

Perrenoud, Michelle Renee. (2015). Attracting and Retaining Middle School Youth Participants in Afterschool Expanded Learning Programs: A Descriptive Case Study. UCLA: Education - Leadership Program 0659. Retrieved from: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/43n287qr>

The purpose of my study was to address the problem of low attendance and growing attrition of middle school students participating in afterschool programs. This study centered on youth and practitioner perceptions of the conditions that foster young people's interest, attendance, active participation, and meaningful engagement in middle school afterschool expanded learning programs funded with After School Safety and Enrichment (ASES) and/or 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) grants. A one-size fits all approach to attracting and supporting youth in afterschool programs is ineffective; focusing on understanding and meeting the needs of this adolescent group is an essential component to supporting and sustaining their attendance. Three elements were found to be keys in fostering enrollment and continued attendance for youth in these programs: (a) alignment between what matters to youth and the content of the activities and program; (b) thoughtful staff recruitment and development processes; (c) meaningful collaboration and shared decision-making between staff and students.

Youth and staff involved in these programs described environments, experiences, and activities which young people were active, both mentally and physically, and engaged in tasks that were meaningful, varied, involved learning, and supported their mastery. Interesting experiences and wide-ranging tasks were favored over routines and conditions that discouraged young people's desires to participate and learn in the hours outside of school. Their perceptions provide insight into three frameworks on effective engagement practices with middle school adolescents during afterschool programs: (a) Convergence of Matterness: A Youth Perspective-Centered Model; (b) Validity of the Learning Experiences Continuum and Process, and (c) Participation-Involvement-Engagement (PIE) Continuum. These frameworks illustrate a shift from traditional approaches of addressing categories in isolation to the connectedness of categories and a confluence of contributing factors, and their relationship to a quality learning experience that further drives attendance by validating and meeting students' expressed needs and interests. Moving students along a continuum from participation to involvement and to the ultimate goal of full engagement is a recommended goal for programs. Reviewing the implications and implementing the recommendations for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers will strengthen middle school afterschool programs thus helping to alleviate the attendance crisis.

Middle School Afterschool Success in the Middle Matters!



Program Design and Engagement Strategies
for Working with Middle School Students

Michelle R. Perrenoud, Ed.D.

BOOST Conference: April 2016

Workshop Description

The Middle Matters!

This presentation and materials are based on the following Dissertation:

Attracting and Retaining Middle School Youth Participants in Afterschool Expanded Learning Programs

<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/43n287qr>

Perrenoud, 2015

- **Workshop Description**

Students in middle school face unique challenges in the transitional years between elementary and high school. Programs also face distinctive challenges while striving to meet the needs of this age group. Learn about research on youth and practitioner perspectives' regarding what makes a program attractive and the conditions that foster young people's desires to attend and participate. Transition your program into a thriving learning zone. Discussion focus: Design, Attendance, and Interests.

- **Objective(s)**

Learn what matters to middle school students about their afterschool expanded learning experience and how to transition your middle school program into thriving space that will meet the growing needs and demands of your youth participants.

Welcome!



My role today... is to facilitate the process.

We are focusing on *Middle School Afterschool – Success in the Middle Matters!*

As your Facilitator, I will:

- ✓ Act as your discussion guide;
- ✓ Often be outcome driven;
- ✓ Play devil's advocate;
- ✓ Ask that you trust the process, and look beneath matters easily taken for granted.

Today, we will address only the tip of the iceberg.

There will be lots of work for you to do as you continue to advance in your development and work.



WHY are we here today?

Did you KNOW?

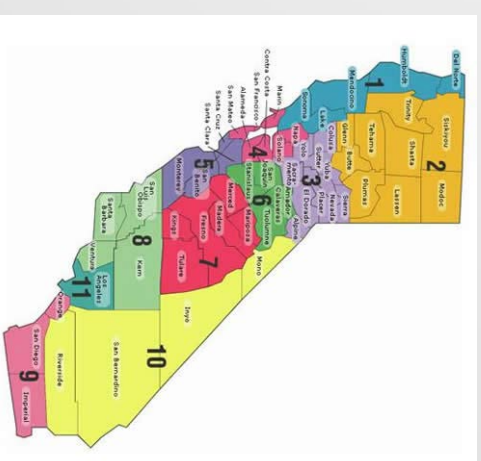
There is a PROBLEM!

Did you KNOW? There is a PROBLEM!

In California, there is an ongoing concern regarding a statewide

ATTENDANCE CRISIS of middle school students participating in state and federally funded afterschool programs.

- Of 1079 programs statewide; 300 (nearly 28%) faced fiscal reduction due to low attendance in 2012 – 2013. This has continued to be a pervasive issue each year.
- While there is an emergent body of research that documents afterschool programs over the past 15 years, relatively little is known about middle school afterschool programs.
- A one-size fits all approach to attracting and supporting youth in afterschool programs is ineffective.
- Focusing on and understanding and meeting the needs of this adolescent group is an essential component to understanding their attendance.



Come Learn About...

1. What **attracts** middle school youth to attend afterschool programs, from the students' and staff members' perspectives?

Attitudes and beliefs adolescents have about their interests to attend the program - and the perceptions and beliefs staff has of youth and their interests to attend the program.

2. What **activities** do middle school youth choose to participate in during their afterschool program and why?

Choices made by youth for participation in activities and the reasons associated - and the perceptions and beliefs staff has of youth and their interests to attend the program.

3. In what ways are **youth involved** in planning activities and selecting materials within afterschool programs?

Resource allocation and activities planning, and who is making the decisions, and the level of youth involvement in the process – from the perceptions of the youth and the staff.

4. What **professional development** and **prior experiential learning** do staff identify as most valuable in working with middle school youth in afterschool programs?

Education, training and experiences that staff reported preparing them to work with middle school youth in afterschool programs – from the perspectives of staff only.

Frameworks

1. Convergence of Matterness: A Youth Perspective-Centered Model
2. Validity of the Learning Experiences Continuum and Process
3. Participation – Involvement – Engagement (PIE) Continuum
4. Daily Program Schedule

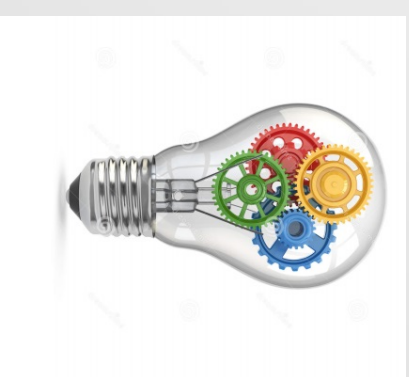
Connections

- Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in California
- Learning In Afterschool and Summer Principles
- Youth Development
- Engagement: Buy-in and Ownership
- Implications for Program Design and Instruction

Points of Integration

Share Out

- What were your Ah-Ha's today?
- How will this information impact your work?
- How will you apply what you learned?
- Who will you share with what you learned?



Success in the Middle Matters!

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