the only dedicated federal funding stream for afterschool programming through the federal government.

The inaugural competitive 21CCLC programs were included under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1994 (Harvard Family Research Project, 2003; Mahoney & Zigler, 2006). It primarily provided three-year grants to local educational agencies for school-based programs. By 1998, 40 million dollars were

appropriated and awarded to 99 grantees in 34 states, serving approximately 360 schools (Mahoney & Zigler, 2006). The funding jumped to $200 million the next year, serving approximately 600 communities and 2100 schools in nearly every state (Mahoney & Zigler, 2006). By 2002, the one billion dollar appropriation reached over one million students in 6800 primarily rural and inner-city schools (Mahoney & Zigler, 2006).

The dramatic rise in popularity of the 21CCLC was based on research into afterschool and youth programs from the field, including the work of several high profile and well-respected national foundations (e.g., The National Research Council and Institute of Medicines' report *Afterschool programs to promote child and adolescent development* [2000]*;* and *Working families and growing kids: Caring for children and adolescents* [2003]). Reports such as these provided ample anecdotal and some empirical evidence of the positive impact of before and after school initiatives on social and emotional growth, academic achievement, and reducing risk behaviors (Mahoney & Zigler, 2006; Smolensky & Gootman, 2003). As the authors state "the benefits of early childhood educational interventions and of after-school programs for early adolescents, particularly for children and young people from low-income families, have helped persuade municipal governments, state legislatures, and the federal government to invest more in these programs" (Smolensky & Gootman, 2003, p. 2).

Four years later, with the advent of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) of 2000, 21CCLC programs were required, mid-grant cycle and for the first time, to provide academic and other enrichment opportunities to children in high-poverty, low-performing schools, and to help these children meet state and local academic standards (U.S.

Department of Education, 2003). Programs were now required to provide at least seven of twelve authorized activities in their programs. Authorized activities included (a) literacy education programs, (b) senior citizen programs, (c) children's day care services, (d) integrated health, social service, recreational, or cultural programs, (e) summer or weekend programs in conjunction with recreation programs, (f) nutrition and health programs, (g) expanded library service hours to serve community needs, (h) telecommunications and technology educations programs for individuals of all ages, (i) parent skills education programs, (j) support and training for child day care providers, (k) employment counseling, training, and placement, and (l) services for individuals with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, 2003; Mahoney & Zigler, 2006). While many grants at the time already had a few of these activities in place it required that they regroup, plan for added activities within their existing budgets, and implement new programs rapidly.

At the time of reauthorization under NCLBA, a major science-based outcome evaluation was proposed and developed to assess the impact of the fledgling program on student academic and behavior improvement (Mahoney & Zigler, 2006). The resulting evaluation, with flawed methodology and questionable results, had a tremendous impact politically and nearly caused the program to be culled during the subsequent budget process. The fact that the evaluation was incongruent with decades of prior research into youth development and was roundly discredited within academic circles saved the program (Mahoney & Zigler, 2006), however did not reduce its impact on future growth.

Currently, there is far more demand for 21CCLC funding than there are appropriations at the federal level.

More recent research and evaluations of youth programs have confirmed the importance of 21CCLC programs and have identified what aspects signify high quality and positive student outcomes, including the framework seen in Figure 1 (Bennett, 2015; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Vandell, 2008, 2013). Research has shown that 21CCLC programs have a positive influence on youth engagement, educational achievement, and skill development (Bennett, 2015; Durlak et al., 2010; Harvard Family Research Project 2008; Kataoka & Vandell, 2013).

Summary

To explore youth-focused programming and components that lead to successful engagement for the learner, I focused my literature review in three key areas. These include Positive Youth Development; the intersection of brain research, motivation and engagement; and components of youth-focused high-quality programming. I introduced the Durlak and Weissberg model of characteristics of high quality youth programs, one that will serve as the research-based best practice benchmark for the ELSP. I also introduced the conceptual framework for this case study that presents a model for a positive experience by the youth summer program participant. In the final section I explored the history of the primary federal funding source for afterschool and summer learning programs, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Using a case study research design, this study sought to understand the degree to which the programs offered by the expanded learning summer program (ELSP) at a midsized Northeastern public school system met benchmarks of high-quality youth-focused programming, and where quality has the potential to be improved. This research examined program offerings from an adult perspective through observation, interviews, and document review. The findings from this research will suggest ways to improve program quality in the future.

The research questions this case study was designed to answer are:

1. To what extent are components of high quality programming evident in the ELSP program?
2. Based on the evidence, what improvements are suggested?

As education opportunity professional interested in out-of-school time learning, it has been personally important to engage with projects that directly impact youth and families. When approached by a colleague to meet with representatives from the local public school system to discuss potential research opportunities of an out-of-school program, I gladly took part. My professional experience with out-of-school and after-school program development and implementation were a complementary fit with the summer program that became the focus of this research.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

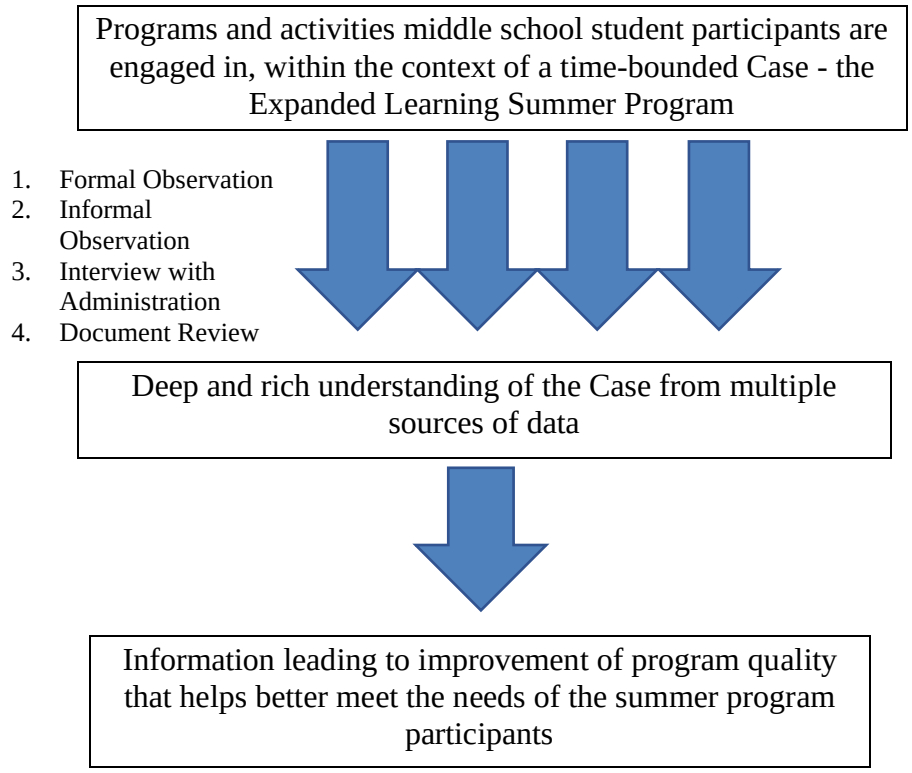
According to Creswell (2013), using qualitative research methods assist in the development of understanding "that deep structure of knowledge that comes from visiting personally with participants, … probing to obtain detailed meanings" (p. 243). To effectively answer the research questions presented above, it was necessary to select the research modalities best aligned to the information sought (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). As qualitative data is in the form of words, specific generally accepted methodologies allow for the selection of one that will most clearly match the research questions. This study sought to gain a deep, rich understanding of one program. Selecting the methodologies most likely to provide the data needed from the array of those available was critical. One primary methodology rose to the top during the design phase of this research project – case study. Data collection strategies that provided the greatest opportunity to meet the goals of this study included observation, interview, and document review.

Research Project Design

This research project was identified as a case study research design, as described in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Case Study Research Design



Utilizing a combination of formal and informal observation, program document analysis, management-level interviews, and informal discussions with teachers and staff, the purpose of this qualitative case study research design was to seek to understand the degree to which the activities offered by the ELSP met benchmarks of high quality youth-focused programming, and where quality may be improved. By developing a thick and rich description of the case through analysis of observations, informal discussions, interviews, and program documents and materials over the course of five weeks, I gained a deeper understanding of the quality of the programming being provided, and thus was

able to provide information and feedback to the administrators as they seek to improve their program.

Rationale for Case Study as a Research Method

Within qualitative research lies a myriad of tools and fields of thought that assist the researcher in identifying the strategy most appropriate for the case at hand (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). For this research, I selected case study as a methodology as it allowed me to include two critical data collection strategies – observation and interview – within what would be considered one bounded event. Given its focus on deep understanding (Saldana, 2016) and developing thick, rich descriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2011), this research methodology allowed exploration of this one case to generate deeper insight and understanding.

In a case study, the researcher explores a "real-life, contemporary-bounded system (a case) … through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case themes" (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that a bounded system with a conceptual framework and a specified set of data collection strategies provide clarity, focus, and a hedge against data overload. The intention when using case study as a qualitative research method is to develop an in-depth understanding of one (or multiple) case(s) using multiple sources of information, through a rich, thick description (Creswell, 2013; Patton 2015). In this study, the one case was the ESLP at a midsized Northeastern public school system. The focus was on the development and description of themes that arise from interactions, observations, and analysis of documents over the course of five weeks. The case study

has clear boundaries (Creswell, 2013; Patton 2015) and described one central phenomenon, the ELSP.

The five-week ELSP has offered enrichment activities and academic improvement classes to an average of 280 students per year over the past three years. Drawn from several middle schools in the urban center and surrounding towns, no student was turned away for lack of funds. This is due in part to availability of funding from the U.S. Department of Education's only federally-funded afterschool and summer learning competitive grant program, 21st Century Community Learning Centers. Grantees are strongly encouraged to utilize part of their grant for summer experiences for their participants (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

However, a systematic examination of the quality of programming has not been undertaken in the three years this local program grant has been in existence. Prior to this research study, ELSP administration had lacked valid data that provided a clear understanding of whether programming strategies had resulted in positive outcomes for their participants. In preparation for an eventual outcome evaluation, this case study research illuminated the quality of the programming designed specifically for youth during the summer of 2017. This research began to explore summer program quality, providing the administration with a greater understanding of its strengths and how it might be improved.

The original purpose of this research, as stated above, was to prepare the program for the development of an eventual outcome evaluation. Once the research design was set in place and data collection began, it became clear that the program director and assistant

director were highly interested in suggestions that could be made based on the evidence. In general, the addition of suggestions might have qualified this research project as an illuminative evaluation, which is defined by Patton (2015) as having the goal of replacing "ignorance with illumination and understanding" (pg. 207). However, the preparation for this research lacked the engagement by all stakeholders in the original design, a necessary component of a utilization-focused evaluation (Patton, 2015). The use of case study remained relevant to this research because the question sought to explain some present circumstance and required an extensive and in-depth description (Yin, 2014). One element of case study research is the necessity of incorporating change as greater understanding is developed (Yin, 2014), or as opportunities emerge as data collection is pursued (Patton, 2015). Thus, as a convenience for the ELSP administration, suggestions that were based solely on evidence from this case study were added to the research design.

Data Collection

In the data collection phase, formal observations of both academic improvement classes and enrichment activities were undertaken twice each week over the course of the five-week program. The observation protocol used was the Youth Program Quality Assessment-School-Age version (YPQA), a tool of the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality (Center for Youth Program Quality, 2020). The YPQA is designed to measure program quality and student engagement across four domains (safety, support, interaction, and engagement), focusing on point-of-service interaction between youth and adults (Center for Youth Program Quality, 2020). Additional time each week was

dedicated to informal observation and semi-structured interviews with the ELSP management team. This provided insight into the development and administration of the ELSP. Grant applications and awards, previous research, and other applicable program documents were collected and analyzed to provide an additional layer of information, leading to a deeper understanding of the ELSP.

Prior to data collection, several procedures were set up and in place to protect the confidentiality of participants and to safeguard data. Information that described the nature of the study, the process of the study, the confidentiality in place (no student identifiers were collected independently of the summer program itself) was developed and shared with ELSP staff. Information about the project and how data would be collected and protected was sent home to parents in the summer program packet. Every family was given the opportunity to speak to the researcher or the summer program director prior to the start of the summer program about the research. No family expressed concerns about the research prior to the start of the summer program, nor at any time during the summer program itself.

Data Collection Strategies

Multiple data collection strategies were utilized in this case study research (see Table 2). Multiple collection strategies are an integral component of case studies, allowing for the development of in-depth understanding through the triangulation of data from multiple sources and methods (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). The summer program site selected for this study was based on a conversation with a community partner about doing research on their program. The goal was to gain insight into the

quality of their program offerings. In addition, its location provided the convenience of access to activities throughout the full course of the summer program.

Table 2

Data Type, Source, Frequency and Purpose of Collection

Data type	Source	Frequency	Purpose
Current program and grant documents, archival records as available	ELSP leadership team, 21CCLC	Study preparation and ongoing	Developing a broad understanding of program history, structure, current management, and program development strategies
Formal observations	YPQA observational protocol, field notes, reflections	Twice weekly	Utilizing YPQA tool to consistently assess program quality across multiple weeks and varied offerings
Semi-structured interviews of program staff	Interview protocols, field notes, audiotapes, reflections, transcriptions	Once each for 2 program staff and 1 grant administrator	Gain insight into program development, implementation, and management
Field notes from each day - informal observations and conversations	Raw field notes	Twice weekly	Develop a greater understanding of the summer program through the development of memos and reflection

Qualitative Sampling Strategy

Since a case study design seeks to produce a deep, rich understanding of a bounded case (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015), sampling of program offerings for observation is purposeful rather than random (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Purposeful sampling refers to the fact that (a) qualitative research deals with lower numbers, making random selection less useful, and (b) these small groups of people are nested within their context (e.g., the ELSP program) and studied in-depth (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Purposeful sampling also allows for the selection of interviewees who are "information-

rich and illuminative" (Patton, 2015, p. 46) and able to contribute unique insights due to their experience with the program. As noted by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), the intent of qualitative data collection is not to generalize from this sample, but rather to develop an in-depth understanding of a bounded case. For the ELSP study, this meant selecting interviewees who had the greatest knowledge of how the summer program activities were conceptualized, designed, built, and implemented. The ELSP program director and assistant program director were interviewed. These individuals provided the greatest likelihood of reaching Patton's (2015) interviewee benchmark of being information rich and illuminative. Table 3 outlines the actual purposeful sampling strategy utilized for the components of this case study. Three data collection strategies were identified and the sampling strategies for each are noted. In addition, the rationale behind for each strategy is included.

Table 3

Details of Purposeful Sampling Strategy

Collection strategy	Sampling	Rationale
Formal observation. 2 offerings per week for 5 weeks. Days of week were selected based on convenience for both researcher and program and determined in advance for most weeks.	1 morning activity or 1 afternoon activity was selected for each of the 10 days of observation, in advance, using a random selection process. Selection of class and activity was done to assure maximum variation, with no class or activity repeated for a formal observation.	**Maximum Variation.** Since the focus is the experience of the participants, a sampling strategy that allowed for the observing of the widest variety of offerings possible on as many different days of the week as possible yielded the greatest variation.
Interviews. Three interviews were completed: one program director, assistant program director, and one administrator	As the leadership team, these three individuals were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol.	**Purposeful**. These individuals have direct responsibility for the program design and implementation.
Informal observation and discussion. At least 2 partial days per week with students and program staff	A similar strategy to formal observation day, to assure maximum variation. Includes visits to activities, conversations with teachers/leaders, youth, program administration	**Purposeful.** While allowing for the inclusion of the widest variety of offerings possible, yielding the greatest variation of data; selection was based on offerings on the day of visitation. Preference was given to activities not previously visited or observed.

Sampling Strategy Implementation

The priority for selection of activities for formal observation was to assure maximum variation. A maximum variation sampling strategy allowed for observing the widest variety of offerings possible on as many different days of the week. To accomplish this, I started with a listing of each activity offered during the five-week summer program (Table 6). To reduce any bias inherent in selecting activities each week, I utilized a random selection process possible through the free service at www.random.org for each day I was scheduled to be onsite for observations. This resulted in the random identification of one morning and one afternoon activity, for a

total of ten observations out of a possible 97 offerings.[1] Over the course of the five weeks, the activities that were identified through this process were observed using the Youth Program Quality Assessment School-age version observation tool, described in depth in the next section.

Observation Protocol

The observation protocol used for this study was the Youth Program Quality Assessment – School-age version (YPQA), developed by the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, a division of the Forum for Youth Investment, located in Washington, D.C (Center for Youth Program Quality, 2020). This assessment is aligned to research-based benchmarks and is a continuous improvement intervention used by a wide variety of youth programs nationally, including afterschool and summer learning programs funded through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21CCLC), a federal Department of Education initiative (Smith & Hohmann, 2005). This observation protocol identifies characteristics of quality youth programs across four domains: (a) safe environment, (b) supportive environment, (c) peer interaction, and (d) youth engagement.

[1]During the summer of 2017 I had a physical limitation that interfered with observing one of the randomly selected activities. I removed that activity and then used the random process identified above with the remaining activities to select a new activity to observe.

Figure 4

The YPQA Construct

Figure 4 (Center for Youth Program Quality, 2020) provides a visual representation of these domains, based on a structure that has a firm foundation of meeting basic needs and safety in the first domain. The next domain acknowledges the importance of support by scaffolding the learning that is taking place. The third domain focuses on the quality of youth and adult interactions, while the highest domain identifies youth engagement as a key component of high-quality youth programs.

The YPQA assessment tool was developed over the course of thirty years through a close collaboration between High/Scope Educational Research Foundation and The Forum for Youth Investment (Center for Youth Program Quality, 2020). Prior to its development, there was no tool available that was aligned to research-based benchmarks that could provide an observational framework utilizing the concepts of positive youth development. At the time, existing observational tools were based within psychiatric

parameters and used for assessing behavioral deficits (Smith & Hohmann, 2005). The YPQA provides a reliable and valid tool capable of providing critical, constructive feedback to those who seek to develop and implement high quality, engaging programs for youth based on the principles of positive youth development that promoted resilience, leadership, and wellness (Smith & Hohmann, 2005).

Over the past twenty years, the YPQA tool has been used by programs nationwide. It relies on a unique model of training and professional certifications to establish and maintain rater reliability. Prior to being certified to administer the observation protocol, a person must successfully complete a two-day training with a YPQA professional trainer from the Weikart Center. Certification is only awarded once the participant has earned a reliability score of at least 80% when using the YPQA tool for a video observation. Failure to do so means certification is not forthcoming, although the participant might be invited to repeat the training. If the score is reached and certification is awarded, newly minted trainers are required to participate in monthly video calls with the Weikart Center and refresh their certification on a yearly basis by scoring online observations, again achieving the requisite 80% reliability score. Throughout the ELSP observation portion of this research study, I maintained my certification to administer the YPQA tool. In addition, I corresponded with the Weikart staff regarding the structure of the ELSP and my intent to use the YPQA as a tool from the perspective of an outside observer. I received written permission via electronic mail to use the YPQA for this study. During the five-week summer program, the YPQA tool

was utilized for two randomly selected observations on each day, resulting in ten complete observation records.

According to The Forum for Youth Investment (2012), The YPQA "is designed to empower people and organizations to envision optimal-quality programming for youth by providing a shared language for practice and decision-making and by producing scores that can be used for comparison and assessment of progress over time" (The Forum for Youth Investment, 2012, p. i). The tool measures the quality of youth's experiences, providing a framework for discussion and development of programming that has the potential to tap into motivation to deeply engage with their world.

The YPQA tool is promoted as a highly valid tool and is aligned with the research on child and positive youth development (Smith & Hohman, 2005). The original YPQA validation study was a 4-year effort to develop and validate a tool to assess program quality in youth settings. The study was comprised of more than 300 YPQA observations and interviews conducted in programs serving over 1600 youth (Smith & Hohman, 2005). The study employed multiple, independent data sources, including interviews with program administrators, observations in youth work settings, surveys of program youth, expert opinions, and verified reports of staff training (Smith & Hohman, 2005). Key subscales in the YPQA demonstrated acceptable levels of internal consistency (Smith & Hohman, 2005). To assess internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was calculated at .74 (standard of scale reliability = .70) (Smith & Hohman, 2005). In addition, pairs of data collectors were able to achieve acceptable levels of inter-rater reliability (Smith & Hohman, 2005). Inter-rater comparison of YPQA scores demonstrated stability

(benchmark for moderate agreement = .7) in repeated measures of the same offering through the calculation of intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs). ICCs for paired-raters on the four YPQA domains were (a) safe environment = .48, (b) supportive environment = .69, (c) interaction = .83, and (d) engagement = .70 with a total score for all scales = .66. (Smith & Hohman, 2005). Finally, YPQA scores demonstrate predictive validity in multivariate and multilevel models of the data, controlling for youth background variables, with 56% to 82% of the variance among offerings is explained by each respective YPQA scale (Smith & Hohman, 2005).

The tool is structured using inter-related rubrics, allowing observers to differentiate programs in meaningful ways, and draw comparisons across seemingly disparate offerings. The YPQA tool was designed with flexibility in mind, allowing for its use to meet the needs of accountability (The Forum for Youth Investment, 2012) and, as in the situation with this research, program improvement. To understand the breadth and scope of what is observed when using the YPQA, Table 4 provides the eighteen scales and the items aligned to each scale with a brief description of what each seeks to measure as the ideal situation. Each observation of an ELSP activity using the YPQA protocol was rated on the entire set of scales and items included here. In addition, the scales served as a priori codes for the observation data collection and analysis.

Table 4

YPQA Scales, Items, and Description

Scale	Item	Description of Ideal
Emotional Safety	Emotional Climate	Evidence of safe climate, inclusiveness, support
	Bias	No evidence of bias; mutual respect, inclusion
Healthy Environment	Physical Hazards	Safe physical environment
	Clean and Sanitary	Lack of health concerns
	Ventilation and lighting	Adequate for program and youth
	Temperature	Appropriate for comfort and controllable by the staff
Emergency Preparedness	Written procedures	Emergency procedures posted and accessible
	Fire extinguisher	Accessible and not expired
	First aid kit	Accessible and up-to-date; not expired
	Safety equipment	Accessible and up-to-date if appropriate (e.g., flotation devices for a pool)
	Supervised entry	Staff have ability to supervise all entries to program space
	Outdoor access	Staff have control of access to outdoors
Accommodating Environment	Sufficient space	Activities are taking place in an area that provides sufficient space for number of youths
	Suitable space	Space is appropriate for activity
	Furniture	Comfortable and safe, if needed
	Space can be modified if needed	e.g., furniture can be moved for activity if needed
Nourishment	Drinking water	Drinking water is accessible and safe
	Food and drinks	If available, sufficient food and drink is available to all youth
	Healthy snacks	If available, snacks are healthy
Warm Welcome	Greetings	All youth are greeted
	Tone	Staff use warm and welcoming tone of voice
	Friendly behaviors	Staff are friendly to all youth
Session Flow	Start and end times	Sessions start and end as advertised
	Materials	Materials are ready to go
	Preparation	Materials are prepared ahead of time, and there are enough for all youth
	Explanations	Staff explains activity and youth understand
	Appropriate time	Allotment of time is appropriate to activity
Active Engagement	Engage with materials or ideas	Youth actively engage with materials or ideas

	Structured opportunity to talk	Youth have structured opportunities to discuss what they are doing
	Concrete vs. abstract	Activity is balanced between concrete and abstract engagement
	Tangible products	Activity leads to a tangible product (during that session or over a period of time)
Skill Building	Clear focus	Specific learning goal or skill building goal is shared
	Practice	Youth have opportunities to practice skill
	Modeling	Staff members model skills for youth
	Tasks are broken down	Difficult tasks are broken into smaller components or steps
	Problem-solving	When youth struggle, staff work with them to problem-solve
Encouragement	Specific support	Staff members make clear references to accomplishments or contributions
	Open-ended questions	Frequent open-ended questions are poised during the activity, and youth have time to respond
	Active involvement	Staff members are actively involved with youth during activity
Reframing Conflict	Calm approach	Staff members approach conflicts calmly
	Youth input	The input of youth is sought when developing both causes and solutions of conflict
	Understanding of conflict	Time and opportunity are provided for youth to examine actions and consequences
	Follow-up	Staff member follows-up with all involved afterward
Belonging	Getting to know each other	Opportunities are provided for helping youth to introduce themselves to each other
	Inclusion	Staff and youth include everyone in activities; exclusion is successfully overcome
	Identity with activity	Youth identify with program and activities being offered
	Acknowledgement	Staff members provide opportunities to publicly acknowledge each other's work and contributions
Collaboration	Cooperation	Opportunities exist for youth to work together cooperatively
	Interdependent roles	All youth have opportunities to take on interdependent roles in activity
	Shared goals	All youth have the opportunity to work toward shared goals

Leadership	Group-process skills	All youth have the chance to practice group-process skills
	Mentoring	Youth have an opportunity to mentor an individual
	Leading the group	All youth have the chance to take the lead in the larger group, or with a smaller group
Adult Partners	Sharing control	Staff members share control of most activities
	Reasons	Staff members provide reasons behind guidelines, directions, and expectations
Planning	Choice	Youth have multiple opportunities to plan activities and projects
	Strategies	Multiple strategies are used for planning (e.g., brainstorming, developing action steps)
Choice	Content choice	Youth have the opportunity to make multiple content choices for their activity or over time
	Process choice	Youth have the opportunity to make at least one process choice during activity about how the session will run
Reflection	Intentional reflection	Reflection time is built into the activity at the end
	Sharing experiences	Multiple strategies are provided for youth to share work that was done (e.g., discussion, showing progress)
	Feedback	Staff members provide youth with opportunity to give feedback
	Presentation	Through the course of the program, youth have the chance to make a presentation to the whole group

The YPQA domains run a continuum from physical considerations (e.g., ventilation, first aid kits) to the inclusion of choice and reflection in programming (e.g., process and content choices, opportunities to provide feedback). Observations require careful consideration and attention to detail, documentation of evidence, and timely reflection by the observer. Each rubric is presented in three sections, with descriptions ranging from lack of evidence for that item (which would receive a score of 1), to evidence existing for that item some of the time or available to some participants (receiving a score of 3), to

clear and full evidence of the existence of that item throughout the activity (thus receiving a score of 5).

YPQA Observation Process

During the five-week summer program, the YPQA tool was utilized for two randomly selected observations each day, resulting in ten complete observation records. Once the activity selection process was completed, I shared the activities that had been selected for formal observation with the program director. She was aware of the ongoing development within each activity, so provided information about daily schedules and the focus of the weekly activity.

For each of the formal observations, I made a point to arrive early and introduce myself to the instructor, share the intent of the observation, and clarify my role for that period. The summer program staff were all aware of the research during the summer, so it was a courtesy introduction for each of the activities. I asked the staff member to introduce me once the activity started underway, which allowed me to say "Hi" and let everyone know I was there to watch, but not participate, in their activities during that time.

The first focus for the observation was taking in the set-up of the space, quality of the environment, and access to the various components of what is identified by the YPQA tool – emotional safety, healthy environment, emergency preparedness, accommodating environment, and nourishment. It is possible to assess these areas prior to the youth arriving (or while they are settling) and before the activity gets started. As the

youth are arriving, I paid special attention to the welcome and session flow, before moving into the rest of the domains.

I utilized a standard observation sheet for each activity. I recorded what I observed and what I heard, being as detailed as possible in the process. The YPQA tool is designed to be supported by evidence. Evidence is identified as actual quotations made by staff members and youth that reinforce the domain, either positively or negatively. The observation sheet was used to record as much of what I saw and experienced during my time watching the activity. Once the activity was over, I invested the time to expand upon the notes and reflect upon all that happened during the observation. Next, I synthesized the entire observation into the YPQA tool by entering evidence into the formal observation record to create a clear picture of the flow of the activity, what learning was taking place, and how the youth and adults interacted. I thoroughly considered each of the domains and scales within the YPQA, utilizing a spreadsheet that mirrored the YPQA observation sheet. Additionally, I added any questions I formulated, and any moments that provided a greater understanding to my overall goal of deep connection to what I was seeing. These illuminating "ah hah!" moments were recorded as notes and on the observation spreadsheet. As each formal observation was completed, the evidence and data were added to the spreadsheet for future analysis.

Informal Observation and Conversation

What happens during breaks, in the hallway, to and from activities, and in the lunchroom has the potential to yield highly informative data (Patton, 2015). For this study, having the flexibility to integrate with and ask questions of adults and participants

in the building on observation days provided informal, yet compelling, insight into the impact of programming, choice, and interest (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2009). It also provided a counterweight to the strict observational protocol that was used for much of the data collection during the program. When I was walking through the halls during the time that activities were changing or during recess breaks, I noted interesting phrases, quotations, conversations, and observations (with no associated identifiers). Informal discussions with teachers, activity leaders and assistants, and ELSP staff members provided additional context to the experiences of those involved. I wrote daily memos to add context and reflection, illuminating themes that were rising throughout the ELSP data collection phase.

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the program director, assistant program director, and the summer program administrator. Semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity to probe for deeper meaning (Glesne, 2011; Patton, 2015). This qualitative inquiry method allowed for the potential for questions to emerge from the interview itself (Glesne, 2011).

The interview is one of the most important data gathering tools in qualitative research yet can create an artificial situation leading to dubious results and can be done poorly (Myers & Newman, 2006; Patton, 2015). Understanding the nature of the interview process is key to making sure that the data derived from the process is genuine and relevant. Skilled interviewing requires asking questions well so that interviewees will want to share their stories (Patton, 2015). Myers and Newman (2006) concluded that

there are five areas that can be controlled to minimize the stresses accompanying interviews: (a) understanding the context the interview is taking place in, (b) minimizing social discomfort, (c) mirroring language of the interviewees via open-ended questions, (d) maintaining flexibility within semi-structured interviews, and (e) maintaining strict confidentiality. Interviews were conducted in a manner that respects all five areas by clearly describing the purpose and process of the interviews, maintaining a comfortable and cordial atmosphere, focusing on flexibility of questions and language, and maintaining strict confidentiality.

Utilizing a pragmatic inquiry lens, the questions were straightforward, getting to "real world" issues, and focused on the practical effects of the beliefs and actions of the interviewee (Patton, 2015). Interviews with adults were conducted in a manner suitable for reliable collection and recording of data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) using a recorder, and transcribed fully utilizing a secure online transcribing service within an appropriate time frame. Audio recordings are kept on a password-protected device and will be permanently deleted once the research is complete.

Collection and Review of Documents

During the data collection phase of this study, documents, and materials pertaining to the ELSP, both current and historical, were collected and examined. This process provided an additional opportunity to triangulate the data. Triangulation has the potential to further strengthen a study by increasing the variety of data sources (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Triangulation "is supposed to support a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with it, or at least, do not contradict it" (Miles &

Huberman, 1994, p. 266). Further, as discussed by Miles and Huberman (1994), triangulation is the practice of using multiple sources and instances of data, from different methods, as a way of increasing the verification process of findings. In this study, the review of documents and other materials provided a complementary set of data that increased insight into how the ELSP program was developed and how it became the program that was observed during this research. The importance of the materials and related data is evident in the development of Chapter 4 about context, as it told the story of how the ELSP grew as part of the community it served, and how the program continues to play an important role in the fabric of the community.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed for codes and themes, then integrated for interpretation and explanation through rich, thick description. A description is "thick" when the context of behavior is described and considered "thin" when lacking. "Thick" is used synonymously with "rich," to refer to detailed descriptions of the object of study. These vary across the scope of qualitative research but are key to understanding the experience of the situations and experiences of subjects (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Utilizing multiple sources for data collection provided a richer, more robust picture of this case study (Creswell, 2013), leading to a deeper understanding of how participants engage with and experience the ELSP.

Memoing

To maintain the integrity of the research, and continually consider and reconsider the data, a process of writing memos was used during the data collection experience

(Creswell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This included documenting any ideas, questions, and interesting items that possibly could have an impact on later analysis. Memos helped to build connections between different pieces of data when looking for recognizable clusters and patterns. For this research, given the fact that it was composed of numerous observations during the day and countless informal conversations, memoing was a critical tool when trying to keep track of the myriad of ideas, connections, questions, and other thoughts that happened during time spent at the ELSP site.

Coding

Coding is the process of dissecting transcripts of interviews and memos meaningfully, while differentiating and combining data that has been retrieved through interview transcripts and observation protocols, and reflections made regarding it. Chunks – connected parts – generally should become clearer as patterns and metaphors within the data emerge (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A priori codes, ideas and themes that are identified during the literature review, and in vivo codes, those that emerge once the qualitative data is analyzed, were identified and refined (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldana, 2016). Codes were clustered around common ideas, themes, and applicable categories, relating to one another in coherent ways, being careful to avoid coding drift (Creswell, 2013). Codes that lack some sort of conceptual or structural order run the risk of overwhelming any clarification of themes and easily become hard to memorize, use, and retrieve (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Instead, I worked hard at developing a "conceptual web" (Miles & Huberman, 1994) with clear definitions and to apply them consistently during the qualitative data analysis. There were two code lists utilized in the

data analysis. The first codes were the scales of the Youth Program Quality Assessment as presented in Table 4. A separate list of a priori codes developed and utilized specifically for the semi-structured interviews is shown below in Table 5.

While analyzing and considering the data of a case study, Yin (2014) identified two additional components for a high quality analysis that I kept in mind during this process. They helped me to mark the boundaries of this particular study, and limit drift by first addressing the most significant aspect of the study. Yin (2014) is very clear for the need of staying free from tangents and staying focused on the research questions. In addition, Yin (2014) emphasizes the importance of utilizing my own prior expert knowledge. As the rater for observations and as the primary researcher for this study, I kept in mind that I have a significant body of experience with summer and similar youth-focused programs and made sure that I routinely and aggressively tapped into that knowledge.

Interview Analysis

Three semi-formal interviews were completed during the ELSP. I transcribed the interviews utilizing www.trint.com, an online transcription service. Once I had the transcribed interviews, I coded the data using those identified in Table 5 and HyperResearch qualitative research software.

Table 5

Final Code List for Interview Analysis (Alphabetical)

Code	Definition
academic incentive	Participation led to an academic credential, and may have influenced enrollment in that activity
adequate staffing	Activity had a ratio of 1 staff person to every 10 students
administration philosophy	Indicates a general philosophy inherent in the administration of the entire summer program
brain breaks	Concept of providing breaks in the learning process as a way of enhancing engagement in material
challenges	A potential barrier to a desired outcome
diversity	Evidence of (or lack of) diversity
energetic and collaborative leadership	aspects of leadership where there is evidence of motivated and collaborative activity and planning
engaging students with disabilities	authentic involvement of students with challenges
interacting with teachers	youth interact with teachers
Involving students	youth involved in activity or planning by adults
youth organizing themselves	intentional or unintentional organizing happening by youth only
leaders engage with students and parents	administration interacting with youth and their parent (or guardian)
mirror to school day	activity is intentionally structured to reflect what a school day or activity might be
motivated students	evidence that youth are excited and eager to participate in an activity
mutual respect	evidence of respectful feelings toward each other, and that it is returned
mutual respect between students and teachers promoted	promotion of respectful feelings and actions between youth and adults
new Americans experience school	specific population - those newly arrived at the US - experience school for the first time
physical space	the physical location of the activity
planning for case study	Researcher planning for this case study
positive changes	evidence of positive change in attitude or skill level
preparation	preparation completed that was necessary for a particular activity
proficiency-based learning	A learning and teaching pedagogy that is specifically referenced
revenue seeking	activity by the leadership undertaken for securing operating funds
school collaboration	evidence of collaboration between schools
student voice in study	evidence of student voice
students set their own ground rules	ground rules established by youth
summer effect on rest of school year	evidence of "summer learning loss"
support from schools/orgs	evidence of support received by summer program from schools and other collaborating organizations
training and support provided to teachers	specific training and support provided to adults who are leading activities
teacher intrinsically motivated	teachers expressed motivations that were intrinsic (vs. extrinsic)
unengaged youth	evidence of youth who were unengaged from the activity

uninvolved teacher/staff	an adult in the room who remained unengaged or uninvolved in an activity that was happening
youth coming back next year	expressed evidence of interest of youth returning to program in a future year

Validation of the findings were enhanced by collecting data from multiple sources and memoing to uncover relationships within the data. Three steps helped to assure the validity of the data, including (a) developing detailed, clear definitions for codes, (b) peer review during coding, and (c) member checking of interpretation (Creswell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994). As presented in Table 5, every code identified from an interview was carefully considered and then defined. This provided a foundation for both the peer review and member checking process. For peer review, one interview transcript was presented to a volunteer reviewer who was a graduate of the same program in which I was enrolled. That person spent a half hour with me reviewing the interview codes and their definitions (Table 5). They then coded the interview transcript on their own time. The results mirrored my own coding process. Transcripts were shared with the interviewees the week following the actual interview date. We met face-to-face for a half hour, during which time I shared my notes about what I learned and asked for feedback as to the accuracy of my interpretation of their meaning. This process confirmed my understanding of their answers. The use of the semi-structured interview format allowed for frequent clarifying questions to be posed during the interview itself (Patton, 2015), thus enhancing my understanding of answers.

Representation of Data and Themes

Data was assessed by looking for representativeness, checking the meaning of outliers, and getting feedback from those who provided the original data (Miles &

Huberman, 1994). Data and findings were presented to complement the observation protocol, weaving in the qualitative interviews and program artifacts as appropriate. Patton (2012), when discussing utilization-focused evaluation, frames the importance of working with the intended users at each step of the process so that they have the information they need to apply findings and implement recommendations. It is my hope that while this case study was not intended to be an evaluative process, the information, findings, and recommendations may lead to the development of a longitudinal utilization-focused evaluation plan for the ESLP. With this as a consideration, it became important to represent the data, themes, and findings in a manner that would assure greater understanding for the program directors and administrators. I chose to present the information in the form of a chart that clearly identifies themes and patterns evident across the sources of collected data. By doing so, I presented the evidence that aligns with the conceptual frameworks of this research study in a manner that represents the quality of ELSP administration and activities.

Pattern Matching

As I considered both the strengths and challenges that became evident in the observational data, I moved into a process of aligning the information with the conceptual frameworks used in this research, the model developed by Durlak and Weissberg, the model of a successful youth experience, and the theoretical framing of positive youth development. This process is identified by Yin (2014) as pattern matching – identifying patterns that were observable in my data and that aligned with previous studies, thus increasing the internal validity of my findings and recommendations. Pattern matching

across data sources increased the validity of the themes identified in this case study (Patton, 2015).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is a process used to design studies with credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in mind (Creswell, 2013). In this case study, I applied three validation strategies for trustworthiness: utilizing triangulation through pattern matching; providing a thick and rich description of the participants, their site, and other elements of context; and clarifying my positionality in relation to the research in terms of ethical considerations (Creswell, 2013, Yin, 2014).

First, I addressed trustworthiness in this study through triangulation. Yin (2014) discussed triangulation as "converging lines of inquiry," explaining that different sources of data allow for more "convincing and accurate" conclusions to be drawn (p. 120). I collected data through three different methods: semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and on-site observations. According to Miles and Huberman, "triangulation is a way to get to the finding in the first place – by seeing and hearing multiple *instances* of it from different *sources* by using different *methods* and by squaring the findings with others (1994, p. 267). Ideally, the verification process (of whether a study is valid or raises concerns about a lack of validity) is largely built into the research study itself if triangulation is present through collecting data from multiple sources, modes, while checking and rechecking findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Yin (2014) identifies pattern matching – identifying patterns that are observable in the data and that align with previous studies – as a method of increasing the internal validity of my findings and

recommendations. In this case study, I identified patterns in my data that align to the SAFE model developed by Durlak and Weissberg (2007).

Second, I addressed trustworthiness by providing a thick and rich description of the setting and a thorough description of the ELSP. This helped provide context for the study and delineate potential transferability. Transferability is a form of external validity – that is, the findings must have value outside of this research study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The first aspect of establishing transferability is to provide a thick and rich description of context, while illuminating similarities and differences to other potential contexts. This will assure that a clear and deep understanding what findings may or may not be transferable to other similar settings.

Third, a good case study researcher, argued Yin (2014), must ask good questions, be a good listener, understand the issues being studied, stay adaptive as unanticipated changes occur during the study, have a firm grasp of the issues being studied, and avoid biases by being sensitive to contrary evidence. All of these characteristics of a prepared case study researcher are negated if a researcher operates without ethical considerations in place (Yin, 2014). Therefore, I positioned myself within the study by revealing aspects of my own identity to the program directors, administrators, and the families engaged in the ELSP, and I addressed how I maintained an ethical practice throughout development and implementation of this study.

Prior to the start of this dissertation research study, I acknowledged that my life experience in counseling and education had the potential to influence how I interacted with participants and how I interpreted themes during the data analysis phase of this

research project. I approached my time onsite from the perspective of an uninvolved visitor. I took no part in the development of any part of the program itself, in the selection of the offerings, in the training of the staff, or in the teaching of any activity. This provided me with a level of objectivity when observing, strictly focused on deep listening, noting behaviors, interactions, and the context of the activity.

I took my role as a researcher very seriously and made sure that every action and interaction I had during my days onsite were carefully considered. I attempted to craft questions that did not lead the participants to particular answers. I reflected meaning back to the member to assure I understood accurately what was being shared with me. I attempted to listen and question without leading through verbal or nonverbal behavior. I clearly delineated the goal of the research for participants in writing and verbally, and collected data from multiple sources (Creswell, 2013).

Limitations

Limitations to this research are inherent to the design–a deep, rich understanding and study of one bounded case. Transferability of results to other summer programs depends on the quality of the thick, rich description developed for this one case. However, a primary goal for this case study research was to assess the quality of short-term youth programs using research-based benchmarks, the Youth Program Quality Assessment. Given the standardized nature of the tool, this research may contribute to a growing body of knowledge about the structure and development of youth programs where the YPQA has also been used to assess quality. In addition, suggestions for quality improvement may have transferability to other similarly assessed youth programs. At the

very least they provide summer program administrators with key information for dialogue and opportunities to share ideas and experiences with counterparts across programs.

As a result of creating boundaries around this research project, and to increase my objectivity as an observer of program quality, I made a conscious decision to focus my efforts and research from the perspective of adults. As a result, I purposefully limited seeking input from youth participants to informal conversations. I did not collect and compile youth perspectives beyond what I objectively observed through the framework of the YPQA. Informal conversations and observations did include a level of youth perspective, yet I purposefully filtered that back through my role as adult observer. This case study does not include a view of program quality from a youth perspective.

Ten activities were randomly selected for observations using the YPQA. As such, not every activity was observed. As a researcher, I was onsite three days each week. There is the possibility that attending and observing all activities, every day of the session, would yield different results. However, employing a random selection process mitigates researcher bias, and improves validity of resulting conclusions and recommendations (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

After the research design was set in place and data collection began, it became clear that the program director and assistant director were highly interested in recommendations that could be made based on the evidence. At the request of the ELSP administration, recommendations that were based solely on evidence from this case study were added to the research design.

Summary

Integrating rich, qualitative data from multiple sources helped to provide a greater understanding of the research questions, producing a deeper, more robust picture than would have been possible with only one set of data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Yoshikawa et al., 2008). By collecting and analyzing case study data from multiple sources, and utilizing several methods of data collection (e.g., observation, interview, document review), and addressing limitation concerns, I answered the research questions for this case study:

1. To what extent are components of high quality programming evident in the ELSP program?
2. Based on the evidence, what improvements are suggested?

Chapter 4: Context

The Expanded Learning Summer Program is the joint effort of three entities: the North End Community Center[2], the Northwest School District[3], and the Eastside School District[4]. Together, professional educators and staff organize and facilitate the program for rising sixth through ninth grade students of the two-city area, at no cost to any participant. Focusing on academic and enrichment courses, the ELSP supports some of the state's most at-risk and impoverished youth.

History of the North End Community Center (NECC)

Founded in the 20th century by a renowned clinical psychologist at a university in Northeast, NECC provides support and programming for low-income, refugee, and immigrant children and their families. Initially, the founding psychologist worked primarily with French-Canadian, Irish, Italian, and German immigrants who moved to the city in search of work that would support their families and build their communities. During the ensuing years, NECC initiated many services to assist the neighborhood citizens most in need, regardless of their ethnicity. The youth clubs of the city and an extensive network of shelters for the homeless men, women, and children of the area are two legacies of this growth period, each becoming an independent agency after starting as programs of the NECC.

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[2] The APA's 5 principles of research ethics protect the privacy of individuals in research and recommend that a researcher protect the confidentiality and privacy of individuals to the greatest extent possible (APA, 2020). Thus, I have applied a pseudonym to the schools, school districts, and community center to protect the identities of research participants engaged in this study.

[3] pseudonym applied to protect identities of research participants.

[4] pseudonym applied to protect identities of research participants.

Continuing its tradition of supporting new American families, NECC has been at the forefront of serving refugee families since the city was designated a federal refugee resettlement area in 1980. The New Arrivals summer language program for refugee and immigrant children was the first of its kind to be developed in the state and has served the community and surrounding area since 1989. In 2014, students from Eastside School District were able to participate for the first time in the middle school New Arrivals program with their counterparts from the Northwest School District. Students considered to be recently transplanted from a different country, and whether or not English is considered a second language in their households, are able to participate for free.

Community Demographics

The communities served by the summer program have one of the highest concentrations of poverty in the state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In 2016, of the Northwest School District's children, 16.4% are English Language Learners (ELL); 14.3% are eligible for special education services; and 61.9% qualified for free or reduced-rate meals, a dramatic increase of nearly 20% from the previous year (Northwest School District Annual Report, 2016). In Eastside's district 30% are ELL students, 21% are on an Individualized Education Program (IEP), and 73% qualify for free or reduced meals (Report on Effectiveness of the Eastside School District, 2016). These statistics illustrate the critical need for access to free, high-quality summer programming as many families rely on the school system to help their children make continual progress throughout the calendar year. The NECC, in conjunction with the Northwest and Eastside

School Districts, continue to work together to provide free access to high quality experiences on a year-round basis.

Expanded Learning Summer Program Offerings

The stated goals of the summer program are to (a) help students to build relationships with one another, (b) support students who are most at risk of falling behind in school, and (c) take action toward better preparing students for bright and hopeful futures (ELSP program booklet, 2017). The ELSP provides youth with the opportunity to experience their community in new and meaningful ways by participating in activities and events that they might normally be unable to access due to financial or transportation barriers. The program offers five full weeks of free academic and enrichment classes to youth entering middle school (rising 6th, 7th, and 8th graders) and those getting ready to enter 9th grade. Transportation to and from the ELSP is provided, with a schedule of pick-up points and drop-off locations provided to families in advance of the first day. Students participate in week-long activities ranging from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) to art, crafts, cooking, sports, outdoor activities, and other offerings. Table 6 lists the activities for each week during the summer of 2017. Participants selected first, second, and third choices, and slots were assigned by the summer program administration on a first-come, first-served basis during the registration time period.

Three academic classes were offered each morning for the entirety of the program: a) Pre-Algebra, b) New Arrivals, and c) Math Ahead and Literacy. If a youth participant made the choice to attend a Math, Literacy, or New Arrivals class, they

committed to attending each morning for the full 5-weeks of the ELSP. However, they could then select any program to attend in the afternoon.

Table 6

ELSP Morning and Afternoon Activity Selections by Week

Morning	Afternoon
Week 1	
• Hiking (all day) • Ultimate Frisbee • Swim lessons • Watercolors and Collage • Cycling • Gardening and Cooking • All Art, All the Time	• Hidden City • Sailing • Art You Can Wear • Tinkering – Low Tech • Fit and Fun • Digital Storytelling • Graphic Novel • Cooking for the Community • Film Fest
Week 2	
• Swim lessons • Random Acts of Kindness • Mini-Golf • Drawing and Paper Arts • Flag Football • Gardening and Cooking • Babysitting Class	• Bike Week • Ultimate Frisbee • Nature Painting • Tinkering – Electricity • Volleyball • Skateboarding • Mindfulness Coloring • Stop Motion Animation • Boys and Girls Basketball • Bookmaking and Design
Week 3	
• Speaking Truth to Action (all day) • Sailing • Fly Fishing • Woodworking • Clay Art • Softball • Girls Fitness	• Explore VT Week • Large Scale Painting • Petra Cliffs Painting • Water Rockets • City Adventures • Soccer • Magic the Gathering • Hip Hop Dance • LEGO Robotics • Common Threads
Week 4	
• Sailing • Metal Working • Origami • Cartooning • Bait Fishing	• Hiking • Ninja Warrior • Anime and Manga • Making Salves and Oils • Floor Hockey

• Clay Art • Gardening and Cooking	• Cardboard Arcade • 251 Club • Repurposed Fashion • Jam Band • Very Merry Theater Acting
Week 5	
• Mapping the City (all day) • The Learning Kitchen with Gardening • Cycling • Junior Olympians • Metal Working • Make TV • Music Production	• Water Adventures • Sailing • Harry Potter • Make It, Wear It • Boys Soccer • Girls Soccer • Bike Mechanics • Shakespeare in the Park • Learn French through Cooking

Academic Classes

Three academic classes are offered every morning for the full five weeks. For 2017, all three classes were at capacity, and were each co-taught by two certified teachers from the Northwest High School[5].

New Arrivals. Participants study math, science, and English language skills. One week took place at a working farm and focused on hands-on learning in science. Youth with the greatest need to develop their English language skills receive highest priority for a spot in this program.

Pre-Algebra. Open to all rising eighth graders enrolled in Pre-Algebra for the coming year. Successful completion of this summer program allows participants to move

[5] Pseudonym applied to protect the identities of the participants.

directly into Algebra instead of Pre-Algebra. This program was jointly taught by teachers from the middle school and the high school**.**

Math Ahead and Literacy. This team-taught class focused on both math improvement and language arts improvement for anyone looking to move into a higher level academic class at their school the following September.

Each of these academic classes provided the participants with the content and support needed to move ahead the subsequent academic year at their school. While the program clearly required a level of commitment to the program from attendees, it was evident from attendance that a need and interest existed within the communities for opportunities such as these. After their morning academic classes, the youth were able to participate in a regular selection from the scheduled afternoon activities.

The week-long schedule structure encourages youth to try a variety of activities over the 5-week course of the program, exposing them to new areas of interest and activities. Most youth received at least one first or second choice, however due to limitations on the number of students an activity leader could safely handle, the most popular options (often those off-site) filled up very fast. It's important to note that youth with potential barriers to registration, such as limited English proficiency or those unable to get parent permissions in early, did not benefit from the system that allotted slots to those who got their completed and signed registrations in the earliest.

As the only one of its kind in the area, the ELSP is open to all Northwest and Eastside middle school children. In addition to the wide variety of activities, the summer program provided two healthy meals to every child each day, without an additional

charge. One in five children in the state live in households that experience food insecurity, with some students receiving their only healthy meals through school and extended learning opportunity programs (Hunger Statistics, 2016) such as the ELSP.

Enrollment

In 2017, the program served 231 youth from two local middle schools over the course of the five week program. The breakdown by grade is provided in Table 7.

Table 7

Enrollment by Grade[6]

Grade (rising)	Number of participants	Percentage of total participants
Sixth	47	20%
Seventh	81	35%
Eighth	69	30%
Ninth	34	15%
Total	**231**	**100%**

Diving deeper into the demographic data, Table 8 shows the number and percentage of participants by gender, limited English language proficiency (ELP), eligible for free and/or reduced lunch (FRL), and those with previously identified special needs. The participants during the summer of 2017 were nearly equal male and female. Forty percent of the participants were eligible for the federal free or reduced hot lunch program, above the state average of 38.8% (State Nutrition Data, 2016). One fifth of the participants were considered to have limited English language proficiency while one fifth

[6] Northwest School District summer program data, 2017

declared and were identified with a special need. It is important to note that families of participants self-reported this data to the ELSP and had the option to choose all of the categories that met the description of their child.

Table 8

Demographics of Participants[7]

Demographic	Number of participants	Percentage of total participants
Female	111	48%
Male	120	52%
Limited ELP	46	20%
Qualified for Free/Reduced	93	40%
Identified special needs	46	20%

A Day at the Expanded Learning Summer Program

To provide a deeper understanding of the daily occurrences at the ELSP, I describe a typical day at the program in this section. This description is a personal reflection from my experience over the five weeks, and does not describe any particular, identifiable day; rather it is a composite experience.

As the parking lot filled in front of North End Middle School, the activity and vibe reminded me of a typical day during the school year. However, the children running into the building from the busses and from the adjoining footpaths were doing so at the height of the summer, on a beautiful, crisp, clear day, and were doing so with gusto and enthusiasm. Entering the building into the open alcove revealed the same bustle and

[7] Northwest School District summer program data, 2017

activity, with young people of all shapes, colors, sizes, and all manner of dress briskly moving in singles and small groups toward the cafeteria on the right. An occasional adult passed by, often dressed in clothes of summer – shorts, summer dresses, t-shirts. Raucous noise emanated from the cafeteria, drawing all, especially anyone not sure of where to congregate.

The enormous cafeteria was inundated with young people milling between the lines for breakfast offerings and the plentiful round tables (each with eight permanently attached stools) set up in the space. Large, sunny windows that ran the length of the walls flushed the area with natural light. Youth and adults milled in conversation, laughter, greetings, and general welcoming activity.

As time drew closer to the start of scheduled activities, the Director and Assistant Director gained the attention of the entire group (not without some difficulty) for announcements. Some of the adult activity leaders were standing in front and given time to share whatever message they had planned. After these brief announcements everyone was released to head off to their activity for an on-time start. The youth moved out of the cafeteria toward the other side of the building where most of the classes and activities took place, or to an assigned meeting location already known to them. The whole process was organized chaos, successful in that within five minutes the cafeteria was cleared and silent, the halls were buzzing, and the rooms were filling with youth planning to engage in their selected weeklong activity.

At this time, the Director and Assistant Director would meet to split up the activities and begin the process of taking attendance. With such a large group, a high

priority was placed on activity attendance and took place twice a day, at the start of each activity. Over the next half hour each classroom or other space would be visited, with activity leaders off-site texting in their attendance rosters. Any youth not in attendance became the priority of the Director and Assistant Director over the next hour. This was considered highly important given the location of the school in a downtown area, and the expectation that each participant was present and engaged in a planned activity. Families were contacted, and if needed, other previously identified stakeholders were made aware of a child missing from the ELSP. To the credit of the administration and emphasis on this process no child was unaccounted for at any point during the summer program in 2017.

During the morning activity time block (generally 9:00 AM through noon) the hallways and cafeteria took on an eerie calm and quiet. Traffic within them consisted of youth moving from one location to the outside for an activity, a slight bustle of movement if a class was on a break, or an adult leader moving between classrooms and the supply closets. Those activities that focused on the outside, such as soccer or field hockey, took advantage of the ample fields and benches, and for much of the summer, the warm dry weather. Those activities held off-site moved to their respective locations by previously identified means and stayed there until the lunch break (or longer if off-site meals were arranged).

At lunchtime, the cafeteria chaos from the start of the day repeated itself as all the youth converged on the food lines as quickly as they could. To their credit, activity leaders tried to stagger when they released their participants, but chaos reigned all the

same. However, it was an energetic and upbeat chaotic energy as youth chatted with each other about their experiences during the morning session. The cafeteria tables filled quickly with hungry young people and their adult leaders. Then, as if by magic (more by design and practice), the cafeteria once again cleared, and the afternoon sessions began. Again, attendance was a top priority for ELSP administrators and activity leaders.

There was no end-of-the-day session where the group was convened before release. The busses arrived at 3:30 and left at 4:00, so all participants were released by then. Youth participating in offsite activities were returned to the school prior to the 4:00 bus departure. After the end of the day, the ELSP staff convened for a short meeting to discuss any notable happenings and to plan for the next day. Activity leaders made their plans and if any important information needed to be shared with the staff it was done so at the end of the day. The buildings were cleaned and prepared for the process to start over again the next morning. It was evident being onsite that the ELSP was poised to provide a useful and meaningful service to the communities it served.

Funding Sources

In addition to support from the federal 21CCLC grant, other funders supporting the ELSP during 2017 included the state's education department, Northwest and Eastside School Districts, and other local and state funders. The space was provided by the Northwest School District through the use of the North End Middle School building, grounds, and maintenance crew. Additional, adjoining space was provided by the North End Community Center. The budget for the program was in the range of $60,000 per year with additional funds utilized for transportation. All adult program leaders and teachers

were paid for their time. The Director and Assistant Director were paid yearly salaries from a combination of sources and had responsibilities during the school year in addition to the development and implementation of the ELSP. This program maintained a balanced budget for the 2017 year.

Participants of the 2016 Summer Program

The ELSP administration tracked students who participated in 2016 and followed their progress the next year. This information was reported to the state's education department as part of their 21CCLC grant progress report (2016). The details from that report are included below.

Academic offerings during the prior year, the summer of 2016, included a five-week pre-algebra course, a sixth-grade math review, and a literacy class, all taught by licensed teachers. Of the fourteen students who completed the pre-algebra class, 85% moved on to the next level math class (e.g., basic math to pre-algebra) the following academic year, with at least six students advancing to the appropriate on-grade-level math class (e.g., pre-algebra to algebra 1). *Math Ahead*, the sixth-grade math review, saw seventeen students complete the class and improve their test scores, with a class-wide 38% increase in test scores relating to the subjects of ratios and statistics. Twelve rising sixth- through eighth-grade students completed all five weeks of the literacy class, with an aggregated 30% improvement between pretests and posttests covering reading comprehension and vocabulary.

Summary

Staff members of three entities – the North End Community Center, the Northwest School District, and Eastside School District – have worked together to create and implement an enriching summer program that is free to all middle school students in the area. The ELSP is the region's only free program for the most at-risk and impoverished youth. Offering a rich array of choices, the ELSP administrative team strives to engage as many youths as possible during the summer. Choices range from skill development to academic improvement. The program operates from a strong financial position and enrollment has remained steady.

Chapter 5: Findings

In this chapter, I will present a summary of the findings for this case study. Utilizing extensive observation, interview, and program document data, I approached the analysis by first examining evidence that indicated the quality of general program administration. These broader foundational elements illuminate several themes of strength as well as areas for potential improvement. Second, I analyzed the data for themes that were evidence of the quality of youth activities offered during the summer of 2017. Doing so provided insight into the components of activities of the ELSP, while aligning the evidence to the sequential high quality youth program framework put forth by Durlak and Weissberg (2007; see Figure 1).

The conceptual framework for this study (Figure 2) outlines a process that engages the youth participant in a cycle of high quality offerings, curiosity, engagement, learning, and ultimately, repeats the process. By analyzing and presenting the data in two specific sections – the quality of the program administration and the quality of the activities – sub-themes were identified that when combined presented a holistic picture of the quality of the ELSP, providing evidence to answer the first research question.

Quality of Program Administration

Based on the various sources of data, I identified the following six sub-themes that had an impact on the ability of the administration to develop and implement a successful summer program. These sub-themes are foundational to providing an engaging experience for all youth participants. First, the physical location and space available to the summer program is a fundamental requirement, and the facilities available were an

excellent resource for the ELSP administrators. Second, as the quality of the program overall is tightly correlated with the quality of the staff, finding adult activity leaders, preparing them for the summer program, and supporting their work was a high priority for the program director. Third, for the first time in the summer of 2017, youth with disabilities were offered full access to the program. This required the program director and assistant director to develop an understanding of the impact of this new reality on the ELSP and having appropriate, specialized personnel on board. Fourth, seeking and securing the necessary funding to support the offerings of the ELSP was high on the list of priorities for the program director and the assistant director. Fifth, communicating the story of what happened during the summer to all stakeholders was seen as critical to assuring continued financial support. The impact of inclusion of an academic class component within the summer program was the final subtheme.

Adequate Facilities and Activity Space

A major strength of the ELSP is the fact that it is housed in facilities that provide a safe and healthy environment for all the programs offered to the youth participants. This was evident across the ten formal observations, in interviews and conversations, and during informal time spent on site. The scores for each YPQA scale were then averaged across the observations to identify patterns. Where appropriate, direct observation and actual quotations from interviews and informal conversations documented during the activity are noted. Looking specifically at observation data (Table 9) provides a picture of the strength of the facilities and space available to the ELSP. Of all the scales assessed

using the YPQA, a number of scales rated the highest across the observations were in the Safe Environment domain.

Table 9

YPQA Scales Receiving the Highest Scores

YPQA Scale and corresponding Item	Average ELSP score	Item Description
Healthy Environment (Items 1, 2, and 4)	4.80	The physical environment is safe and free of health hazards. There are no sanitary concerns, and the temperature is comfortable for the activity.
Emergency Preparedness 4 – Appropriate emergency procedures and supplies are present.	5.00	All entrances to all activities are supervised for security during program hours.
Accommodating Environment 2 – Program space accommodates the activities	4.80	The program space is suitable for all activities offered.
Accommodating Environment 3 – Program furniture accommodates the activities	5.00	The furniture in each room is of sufficient quantity for all youth participating in each activity.
Accommodating Environment 4 – Program space and furniture accommodate the activities	4.78	The physical environment can be modified to meet the needs of the program being offered.

The scales at the top of the ratings for the ELSP mirrored national validation data (Smith & Hohman, 2005). The scales in the Safe Environment domain generally rate higher across all observations because they are aspects of youth programs that are considered necessary for the safe implementation of an activity (Smith et al., 2012). This domain includes items such as an appropriate physical space, access to water, food, and materials, the safety of the setting, and efforts by the program administration to prepare for emergencies.

The consistency of ratings across the full range of data attest to the excellent facilities available to host the ELSP. The ELSP director and assistant director had the advantage of being able to fully access well-situated, safe, and clean facilities at North

End Middle School and the adjacent North End Community Center, so it is understandable that this domain scored at the top of the scale range. High scores in the scale of Healthy Environment validate the choice of the location of the summer program. The ELSP utilized the middle school building, which had secure, modern, environmentally appropriate facilities for every activity offered to the participants. The woodworking class, for example, was held in a fully equipped workshop that had enough equipment and seating, and was well lit and ventilated (observation 7, July 2017). Examples of other elements addressed in this domain are access to safe and healthy water; clean, separate bathrooms for boys and girls; adequate heating, cooling; and adequate security. Healthy Environment item 3, which assessed ventilation and lighting, did not receive a high enough score to qualify for inclusion in the top rank. It was close with a mean score of 4.4 out of 5, but there were several instances of insufficient lighting and stuffy rooms during the observations.

The use of the middle school building provided additional benefits for the morning academic classes. Each was housed in a wing where classrooms had access to the outside via a secured entry door. This allowed the adult co-leaders to build in breaks for fresh air and exercise throughout the morning. Doing so provided the high quality "brain breaks" the participants needed to remain attentive and focused during the in-class sessions. "[That] half hour running around outside is a brain break - it's critical for them" (teacher during observation 2, July 2017). Most, but not all, observed activities took advantage of the easy access to the outdoors.

Having up-to-date and appropriate emergency supplies that are clearly visible and available to staff is an important practice and commonplace in a school building. The ELSP facilities were no exception. Emergency procedures were discussed during staff training (ELSP program booklet, 2017), and supplies were checked (and if necessary updated or restocked) by the program director or assistant director on a regular basis. Attention to the physical environment and to preparing for emergencies provided a foundation of safety and comfort for everyone engaged in the ELSP and aligned with ratings for high quality youth programs as measured by the YPQA.

Similar in importance to Healthy Environment, the Accommodating Environment scale measures whether or not the space itself was appropriate for what was needed to run a particular activity. For instance, the cooking classes were held in a fully outfitted and modern kitchen, with five stations allowing groups of four to five youth to participate in cooking and was located within the North End Middle School building itself. Similarly, boys' and girls' basketball were held in a full-size basketball court in the adjacent North End Community Center. The ELSP adult activity leaders had access to a wide variety of appropriate space for the activities they were responsible for.

Similarly, if furniture was needed it was available and adequate for the needs of the activity being offered. There were enough items to accommodate the participants in each of the observed activities. Furniture ranged from chairs, tables, desks, and stools in classrooms and workshops, to benches and bleachers for activities held on the outdoor soccer fields.

Beyond access, the appropriateness of the furniture was assessed. Attention was paid to how the space could be adjusted to meet the needs of the youth during the activity. Can tables be moved if needed? Can chairs be circled if an activity requires it? This assessment was different for each activity. For instance, in a woodworking class it is not appropriate to have movable tables as access to electricity, water, and safety gear requires permanent cabinets and workstations (observation 5, July 2017). However, the classroom where cartooning took place required chairs to be grouped around tables or moved around the blackboard during demonstrations. That room had movable tables set up in a horseshoe, which allowed students and staff to roam around freely and see each other's work in progress (observation 6, July 2017).

Concurrently, activities that focused on integrating with the local area took advantage of numerous opportunities within a ten mile radius. The urban nature of this corner of the state draws artists and businesses of all types, and is a haven for outdoor activities, all within a van ride of the Northwest Middle School facility. Having access to facilities, equipment, and local opportunities provided ELSP administrators with a great deal of flexibility and opportunity when setting the schedule for the summer.

When activities happen in a physical space that easily accommodates the number of participants, is bright, well-ventilated, and contains the essential supplies and materials necessary for the needs of the activity, then it is more likely that the summer program goals will be met. Consequently, youth participants are more likely to engage with the activity because their own internal expectations of the activity are met. In every formally observed activity, the physical space met the needs of the activity. The Northend Middle

School and the adjoining NECC provided appropriate facilities for each of the scheduled activities. One positive structural element consistent throughout the building was the presence of doors to the outside in each classroom, allowing youth access to the outside for physical breaks during their activities, a key element for increasing the brain's ability to learn (Hinton, et al., 2012).

Finding Adult Activity Leaders

The quality of the activities offered to youth was directly related to hiring and retaining adult leaders who had expertise in each activity area. In addition, an adult leader needed experience teaching or facilitating learning specifically with middle school-aged youth, or at least a willingness to work closely with a more experienced leader. In the case of the academic classes, finding a certified teacher was paramount if the participants were expecting their work over the summer to carry over to the next academic year.

The director and assistant director both expressed their belief that the ELSP budget did not allow them to pay certified teachers and other adult activity leaders at a rate that was comparable to what would be expected during the school year. They believed that this pay gap was detrimental to their ability to attract and retain the certified teachers they needed to run the planned academic classes, and the content experts needed for other planned activities. As a result, they both believed that teachers often signed on to the ELSP not merely for the financial reward; there were other, more personal reasons teachers and activity leaders had for committing their summer to the program. The ELSP director explained her focus on supporting her staff and teachers:

> I think we offered them enough support that they felt like they could do what they needed to do to make it all work. And I hope that this is happening again [this year] - you know it seems like they're doing great. The people that work here are wonderful (interview, July 12, 2017).

Once hired, providing support to the adult activity leaders is a key responsibility of the program director and the assistant director. There was evidence that financial benefit was not the full reason adult activity leaders ultimately signed on. As one remarked:

> I really enjoy working with the students. It is awesome to watch their enthusiasm as they experience new adventures and discover new things. Without the summer program the students would not be able to experience so many things due to the fact of their home situations (interview, July 2017).

Based on the views of this adult activity leader, it is evident that the program director and assistant director have been successful recruiting adults who understand the purpose and power of the summer program, especially for youth who have limited opportunities to experience new and exciting activities out-of-school. Engaging adult leaders such as this one may provide insight into how best to seek and sign on other potential summer program staff members who feel similarly. Active, engaged, and experienced adult activity leaders may be the most effective recruiters for new summer program staff during the academic year.

Enthusiasm for working with youth in a different way than normal fueled one adult activity leader when he remarked “working with kids is really rewarding and a great

complement to my normal desk job. The structure of camp made it really easy to fit the half-days in around my job" (interview, July 2017). Intrinsic motivation was evident in conversations with several adult leaders, as stated by one academic class teacher; "I really enjoy working with students and know there is a gap in their learning. I love helping kids get better at math" (interview, July 2017). A teacher in the New Arrivals program remarked "it's hard to not respect these kids. They've had more [difficult] experiences than I have ever had" (interview, July 2017). It is evident that the ELSP administration had found individuals who were genuinely interested in working with the youth and providing them the opportunity to have an engaging and stimulating summer program experience.

A primary concern expressed by the ELSP administration was the need to provide the teachers and activity staff (leaders, co-leaders, paraprofessionals, and support staff) with the structure, information, and support necessary to safely run their respective activities. The ELSP training booklet (2017) was provided to all adults at a required meeting held prior to the start of the 2017 session. This was a first-time occurrence in 2017; in prior years there was limited group training time scheduled. As the program director mentioned, she had more than one goal for the group training time together:

> The other different thing that I did this year was that we offered a couple training days. Offering those two days - one was just like a check-in to meet everybody else. I say they were training days, but really it also gave them paid time to plan. Paid time to think about what they're doing. Yeah that's just a couple days. I think

we offered them enough support that they felt like they could do what they needed to do to make it all work" (interview, July 2017).

The focus by the ELSP director and assistant director on finding and retaining highly qualified staff is critical to the success of the program. The evidence suggests that they were successful during the summer of 2017. However, there is room for improvement as noted by one adult activity leader when asked in informal conversation what was needed to strengthen the program going forward, "maybe more specialized staff members? Most of the teachers are awesome, but there are a few classes that could use real professionals" (interview, July 2017). Overall, during the course of the five-week ELSP, it was apparent that the adult activity leaders felt that most programs were adequately staffed. Most activities were led by one leader who possessed expertise in the activity area, and had the background needed to engage middle level learners in a hands-on and sequenced curriculum that focused on the progressive development of skill or knowledge.

One adult activity leader summed up her overall experience by stating "I think it's a really great program for the students and for the teachers, and the directors go above and beyond to facilitate activities for the students" (interview, July 2017). It was evident that the staff appreciated the efforts of the ELSP program director and assistant director, especially when it came to providing support to the youth participants and their adult activity leaders.

Engaging Youth with Disabilities

Prior to the summer of 2017, the school districts involved in the ELSP did not offer summer programming that met the needs of youth with disabilities. Youth requiring a one-on-one paraprofessional did not have access to any public summer program. Since many families were unable to cover the cost of the paraprofessional's time, children with significant developmental, physical, or psychological challenges were unable to participate in school-sponsored programs outside of the home during the summer.

In preparation for the 2017 ELSP, the sending school districts worked with the ELSP administration and several funders to change that reality. A decision was made to reach out to all youth, including those who needed one-on-one support, and make sure they could participate in the full five-week program. All transportation costs were included in the 2017 summer program budget, as were funds to provide one-on-one paraprofessional support. This was a source of great pride for the ELSP director and assistant director, while also creating a certain amount of concern and anxiety about putting this new aspect of the ELSP into place. "I think we're learning lessons of how to do that in a way that best serves those students. And I think we're all [thinking about] pieces that we can set up with more structure and with more productive communication" (program director interview, July 2017). The program director struggled with how to meet the needs of youth with very specific challenges, and all the while helping the adult activity leaders provide the youth with an experience that any other participant could expect:

> We are figuring out what they can work on in and [out of] the classroom. They can be outside the classroom with a paraeducator working on what they need to, and they can then come back and join a group, [while] waiting for recess for help with social skills. If there's a disruption in the classroom, we can help (program director interview, July 2017).

While at the ELSP I did not observe disruptions caused by any of the participants, with or without a disability. To the contrary, throughout the summer program observation days I frequently came into contact with youth with disabilities deeply engaged in activities. I was often struck by how engaged the other youth participants were with those with disabilities, helping them to play on a team in basketball (observation 3, July 2017) or lead a theater practice (observation 8, July 2017).

Adequate Revenue

A frequently mentioned concern by the ELSP program director and assistant director was the need to assure that expenses were kept in line with the budget. While the program was not expected to generate a profit, deficit spending was deeply frowned upon by business personnel in both school districts. As the ELSP director pointed out, her professional background helped with this aspect of her responsibilities:

> So that was really [key] - understanding the different revenue funds. I know how different funds work and where they come from and what they should be used for. I mean I even remember in my interview being really excited about being clear that I understood that, because it is kind of a separate skill set. It's important in my role (program director interview, July 2017).

The summer of 2017 was a challenging time for programs (such as the ELSP) that fell under the 21st Century Community Learning federal grant initiative. Through the federal budget process, the President of the United States had threatened to eliminate this popular state block grant program. This was a source of anxiety for the assistant program director, “unfortunately for us too the summer is the time [we need the funds]. If we had to make cuts, we would be the most impacted program out of all 21CCLC sites” (assistant director interview, July 2017).

At the same time, the effort to increase the academic component of the ELSP was ongoing:

> You know there's no other summer program for these students, and our students are falling behind. Right. So, I think there's a way we can have more of the academic pieces come in which is seen as a need by the school district and the students, while also keeping it fun. And I think we have even more [need] – the ones that get put on the waitlist; you know, we've tried and we'll do as much as we can but we're still tied to our budget and it's hard for me [to add the staff needed]. I can advocate and I think people are understanding more and more how important and critical summer and summer learning loss are. I think the district realizes it, but it's been a tough sell to get the funds we need (program director interview, July 2017).

The program director clearly felt a need to balance the demands of the school district to remain well within the budget allotted for the ELSP, while believing that more needed to be done to support learners in the community during the summer. While waitlists in key

academic classes indicated that she and her colleagues had marketed the opportunities to the community effectively, her inability to offer enough seats to all youth who wanted to attend weighed on her. This in turn fueled her interest in seeking additional funding.

Seeking and Retaining the Support of Stakeholders

Identifying potential donors and making the case to the school districts was always on the minds of the ELSP director and assistant director. Each possessed a strong sense of the importance of the ELSP to all stakeholders – youth, families, the school community, and funders. They each focused part of their work week communicating the highlights of what was going on in various activities, utilizing social media, sending notes home, and scheduling one-on-one interactions with school district personnel and funders. The assistant director noted:

> I get to work with people who believe in my work. You believe that it's important but also more than anything we see later from the students that they really shine. It's all student driven, and they work really really hard every day. I want to share that (assistant director interview, July 2017).

The ELSP administration made a great effort to share what the students were accomplishing as often as possible. Funders and key community stakeholders were provided frequent updates and invitations to visit in person. As the ELSP director (personal communication, July 2017) attests:

> I'm really grateful that I have the school district that I have and have those people behind me. It’s not always perfect but if you have somebody that is your go-to person and they [understand] you - yeah. Absolutely. I'm very grateful for that. I

> recognize how important [that is] and how lucky I am to have that now (program director interview, July 2017).

Having a colleague in a position of authority served the program director well. There was a nurturing, collegial relationship between her and the person who oversaw the summer and afterschool programs, and who controlled the budget and funding for the 21CCLC. This relationship provided the program director with a strong collaborator with whom she could share ideas and concerns, ask for advice, and plan for the improvement of the ELSP.

Inclusion of Academic Programs

The offerings at the ELSP fell into two general categories - short-term, enrichment-focused youth activities and those that were best described as academic classes. The math class (observation 3, July 2017) was instructed by Mr. T, a certified high school math teacher. The goal of the program was very clear – every youth who successfully participated in and completed the morning program for the full five weeks would automatically progress one math level the following academic year. For instance, if a youth was already signed up for pre-algebra the next year, and completed this class successfully, they would be able to start the academic year in Algebra 1 instead.

This math class filled a need in the community (it had a waitlist) and engaging a certified high school teacher for a middle school summer program created a unique opportunity for these students. When I asked Mr. T about this, he stated that while he teaches the class for the money, he felt strongly that it was important to bridge the gap between middle school and high school. He believed the curriculum was focused on

understanding, and as an experienced teacher he was able to gauge this using open-ended questions while reinforcing prior knowledge throughout the morning (personal communication, July 2017).

The three academic classes offered in the mornings were at full capacity, with two of the three having waitlists. Youth who participated did so by their own choice, creating a learning environment of purpose and eager engagement. All three classes were taught by certified teachers. It was evident that this aspect of the ELSP was considered important by the community, and the emphasis the program director put on securing appropriate staff was warranted. There is an opportunity in the future to determine the needs of the community and perhaps add other academic classes.

Summary: Quality of Program Administration

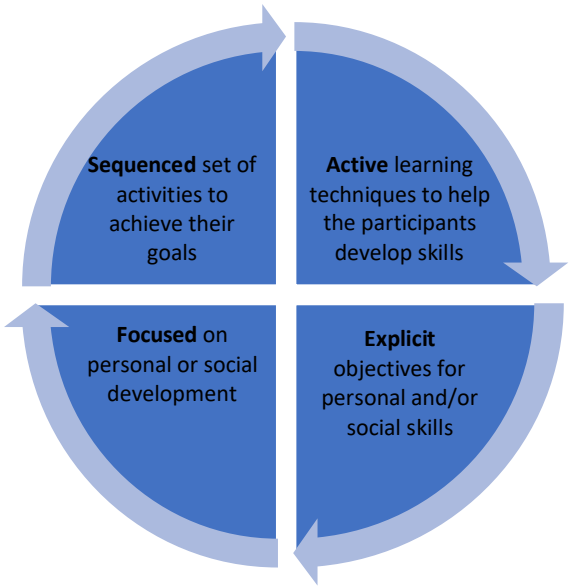
The six sub-themes that emerge from the data illuminate areas of program administration that affect the success of the entire program. Four of the sub-themes – having appropriate facilities, finding and maintaining quality staff, securing adequate revenue, and engaging the support of key stakeholders – address major components of managing a successful multi-year program. It is clear that the physical facilities used by the ELSP are exceptional, and that families can be confident that their child's comfort, safety, and access to appropriate space has been taken into account during the planning of activities. The inclusion of youth with disabilities in all programs and the hiring of certified teachers for academic classes are two themes that signify a new direction and focus undertaken by the program director during the summer of 2017.

Quality of Program Activities

In order to provide a framework for assessing the quality of program activities for this case study, I chose a model that was developed specifically for short-term youth programs and is used as a model by summer programs nationwide. Durlak and Weissberg's (2007) meta-analysis of sixty-five youth programs identified four specific characteristics inherent in activities that presented evidence of positive effects on student outcomes. They were (a) activities must be sequenced with a specific goal in mind, (b) activities must include active learning techniques, (c) activities must meet explicit objectives for personal and social skills, and (d) activities must be focused on personal or social development. The Durlak and Weissberg (2007) model (Figure 1) is widely shared as a "best practice" in the out-of-school and youth program literature.

Figure 1

Characteristics of High Quality Youth Programs



According to the Durlak and Weissberg model (2007), the most effective skill building activities are intentionally developed with a meaningful sequence in mind. In the ELSP where the summer program activity generally lasts for five days, this would suggest that an activity on day one would lead to the achievement of a skill at a basic level, followed the next day by achieving a slightly more challenging skill level, and so on with each day providing a new, sequenced, developmentally-appropriate challenge. Activities must employ active learning techniques, focused on exploring, involving, and experimenting (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Such engagement in learning helps to develop the competencies needed for academic learning, including concentration and motivation (Shernoff & Vandell, 2008). Programs that intentionally incorporate objectives for personal and social skills provide the opportunity for youth to develop stronger peer relationships (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Vandell, 2013), reduce incidences of misconduct in school, and decrease potential for use of illegal substances (Vandell et al., 2007). Youth programs that use a comprehensive framework such as this have a higher potential to create positive outcomes for the children they serve (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007).

Program Activity Components Indicating Strength

Ten formal observations using the YPQA were performed over the course of the five-week ELSP. The scores for each YPQA scale were then averaged across the observations to identify patterns. Where appropriate, direct observation and actual quotations from interviews and informal conversations documented during the activity

are noted. The scales presented in Table 10 rated an average score of 4.78 – 4.80 across the ten formal observations.

Adult Activity Leaders Created a Welcoming Atmosphere. The welcoming scale is designed to assess the tone the adult activity leader establishes during the first few minutes of the session. A warm welcome, where the leader makes a concerted effort to greet incoming youth by name or recognition, is an indication of their eagerness to engage with that youth during the activity. A warm welcome signals comfort, belongingness, alertness, and eagerness for what is to come, and is transmitted to the youth participants as they enter the door.

Table 10

YPQA Scales Identifying Program Activity Strength

YPQA Scale	Average ELSP score	Scale Description
Warm Welcome 2 – Staff provides a welcoming atmosphere	4.80	Staff members mainly use a warm tone of voice and respectful language.
Session Flow 1 – Session flow is planned, presented, and paced for youth	4.78	Staff members start and end session within 10 minutes of scheduled time
Session Flow 3 – Session flow is planned, presented, and paced for youth.	4.78	There are enough materials and supplies prepared for all youth to begin activities
Session Flow 5 – Session flow is planned, presented, and paced for youth	4.80	There is an appropriate amount of time for all of the activities scheduled (i.e. youth do not appear rushed; youth do not finish early with nothing planned to do)

Most of the activity leaders engaged their participants early on and continued to interact warmly and respectfully throughout the session. This included general greetings such as “hello” while looking the youth in the eye, helping to orient the participants to the room, and sharing what would be happening during that session. Having more than one adult leader in the room during the first few minutes helped to establish a positive

environment for all students. Only during one observation did I experience an adult leader express any irritation or raised voice at the beginning of the session (observation 1, June 2017). In that case, the leader had a relatively large group (29 youth) and was by herself. When I asked her about it after the activity finished, she shared that her co-leader had called in sick and there was no one else who could support her that day. The frustration she felt was evident and had a negative impact on her attitude and ability to engage with youth positively. This was a rare situation where I observed an adult activity leader who did not reach out and seek the support of the ELSP director or assistant director when doing so may have mitigated the issue. Despite this situation, there was ample evidence that adult activity leaders felt that it was important to welcome the youth at the beginning of each activity session.

Activities were Planned, Presented, and Paced for Youth. The scales identified in this section scored the very highest based on formal observations. When each day's activity started, leaders made the youth participants feel welcome, and proceeded to lead the session in a manner that was appropriate for the age and development of the middle level participants.

Any program designed for youth must be developed and implemented in a way that is developmentally and cognitively appropriate for the age group (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). For the ELSP, each activity needed to flow smoothly from day one to day five, with each session building upon or integrating with the previous meeting. The ability to design activity sessions that were engaging and appropriate for middle school-aged youth was key to keeping the participants attending throughout the whole week. As

observed in several activities that were focused on skill development, their project-focused nature allowed youth to make and celebrate progress at their own pace. In these activities' participants started by making simple objects in clay or wood, mastering basic skills along the way. This led to taking on more complicated projects later in the week, putting their newly acquired skills to use in the process (observation 5, 6, July 2017).

Another factor that assured the success of youth was having an adult activity leader, in this case a teacher, who was certified in the subject being taught. This was particularly important for the academic classes, which offered an incentive for each participant who successfully completed the full five week course – moving forward to the next sequenced level in math the following school year. The Math Ahead teacher was experienced in providing differentiated math activities for each student. He also provided numerous additional activities for the youth to engage in if they were done early with whatever the class was working on at the time. He remarked "I really enjoy working with the students and [I] know there is a gap in their learning. I love helping kids get better at math" (interview, teacher, observation 2, July 2017). His expertise combined with sincere regard for his students' progress was evident in his interactions with the youth, and in their obvious comfort asking questions and sharing their understanding of the math concepts they were working on (observation 2, July 2017).

Additional factors that assured the success of the youth participants engaged in activities were having enough supplies for each on hand and ready to go at the start, and using the full time allotted each day. The staff and teachers of the ELSP had a solid grasp of these factors across the program. The ELSP is well-aligned to the national validation

data for these scales (Smith & Hohmann, 2005). The components of quality youth programs that are measured by the YPQA scales outlined in this section are foundational; they are important because they are creatively designed based on the needs of the learner, align with what is considered to be best practice, and are developmentally appropriate for the participant. As such they allow a child to engage in an activity while remaining physically and emotionally safe (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

Program Activity Components Rating Average

There are a number of areas that rated close to or slightly above average (2.8 - 3.4) across the ten formal observations that indicate compatibility with the national YPQA validation data, meaning that the ELSP scores in these areas are congruent to what is seen in similar programs nationwide. The three scales are important for youth because they indicate that the program administration and adult activity leaders created an encouraging environment and built a sense of belonging among those engaged in the activity. The scales and item descriptions are identified in Table 11.

Table 11

Description of YPQA Domains that Scored Average

YPQA Scales	Average ELSP Score	Description of Items
Skill Building	3.60	Specific learning goal or skill building goal is shared
	4.40	Youth have opportunities to practice skill
	3.20	Staff members model skills for youth
	3.80	Difficult tasks are broken into smaller components or steps
	4.20	When youth struggle, staff work with them to problem-solve
Encouragement	3.80	Staff members make clear references to accomplishments or contributions
	3.20	Frequent open-ended questions are poised during the activity, and youth have time to respond
	4.60	Staff members are actively involved with youth during activity
Belonging	3.00	Opportunities are provided for helping youth to introduce themselves to each other
	4.00	Staff and youth include everyone in activities; exclusion is successfully overcome

Traditionally, summer programs have served three purposes: (a) provide remedial opportunities for those youth who fell behind during the school year or did not pass their intended grade, (b) provide safe childcare for working families when school was not in session, and (c) offer new and exciting skill building activities to youth who may not have the opportunity to experience them during other times of the year (McLaughlin & Pitkcock, 2009). For those families engaged with the ELSP, while the first purpose is

covered by a separate program within the school district, the other two areas are being met through a safe and engaging traditional summer program.

Several components of skill building are assessed through the YPQA. On each, a cumulative score was recorded between 3.0 and 3.4. In the rating definition used by the YPQA, this means that evidence existed for this item, although the item was not available to every student in every situation. As an observer, I did find evidence that learning and skill building goals were shared, but not in every situation where learning or skills needed to be explained. For example, participants had the opportunity to practice their new skills in most situations. Said one participant, "I really like creating my own jacket from repurposed fashion. It was really fun to mix fabrics and make something fun!" (personal conversation, July 2017). Youth who were able to practice were often deeply interested and engaged in the task at hand. Occasionally I observed adult activity leaders modeling a difficult task, as when a group was working on their in-class performance of a section of a Shakespeare play. The adult leader provided an example of how the character Puck might sound during his monologue in the woods, and then provided pointers for the youth actor (observation 9, July 2017).

Sometimes, when youth were having difficulties, adult activity leaders were able to help break new tasks down into smaller elements and support struggling participants, such as during cartooning. The adult leader provided help numerous times around the room, often suggesting how a frame (a scene from a cartoon) could be built or drawn in a different way, giving the youth a different perspective that seemed to help move them toward their ultimate goal (observation 6, July 2017). On the whole, I observed that youth

participants had opportunities to develop new skills during the ELSP. However, that was not a uniform observation across the board. There were times when the opportunity to share goals, model new skills, or support struggling students was missed. When these opportunities are missed, youth are less likely to successfully focus on developing skills (Smith & Hohmann, 2005).

On the other hand, I did not find evidence that learning and skill building goals were shared in every situation where there was a need for explanation. One informally observed activity illustrated the importance of engaged, welcoming adult activity leaders who were committed to modeling and providing careful scaffolding to youth. The library was the scene of tinkering - often a deeply interesting and creative activity where groups of youth figured out how to make gadgets capable of performing a task using simple, everyday items as components. The group was large (over 25) and was supervised by two adults. However, neither adult seemed interested in being engaged with the participants, perhaps believing that the groups would naturally and automatically begin to work together to build an item (the goal on this day was to build a car). The group of youth next to the table I was at had no intention of doing so. We were in the back of the library, far away from the front table where both adults were rooted. Communication from the adult was limited to quick pass-byes, with spoken commands (e.g., “put away the phone”). One member of the youth group remarked to another, “Instead of sitting there try to do something for yourself.” The conversation at the table continued to deteriorate, and while the conversation was heard around the room, the adults made no effort to intervene and move the group in a different direction (informal observation, July 2017).

As was described earlier, it is difficult to ensure that every activity has the necessary amount of encouragement from staff, or elements of belonging that will lead to the optimal environment for skill building. On the whole, the activities of the ELSP provided that environment. The program director and assistant director should determine a way to monitor activities in a manner that is respectful to both youth and adults, in order to ensure all reach and maintain an optimal learning environment on a daily basis.

Program Activity Components Needing Improvement

Out-of-school time programs can positively influence developmental and learning outcomes in children (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). However, those outcomes are dependent upon program access, quality, and participation (Bennett, 2015; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010). The YPQA is designed as a low stakes' youth program quality assessment tool, providing stakeholders with the opportunity to engage in targeted, fruitful discussions of strengths and where improvement can be made in that program (Smith & Hohmann, 2005). In this light, it is important to recognize that any of the assessment scales that did not rate an average of 5 across all ELSP observations could be considered opportunities for improvement. However, in order to identify those scales with the largest gap in quality on this assessment, and to identify key areas the ELSP can improve that have the potential to strengthen the activities and program overall, scales with an average rating of under 2.8 are noted in Table 12.

Table 12

YPQA Scales Indicating a Need for Improvement

YPQA Scale Identified as Needing Improvement	Average ELSP Score	Scale Description
Active Engagement 2 – Activities support active engagement	2.6	During activities, staff provides all youth with structured opportunities to talk about what they are doing and thinking with others.
Active Engagement 4 – activities support active engagement	2.4	The program activities lead (or will lead) to tangible products or performances that reflect ideas or designs of youth.
Collaboration 2 – Youth have opportunities to collaborate and work cooperatively with others	2.2	Staff provides all youth with opportunities to participate in activities with interdependent roles (e.g., note-taker, spokesperson).
Leadership 1 – Youth have opportunities to act as group facilitators and mentors.	2.0	Staff provides all youth with multiple or extended opportunities to practice group-processing skills (e.g., contribute ideas or actions to the group, do a task with others).
Leadership 2 – Youth have opportunities to act as group facilitators	2.2	Staff provides opportunities for all youth to mentor an individual (e.g., youth teach or coach each other)
Leadership 3 – Youth have opportunities to act as mentors	1.4	Staff provides all youth one or more opportunities to lead a group (e.g., lead a discussion or other activity).
Adult Partners 1 – Youth have opportunities to partner with adults	2.0	Staff shares control of most activities with youth, providing guidance and facilitation while retaining overall responsibility.
Planning 2 – Youth have opportunities to make plans	1.8	In the course of planning the projects or activities, 2 or more planning strategies are used (e.g., brainstorming, backwards planning).
Choice 2 – Youth have opportunities to make choices based on their interests	2.2	Staff provides opportunities for all youth to make at least one open-ended process choice (e.g., decide roles, how to present results)
Reflection 3 – Youth have opportunities to reflect	1.89	Staff initiates structured opportunities for youth to give feedback on the activities.

Each of the scales in Table 12 is an opportunity for program improvement for the ESLP. While individual improvements in a scale may strengthen the program marginally, collectively they reach across aspects of engagement, leadership, planning, and reflection and have the potential to greatly enhance every aspect of the ELSP. In the next section, I

grouped related scales into five distinct areas and discuss evidence for each through the lens of program quality and increased youth engagement and learning.

Active Engagement: Sharing, Tangible Results, and Collaboration. For youth, the level of engagement in the summer program is directly related to what they gain (Hinton, Fischer, & Glennon, 2012). That engagement is what happens when students are motivated to actively learn (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Providing youth with opportunities to share what they are doing and what they are thinking is one key component of engaged learning (Strafford-Brizard, 2016). For an activity to rate highly on the YPQA, opportunities to share must be intentionally structured by staff, with all youth having equal access to engage in discussions. If either one or the other of these requirements was not observed, then a rating of 3 was given. If intentional discussions did not happen, the activity would have rated a 1 on this scale.

Most observed activities did not provide structured opportunities for sharing their work and their thinking with their peers, or with the group as a whole. Activities were often wrapped up at the end of a session with the focus on cleaning the counters and putting supplies away (observations 1,5,7, July 2017) – all important, however the opportunity to bring participants together, share their progress (e.g., through a peer-to-peer update), and talk about what they wanted to do the following session was missed. Only one, the theater group, scheduled dedicated time for a peer-to-peer share after each activity, with one or two youth asked to share with the entire group (observation 8, July 2017).

Providing opportunities for a young person to share what they are doing and thinking fosters social and cognitive competence, self-determination, and self-efficacy (Catalano, et al., 2004). When taking part in structured sharing, the learning experience becomes more relevant to the youth, increasing the likelihood that he or she will develop new interests and the curiosity needed to seek new learning opportunities (Hinton, Fischer, & Glennon, 2012; Mitra, 2009; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Seeking out new learning is a concept that completes a cycle of the summer learning experience as identified in the conceptual framework for this study.

Only a couple of the observed activities were intentionally planned to lead to a tangible product or performance, and those were specifically skill-building (e.g., woodworking). Other activities, such as basketball (observation 3, July 2017), while focused on skill development, did not have a tangible product for the group to work toward together during the week. The adult activities leaders might have considered including a creative culminating event, such as putting together a tournament with another group in the community or hosting a camp where ELSP participants could teach skills to elementary school-aged youth.

Tangible products (or performances) to work toward provide a clear common goal among the group members, encouraging the development of a sense of purpose, camaraderie, connection, and achievement (Catalano et al., 2004). Even a short-term activity – whether it happens at the end of a morning session, the end of a full week program, or one that takes place at the end of the summer session – can successfully incorporate a common goal for group members to work toward (Dohn, 2013). The

process of achieving that goal together forms the foundation of collaboration and cooperation (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Utilizing interdependent roles, where the group outcome is dependent upon the actions of others engaged in the same activity, is an intentional and useful strategy that fosters the development of collaboration and cooperation (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010). An example of this concept was the strategy-focused *Magic: The Gathering* card game (observation 4, July 2017). Each group of five or six players had an interdependent role assigned to them, possessing powers and resources that could be used (or not, depending on the strategy) to gain a particular outcome. No one player could accomplish an advantageous outcome on their own – they relied on collaboration and cooperation to attain the desired end result. In a different observed activity, participants were assigned roles such as director, timekeeper, writer, and actor to script and perform timebound, short plays with a common improvisational theme. Here each person was given the chance to experience each role in their small group, building on each experience in a creative and collaborative manner (observation 8, July 2017). These were the only two observed activities that incorporated interdependent roles.

Only a few of the activities were developed with components of active engagement in mind. This provides the administrators of the ELSP with one area that has the opportunity to strengthen the activities for their participants. If the adult activity leaders purposefully build in time for youth to discuss their progress, share their thinking, practice the skills needed to collaborate and cooperate with each other through the use of interdependent roles, and incorporate tangible results into planning, they will provide a

more engaging and stimulating learning experience for the participants (Smith & Hohmann, 2005).

Youth Leadership. Having an opportunity to develop group processing skills is a major component of learning about leadership, as those skills are based in collaboration, cooperation, negotiation, and working toward a common goal (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010). On the YPQA, the development of youth leadership skills parallels and links many of the aspects of youth engagement, such as sharing, working toward tangible results and outcomes, and collaboration. Leadership goes a little further though, acknowledging the role of group process and planning how to accomplish those outcomes. This set of scales required the YPQA observer to separate "multiple or extended opportunities" for such opportunities from other observational scales, often in a setting with multiple conversations being undertaken simultaneously. As an observer, I looked for opportunities that existed for a young person to contribute ideas, to work as part of a group, or to do tasks together. If I observed a substantial amount of an activity and did not witness intentionally planned group process time, the activity rated a 3 (if inconsistent or not available to all youth) or a 1 (if non-existent) on leadership scales.

When activities are planned with an emphasis on the development of youth leadership, it requires the inclusion of deliberate strategies that support this work. Providing the opportunity for a young person to lead the group is one such strategy. Making that opportunity available to all youth in the group is a more difficult planning task, so rarely do observed activities reach a top rating in the leadership scale. However, once the adult activity leaders become more comfortable with youth taking on active

leadership roles in planning and implementing activities, other methods to engage youth, such as leading a group discussion, become more common.

At the ELSP, the process of sharing knowledge and planning activities often remained the domain of the adult activity leader, and only occasionally were youth sought out to share their understanding of what they were learning or contribute to a group planning process. Where there was a tangible outcome (such as a finished piece of woodworking), a youth might be asked to share their process and product, but in general it was not a common strategy to provide opportunities for the youth participants to share their learning or their planning ideas.

One activity having a stated tangible outcome could have helped to encourage development of leadership and group process skills to a greater extent than was realized. The cooking class had a trip to the firehouse planned for the end of the week to serve cookies that the class was to bake. The collaboration among each group of five or six youth was evident as they started to practice what the adult activity leader instructed them to do. The week-long activity could have built in opportunities for the youth to make collaborative decisions about what their tangible outcome would be (e.g., what kind of cookies, who within each group would take responsibility for tasks each day). However, the youth were not provided with planning time (other than to follow the directions the adult leaders had written on the board) or the opportunity to decide what to do during the time they were together. Providing greater opportunities for the youth to develop leadership and group processing skills would have required that the adult leader share control of the activity itself with the participants (observation 1, June 2017).

The adult leaders of some activities, such as basketball, missed the opportunity to structure the week's program to stimulate youth leadership. While the youth were engaged enthusiastically in the games during the program, there was no plan to put into place the components (e.g., incorporating interdependent roles) that would lead to experiences that would provide an opportunity for youth to develop leadership (observation 3, July 2017).

Although the mean score on this scale across the ten observations was below average, one program stood above the others by providing extensive opportunities for youth group leadership development – the theater activity. The score was not sufficient to bring up the average across the ten observations, but it is worth noting here because the adult activity leaders intentionally took a facilitation (versus controlled teaching) role throughout the observed session and provided every young person with the opportunity to identify an activity and lead their peers through it. The activities on my observation day focused on improvisation (improv) activities, which were presented as games and embraced by the youth, providing multiple opportunities for self-expression and sharing. The youth had time to think about their improv selection, and could be silly as they addressed each other, making up a scene and assigning characters to the other participants in the group. Each youth was thoroughly engaged; and evidently really loved being part of the group (observation 8, July 2017). When a young person is engaged in learning to this extent, it is a result of having the interest, focus, and attention needed to develop the metacognitive strategies and build new knowledge and skills (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Over time, scaffolded opportunities such as these will help

the youth develop a stronger sense of their own ability to solve problems, and comfort with and ability to engage in their own learning (Willingham, 2007).

Mentoring is another youth leadership scale where there is room for improvement at the ELSP. While it is understood that mentoring provides an opportunity for a young person to gain from the attention of a caring adult (Kataoka & Vandell, 2013), the act of mentoring provides positive benefits to the mentor as well (Coyne-Foresi, Crooks, Chiodo, Nowicki, & Dare, 2019). For the purpose of the YPQA, a relationship where a youth can teach or coach another youth participant in the structured activity setting creates a mentoring relationship that has positive benefits to both individuals.

Evidence of youth mentoring (coaching skill development or teaching concepts) among participants was not observed across the ten activities. An opportunity is missed when leadership components, such as mentoring, are not interwoven into the structure of the activity. It is an opportunity for the program's adult leaders to abdicate a small portion of control and give youth the leadership role in the activity.

The ELSP administrators recognized that the lack of mentoring opportunities was a limitation of the current structure. They also saw this as a potential area of improvement in the future by engaging youth who have participated in the ELSP in middle school and who come back to the program while in high school. The assistant director spoke about this during an interview:

> So [now] they're in high school and then it's a position for them to come back during the school year [to the afterschool program] and then in the summer. So [they can] work to support the programs and gain new experiences in mentorship

> and professional development. So [we can] really support them to work on these activities, and to try and support younger peers (interview, 2017).

Engaging high school youth as staff members and mentors would serve both the ELSP participants and the older youth. Doing so would also provide the adult activity leaders with additional support throughout the day, allowing high school youth to take on the role of mentor to an eager young person. As noted above, the act of mentoring benefits the mentor as well (Coyne-Foresi et al., 2019).

Partnering with Adults. Youth are engaged in their learning and motivated to take on new and unfamiliar tasks when the topic is of interest to them and the process by which they learn allows for experimentation, interaction, and building to success (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). The more the program's adult leader can share control of activities, the more the learning process takes a course that engages the youth as they co-create meaning and knowledge (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). The adult leader must be comfortable in their own ability to give up full control and facilitate instead of needing to control the learning process entirely (Mitra, 2009).

The ESLP observed activities, on the whole, revealed that adult activity leaders have less confidence in their ability to shift away from controlled teaching and move toward a focus on facilitation. Greater confidence was evident in one observation when the math teacher created a learning environment with the focus on engagement of prior learning, the development of a new skill, and closely followed by review that included sharing and feedback by class participants (observation 2, July 2017). Once the new skill was taught and all questions considered, the adult leader then had time to take a step back

from controlling the pace and process of the class, allowing small groups (or individuals, if appropriate) to experiment, converse, practice, make mistakes, and ultimately experience success as a group. A majority of the activities observed, however, spent significant time (sometimes the whole activity period) in the teaching of sometimes complicated skills, allowing for very little time for experimentation and practice.

When an adult activity leader was particularly focused on skill development, such as in woodworking, there was a more didactic approach to the activity. This led to a highly controlled environment with little room for working in partnership or developing valuable leadership skills. To be fair, woodworking required the use of technical and potentially dangerous equipment, so retaining control over those aspects of the activity was required in order for youth to have a safe experience. However, not partnering with the youth in the class meant there were no interdependent roles or shared goals, no group process skill development, no leadership opportunities, and no process choices. Co-planning the week with youth might allow the adult activity leader to focus more exclusively on the safety aspects of using new and exciting machines, while providing the opportunity to youth to provide input into shared goals, share their learning, make daily process choices, and ultimately reflect on the variety of skills they developed (observation 5, July 2017). When youth are given the opportunity to share their voice and share in the decision making, they are given an opportunity to develop higher executive functioning skills (Mitra, 2009).

Sometimes it was hard for the adult activity leader to instill enthusiasm during the limited actual practice time they allotted. If practice time was pushed off to the final few

minutes of the session, it quickly disintegrated into unfocused social time where participants were far more interested in moving onto the next activity (or lunch) than reflecting on what they might have learned and accomplished over the past three hours (observation 6, July 2017). A more balanced co-facilitation of building and then practicing skills has the potential to improve youth engagement throughout the activity (Peterson, 2013).

Planning, Choice, and Reflection. The focus of the Planning scale is the integration of techniques that actively engage the youth in the room. This scale requires evidence of the inclusion of at least two planning strategies in each activity. Many different types of planning strategies can be used (e.g., brainstorming, voting). The youth participants might first be asked to brainstorm what they want to do for the activity that day as a small group for a few minutes, and then put their ideas on post-its and place them on the classroom whiteboard. Once the whole group has their ideas up, they may then be asked to hone their suggestions and pick priorities for the day. This is an example of utilizing more than one planning strategy.

On the whole, planning strategies were not observed during the activities. Some of the skill-focused activities, such as basketball, did not use planning strategies, as the adults in the room directed the flow of activities exclusively throughout the morning (observation 3, July 2017). Others, such as the strategy card game (observation 4, July 2017), started immediately where they left off the previous morning, limiting the need for additional planning considerations. For youth with disabilities, his or her paraprofessional

included planning techniques to increase their comfort and skill at making decisions for themselves.

Including planning choices in each and every meeting during the week would require a conscious decision by the adult activity leader to be a facilitator of learning instead of controller of the classroom. There was minimal evidence of providing youth with planning choices by the ELSP adult activity leaders during the observations. Lack of choice can influence an activity from the start. If a youth was required to participate in an activity they did not choose or do not value, there is a deeper problem. Stated one adult activity leader:

> I have a program that makes it clear there will be running and physical activity. If there wasn't an argument against running daily, and if I didn't have to encourage participation it would enhance the experience for all the kids and me. Spending time cajoling the kids who want to [remove] themselves from the program takes away from the fun and skill building (interview, July 2017).

This leader may have benefited from a discussion with the ELSP director to determine if he could change how he shaped the weeklong experience. He was focused on setting goals, making choices, and firmly controlling all aspects of the activity. Engaging his youth participants from the onset may have resulted in heightened interest and motivation as they moved through the week, working toward goals they themselves had a role in establishing.

Keeping track of process choices can be a daunting task when an adult leader is focused on making sure all participants stay safe and engage with the activity in a

meaningful way. Process choices are those made about how an activity progresses over the course of the allotted time. It is often easier to dictate the process, so all participants have a clear view of the outcome the instructor is heading toward. However, strictly managing the process provides little opportunity for youth to take the lead in their own learning, consequently missing out on the development of skills that would benefit them when facing less structured learning environments. Activities that focus on active learning techniques such as exploring, involving and experimenting in a less-structured, informal learning environment serve to engage and motivate young people (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Unfortunately, only scattered evidence existed of activity leaders providing process choice during the ELSP.

The final scale that scored low across the observations was the inclusion of reflection in each activity. The length of most ELSP activities was three hours from start to finish. Very few included any discussion before the end where the youth were encouraged to discuss the activity they were engaged in, what they felt was great about it, and what they felt needed to be improved. Reflection provides an opportunity to think about the accomplishments (or lack thereof) and how one internalized that information. By sharing feedback, youth and their teachers gain insight into what might be needed to provide the most fulfilling activity in future sessions (Smith & Hohmann, 2005). The leaders of the observed activities missed the opportunity to strengthen the bond with their participants and hone the activities to more closely meet the needs of the youth, thereby increasing the possibility of successful youth outcomes.

Importance of Unstructured Time. While this topic was not assessed using the YPQA, it is a theme that was evident from other sources of data. Time during activities spent in unstructured activity are not wasted minutes. The effect of sitting in one place for an extended period, even during an otherwise engaging activity, caused some participants to express their frustration in disruptive ways. In one instance, youth in the activity were tired and stressed. The adult activity leader did not schedule a "brain break," so the youth had not left the room during the entire three hours. This may have been the reason one boy let it be known he had been forced to sign-up for summer camp by his mom, and he did not want to be there because he was bored. Another boy echoed this sentiment. The adult leader was noticeably tired. This led to a quick exit at the end of the period, resulting in lack of reflection or group planning for the following day (observation 6, July 2017). A similar situation happened during another activity where little positive communication was noted between the adult leader and the youth, resulting in limited engagement and no questions asked or comments made by participants when offered the chance (observation 7, July 2017).

Both are examples of why unstructured time (outside or inside) is so valuable for this age group. The unstructured time allows youth to take a "brain break," engage their bodies, and ready themselves for additional learning. Even though this is a summer program that was focused primarily on enrichment, it still required effort on the participants' part to stay focused so they could develop new skills and understanding. Unstructured time contributes to the development of social, academic, and creative skills (Thiessen, Gluth, & Corso, 2013). For the ELSP administrators, there is an opportunity to

educate all adult activity leaders about this important - and often overlooked - component of their programs.

Other areas identified as needing improvement were the need to provide more opportunities for youth to develop leadership skills, teaching or mentoring others, and finding ways for the adult activity leaders to share facilitation with the youth in their activities. In addition, evidence suggests that a greater focus on involving youth in the planning of the activity, making choices within the activity, and having the opportunity to reflect on their learning and experience will all strengthen the programs at the ELSP. When youth are given the opportunity to share their voice by influencing decisions that shape their experience, higher metacognitive skills (e.g., critical thinking) are developed and exercised (Mitra, 2009; Wellingham, 2007). The importance of including unstructured time, is also an area that can be improved upon by adult activity leaders in the ELSP.

Programs such as the ELSP have the potential to positively influence developmental and learning outcomes in children, but only if those activities are high quality (Bennett, 2015; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). If the ELSP activities are high quality and youth focused, there is a greater potential that the participants will be motivated to engage in active learning (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Hinton et al., 2012).

Summary: Quality of Program Activities

There were a few areas of program quality that landed on the top of the YPQA ratings. Adult leaders are generally warm and welcoming and have the knowledge to plan and pace activities in a way that meets the developmental needs of the youth participants.

Several areas of the ELSP program activities fall into the middle range of quality. Skill-building, helping the participants develop a sense of belonging in the group, and creating an encouraging environment were often observed, but not in every activity and were not readily accessible by all youth. There were several areas that scored lower and can be improved upon. While the activities were well-planned and paced, control for all aspects of the activity generally remained in the hands of adults.

So far in this chapter I have presented evidence separated into two general categories, the quality of program administration and the quality of program activities. As previously discussed, having quality in both areas - program administration and program activities - is critical to optimizing the experience of youth participants. In the next section, I move into a discussion that will answer my first research question: To what extent are components of high quality programming evident in the ELSP?

Quality of Youth Programs

Based on the evidence, and when aligned to the Durlak and Weissberg (2007) SAFE model for high quality youth programs, the ELSP contains a number of elements that are considered high quality, as well as a set of elements that would be considered average in comparison to other programs. However, there were also a number of below average elements, providing the opportunity for the ELSP administration to focus their improvement efforts on areas that have the potential to strengthen the activities and the program overall.

The foundation that the ELSP is built upon includes the excellent physical facilities in which it is operated. Both the North End Middle School and the North End

Community Center facilities provided a safe and healthy environment for youth participating in the ELSP. The space available to each activity was appropriate, having the equipment, technology, materials, lighting, and ventilation required for youth to comfortably engage with the topic. In addition, central gathering areas (e.g., the cafeteria) were large, clean, and available to the program as needed. Every activity at the ELSP benefitted from this physical environment.

Table 13 provides a visual representation of the components of the Durlak and Weissberg (2007) SAFE model and the corresponding findings for high quality, average quality, and areas that need improvement.

Table 13

Evidence Aligned to the SAFE Program Quality Model

SEQUENCED set of activities to achieve their goals	**ACTIVE** learning techniques to develop skills	**FOCUSED** on personal or social development	**EXPLICIT** objectives for personal and/or social skills
ELSP Program Quality: STRENGTH			
Activities were planned, presented, and sequenced to meet the developmental needs of the youth Several academic classes with specific, achievable goals	Wide variety of high interest offerings, with many activities having waitlists -Activities were planned, presented, and sequenced to meet the developmental needs of youth	-Adult activity leaders created a welcoming, personal atmosphere for their participants	
ELSP Program Quality: AVERAGE			
Specific learning goal or skill building goal were shared sometimes Some difficult tasks were broken into smaller components or steps	Youth had some opportunities to practice skill Some staff members modeled skills for youth, and most were actively involved during the activity	When youth struggled, some staff worked with them to problem-solve	In some instances, opportunities were provided for helping youth to introduce themselves to each other Most staff and youth included everyone in activities; exclusion was not common
ELSP Program Quality: NEEDS IMPROVEMENT			
	Limited opportunities for youth to plan, develop, or share tangible results Some activities did not allow for unstructured time (brain breaks), a critical component of learning	There were limited chances for youth to use interdependent roles, collaborate with peers, develop leadership skills, or mentor a peer or younger person Limited chance to partner with adults in planning or implementing activities	No program-wide collaboration objective No leadership, mentoring objective Limited opportunity for youth to plan activities, make choices, or reflect on their experience

Areas of High Quality

It was clearly evident that adult activity leaders felt a degree of passion about the activities they were teaching at the ELSP. The program administration had dedicated time and effort to finding and hiring summer staff who were able to cover a wide variety of topics that were of great interest to the youth participating in the summer of 2017. Attendance was high all summer, with many offerings full to capacity, and some with waitlists. The programs were developmentally appropriate for the age group, well sequenced, and had knowledge and skill-building goals in mind for these short-term activities. On the whole, the ELSP clearly met two criteria of the Durlak and Weissberg (2007) SAFE Model - program activities were sequenced within the short-term nature of the ELSP and were focused on active learning techniques to help the participants develop knowledge and skills.

Areas of Average Quality

The evidence suggests commonalities, but not consistencies, across activities for other aspects of the SAFE Model. These are areas that scored average on the YPQA, most likely because the element was not in evidence all the time or the opportunity was not provided to all youth. This inconsistency is commonly found in youth programs across the nation that have used this tool, and points to an opportunity for the ELSP administration to improve practice in these areas across all activities. Inconsistent practices included limited sharing of goals with all participants on a daily basis, not always breaking down difficult tasks into more manageable parts, not always modeling skills if youth are struggling, and sometimes providing only limited opportunities for

youth to make strong connections to their peers, other adults, and to the values that undergird the ELSP in general.

Areas that Need Improvement

Improvement in the following areas have the potential to enhance the impact of the short-term summer program experiences for all youth participants. The active learning component of the ELSP could be improved by focusing on the corresponding step on the SAFE model, thus working toward providing youth with greater opportunities to plan, develop, and share tangible results. Tangible results are any product, performance, or plan that engages all the youth in creative learning and is celebrated or presented at the end of the short-term activity. It may be one piece of a larger effort, or an item created individually by the participant. In addition to tangible results, the ELSP administration should assure that activity leaders understand the importance of providing periodic and sufficient unstructured time - brain breaks - as they are a critical element toward maximizing the learning process (Theissen et al., 2013).

This research has illuminated the fact that some, but not all, activities have been planned and implemented with youth collaboration, leadership development, or partnership with adults in mind. Specifically, there were limited chances for youth to develop collaborative skills through the use of interdependent roles, develop leadership skills through mentoring peers or younger youth, and limited chances to partner with adults in the planning or implementing any phase of the activities they were participating in. Given the length of the short term-activity sessions - three hours each day over five consecutive days - integrating those aspects need to be thoughtfully planned into the

implementation process. Focusing on that process will leave room for details determined by youth input throughout the course of the week. Mindful attention to providing time for those opportunities to develop do not take away from time spent on the activity itself. Instead, doing so has the potential to increase youth engagement, leadership development, and commitment to the learning process by participants (Mitra, 2009; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). From here, I will make a series of specific recommendations that this research suggests will improve the ELSP.

Suggestions

The purpose of research question #2 is to provide suggestions for improvement based on the evidence collected through this case study. While it is uncommon in case study research to offer such recommendations, in the case of the ELSP the decision was made to include them for the convenience of the program administrators. Therefore, I suggest the following six actions that, if successfully implemented, have the potential to improve the overall experience of the youth participating in the ELSP. These steps include (a) focusing on the two higher domains as outlined in the YPQA, (b) adopting program-wide goals for personal and social development of youth participants, (c) exploring other opportunities for academic offerings, (d) assuring a greater role for youth in planning the ELSP, (e) re-envisioning the registration process to enhance equity, and finally (f) working toward reflecting the diversity of participants in the staff.

Focus on the YPQA Domains of Interaction and Engagement

The evidence suggests that while the ESLP has strong, basic elements in place (e.g., excellent facilities), and that activities are planned with the developmental needs of

youth in mind, there is room to improve in areas of youth interaction in the YPQA (belonging, collaboration, leadership and working with adult partners). Providing youth with increasing opportunities for engagement will encourage the focus and attention needed to build new knowledge and skills (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Given the opportunity to participate in planning, choice, and reflection by sharing their voice and shaping the decisions that impact their lives helps youth to develop their own executive functioning skills (Mitra, 2009).

Adopt Program-wide Goals for Personal and Social Development

Promoting social competence means providing the opportunity to develop skills needed to integrate a young person's feelings, thinking, and actions to achieve specific social and interpersonal goals (Catalano et al., 2004). While some individual activities did promote aspects of social competence, there is currently no program-wide goal for activity leaders to develop their syllabi through a lens of personal and social development. Instead of relying on haphazard inclusion of such important goals, it is my recommendation that the ELSP administration consider developing and sharing a framework for the development of youth activities with their adult staff. In addition to the personal and social goals, they should include a specific recommendation for unstructured time. Goals for youth involvement in the actual development and implementation of each activity are also warranted and correspond to the first recommendation.

Explore Opportunities for Additional Academic Offerings

The three academic classes offered during the ELSP were focused on moving the participants toward a greater level of skill in pre-algebra and literacy, and the final class providing an orientation specifically designed for youth who will enter the U.S. education system for the first time. For each of these, participants chose to enroll; no one was required to take these classes in order to graduate or to avoid being left behind. Each of these classes had a waitlist during the summer of 2017. These offerings each had several similarities: (a) they were led by at least one certified teacher, (b) they were co-taught by at least two adults, and (c) were developed with specific and clearly defined goals that were shared with all the participants. It is my recommendation that the ELSP administration investigate ways to assure additional youth can participate in these offerings and explore what other academic programs might be of interest to the community.

Increase Youth Voice in the Planning and Implementation of the ELSP

Evidence has already been presented that points to a lack of opportunities for involvement by youth in the development of program activities, and the common practice of adult-controlled learning vs. facilitation of learning by activity leaders. Moving toward greater partnership between the adult leaders and the youth they are engaging over the short-term summer programs is a process that may be new to some activity leaders; they may have an openness to do so but may lack the experience developing such a model within the ELSP framework. This could be addressed by the program director and assistant director if they began including youth voice well before the summer program

started. One suggestion would be to gather a planning group of youth who have experienced a prior year of the ELSP and engage them as authentic partners in the development of the following year's program. A comprehensive plan that puts youth voice at the forefront of program development not only has the potential to assure the ELSP reflects the needs of all participants, but also provides a model from which adult activity leaders can draw as they reconstruct their offerings toward facilitated learning.

There are two additional recommendations to add to this section. As an observer over the five weeks, I was able to develop a deep understanding of the ELSP. These recommendations stem from that experience of immersion and reflect my deepening understanding of the issues faced by the New American population in the surrounding area. Assuring equity for recent immigrants to these communities is a primary concern of the school districts, and a few actions will make a difference to youth participants.

Examine the Current Registration Process

The administration took great care to develop programs that met the needs of all those who wished to attend. However, by creating a registration process that was highly dependent on knowledge developed from previous years' participation, a hidden inequity has been allowed to function behind the scenes. Families with limited experience with the ELSP, how the registration process worked, who possessed limited English language skills, or youth whose parents possessed limited English language skills were at a distinct disadvantage in a system that required a first-come, first-served, time-bound response. A more equitable system should be developed going forward.

Reflect the Diversity of Participants in the Summer Program Staff

There is strong evidence that the adult activity leaders employed by the ELSP program director and assistant director are highly skilled and dedicated teachers and leaders. However, while spending even a few moments in the cafeteria during the breakfast each morning it was evident that there was a great disparity in representation of diversity between the youth participants, and that of the summer program staff. Efforts should be undertaken to identify and hire more adult activity leaders that reflect that diversity. Both of these recommendations represent an opportunity to create a more effective experience for newly integrated youth participants and their families. Further research into the needs of the New American population would offer the opportunity to gather firsthand knowledge of and input from community members not commonly sought out for their opinions.

For the second research question, I made recommendations for improvement based on the evidence collected through research on the ELSP. I recommended six action steps to improve the overall experience of the youth participants. These steps included focusing on the two higher domains of as outlined in the YPQA, adopting program-wide goals for personal and social development of youth participants, exploring additional opportunities for academic offerings, assuring a greater role for youth in the planning and implementation of the ELSP, re-envisioning the registration process to enhance equity, and working toward reflecting the diversity of participants in the staff.

Chapter 6: Summary and Implications

In this summary chapter I provide an overview of my case study research, including purpose, research questions, and evidence-based findings. In addition, I will discuss the implications of this study and my recommendations for future research.

Overview and Purpose of Research

Students participating in afterschool and summer learning activities are more engaged in learning, while demonstrating improved school attendance, grades, and rates of homework completion (Vandell et al., 2007), while exhibiting stronger problem-solving skills (Durlak et al., 2010). Afterschool and summer learning programs strive to increase learning outside of the classroom through formal and informal opportunities for inquiry and discovery (Hinton et al., 2012; Kataoka & Vandell, 2013).

Summer learning opportunities, such as the expanded learning summer program (ELSP) at one midsized Northeastern public school system, are provided by schools as one way to combat learning loss that happens over the summer break, especially for those students who lack access to engaging learning opportunities during that time. For the ELSP, assessing the quality of their own program offerings and determining how that may relate to the experience of their youth participants is the first step toward program improvement.

Review of Research Methods

Using a case study research design, this dissertation sought to understand how the ELSP aligns with benchmarks of high quality programming for out-of-school and summer learning youth programs. Utilizing the assessment tool Youth Program Quality

Assessment (YPQA) and based on relevant research into the components of youth programming, through this case study I sought to understand the degree to which the programs offered by the ELSP met those benchmarks.

During the five weeks of the summer program, I collected qualitative data from several sources using formal and informal observation and semi-structured interview techniques. As a method for triangulating the data, I collected program documents, previous research, and other related items and analyzed them for corroborating themes (Creswell, 2013). The observation data was analyzed for patterns (Yin, 2016) and how well the data supported the existing general conceptualizations using a deductive analysis strategy (Patton, 2015).

Significance and Research Questions

The ELSP administration lacked valid data that provided a clear understanding of how their programming strategies resulted in outcomes for their participants. This study sought to understand the degree to which the activities offered met nationally normed benchmarks of high quality youth programming, and to illuminate components of program activities where quality could be improved. This research examined program offerings from an adult perspective through observation, interviews, and artifact review.

The research questions this case study answered were:

1. To what extent are components of high quality programming evident in the ELSP program?
2. Based on the evidence, what improvements are suggested?

Research Approach

For this dissertation research study, I applied a qualitative epistemology. This epistemology allowed me to develop a greater understanding of the reality of administrators and teachers as they implemented the summer program activities and classes (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, the engagement of the summer program participants, their experiences, and response to the programs were more deeply understood the more I was able to observe (Creswell, 2013). In Chapter 3, I explained why a case study design was used to illuminate the characteristics of ELSP from a program perspective, and how this research design led to a greater understanding of program quality. I used a deductive data analysis strategy to ascertain whether or not the data supported existing generalizations and explanations of high quality programming, a strategy appropriate for single case studies (Patton, 2015). Concurrently, I applied a pattern matching data analysis technique to uncover patterns across the formal observations, informal discussions and observations, from the program artifacts, and themes evident from semi-structured interviews.

This dissertation research started with an exploration of what is understood about youth development, especially the movement toward positive youth development in the latter half of the twentieth century. From there, I drew from experts in the areas of student engagement, motivation, and moved into a discussion of the impact of afterschool and out-of-school programming, summer learning, and summer learning loss on student achievement. I then reviewed the components of high quality out-of-school youth programming as identified in the literature. Next, I moved into a discussion of the use and

development of the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) tool as a measure of high quality programming and practice. Through this research I identified two conceptual frameworks, one that describes characteristics of youth program quality (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Figure 1) and one that presents a framework for engagement in the ELSP by youth participants (Figure 2).

Findings

Table 13 provides a visual representation of the components of the Durlak and Weissberg (2007) SAFE model and the corresponding findings for components of the ELSP that are of high quality, those of average quality, and those components of lower quality that warrant improvement.

Quality of Youth Programs

Based on the evidence, and when aligned to the Durlak and Weissberg (2007) SAFE model for high quality youth programs, I concluded that the ELSP contained a number of high-quality elements, as well as a set of average elements based on the nationally normed YPQA. However, there were also a number of below average elements. Illuminating these provides an opportunity for the ELSP administration to focus their improvement efforts on areas that have the potential to strengthen activities and the program overall.

The foundation that the ELSP is built upon includes the excellent physical facilities in which it is operated. Both the North End Middle School and the North End Community Center facilities provided a safe and healthy environment for youth participating in the ELSP. The ELSP administrators had dedicated time and effort to

finding and hiring summer staff who were able to cover a wide variety of topics that were of great interest to the youth participating in the summer of 2017. Attendance was high all summer, with many offerings full to capacity, and some with waitlists. The programs were developmentally appropriate for the intended age group, well sequenced, and had knowledge and skill-building goals in mind appropriate for short-term, exploratory activities. On the whole, the ELSP clearly met two criteria of the Durlak and Weissberg (2007) SAFE Model – program activities were well sequenced within the short-term nature of the ELSP and were focused on active learning techniques to help the participants develop knowledge and skills.

I discussed several aspects of the ELSP where quality was average. These included limited sharing of goals with all participants on a daily basis, adult activity leaders who did not always break down difficult tasks into more manageable parts or model skills if youth were struggling, and sometimes providing only limited opportunities for youth to make strong connections to their peers, other adults, and to the values that undergird the ELSP in general. I discussed areas where improvement had potential to enhance the impact of the short-term summer program experiences for all youth participants. The active learning component of the ELSP could be improved by providing youth with greater opportunities to plan, develop, and share tangible results aligned with each activity. In addition to tangible results, the ELSP administration should assure that activity leaders understand the importance of providing periodic and sufficient unstructured time, consistently using the easily accessible outdoor space as weather allows.

This research has illuminated the fact that some, but not all, activities have been planned and implemented with youth collaboration, youth leadership development, or partnership with adults in mind. Specifically, there were limited chances for youth to develop collaborative skills through the use of interdependent roles, develop leadership skills through mentoring peers or younger youth, and limited chances to partner with adults in planning or implementing any phase of the activities they were participating in.

Through this research, I have analyzed the program components of the ELSP through the lens of high quality programs aligned with the Durlak & Weissberg model. I was able to identify components that were of high quality, those that were of average quality, and those where improvement is warranted. From that point, I made a series of recommendations that this research suggests will improve the program on the whole.

Suggestions and Implications

Based on this qualitative research, I made six suggestions that have the potential to improve the ELSP:

1. Focus on the YPQA domains of Interaction and Engagement.
2. Adopt program-wide goals for personal and social development
3. Explore opportunities for additional academic offerings.
4. Increase youth voice in the planning and implementation of the ELSP.
5. Examine the current registration process.
6. Reflect the diversity of participants in the summer program staff.

There are multiple implications if these suggestions are implemented by the ELSP administrators. Initiating them will bring the ELSP closer to meeting the definition of

high quality youth programs as outlined by Durlak and Weissberg (2007). The ELSP will also provide an experience that focuses more closely on the principles of positive youth development (Catalano, et al., 2004) and greater engagement and motivation toward learning as outlined by Toshalis and Nakkula (2012). If the learning experiences at the ELSP are relevant to the life of a youth, there is a greater chance that the curiosity needed to seek out new interests and new learning opportunities will be developed (Hinton et al., 2012; Mitra, 2009; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). This curiosity is part of the satisfying experience of a youth participant, as noted in the conceptual framework for this study.

Future Research Directions

This case study was developed and undertaken to provide a foundation for future research focused on the ELSP. Prior to this study, the ELSP administration had no detailed background information to help guide the planning or implementation of an outcome evaluation. Going forward, there are several suggested opportunities for further research that will build upon this case study. I will discuss these opportunities in the next section.

As mentioned under limitations in Chapter 3, this case study included limited use and collection of the voices of youth participants. Given that a finding of this study concludes that youth have limited opportunities to share in the planning, development, and implementation of the ELSP, I suggest research that includes youth perspectives about the program and their experiences. Research into the needs and experiences of youth participants and their families in the New Arrivals program would be beneficial for the same reason.

The ELSP administrators were interested in outcome evaluations; specifically, to discover if participants in the ELSP benefitted academically the following year. There are two potential research studies that may prove useful. The first would be tracking the academic progress of completers of the New Arrivals program over the following year and determining if they benefited from attendance when compared to youth with similar demographic profiles who did not attend. The second would be to take a broader view by tracking the academic progress over the following academic year of all participants to determine any gains (or losses) when compared to their class cohort.

Research on the experiences of youth with disabilities during the summer is warranted as it becomes a more important part of the ELSP. Engaging the youth, their families, and the professionals who support them would yield a greater understanding of how their experience can be improved going forward.

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