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Impoverished Neighbourhoods & After-School Programs

By
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Major Research Project

Completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Social Justice and Community
Engagement Master of Arts program at Wilfrid Laurier University

Brantford, Ontario

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Abstract

This paper examines the quality of Ontario's after-school program as implemented by Rapport by using Tuason et al.'s (2009) criteria. The goal of this study is to answer the following questions: How the three core areas of the program are implemented and what activities are offered in the three core areas? How staff members and participant perceive the program and how the program impacts the lives of the participants? After-school programs have become an essential part of impoverished communities over the past three decades. The need of quality after-school programs in disadvantaged neighbourhoods has never been higher. Children residing in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are vulnerable to countless harms such as: crime, victimization, drugs, dysfunctional family systems, abuse and etc. Children are most vulnerable during the after-school hours and require adequate supervision. Through qualitative research methods, data was gathered through focus group interviews with participants attending Ontario's after school program at Dunrankin public school in Malton Ontario. Additionally, data was also gathered through one on one interviews with staff members and program coordinator of the program. This study revealed Rapport offered the participants a quality after-school program.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, all praise to Allah (swt) and peace and blessings be on Prophet Mohammad (saww) and his progeny. It is through Allah's blessings and the teachings of the Prophet and his household that I have achieved all the success in my life.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor Dr. Bree Akesson for her patience, continuous support, immense knowledge, guidance, motivation and encouragement. This research would not have been successful without her support. I consider myself truly lucky and blessed to have conducted this research under her supervision. I would also like to thank my second reader, Dr. Abdelfettah Elkchirid for his invaluable time and feedback.

I especially want to thank the after-school program coordinator for accommodating this research at such a short notice. Your support, help and feedback throughout this research played a vital role in making this research successful. I would also like to thank the program's staff members and the participants for sharing their thoughts and participating in this research.

Last but not the least, I would like to thank my family: my mother, my siblings and my wife for supporting me throughout this research. I am blessed to have my mother's continuous prayers for me, my siblings' encouragement and my wife's support.

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“There can be no keener revelation of society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”

Nelson Mandela

Introduction

After school programs have become an important segment of North American education systems especially in schools that are situated in marginalized neighbourhoods (Austin, Chow, Hastings, Taylor, Johnson and Leer 2004). Lea and Abrams (2017) state that some of the characteristics that compose a marginalized neighborhood are poverty, high unemployment, substance abuse, chronic health problems, criminal victimization, teenage pregnancy and low rates of graduation. After school programs have gained significance in schools because these programs are meant to shield youth from the various harms they encounter in their communities. These programs aim to assist participants in their school work, improve their physical and mental health, provide adult supervision, promote healthy eating habits, and mitigate violence (Lea and Abrams (2017). After school programs vary in general but overall the aim of these programs is to offer youth healthy and supervised environments.

Historical Background

Since the early 1990's, afterschool programs have gained significant consideration in North America. However, afterschool programs have been a growing element in the North American education systems since the latter part of the 19th century (Mahoney, Parente & Zigler 2009; Halpern, 2002). The development of afterschool programs was a direct result of historical changes in children's participation in structured schooling and in the labour force (Mahoney, Parente & Zigler 2009; Kleiber & Powell, 2005). Towards the end of the 19th century, the rapidly expanding industrial labour power saw a significant decline in child labour (Casey, Ripke, & Huston, 2005). Due to the efforts of various organizations such as labour unions, religious institutions, and children's bureau, children's participation in the labour force continued to

decline. Mandatory education laws were passed in the late 1800s and children were required to attend compulsory education (Casey, Ripke, & Huston, 2005).

Education laws led to the establishment of mandatory universal education system in the United States of America (Mahoney, Parente & Zigler, 2009). The universal education system continued to evolve and drop-in after school centers known as “boys’ clubs” begun to emerge in the latter part of the 1800’s (Mahoney, Parente & Zigler, 2009). The purpose of boys’ clubs was to fill the unsupervised idle time after school. The early 1900’s saw the birth of structured after school programs that served beyond the average child care needs (e.g., develop children’s social, psychological and academic abilities, serve developmental supports to working families).

The primary element that has driven the rising growth in after school programs is the transformation in family and labour force participation (Mahoney, Parente & Zigler 2009). Women’s engagement in the labour force particularly generated a demand for child supervision that was missing due to the changes in traditional family roles and structure. In 2013, 75 percent of mothers in the United States with school age children participated in the labour force (U.S Department of Labor, 2013). In Canada, 69 percent of mothers with school age children participated in the labour force in 2014(Statistics Canada, 2014).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation was passed in 2001 in the United States as a result of concerns over the nation’s failing education system. One of the aims of the NCLB was to help failing students achieve success through the administration of after school programs. In order to help struggling students achieve success, NCLB developed a plan called supplemental educational services (SES). Prior to the implementation of NCLB and the introduction of SES, after school programs were generally managed and run nationwide by community-based

organizations such as libraries, community centers, museums, churches and small not-for-profit organizations (Zimmerman, Hamilton, & Christina, 2010).

Similarly, in Canada the Stay-in-School Initiative was launched in 1992 by the government of Canada (Miller, 2002). Unlike the NCLB in the United States, the Stay-in-School Initiative in Canada was not a part of any legislation but a mass-mentoring program. The goal of the Stay-in-School Initiative was to tackle the growing drop-out numbers in high schools all over the country. The various elements of the initiative included a campaign training-the-trainers and peer assistance, consultancy for community and school-based mentoring and tutoring programs, dissemination of services to support mentoring and peer assistance all over the country (Miller, 2002).

The growth of after school programs was significantly bolstered due to the concerns over “the changing American neighborhood” and concerns over self-care. Self-care in the context is understood as children looking after themselves without adult supervision and caring for themselves and following parental guidance (locking doors, staying inside, coming straight home from school) (Mahoney, Parente & Zigler 2009). Development of urban areas and multiple complex housing was introduced in the early 1900s that expanded children’s recreational territory into the surrounding areas. The inner-city blocks by the 1960s exposed children to various harms such as crime, drugs and violence manifest to the present. Self-care was also a concern for working families because overwhelming number of children lacked adult supervision during the after-school hours. Among the many harms of self-care such as stress, loneliness, fear at home, low social competence, grades and academic failure, low-income middle school children experience school-based externalizing behavior issues (Mahoney, Parente & Zigler 2009).

In general, after school programs differ among size, type, and focus, most programs however deliver a common purpose of expanding the volume of time participants are monitored (Aspler, 2009). Extensive research on after school programs shows that children attending after school programs reap countless benefits while deflecting various harms (Lee, Park, Jang and Park, 2017). After school programs shield participants from harmful neighbourhoods and decrease the amount of time children spend associating with delinquent counterparts (Gottfredson, Cross, Wilson, Rorie, and Connell, 2010a). After school programs have also proven to facilitate children in learning new skills and establishing upon existing hobbies and activities. Various after school programs concentrate on deflecting externalizing behavior issues as their main focus. After school programs also serve exclusive platforms that bring together families, community members, and schools to deliver prosocial opportunities for youth (Padia, 2009). After school programs are reliable initiatives of education and physical development in addition to formal supervision and informal social control. Due to the nature of after school programs being available during after school hours, these programs also help keep children in a safe and supervised setting by averting delinquent behavior and victimization (Durlak, Weisberg and Pachan, 2010).

Children enrolled in after school programs demonstrate greater rates of graduation and lower dropout rates in comparison to their counterparts that do not participate in after-school programs (George, Cusick, Wasserman and Gladden, 2007). Children that participate in after school programs dedicate more time and effort on academic and extracurricular activities; meanwhile children that do not participate in after school programs tend to allocate their time watching television (Posner and Lowe, 1999). Children that do not attend after school programs are three times more likely to experience with illicit drugs, consume alcohol and smoke

cigarettes (Durlak and Weissberg 2007). In addition, unsupervised hours after school are the optimum time when children experiment with illicit drugs, alcohol, cigarettes and sex (Durlak and Weissberg 2007). Research on San Diego's "6 to 6 after school program" found that youth arrests dropped by 13.1 percent during after school hours once the program were implemented. Simultaneously, numbers of youth as victims of violent crime dropped by 11.7 percent during after school hours in comparison to the previous year (Ferrin and Amick, 2002).

As of 1995, billions of public and private funds have been spent annually to run roughly 50,000 elementary school, middle school and high school after school programs across the United States (Kremer, Maynard, Polanin, Vaughan, and Sarteschi, 2015). After school programs are defined programs overseen by adults and run after school during the school year. Different from extra-curricular activities that also take place after school such as sports clubs or academic clubs, after school programs are substantive programs providing wide range of activities such as socializing or play exercises, academic improvement, homework assistance, snacks, community work, sports, arts, crafts, music and scouting (Kremer et al., 2015). Research in the fields of education and youth development indicates that the phrase "after-school program" should not be understood as any program that generally runs after school hours. In fact, participants enrolled in after school programs meet regularly on daily basis, engaging in a combination of activities such as homework help, academic activities, athletics or cultural enrichment. After school programs are generally offered to low-income children, obtain public funding and offered at no cost to participants. These programs are largely school based and overseen by external community-based agencies (Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009). After school program objectives range from maintaining reliable adult supervision and safe childcare for children during the after-school hours to mitigating society's various troubles. These troubles include but are not limited

to: crime, academic achievement gap, use of illicit drugs, behavioral issues, academic failures, specifically for racial/ethnic minority groups and low-income students. Due to the vast array of benefits offered, after school programs secure strong support from various stakeholders (Mahoney et al., 2009).

A comprehensive volume of research indicates that children's experiences outside of school have a significant impact on their academic success (Leos-Urbel, 2015). In order to improve children's academic performance and narrow the academic achievement gap, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program (CCLC) provided \$1.1 billion approximately to 9,500 centers in 53 states and territories. The CCLC primarily focuses on programs offered in public schools, specifically poorly performing schools and schools with large numbers of low-income children (Penuel & McGhee, 2010). Wade (2015) predicates that children engaged in after school programs encounter circumstances that prepare them with social skills via peer interactions and maintain relationships with responsible, caring adults which in turn sustain positive youth development.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) propose that children attain endless benefits by participating in after school programs. For example, children learn to develop healthy peer relationships when they engage in after school programs that promote and sustain positive social interactions. These positive social interactions encourage children to foster such relationships in their classrooms which may benefit their academic performance. Positive social interactions with peers reduce the amount of negative interactions children may have with their classmates (Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009). Researchers in human development assert that developmental settings that offer children prominent role models, reward positive peer

relationships, and aid self-esteem are likely to support children's feelings of control over their surroundings, emotional capacity to self-regulate (Wade 2015).

My interest and my relationship to this research stems from my experiences as an auxiliary police constable with Toronto Police Service (TPS) and as a volunteer probation officer. During the time I served with TPS, I had opportunities to participate in community details (events) and neighborhood patrols in various parts of the city of Toronto. I was based in 31 division (Jane and Finch) North York, considered to be one of the most disadvantaged neighborhoods of Toronto. During various community patrols, I encountered teens and younger kids spending unstructured time during the after-school hours and mingling with adults that appeared to be much older. I encountered school aged children playing outside without any adult supervision on many occasions. I can recall an event of this nature when officers from 31 division were tasked to change the lightbulbs in the front/back yards in a Jane and Finch neighborhood. The bulb change event was part of a community policing initiative and an attempt to conserve energy and educate occupants on energy saving. During that detail, I remember many doors were answered by school aged children that claimed to be home alone. As a volunteer probation officer, I encountered between three to five intakes of individuals on daily basis that were sentenced for theft related charges. Most individuals were young teens and they all belonged to disadvantaged neighborhoods. My experiences led me to understand unsupervised children, teen offending and disadvantaged neighbourhoods as a multipronged structural problem. I became interested in research that focuses on solutions that protect kids in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. After-school programs became my primary focus due their mandates, goals and accomplishments.

Statement of the Problem

Extensive research shows that not all after school programs are equal in their mandate, implementation and overall success or failure (Huang, 2001). In general, after school programs are similar in nature and aim to provide students a safe environment that promotes prosocial behaviors, positive attitudes, healthy peer relationships, self-esteem, conflict management and academic assistance (Mahoney et al., 2009). The success of any after school program depends heavily on elements such as: program environment, program organization, instructional features, student outcomes, qualified staff and student commitment (Huang, 2001). While some after school programs focus primarily on helping students achieve academic success, others may concentrate on promoting healthy eating, social skills, sports and a wide range of enrichment activities.

The mission and the mandate of the Ontario after school program is to focus on three core areas: physical activities, healthy eating and health and wellness. Funding by the provincial government is provided to organizations that offer activities based on these three core areas. The Ontario government does not dictate specifics to the organizations committed to Ontario's after school program. The goal of this study is to evaluate the quality of Ontario's after school program as implemented by Rapport by using Tuason et al.'s (2009) criteria and attempt to answer the following questions:

- How the three core areas are implemented and what activities are offered in the three core areas?
- How staff members and participant perceive the program?
- How the program impacts the lives of student-participants?

Literature Review

Impoverished Neighbourhoods & After School Programs

Most after school programs are run by government funded organizations in communities of concentrated poverty (Kremer, Maynard, Polanin, Vaughan, and Sarteschi 2015). Low income neighborhoods or communities of concentrated poverty are: “Neighbourhoods facing socioeconomic disadvantage with other social problems, including high rates of unemployment, crime, adolescent delinquency, teenage childbearing, social and physical disorder, single-parent households, child maltreatment, high levels of mobility, poor child and adult health and mental health, and poor developmental outcomes for children and adolescents” (Austin, Chow, Hastings, Taylor, Johnson, and Leer, 2004). In addition, impoverished neighbourhoods are primarily occupied by immigrants and minorities in Canada and the United States (Austin, Chow, Hastings, Taylor, Johnson, and Leer, 2004). Over 3 million Hispanic and African American children lived in chronically impoverished neighbourhoods in the United States in year 2000. In addition, as of 2013, minority youth poverty rates in America are over 20 percent (Berliner 2013).

These impoverished neighbourhoods fostered high rates of poverty, single mother households, high school dropout rate, and unemployment (Fauth, Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2007). Goering (2005) states that impoverished neighbourhoods in North America consist of public housing occupied by minorities. Growing concentration of visible minorities, new immigrants and Indigenous peoples are reported to be primary factors establishing the expansion of impoverished neighbourhoods in Canadian municipalities (Walks and Bourne, 2006). In 2001, visible minority families comprised 77.5 percent of low-income families living in high poverty neighbourhoods in Canadian municipalities (Afterschool Alliance, 20013). In 2014, the “America

After 3PM” report concluded that children living in communities of concentrated poverty had higher rates of participation in after school programs in comparison to the national average (Afterschool Alliance,20013). For example, 24 percent of children living in communities of concentrated poverty participate in after school programs in comparison to the national average of 18 percent. In 2014, demand for after school programs was 56 percent in communities of concentrated poverty in comparison to the national average of 41 percent. These statistics show that children residing in communities of concentrated poverty have a higher rate of attendance and a greater need for after school programs in comparison to affluent neighbourhoods.

Children residing in impoverished neighbourhoods encounter a multitude number of challenges that directly impact their social life, physical and mental health, family ties, financial stability, academic performance, and self-confidence (Cornelius, Hardaway and Larkby 2014). Children from low income backgrounds and visible minority groups witness violence and violent victimization at staggering high rates (Cornelius, Hardaway and Larkby 2014). Research shows that children who witness violence face a high risk of depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, behavior problems, violent behavior and delinquency (Cornelius, Hardaway and Larkby 2014). Children residing in impoverished neighbourhoods are exposed to higher levels of stress and violence in the community. Community violence has been documented to trigger a wide range of negative outcomes. Research shows that children exposed to violence may foster feelings of fear and vulnerability which may increase negative coping methods which are linked to poor psychological development (Cornelius, Hardaway and Larkby 2014).

The exposure of community violence in impoverished neighbourhoods impacts children’s academic performance. Howard and colleagues (2010) reported that exposure to violence is extremely damaging to school grades, achievement test scores, and IQ. In addition, children

living in low socioeconomic neighbourhoods are vulnerable to health problems such as pediatric asthma and pediatric obesity (Chen and Schreier 2013). Impoverished neighbourhoods contain an overwhelming number of sources of pollution such as industrial plants, great numbers of air pollutants, ozone, nitrogen dioxide and fine particular matter (Chen and Schreier 2013). These pollutants have detrimental impacts on children's overall health and specifically asthma. In comparison to affluent neighbourhoods, impoverished neighbourhoods are known to have doubled the traffic density which produces greater pollution. A study conducted in California found that 6 percent to 9 percent of pediatric asthma cases could be a result of automobile and truck traffic and also due to pollution emitted by ports in the area (Chen and Schreier 2013). Children residing in impoverished neighbourhoods are also more likely to be obese in comparison to their counterparts living in affluent neighbourhoods. Studies show that impoverished neighbourhoods have fewer grocery stores and more fast food and variety stores. In addition, children in low socioeconomic neighbourhoods have little access to physical training amenities resulting in little or no exercise. Children from low socioeconomic neighbourhoods consume less healthy foods, lack exercise and watch increased hours of television and therefore more vulnerable to obesity (Chen and Schreier 2013).

Case Study

The Refuge: an after-school care programme for African-American children in poverty

The refuge is an after-school care program offered in southeastern America to support the psychological and academic needs of impoverished African-American youth. The refuge is a not-for-profit after school program that offers cost free educational childcare to 20-35 children ranging from kindergarten to grade 12 children. The program is run by five staff members who look after children from four public schools located in the vicinity of the program's location. The

program runs between 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. supervising the children while their parents are at work. Participating children range between the ages of five to 18 years and many participants come from impoverished communities. The participants at The Refuge are known to be exposed to family issues associated with illicit drug use, child delinquency, crime, violence, health problems and unemployment. A study conducted in October 2009 by Tuason, Marcetic, Roberts, Stuart and Rearick evaluated the effectiveness of the program and how it impacts the lives of the participants.

The after-school program's mission statement is "encourage and empower youth and adults to become strong and independent, by ministering to their spiritual, physical, social, and intellectual needs" (Tuason et al., 2009, p 978). All participants at The Refuge engage in all the activities offered despite the age difference. On a regular day, participants eat snacks, engage in academic (homework, creative writing, reading), physical (sports, taekwondo, play outside) and social activities (computer lab, singing, dance, puzzles, games, artwork, story circle). The children also have the opportunity to join summer camp in order to continue their participation at the program all year round.

Tuason and colleagues (2009) used qualitative methods to conduct their research. there were 24 children participating in the after-school program during the week (Monday to Friday) three hours a day. Among the 24 participants, there were 13 female and 11 males of African-American background. Five staff members also participated in the study. The collection of qualitative data consisted of staff interviews and group discussions with children. The data produced a comprehensive result of staff members' and children's experiences at the Refuge. The study produced the following results:

The results of the study emphasized the significance of the Refuge (after-school program) on the lives of children living in impoverished neighborhoods. The findings indicated that the participants found the program's environment safe and secure. Children were able to establish positive relationships and found emotional and psychological support. The program also supported the academic needs of children while encouraging vocational ambitions. The Refuge played a central role in protecting children from after school hours risks such as violence, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, sex (unintended pregnancies) and crime related activities etc. Chung and colleagues (2018) reported that youth actively participate in after school programs based on program content, positive and healthy staff relations and peer relations. This is important because not all programs are equally successful and some programs may not deliver their intended benefits to their participants (Durlak et al., 2010). Kane (2004) states that participants of after school programs fail to attend consistently and participating in afterschool program does not improve children's academic performance. Mahoney and colleagues (2005) report that afterschool programs are vulnerable to failing and leaving a negative impact on the participants which may result in negative consequences both socially and academically for children. A prime example that illustrates this issue is poorly structured programs that lack skill building aims. Data from the study suggests that the Refuge significantly contributed towards the wellbeing of the children (Tuason et al., 2009). The results of Tuason et al's study indicate that the Refuge is a quality after school program. Similar results were found in my study that show that Ontario's after school program run by Rapport is a quality after school program.

After-School Programs in Canada

There is no mandate in Canada like the NCLB in the United States which is implemented by every state as per the federal government's regulations. However, in Canada every province from British Columbia to Newfoundland and Labrador offers an after-school program at the provincial level. Each program is designed by the province to support the needs of its unique communities and populations. In addition, there are non-profit organizations like the YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers and Big Sisters in each province Canada wide that offer all sorts of programs and services to children.

Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)

The YMCA is a charitable organization that operates 1700 locations across Canada. The first YMCA was opened in Montreal in 1851. YMCA's mission is to "improve the health and well-being of Canadians in spirit, mind and body" (YMCA Canada, 2019). The YMCA is an organization that operates globally providing a wide range of programs such as health and fitness, aquatics, child care, camps, employment services, education and training, youth engagement, community initiatives and global initiatives.

YMCA's child care initiative focuses before and after school care for children. In 2016, YMCA introduced "A place to connect curriculum" that focuses on its after-school programs all across Canada. A place to connect curriculum was constructed by a group of child care experts at the YMCA's Greater Toronto location. This curriculum focuses on administering good quality before and after-school care programs for children between the ages of 5-12 years old. A place to connect curriculum is an innovative program because it was created with the input of children and parents and what they wanted to see in a before and after school care program.

YMCA's before and after-school care program ensures a nurturing relationship between staff and participants while attending to the developmental and emotional needs of the children. The focus of the program is to provide children with a safe and healthy environment and encourage pro social behavior. Children get the opportunity to engage in physical activities, games, outdoor play, arts, and crafts, science, math, reading etc. The staff ensure program quality by promoting child development, relationship building, program planning, physical activity, bullying awareness and healthy child development.

Big Brothers and Big Sisters

Big Brothers is a youth mentorship movement that started in the United States in 1904. In 1912, the Big Sisters movement started in Canada and the following year in 1913 the Big Brothers movement also started in Canada. Both agencies operated independently until 2001 when both agencies merged and became the Big Brothers and Big Sisters (BBBS) of Canada. As of 2019, the BBBS of Canada serves 40,000 youth across Canada in over 1100 communities (BBBS, 2019).

BBBS of Canada as an organization recognizes that many children and youth in Canada encounter societal barriers, harmful living conditions, family violence, mental health issues, problems in school and identity challenges (BBBS, 2019). The goal of this organization is to provide a mentor to every child in need who can play a positive and healthy role in that child's life. BBBS of Canada aims to help children and youth at risk who live in poverty, marginalized communities, encounter crime and violence and exposed to negative variables that may impact that their physical and mental health.

BBBS of Canada runs three mentorship programs: One on One mentoring, In-school mentoring, and Group mentoring. Each program takes a unique approach towards pairing adults and children that result in positive and life changing experiences for both the mentor and the mentee. The one on one program pairs an adult male (Big Brother) with a male child and an adult female (Big Sister) with a female child. The goal of the one on one program is to pair young boys and girls with role models with whom they can converse and share experiences of growing up. The mentor and mentee form relationships built on common interests and trust by meeting on routine basis.

The In-School mentoring program pairs a child with a role model/friend to communicate with and share experiences of growing up within school boundaries. The program requires the mentor to meet with his/her mentee and engage in social activities such as art and crafts, board games and hanging out on school grounds (BBBS, 2019). The In-School mentoring program seeks from the mentor a weekly visit to his/her mentee for an hour throughout the school year. The group mentoring program is offered to both boys and girls. The group mentoring program offered to girls is called “GO GIRLS”. The program is offered to girls between the ages of 12-14 years old. The program focuses on physical activity, self-esteem and balanced eating. The vision of this program is to help build young girls a positive self-image, so they may attain their full potential in life. The four main themes of the program are: physical activity, healthy eating, self-esteem and communication skills (BBBS, 2019). Similarly, the group mentoring program offered to boys is called “GAME ON”. The program is offered to boys/ young men with the goal to inform and support them in making educated choices about various healthy-lifestyle practices. The participants in the GAME ON program engage in non-traditional physical activities, learn

about healthy eating, life skills, communication and emotional health dialogue constructed to promote long-term healthy lifestyles among participants.

It is evident from the structures of the programs offered by BBBS of Canada that it utilizes mentorship as a vital tool to support children in impoverished communities. While the programs of BBBS of Canada are not delivered in the conventional after-school program approach, it is important to note the elements of the programs offered to its participants that aim to address health and fitness, healthy eating, physical/social activity, self-esteem and communication skills. The programs offered by BBBS of Canada deliver life changing experiences to youth in diverse settings (one on one, in school, groups, outside of school setting)

BOYS & GIRLS CLUB

The Boys and Girls Club of Canada (BGCCAN) is a proudly Canadian non-profit organization. The BGCCAN was initially established by a group of local citizens in Saint John, New Brunswick as a “public playground movement” to offer a safe place for children to play. The purpose of this movement was to establish a safe place for boys living under poor and disadvantaged circumstances and lacked a safe place to go to after school. Initially the organization was named as the “Every Day Club” and later changed to “The East End Boys Club of Saint John”. This was the first boys club in Canada (BGCCAN, 2019).

The organization went through various changes since its inception before officially becoming the “Boys and Girls Club of Canada” in 1974. The BGCCAN operated at 700 locations across Canada, offered 24 national programs and served 200,000 children and youth as of 2018. BGCCAN operates at 300 locations throughout the Province of Ontario. BGCCAN across Canada seeks to promote healthy active living, learning and career development,

leadership programs, parenting programs, scholarship opportunities and youth engagement initiatives. While the organization offers 24 national programs throughout the country, each location designs and establishes programs according to the community it serves and therefore each location offers a unique set of programs.

In relation to after-school programs specifically, BGCCAN may offer a single after-school program in one location, multiple after school programs at the same location or multiple after-school programs at multiple locations. This disparity of program offering is largely due to the location of BGCCAN. In order to better understand, a comparison is conducted between the following locations: Toronto and London.

The BGCCAN in Toronto (St. Albans Boys and Girls Club) offers a wide range of after-school programs such as: STARS, ROCKETS, C.A.T.C.H, HIGH FIVE Quality At Play, Arts, BBL (Bounce Back League) and The Sharing Dance program. The STARS after-school program is offered at the main clubhouse location and six other satellite locations. The STARS after-school program is offered at the main clubhouse location caters to children attending grades one to four. The program contains 20 children and two staff members. Children participate in activities such as: cooking, swimming, drama, arts & crafts, computer times and indoor/outdoor sports. The STARS after-school program offered at other satellite locations caters to children attending grades one to six.

All other after-school programs are also offered at the main clubhouse location and other six satellite locations. All the after-school programs are diverse and unique in the activities they offer, however, the main elements of all the programs is as follows: mentorship for children, community engagement projects, leadership skills, responsibility, asset building, healthy

lifestyles, social development, physical development, emotional development, cognitive development, literacy, academia, sportsmanship and safe environments.

The BGCCAN in London (Boys and Girls Club of London) offers a single after-school program available at two different locations in the city. The program is offered to children attending grades one to eight at “Pond Mills” (satellite location) and youth attending grades nine to twelve at Sir John Paul II S.S (school). The after-school program provides homework support, educational activities and recreational activities. The program for grades one to eight children at the Pond Mill location runs from Monday to Friday between 3:30 – 6:00 pm. The program’s main elements are: homework help, literacy and numeracy-based activities, healthy snacks, self-esteem and peer relationship building. The program for grades nine to twelve youth at Sir John Paul II S.S location runs on Tuesdays, Wednesday and Thursdays from 2:00 – 5:00 p.m. The program’s main elements are: self-esteem and peer relationship building, healthy snacks and physical activity.

This comparison shows the significant disparity between both BGCCAN locations in Toronto and London in terms of number of programs offered and number of sites operated. While the Toronto location offers ten different after-school programs at seven different sites, the London location offers one single after-school program at two different sites. This vast disparity is a result of the difference in the communities both locations (Toronto & London) serve in terms of demographics, population and funding.

Ontario’s After School Program

In 2008, the government of Ontario launched “Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy”. This initiative places an exclusive focus on children and youth across the province. The goal of

this strategy is to develop and fund programs that aim to improve the health and wellbeing of children. This strategy implements programs that give children access to nutritious foods, healthy eating, physical fitness, health/dental programs, mental health enhancement and access to educational programs. In addition, this strategy aims to eradicate obstacles to educational achievement by targeting youth at risk (Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2018).

In October 2009, the government of Ontario developed the after-school Program as a part of Ontario's poverty reduction strategy. This program is funded by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. As of 2018, the after-school program serves 21,000 children and youth in grades 1 to 12 at more than 400 locations across the province (Ontario's Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, 2018). The 400 plus locations that host the after-school program are recognized as "priority neighbourhoods" which are identified by the following characteristics: where young people face the highest risks; areas where there are significant gaps in after-school programming; socio-economic status; community needs in urban, rural and northern areas, including those adversely impacted by economic conditions and limited resources or funding; education quality and accountability office (EQAO) scores. EQAO scores are mentioned specifically because children in priority neighbourhoods tend to score lower on their EQAO tests in comparison to their counterparts in affluent neighbourhoods. The after-school programs run between 3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. The goal of the programs is assisting children and youth in becoming active, learning to eat healthy and gaining confidence to perform better in school. These activities are aimed to decrease childhood obesity, youth violence, victimization and enhance academic performance. The ministry offers certain resources directly to organizations to enhance the delivery of the after-school program but the ministry does not dictate precise instructions to execute to program.

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport provides funding to organizations that follow the ministry's guidelines by implementing core requirements of the program. In order to qualify for funding, the organization must offer activities in the following three areas: physical activity, healthy eating, and health and wellness. The ministry classifies physical activity in the following terms "Get students moving through participation in structured activities like basketball, hip hop dancing or soccer, or simply through unstructured play time (Ontario's Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport,2018)". Healthy Eating is classified as "Teach participants about nutrition and cooking healthy foods, with a focus on fruits and vegetables. Students prepare their own healthy after-school snacks such as fruit smoothies or quesadillas (Ontario's Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, 2018)". The area of Health and Wellness is classified as "Build self-esteem, resiliency, confidence and self-reliance among participants and raise awareness about anti-bullying and enhance positive relationships" (Ontario's Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, 2018).

Rapport Youth & Family Services

Rapport Youth & Family Services is a non-profit charitable organization operating since 1971. In addition, Rapport is a United Way of Peel funded agency that offers services such as youth counseling, counseling for families at risk, youth centers, group services and after school programs (Rapport Youth & Family Service, 2018). Rapport runs the Ontario after-school program at three different public schools (Dunrankin public school, Ridgewood public school and Marvin heights public school) in Malton. The programs at all three locations run between September and June. After school programs at all three locations run between 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. with children attending between grades one to five. Thirty participants of grades three, four, and five attend the Dunrankin location, fifty participants of grades three, four, and five attend the

Ridgewood location and fifty participants of grades one to five attend the Marvin heights location.

There are various similarities and differences that exist between Rapport and all the other organizations mentioned in this paper. All the other organizations and Rapport share commonalities such as: offering participants safe spaces, care during the after-school hours, snacks, physical activities, cognitive development and recreational activities. Rapport is different from the other organizations because it offers an after-school program mandated by Ontario's Ministry of Tourism Culture and Sport. Rapport's after school program is solely funded by the ministry as well. In order to receive funding, Rapport must offer Ontario's after school program that promotes its three core areas (physical activity, healthy eating and health and wellness). All other organizations may receive funding from various sources and offer programs without any mandated guidelines. After school programs tend to similar in nature but no two organizations offer identical programs. For example, BBBS offers programs and activities during the weekend as well with a focus on mentorship, while BGCCAN offers activities only during the after-school hours.

Theoretical Framework

The following theories guide this research: (a) Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural learning theory (b) Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological theory and (c) Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs. Each theory is important in understating the roles and benefits of an after-school program in the lives of children especially residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Sociocultural Learning Theory

It is important to draw on Sociocultural learning theory because it takes a learner-centered approach (Wang 2007). The Sociocultural learning theory takes into consideration the significant roles that social relations, community, and culture play in cognition and learning (Wang 2007). Sociocultural learning theory borrows from the work of Vygotsky who proposed that learning, thinking, and knowing are relations alongside people in activity and originating from the socially and culturally structured world. Vygotsky proposes that culture and family play a central role in children's learning and therefore all children learn and behave differently and educators should not anticipate similar outcomes for all children. The most important element of Vygotsky's theory is the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD). This theory suggests that children are required to be in the ZPD to engage in learning. This zone offers children an environment of participation that challenges them to learn new concepts. Furthermore, Vygotsky's theory proposes the idea of scaffolding to engage children in learning. Vygotsky believed that children can attain new skills and knowledge faster when they are offered a modest amount of assistance to them motivated to carry on learning. It is important to note researchers in the past have used the Sociocultural learning theory to guide their research to address afterschool programs (e.g., Heath, 2001; Mclaughlin, 2000). Honig and McDonald (2005, pg 6) state "At its most basic level, socio-cultural theory views learning as a social endeavor—an endeavor that occurs through social interactions among youth and between youth and adults as they all engage in various activities." This shows that sociocultural learning theory has been used in the past as a research tool to study after-school programs. The Harvard Family Research Project analyzed the results of 25 evaluations and established a link between after-school programs and improved student attitudes toward school, school performance, and attendance. The analysis further

revealed that participants at after-school programs portrayed positive ambitions towards higher education, in comparison to their non-participating counterparts (Honing & Macdonald, 2005). In my analysis, I used the socio-cultural learning theory to evaluate whether the after-school program offers the participants an environment of ZPD.

Ecological Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological theory investigates how an individual's development is affected by his/her social surroundings. Bronfenbrenner's theory proposes that individuals learn according to their interactions with others and how they perceive these interactions. Bronfenbrenner describes the microsystem as the smallest and the most immediate environment in which an individual resides. This may include the home, school, circle of friends and the neighborhood environment. This theory further states that people possess a microsystem which links together their multiple social contexts in life. In the case of school children for example, this microsystem may incorporate school, neighborhood, family and friends. In these multiple environments, a child engages directly with others and all these interactions play an important role in the child's development. It is important to understand and maintain each segment of a child's microsystem; changes or disruptions in one segment of the microsystem may cause a chain effect in other segments such as the child's macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner states that an individual's macrosystem may contain cultural values, beliefs or an official religion. Lacking adequate and productive after-school care which is an immediate microsystem may expose children to street harms such as drugs, violence and delinquency which would impact their social and academic success. In the case of children, social and academic success would be considered their macrosystem because it is being impacted due to a change in their microsystem. On the contrary, children under adequate supervision in after-school care may engage in productive

social and academic activities that may improve their social and academic success. “Also, statistics indicate that the hours between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m. on school days are peak hours for teens to commit crimes and engage in sexual activity; for innocent children to become crime victims; for 16- and 17-year-olds to be in or cause car accidents; and for youth to smoke, drink, and use drugs (Kanter, 2001, p.13).” Furthermore, Kanter (p.13) states: “After-school programs can help curtail this trend by providing secure, alternative environments for young and older children alike”. I utilized the ecological theory in my analysis to evaluate the after-school program’s environment, the program’s environment on the participants and the macrosystem components that surround the participants.

Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs theory proposes that individuals are motivated to according to a hierarchy of needs and some needs are of a higher priority than others. Maslow states that individuals must meet lower needs before fulfilling higher level needs. Maslow constructed a pyramid of needs and divided this pyramid into five sections. The bottom to top, the pyramid is divided into five types of needs: Physiological, Safety, Love/Belonging, Esteem and Self-actualization. Physiological needs are defined as biological requirements for human survival such as oxygen, food, water, shelter, clothing, intimacy and sleep. If an individual is unable to fulfill these needs, him/her cannot function at optimum level or function at all. All other needs are secondary to physiological needs. Safety needs consist of protection from various elements of danger, security, law/order, stability and liberty from fear. Love and belonging needs are third up on the pyramid of needs which consists of interpersonal relationships which motivate behavior. These needs may be categorized as friendship, acceptance, trust, positive affiliations among various groups like family, friends and colleagues. The next level of needs on the

pyramid is Esteem needs that is divided into two separate sections as esteem needs for oneself (independence, achievement, confidence) and respect from others (prestige, status, success). Maslow states that esteem needs are most important to children and juveniles. The final and the most difficult level to reach on the pyramid is Self-actualization needs. The level consists of appreciating personal potential, solving problems, being creative, accepting of facts, self-fulfillment and seeking personal growth. I used Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory to evaluate the quality of the after-school program according to the various needs in each stage of the pyramid. This theory was instrumental in analyzing how the participants' physiological and esteem needs were being met.

Research Methodology

The goal of this study was to evaluate the quality of Ontario's after-school program as implemented by Rapport by using Tuason et al.'s (2009) criteria by answering the following questions:

- How the three core areas are implemented and what activities are offered in the three core areas?
- How staff members and participant perceive the program?
- How the program impacts the lives of student-participants?

The use of qualitative case study method was adopted to conduct this research. I chose to use the qualitative research method for this research due to limited resources, time constraints and the nature of the research. It was very time consuming to find an appropriate organization/after-school program for my research. Many organizations that I contacted required at least six months' notice and my research proposal before any research could take place. At the

I was preparing for my MRP, it was already March and therefore a quantitative method was not viable. Additionally, this was my first research paper and I was also advised by various professors to stick with a qualitative research method for my research. My goal was to conduct my research with an organization that that ran an after-school program on regular basis throughout the year. In addition, I was interested in interviewing children and staff members to gather rich data for my research. Therefore, the qualitative method was most appropriate. The qualitative research method helps answer my research question because it allows me to record direct and specific responses of the participants.

In this study, I collected the data through one-on-one interviews with the program coordinator and two staff members and conducted two) focus group interviews. One group interview comprised of male members and one group interview comprised of female members. I chose to conduct one-on-one interviews with the program coordinator and the staff members due to the data collection benefits of this method. Alshenqeeti (2014) states that interviewing is a vital tool in the field of qualitative data collection as it allows the interviewees to articulate their speech thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, interviews offer a comprehensive snapshot, analysis of terms and an in-depth view of interviewees' expressions. The female focus group comprised of 5 members in grade five and the male focus group comprised of 6 members in grade five attending the program at Dunrankin public school in Malton. Focus group interviews carry benefits such as: useful tool in obtaining data from children, high face validity, easier to organize, low cost, require less preparation, easy to conduct, direct interaction between researcher and participants, flexible and results are easy to understand (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Rubin and Rubin (1995, p. 140) state "In focus groups, the goal is to let people spark off one another, suggesting dimensions and nuances of the original problem that any one individual

might not have thought of. Sometimes a totally different understanding of a problem emerges from the group discussion.” However, disadvantages of focus group interviews are less control over group, less control over what information will be produced, data difficult to analyze, and small numbers limit generalization to larger populations and uncertainty of accuracy of what participants say (Kruger 1994).

Research Permission and Consent Forms

Under REB# 5758. Parents’ and children’s permission was obtained through written consent forms that were first reviewed by the program coordinator. Once the program coordinator approved the consent forms, the program coordinator reviewed the consent forms with the children in detail. The program coordinator and I read through the forms thoroughly and explained the children the scope and the purpose of the research. Children were made aware of their choice to participate or abstain from participating in the research. All questions posed by the children were clarified. The consent forms were then taken home by children who chose to participate in the research which were reviewed and signed by the parents. None of the participants’ names were used in the research or the transcripts of the interviews. Aliases were assigned to the focus group participants; staff members were referred to as staff member A and staff member B and the program coordinator was referred to as program coordinator.

Compensation

In order to compensate the children, among the various choices discussed (money, books, crayons, gift card) the program coordinator and I arrived at the conclusion to offer each participant \$ 10 dollars.

Research Setting

All interviews (one-on-one and focus groups) were audio recorded and will be later destroyed after three years as per research ethics guidelines. All the interviews were transcribed. Excerpts from the transcripts are included in the MRP. In order to analyze the data, I employed a qualitative analytic approach. As per Berg (2001) there are three major approaches to qualitative data analysis. These approaches are categorized as: collaborative social research approaches, social anthropological approaches and interpretive approaches. The method (qualitative analytic approach) I adopted falls into the category of collaborative social research approaches. It was appropriate for me to adopt this approach because I had the opportunity to work with subjects in a given setting. In this particular setting, Berg (2001) describes the following stages that occur during data analysis:

- Data are collected and made into text (e.g., field notes, transcripts, etc.).
- Codes are analytically developed or inductively identified in the data and affixed to sets of notes or transcript pages.
- Codes are transformed into categorical labels or themes.
- Materials are sorted by these categories, identifying similar phrases, patterns, relationships, and commonalties or disparities.
- Sorted materials are examined to isolate meaningful patterns and processes.
- Identified patterns are considered in light of previous research and theories, and a small set of generalizations are established.

Permission from Rapport

I received permission from the organization to conduct this research. Through the efforts of the program coordinator, permission was obtained from the organization (Rapport) for this research to go forward.

Study Location/ Participants

All interviews were conducted on the same day at Dunrankin public school. All the interviews were conducted in the activity room at the premises. While I interviewed the program coordinator, no other person was present in the room. Once the interview with the program coordinator was complete, I interviewed the staff members one at a time while no one else was present in the room. This was important in order to ensure transparency and complete ease in the expression of thoughts, concerns and compliments of the interviewees in regard to the program. Once the one-on-one interviews were complete, the focus group interviews were conducted in the presence of staff members. The presence of a staff member during the focus group interviews allows for the grounds to question whether the focus group participants gave genuine answers. The presence of a staff member may appear to be a factor that could intimidate the participants from expressing their true feelings. During the focus group interviews, I witnessed a very open and friendly environment. The participants were thrilled to answer questions and express their experiences in the after-school program. The participants were not hesitant in stating their likes or dislikes in the after-school program and proposed their ideas of what they would like to see different in the program.

Both groups were given the opportunity to decide among themselves as to which group would be interested in going first for the focus group interview. The female focus group vouched

to go first and one staff member remained in the room during the interview. It was important to have a staff member present during the focus group interviews in order to ensure safety, discipline and comfortable environment. While the female focus group interview was being conducted the male group played in the gym with the other staff member. Once the female focus group interview was complete, the male group settled in the activity room with a staff member while the female group went on to play in the gym. This ensured the eradication of any bias in the answers of both groups because one group did not know how the other group responded to the questions presented. Once all interviews were complete, the data was analyzed in the following manner:

Stage A

- Data from the program coordinator's interview transcribed
- Data from the staff members' interview transcribed.
- Data from focus group interviews transcribed.

Stage B

- Data from the program coordinator's interview coded and categorized to establish emergent themes.
- Data from the staff members' interview coded and categorized to establish emergent themes.
- Data focus group interviews coded and categorized to establish emergent themes.

Stage C

- Emergent themes from all interviews were assigned to one of the appropriate structures of the after-school program:

- A. Physical Activity
- B. Healthy Eating
- C. Health and Wellness

Limitations of Research

This research comes with limitations. Results from this research cannot be generalized to all after-school programs. Most after-school programs aim to accomplish similar goals such as broad learning opportunities that may enhance the social, cognitive, physical, academic, cultural, recreational, nutritional and emotional outcomes. However, each after-school program is unique in nature and its execution of activities. Similarly, the Ontario after-school program offers a unique agenda (physical activity, healthy eating and health & wellness) that organizations must follow to qualify for funding. This research was also limited due to the number of participants, their age and class. The research does not contain any data from parents. Finally, this research was only limited one site and the focus of the research was limited to three core areas of the program and their implementation. Benefits of conducting research with just a single organization are rapid data collection, opportunity to explore issues in depth and less time consuming. Disadvantages of conducting research with a single agency are time limited data, confined findings, limited accuracy, small sample of participants, lack of quantitative data and lack of variety in participants.

Findings & Discussion

The goal of this research was to evaluate the quality of Ontario's after-school program as implemented by Rapport by using Tuason et al's (2009) criteria by answering the following questions:

- How the three core areas are implemented and what activities are offered in the three core areas?
- How staff members and participant perceive the program?
- How the program impacts the lives of student-participants?

. I intended to document the various activities offered by the program and how effective they have been in engaging the participants. Data analysis of all the interviews conducted in the research revealed common themes such as: Peer Socialization, Sportsmanship, Motivation, Communication Skills, Quality Time, Participant-Staff Relationship. These themes were assigned to the appropriate core areas of the Ontario after-school program to better organize and analyze the data. The themes present in the research were assigned to the core areas of the program as follows:

A. Physical Activity

Themes: Peer Socialization, Sportsmanship, Motivation and Communication Skills

B. Healthy Eating

Themes: Physical Health Awareness

C. Health and Wellness

Themes: Quality Time, Participant-Staff Relationship

Physical Activity

The after-school program runs three days a week on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Participants engage in a wide range of physical activities like basketball, hip hop, soccer, dancing, dodgeball, skipping ropes, hula hoops, yoga, Zumba etc... Participants are also permitted and encouraged to create their own physical activities like tag to stimulate creative

thinking. All activities are planned according to participants' consensus. When weather permits, participants engage in physical activities outdoors. Three different activities are planned for each day to keep the day exciting and prevent boredom. Staff members meet every Friday before or after the program to and plan all the activities for each day that are to take place the following week. By engaging in various physical activities, participants experience and benefit through peer socialization, sportsmanship, motivation and communication skills.

Peer Socialization

Physical activity is one of the three core areas of the Ontario after-school program that offers participants among its various benefits the opportunity to socialize with their peers. Larson and Verma (1999) describe peer socialization in after-school programs as a platform for experiencing roles while learning cultural norms and expanding social, intellectual and emotional self-regulation. Peer socialization avails children the opportunity to learn about different cultures, share ideas (academic, arts, sports etc....), establish friendship, trust and mutual respect. Data gathered through the interviews with the program coordinator, staff members and focus groups established that physical activity resulted in peer socialization. Participants enjoyed engaging in a variety of activities.

The program coordinator said:

The students become more social and make new friends in the program and interact more with each other and the staff. The students know how to share once they are in the program.

Staff members affirmed that the participants actively engaged in physical activities. Boys and girls alike exercised creativity in creating their own games to make different activities challenging and competitive.

Staff member A stated:

Children enjoy basically most of the activities they engage in. Mostly because they decide which games they want to play like soccer or basketball or when they play outside, they like to make teams with their friends.

Staff member B added:

It's not the same for boys and girls because boys usually like to play basketball or soccer more than like skipping ropes or Zumba which the girls like more so that's why we have a mix of everything. Sometimes they make groups where its boys versus girls in soccer and sometimes they make mixed groups and play the game like that.

Participants in both focus groups had formed groups of friends whom they socialized with in all the activities they engaged in. None of the participants in both focus groups expressed being alone or not having a friend to hang out with. Some participants had friends from school with whom they spent time with at the after-school program while some participants made new friends whom they met at the program. During the focus group interviews, participants were asked "with whom do you usually hang out?" Lisa, Kate, April and Lucy all named each other (all present in the focus group) while Jane claimed hanging out with a friend from the program who was not present that day. David, Mike and Luke named each other in addition to two other participants that were absent that day. John, Allen and Joe claimed to hang out together. This shows the close friendships developed by all the participants in the program. Overall, healthy relationships were present in both groups. Participants engaged in a wide range of physical activities which allowed them to pair up with friends or form groups. Girls and boys could either face off each other in basketball or soccer as groups or create mixed teams or play in pairs of two. It was interesting to see that participants had the choice to create their own games which allowed them to express their creativity; an excellent opportunity to stimulate their thinking.

Sportsmanship

Sportsmanship is an integral part of all physical activities. The concept of sportsmanship is often perceived as an attitude (positive/negative) towards winning or losing a game. In contrary, sportsmanship is resource that offers opportunities in building character, intergroup relations, cooperation, assertion, empathy, confidence, responsibility, self-control, leadership, conflict management, discipline, commitment and teamwork (NRCIM 2002). Interviews with staff members and focus groups were helpful in understanding how participants exercised sportsmanship in the after-school program, conflicts among children and conflict management tools. When discussing the types of conflicts that staff members witnessed among the participants, staff member A stated:

Sometimes they will want to sit at a certain spot and they will argue about who got there first and who should sit there or when they play in the gym they run into issues.

Staff member B added:

I would say they can get competitive especially in the gym when they play sports. They are very disciplined though like they never fight but they can argue over things like a foul or a goal or two teams wanting to pick the same person when they face off.

Staff members did not encounter any troubling behavioral problems among participants whenever conflicts arose. Rather, they emphasized that participants resolved issues through discussions and mutual respect. In order to resolve conflicts among the participants, staff member A said:

There are rules in place for all the activities in the program like when one person is speaking everyone else has to listen or when its snack time everyone must wait for their turn. Same thing goes for gym activities. When one team wins it has to shake hands with the other team at the end of the game. But whenever there is any issue, everyone sits down and talk it out and make sure everyone is being fair and everything.

Staff member B reiterated:

We resolve all issues by discussing things out. All the kids get a chance to have their say and everyone listens to each other to clear out any misunderstandings. Its not very often that issues arise because everyone follows rules and all the kids are friends so yea basically its all about dialogue.

In addition to learning conflict management and communication skills, participants during focus group interviews mentioned how they socialized and what they learned in the program. Lisa said 'I made new friends'. Jane stated 'we play tag and yoga'. April mentioned 'I play with my friends and like I making yummy snacks'. Kate said 'I learned the three-strike rule and I also like to play outside' and Lucy agreed with Kate's statement. Male focus group interview also produced a variety of responses. David said 'I learned to always wash my hands before snack time' and everyone in the group nodded in agreement. Joe stated 'I learned to pass the ball because we learned to share and play as a team' and everyone in the group nodded in agreement. Allen said 'I made new friends and I learned sharing is nice'. Luke said 'I learned not to talk when someone else is talking and passing the ball'. Mike added 'Not talking over others and we throw the plates in the bin after snack time'. John stated 'I learned that vegetables and fruits are good for us.'

Analysis of this discussion show the various skills acquired by the participants in the after-school program through physical activities and coaching by the staff members. Participants learned to follow instructions laid out by staff members such as the three-strike rule, respecting others and listening when their peers or staff members spoke. Participants also engaged in tasks that taught them responsibility such as cleaning up after themselves after snack time. By engaging in a wide range of sports, participants learned the importance team work, sharing,

fairness and resolving differences through communication. In addition, participants practiced sportsmanship by shaking hands at the end of their games.

Motivation and Communication Skills

Participation in after-school programs offer children various means to become motivated and develop their communication skills. Engagement in physical activities allow participants to complete tasks and set goals and work towards achieving those goals. Sports offer youth a platform that is instrumental in enhancing their skills such as cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control (Co[^]te', 2002. Participants become motivated to complete tasks or achieve their goals such as winning a basketball game or scoring a goal in soccer. The element of a challenge or an obstacle in an activity is an important factor which motivates participants to engage with their peers and develop their communication skills. Interviews with staff members and focus groups were helpful in understanding how participants became motivated and improved their communication skills in the after-school program. In response to whether participants are motivated to complete tasks, staff member A stated:

Yea, they are always excited and motivated to complete tasks. Whether they are assigned tasks in the gym or other activities in the program they always finish it. Its not very often that it happens but sometimes there is the odd child who will not want to participate. So staff members talk to the child and ask why he or she doesn't want to participate. Sometimes they will say they are tired or their friend isn't there that day so we give them a short break and a drink or pair them with whichever group or participant they like.

Staff member B said:

The enjoy completing assigned tasks because I think they feel accomplished when they are done and that's very encouraging for the staff members and program as a whole. Very rarely they need motivation from staff members to participate because they play a central role in developing the activities, they participate in so they are always happy and motivated to participate. We just talk

and find out why they don't want to participate and its very minor concerns that are resolved quickly.

Both staff members acknowledged that it was important for them to develop strategies that may aid them in communicating with the participants.

Staff member A said:

I would say listening is the best way to communicate with kids and educating them addressing their concerns are important communication tools.

Staff member B added:

I feel acknowledging the participants is really important in order to communicate with them. We as staff members act as role models and with the children, we have established a relationship of respect and understanding. They are always confident in talking to us.

Furthermore, staff members were asked if the participants communicated with them about any obstacles or success at school.

Staff member A said:

They do share the things they do at school or ask questions about something new they have learned or tell us if they did really well on an assignment or not so well. Just this week a female participant was telling us about the flag of a country and what each color on the flag meant.

Staff member B reiterated:

Yeah they like discussing school related things with us. Sometimes they will tell us what they learned or getting a sticker on an assignment or helping the teachers in something.

Positive staff-participant relationship is an important indicator of a quality after-school program. It shows that participants are comfortable sharing their feelings and concerns with the staff members which is a result of trust-based relationships. During the focus group interviews, participants were asked about their favorite activities in the program. Lisa said 'My most favorite

is dancing because its fun and sometimes we create new moves’. Jane said ‘Mine is skipping ropes because I try to set a new record’. April added ‘Yea mine too because we skip together and the person standing last wins’. Kate stated ‘I like everything I don’t really have a most favorite’ and Lucy said ‘My favorite is tag because we can make secret plans to win’. David said ‘My favorite is basketball and soccer and I like playing outside whenever we are allowed to go outside because its fun’. Joe reiterated ‘Playing basketball is my favorite too because its fun’. Allen said ‘Soccer and dodgeball are my favorite but mostly soccer because I want to be like Ronaldo’. Luke stated ‘My favorite is soccer too because its fun’. Mike said ‘Soccer is my favorite because I like to learn new tricks’ and John stated ‘I like dodgeball and its fun but sometimes other kids keep playing even when they are out’. Participants’ responses verify statements made by staff members in regards to male participants seeking interest in different activities in comparison to their female counterparts. It is also important to note that participants were driven by some sort of purpose that led them to engage in their favorite activities. For example, Jane enjoyed skipping ropes because she was motivated to set new records while Allen played soccer to become a pro athlete like Ronaldo one day.

Analysis of this discussion revealed a rich mix of responses from both staff members and focus group participants. Participants and staff members fostered a tremendous relationship of trust and friendship. Participants respected and followed rules laid out by staff members and participants had the confidence to talk to staff members about school related matters. In addition, participants learned important character-building traits such as: sharing, respect, organization and teamwork. Engagement in various activities offered by the after-school program also taught the participants to communicate effectively with each other and the staff members. This could be seen when they build strategies during sports or talk to the staff members when they encounter

any concerns. In addition, Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural learning theory assisted the researcher in understating the positive impact of physical activity in the lives of the participants. The participants developed awareness, learning and thinking skills by engaging in various physical activities. Focus group interviews show that engagement in physical activities helped stimulate their cognitive skills. This could be seen by their motivation to set new records in the games they played such as rope skipping and basketball, enhancement of their ability to make plans and build strategies in the game of tag. Participation in the after-school program offered the children the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD). Participants expressed their excitement and contentment during the discussion of sports. The ability of the participants to learn positive behaviors such as sharing with their counterparts, respecting the rules of communication set by staff members and accomplishing tasks shows the after-school offers an environment of ZPD. One of the most important social skill the participants were seen developing was the ability to communicate with their peers and the staff members. Whether it is was resolving differences among each other in the gym or not wanting to participate in a certain activity, the participants utilized their communication skills to seek solutions. The "Zone of Proximal Development" could further be understood through Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs pyramid. The participants in the after-school program demonstrated creativity, potential and personal growth in an environment that offered them a ZPD. This shows that the participants accomplished self-actualization which is the final level of the pyramid. The accomplishment of this level by the participants in the program emphasizes that the participants had their other needs (Physiological, Safety, Love/Belonging, Esteem) on the pyramid fulfilled as a result of accomplishing self-actualization. For example, the third level of needs on the pyramid are classified as

“love/belonging” were seen attained by the participants when they mentioned making friends, building relationships and trust among peers and staff members.

Healthy Eating

The after-school program runs three days a week on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Healthy eating is one of the three core areas of the after-school program. This core area educates the participants about food nutrition and the importance of healthy diets. Healthy eating habits and an understating of nutritional foods at early ages help children transition into healthy adults. In addition to making informed food choices, children can become cautious of the harms of poor diets. Healthy eating is a vital tool to combat obesity that leads to countless health problems. Rates of childhood obesity tend to be higher in disadvantaged communities in comparison to affluent communities. Phipps, Burton, Osberg and Lethbridge (2006) conducted research that compared childhood obesity in Canada, Norway and the United States based on levels of poverty. The study revealed that childhood poverty in Canada was higher than Norway but lower than the United States. Childhood obesity was highest in the United States and lowest in Norway among the three countries. The study concluded that childhood obesity was highest in the United States due to highest childhood poverty levels among the three countries. Childhood obesity was lowest in Norway due to its lowest childhood poverty levels. Finally, childhood obesity levels in Canada were lower than that of the United States but higher than Norway due to its childhood poverty levels. During the after-school program, participants play an active role engaging in healthy eating activities. Staff members divide the participants in groups and each group is assigned a day to prepare snacks. Staff members engage the participants in planning and constructing the snacks and refreshments menu. Interviews with the program coordinator, staff

members and focus groups were helpful in understanding how healthy eating as a core area was implement in the after-school program. The program coordinator stated:

The goal of the after-school programs is to eliminate childhood obesity through healthy nutritious eating and physical activities. To ensure dietary restrictions, program policy is no meat, eggs or nuts at any given time. We only serve fresh fruits and vegetables in the program so nothing preserved, canned or frozen. Also, the permission forms have a section where the parents can notify us of any food allergies or dietary restrictions and those allergies and dietary restrictions are taken into consideration and followed.

Through communication and snack preparation, staff members encouraged healthy eating in the after-school program. Staff member A stated:

We talk to the kids about the benefits of eating fruits and vegetable and we also have discussions with them about different foods when we prepare snacks.

Staff member B added:

I would say they learn about healthy eating when we talk to them about different foods and their pros and cons. Most importantly they learn when they take part in preparing snacks.

Participants' responses illustrated how the staff members helped them learn about eating healthy, the benefits of good foods and the harmful affects of junk foods. Kate said 'We learned that eating apples and bananas keep us healthy and too much chocolate is bad for our teeth'. Jane added 'Eating fruits can give us energy and vegetables too and we make fun snacks'. Lisa stated 'We learned that greens are good for us and fruits'. Lucy reiterated 'I like eating carrots and its good for our eyes'. David said 'They help us make healthy snacks with fruits and vegetables'. Joe stated 'They tell us about different foods that are good for us'. Allen said 'We learned that fruits and vegetables are better than eating chips and stuff'. John added 'We learned that bananas are good because they give us energy'.

Analysis of this discussion disclose that participants benefit tremendously by participating in healthy eating activities. The program coordinator states “the goal of the after-school program is to eliminate childhood obesity through healthy nutritious eating and physical activities”. This goal could be seen being accomplished through discussions with the participants. Engagement in snack preparations and dialogue between staff members and participants helped them learn the value of food nutrition. Staff members allowing participants to engage in snack preparation was a creative technique to make snack time a fun activity for the participants and opportunity to educate them about food nutrition. Participants were also able to establish the important relationship between nutritious foods and physical activities. They further learned the impacts of junk foods.

Health and Wellness

The after-school program runs three days a week on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Health and wellness is one of the three core areas of the after-school program. The aim of this core area is to help participants build confidence, resiliency, self-reliance and self-esteem. Furthermore, participants learn to build positive relationships and raise anti-bullying awareness. Participants engage in mindfulness exercise and yoga daily once at the beginning of the program and once at the end of the program. Participants engage in presentations that address anti-bullying and relationship building strategies. The after-school program’s health and wellness core area is an embodiment of the whole program. Health and wellness is practiced by participants when they engage in all activities of the program with complete commitment. All activities in the program are interrelated and engagement in each activity is equally important for the participants to experience health and wellness. For example, when participants engage in physical activities, they build their confidence, self-esteem and enhance positive peer

relationships. Participation in itself in the after-school program is an important first step for participants to counter bullying. This can come through education, positive staff-participant relationships and making new friends at the program with similar interests (Nansel, Overpeck, Haynie, Ruan and Scheidt, 2003). Miller (2005) states that effective after-school programs with committed participants are vital platforms that reduce delinquency and enhance social and cognitive skills of youth and children. Structured settings with oversight in the form of after-school programs are excellent arenas to engage children who bully. Structured programs can offer these children opportunities to use their social skills in a constructive manner (Nansel et al., 2003).

Quality Time/ Participant-Staff Relationship

Participation in an after-school program is an excellent opportunity especially for unsupervised children to spend quality time during the after-school hours. Research shows that children residing in low socioeconomic neighborhoods are more likely to spend unstructured and unsupervised time after-school. Studies show that the period between 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. after-school is when children are most vulnerable to harmful experiences. During this period, children may engage in or become victims of bullying, violence, illicit drug use and delinquent behaviors such as: crime, theft, drinking, vandalism etc. Children engaging in such activities develop anti-social behavior problems and do poorly in school. Consequences of such actions may lead to poor health, school dropout, incarceration and deterioration of relationships. Therefore, spending quality time in structured and supervised activities protect children from harmful environments. As a result, children are afforded the opportunity to enhance their academic performance, physical/ cognitive health, develop positive relationships, build self-esteem, confidence and contribute to their health and wellness as a whole.

Interviews with participants, staff members and the program coordinator were instrumental in understating how Health and Wellness was accomplished. During the focus group interviews, participants were asked their reasons for participating in the program. Lisa, April and Kate stated that their parents enrolled them in the program because they did not want them to be alone at home after-school. Jane said ‘My friends are in the program and they told me its fun so I asked my parents and they said I am allowed to go’. Lucy added ‘I didn’t like being home alone so I told my mom and she registered me’. Joe, Allen and Luke stated that their parents enrolled them in the program. John said ‘Joe and Allen told me about the program so I came too’. David expressed ‘My friends are in the program so I came in the program too’. Mike reiterated ‘David came to the program first and then I came too when he told me’.

Participants’ responses in both focus groups were similar for the reasons they chose to join the after-school program. Some participants joined the program because their friends were enrolled in the program and motivated them to join, others were enrolled by their parents because they were alone at home during the after-school hours. Additionally, participants were asked how they would spend their time during the after-school hours, if they were not enrolled in the program. Lisa responded ‘I would hang out with my friends’. Jane added ‘I would go to my friend’s house to play’. April said ‘I stay at home when I am not at the program’. Kate stated ‘I stay home too but sometimes I go to the mall with my friends’. Lucy said ‘I would watch Netflix’. Luke and Mike mentioned playing Fortnite (video game). David said ‘I would play at the park with my friends’. Allen reiterated ‘I would work on my YouTube channel and add new videos’. John stated ‘I play basketball with my friend at his house’. Participants’ responses verified the data gathered in previous research about children when left unsupervised spend their

time in unproductive activities during the after-school hours. Staff members were asked to rate their relationship of trust with the participants on a scale of 1 to 10. Staff member A stated:

I would say it is 10 because the kids have a great relationship with the staff members. They talk to us very openly and look at us more like friends than staff.

Staff member B added:

I want to say it is definitely 10 based on my experiences with the participants. They have the confidence to talk to us and share their ideas.

Staff members reported that parents were actively involved in the after-school program and regularly shared their concerns or their child's progress in the program. Staff member A said:

There is a fair amount of parental involvement. Parents share with us their thoughts and concerns and keep us updated on how the kids feel about the program.

Staff member B expressed:

Yes, most parents are very involved. I would say 90 percent of parents are actively involved in the program. They talk to the staff members on regular basis.

Staff members also expressed the importance of regular attendance to maintain consistency in activities and quality of the program. Staff member A said:

Yes, regular attendance is mandatory. Exceptions are made for legitimate reasons.

Staff member B added:

It is very important because it is mandatory to attend on regular basis unless there is an emergency.

Staff members stated that participants communicated their displeasure about summer months for not being able to attend the program. Staff member A stated:

They feel sad because they are always excited and happy to attend the program.

Staff member B added:

They are excited for their summer break but they are not happy because they cannot come to the program. They ask us how long they have to wait before they can come again.

The program coordinator reported positive feedback from the community in regards to the after-school program. The program coordinator stated:

The community has reacted very positively. The community has seen the benefits of the after-school Program. They are free of cost to each and every parent and they are very safely delivered with paid staff to supervise the participants and we serve healthy nutritious snacks.

The after-school program adhered to strict policies that ensured participant safety, privacy, conduct and the overall quality of the program. The program coordinator expressed:

The program protocols are similar to the school protocols, no participant is sent home until we have written permission from the parents, participants in the ECLYPSE after-school program never walk home after the program they have to be picked up. Our after-school program takes bullying very seriously. We also have a three-strike rule, we work with the student and the parents however, if the student is not improving and continues to be a danger to himself/herself and others then they are let go.

The program coordinator was asked whether parents understand the importance of their children attending the after-school program? The program coordinator responded:

Most parent do. I have had parents come and speak to me and let me how much of a positive impact the program has had on their child. As once their child is in the program the child is away from computer or television and is active, interacting and social. Some parents even go as far as sharing that their child overall behavior has changed and they are no complaints from the school and they are also excelling in their studies. Some parents would share that their children are now eating healthy and also demanding healthy fruits and vegetables instead of the junk food and there is a change in their physical health. However, we will have those few parents who use the

after-school program as a free babysitting services for their children and see no importance but that is a very small number of parents.

Analysis of this discussion show the vital need of quality after-school programs in impoverished communities. Enrollment of participants in the program was primarily due to parental concern in regards to their children's supervision and safety during the after-school hours. Majority of participants stated that their parents enrolled them in the program. More importantly, when asked about their activities if they were not in the program, most participants mentioned being alone, being unsupervised, playing outside or spending time on social media. Interviews with staff members and the program coordinator highlight the following: strong staff-participant relationships, positive community response, positive program outcomes, parental involvement, safety, benefits on the participants health/wellbeing (social, physical, emotional and cognitive). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological theory was essential in understating role of the after-school program in the lives of the participants as an active microsystem. As proposed by this theory, the participants in the after-school program were seen developing their social, physical and cognitive skills through positive interactions with their counterparts and staff members. The after-school program offered the participants a safe, supervised and a supportive environment which are all positive microsystems. These microsystems protected the participants from negative and harmful microsystems such as: inadequate supervision, drugs, violence, delinquency and etc. Positive microsystems in the after-school program like physical activity, healthy snacks, social interactions, healthy environment all contributed to the healthy development of the participants.

Program Challenges

The demand and need for after-school programs continue to grow especially in low socioeconomic communities. After-school programs tend to be unique in nature and no two programs are the same. Some after-school programs may focus more on academic activities while other programs offer arts and sports-based activities. However, all after-school programs share a common goal of offering children/youth a safe and supervised environment to develop their skills (social, physical, cognitive, academic). Similarly, after-school programs also share common challenges that may limit them in their potential. Pelcher and Rajan (2016) in their study found that the most common challenges after-school programs face are: staffing, funding, resources, transportation and space. Halpern (1999) conducted a study on challenges faced by after-school programs in Boston, Chicago and Seattle. The study found that after-school programs in all three cities encountered challenges in areas such as: facilities, financing and staffing. It important to note that while both studies are conducted 17 years apart, the issues faced by after-school programs remain unchanged. Interview with the program coordinator was helpful in understating program challenges. Focus group interviews were helpful in understanding program improvement. In reference to program challenges, the program coordinator said:

The obstacles we have are staff turnover. Once I have a strong team of staff in place the program runs very smoothly and the participants enjoy the program. The biggest challenge is getting the right staff for the programs since the after-school programs are part-time only 10 hours a week. I would prefer to see more funding towards pay rise for the staff as they have been paid the same amount for the past 7 years.

The participants were happy with the program structure and enjoyed the activities that were being offered in the program. In response to program improvement ideas, all the

participants offered a range of creative opinions. Lisa said ‘Umm I think we can have homework help which would be good’. Jane stated ‘Yeah help with school projects’. April reiterated ‘Homework help and art activities’. Lucy added ‘I think homework help as well’. David said ‘We can have basketball competitions with kids from other after-school programs’. Joe stated ‘We can try cooking classes’. Allen added ‘Help with homework for sure’. Luke said ‘We can build things from wood and stuff’. Mike expressed ‘Board games I think would be fun too’. John stated ‘We can try science experiments’.

Analysis of this discussion demonstrate the consistency in obstacles encountered by after-school programs. The issues continue to revolve around shortage of funding, staffing and resources. It is important to note that all three issues of funding, staffing and resources are interrelated. Specifically, lack of adequate funding results in shortages in staff and resources. Halpern (1999) states “Interviews with program directors and coordinators in the three MOST cities reveal the concern that program leaders have regarding their ability to recruit qualified staff, pay adequate salaries, and stem high rates of turnover. Jobs in after-school programs are primarily part time and poorly paid. The 1991 national survey found that staff in after- school programs worked on average fewer than 20 hours per week.” During discussions with the program coordinator in regards to program obstacles, the program coordinator stated “The obstacles we have are staff turnover. Once I have a strong team of staff in place the programs run very smoothly and the participants enjoy the program. The biggest challenge is getting the right staff for the programs since the after-school programs are part-time only 10 hours a week.” The program coordinator’s response goes hand in hand with Halpern’s findings. Pelcher and colleagues (2016) state “However, low wages, an inability to pay staff for more than a few hours of work per week, and a program’s exclusive reliance on volunteers often lead to high turnover

rates.” These findings support the program coordinator’s concerns with inadequate funding, staffing and resources. The program coordinator also mentioned that wages for the staff members have remain unchanged for the past seven years. Insufficient hours and poor wages are major obstacles to hiring and retaining qualified staff. Lack of qualified and permanent staff can impact the day to day activities and structure of an after-school program. For example, participants may fail to form healthy relationships with staff, lose interest in the program, experience anxiety and drop out from the after-school program.

Conclusion

After-school programs have become an integral part of Canadian and American school boards in North America. Research shows the important benefits after-school programs can deliver while offsetting the harms children may encounter in their communities if left unsupervised. After-school programs generally operate between 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. during the school days. After-school programs offer all children various activities that may help in the devolvement of their social, physical, psychological growth. However, most after-school programs are offered not for profit or government funded agencies in impoverished neighbourhoods. Children in disadvantaged neighborhoods may lack adult supervision during the after-school hours. This lack of supervision leaves them vulnerable to victimization and delinquency. Children enrolled in after-school programs engage in meaningful activities in supervised environments.

The goal of this study was to understand and analyze the implementation of Ontario’s after-school program by Rapport at Dunrankin public school in Malton. I intended to document how the core areas of the after-school program were administered, activities offered in each core area, staff perceptions about the program, participants’ perceptions and impact of the after-school

program in the lives of the participants. Furthermore, I attempted to investigate whether or not Ontario's after-school program offered components that a quality after-school program contains.

According to Ontario's after-school program guidelines, Rapport offered a wide range of activities to program participants in all three areas. These activities are as follows:

- 1.) Physical (basketball, hip hop, soccer, dancing, dodgeball, skipping ropes, hula hoops, Zumba and tag)
- 2.) Healthy Eating (Snack preparation, healthy eating discussions, obesity awareness, nutrition education, awareness of healthy/poor diets)
- 3.) Health and Wellness (Yoga, Mindfulness, anti-bullying presentation, anti-bullying discussions, confidence and sportsmanship through physical activities, and peer relationship building through activities)

Staff members spoke positive about the after-school program and the participants. The staff members appeared to be committed to the after-school program in light of their employment period. They also appeared to be well connected with the participants due to their knowledge of the participants' character traits, favorite snacks, favorite sports, likes/dislikes and etc... Staff members had also developed strategies to communicate with the participants and engage them during times when participants showed lack of interest in an activity. Participants also demonstrated their commitment and enthusiasm for the after-school program. They enjoyed activities in all three core areas of the program. Some participants joined the after-school program because their friends were attending while some were enrolled by their parents. In both cases, all the participants were excited to be in the program. Engagement in physical activities helped the participants learn about the importance of health and fitness. It also taught them important skills like sportsmanship, communication, building strategies, team-work, confidence

and ambition. The healthy eating segment of the program offered the participants nutritious foods and healthy snacks. More importantly, participants engaged in healthy eating activities that helped develop their social skills, increase their knowledge nutrition and obesity awareness. The health and wellness core area of the after-school program participants activities like yoga, mindfulness and anti-bullying initiatives. Engagement in health and wellness activities allowed the participants to build confidence, have anti-bullying discussions, practice resiliency and develop healthy and positive relationships. Enrollment in the program allowed the participants to spend their after-school time a productive and a meaningful manner in a supervised environment. Discussions with the children showed that if they were not enrolled in the after-school program, they would spend unstructured and unsupervised time playing outside, browsing the internet or playing video games. Rapport did an excellent job of implementing Ontario's after-school program. I base this statement on the data I gathered and as my personal opinion. The responses in the interviews with the staff members and the participants show the success of the program. Participants experienced a safe, friendly and a healthy after-school environment and benefitted physically, emotionally, psychologically and socially by participating in all of the after-school program's activities. I can conclude that the data I gathered was sufficient in answering my three research questions. Rapport implemented Ontario's after-school program by offering the participants all three core areas of the programs with a wide range of activities that the participants enjoyed. Each core area was administered with multiple activities that were diverse and inclusive. Staff members and participants fostered positive relationships. Staff members enjoyed their roles as mentors. The after-school program had a positive impact in the lives of the participants. The after-school program offered the participants a safe and friendly environment, activities that developed the participants' physical and cognitive health and social skills.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Practice

There was diversity in activities in all three core areas of the program. Discussions with the participants revealed their satisfaction and attachment to the program. However, most participants expressed the lack of an academic component in the program. Participants expressed the need for help in school projects and homework.

- Academic support is not part of Ontario's after-school program mandate and including academic support as the fourth core area of the program would improve the quality of the program. This core area may offer the participants help in daily homework, school projects and any other school related work.
- The program should establish a discussion forum between program staff and participants' teachers to implement activities in the program that may help participants in school.
- Parental involvement plays a crucial role in the success of any quality after-school program. Parental involvement offers a forum of discussion and establishes a channel of communication between parents and staff members of the program. This platform allows parents to share their concerns with the staff members and vice versa. Parents have the opportunity to follow up on their children's success in the program and understand their children's strengths and weaknesses. Staff members can also share the participants' behaviors, habits and progress with the parents and develop strategies for improvements as each child is unique.

Recommendations for Policy

- Adding new activities based on participants' interests (i.e. science experiments, wood working, competitive sports events) would help improve the quality of the program.
- Establishing an official staff/parent meeting event would be an excellent opportunity to continue program improvement.
- Introduction of cultural activities should be considered as an element of program.
- An increase in funding is also highly needed to sustain the quality of the program. Adequate funding would allow more children to participate in the program, hire/retain qualified staff and purchase supplies.
- An increase in staff remuneration is important for the success of a quality after-school program. After-school programs generally run 3 hours a day and 3 to 5 days a week and staff members are a paid minimum wage. This results in a high turnover of staff members and makes it a challenge for the program to hire and retain qualified staff members. Additionally, after-school programs run during 3 – 6 p.m., which makes it impossible for anyone to find an additional full-time job. The turnover of staff members may also impact the participants. Participants develop relationships with the staff members and a sudden/continuous change in staff members causes stress to the participants and eliminates the development of positive staff-participant relationships.

- The after-school program currently runs three days a week. It would be highly beneficial for the participants, staff members and the overall quality of the program to run five days a week.

Recommendations for Future Research

- For future research, a qualitative study should be conducted which includes Ontario after-school program locations across the GTA.
- Additional research should be conducted that includes participants' performance in school commencing the period they joined the after-school program.
- A GTA wide survey from all the participants in the program should be conducted to understand their likes, dislikes and new ideas for the program.

Limitations of the Study

Ontario's after-school program is an effective and a vital initiative for children residing in impoverished neighbourhoods. It offers them an opportunity to enhance their health and wellness needs in a structured, safe and a supervised environment. The results of this study cannot be generalized to all afterschool programs. Recommendations made in this study may help improve and sustain the quality of the after-school program.

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire for Focus Groups

1. What do you usually do during after-school hours?
2. How long have you been attending the program for?
3. With whom do you usually hang out?
4. If you were not in the afterschool program, what would you choose to do during after-school hours?
5. What made you participate in the program?
6. What are your expectations for the program?
7. What you do want to learn or do in the program?
8. What did you do or learn in the program?
9. What was the most important thing you learned in the program?
10. Have you ever learned similar things in class or at home?
11. Were there any differences between things you learned here or other places?
12. Have you tried what you learned in the program in school or at home?
13. If you answered yes, did it work?
14. How did it make you feel?
15. Has your behavior changed following your participation in the program?
16. How did the program instructor help you learn?
17. What did he do or say? Can you give me an example?
18. What is your most favorite activity in the program and why?
19. What is your least favorite activity in the program and why?
20. Are there any activities that you wish to introduce to the program?

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire for Staff

1. How long have you been supervising the after-school program?
2. What does the after-school program mean to you?
3. What skills or strategies do you feel are important in order to communicate with the participants?
4. How do you manage conflicts among the participants?
5. What sort of conflicts do you see the most among children any why?
6. What sort of conflicts do you see the least among the children and why?
7. Do participants engage actively in all activities of the program? (How is healthy eating encouraged in the after-school program?)
8. How do you motivate participants to engage in activities when show lack of interest?
9. Which activities do participants enjoy the most?
10. Which activities do participants enjoy the least?
11. Do participants communicate with you about any obstacles or success at school?
12. How would you rate staff-participant trust and relationship on a scale of 1 to 10?
13. Are participants motivated to complete tasks?
14. Is there any parental involvement in the program?
15. Are parents welcome in the program?
16. Do parents appear to be interested about their children in the program?
17. Is it important for the participants to consistently attend the program?
18. Are participants concerned or sad when they need to miss a session?
19. Are participants enthusiastic about attending the program?
20. How do participants feel about the summer break when they do not get to attend the program?
21. Have participants mentioned how they will spend their time during the summer break?

APPENDIX C

Questionnaire for Program Coordinator

1. What does the afterschool program mean to you?
2. How do participants enroll in the program?
3. How has the community reacted to the after-school program?
4. What would you like to see different?
5. What is the goal of the after-school program?
6. How are dietary restrictions followed in the program?
7. What protocols are implemented in the program?
8. What are the challenges and barriers faced in the after-school program?
9. How does enrollment or number of participants impact funding?
10. Do you believe parents understand the importance of their children attending the afterschool program? Explain.
11. Have you witnessed any parental involvement in the afterschool program? Explain.
12. What sort of gains (academic, social, physical, emotional) have you seen in the participants who attend the after-school program?
13. Have parents expressed to you any emotions about their child attending the afterschool program? Explain.
14. To your knowledge, how many youths actively participate in the afterschool program? Explain.
15. Do you believe the afterschool program operates safely and effectively? Explain.
16. To your knowledge, do the participants enjoy attending the afterschool program? How do you know?

APPENDIX D

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Project Title: Impoverished Neighbourhoods & After-School Programs

Principal Investigator: Syed Bukhari, MA student, Social Justice Community Engagement

Co-Investigator N/A

INFORMATION

You are being invited to participate in a research project by student Syed Bukhari at Wilfrid Laurier University (Brantford, Ontario) supervised by Dr. Bree Akesson. The purpose of this study is to analyze the structure of the afterschool program and the activities you host at Dunrankin public school in Malton. This discussion will evaluate the program and how it benefits the participants. This discussion may also help improve the quality of the program and how it is implemented by understanding the views of the participants in regards to the program. You are being invited to participate in this study because you were recommended by the program coordinator and because are a staff member who runs the afterschool program at Dunrankin public school in Malton. I expect to be working with one more staff member, the program coordinator and ten grade five youth who attend the program.

You will be asked to participate in a semi structured interview with me (Syed Bukhari) at the program site at Dunrankin public school. The interview should take between 30 to 40 minutes to complete.

RISKS

As a staff member, you may feel anxious of encountering social risks (e.g., fear of reprisal from the coordinator if a response makes the program or coordinator look bad) and emotional risks (e.g., anxiety about sharing examples of program shortcomings) The following safeguards will be used to minimize any risks/discomforts:

All answers will be kept confidential. Any answers provided will not be associated with the name of the participant in any part of the research. Any responses provided will be for the benefit and improvement of the program. As a participant, you have the freedom and choice to say "PASS" to skip any question.

PARTICIPATION

You are under no obligation to participate in this research, it is your choice whether to be a part of the study or not. You may decide not to be a part of the study and even if you have accepted to participate in the interview you may stop and leave the interview at any time. There will be no bias or penalty from the agency, or Wilfrid Laurie University Brantford if you decide not to participate or if you decide to stop participating in the research. There are no repercussions by participating or not participating in this research.

APPENDIX D (continued)

BENEFITS

You may benefit from the study by getting a better understanding of the program and how the participating youth perceive the program. A better understanding of the program may help you reshape certain things and better execute the program. This study may allow important research to be done in the future for an improvement in the construction and execution of afterschool programs in Ontario. There are no risks to you in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

To keep this information safe, the audiotape of your interview will be placed in a locked file cabinet until a written word-for-word copy of the discussion has been created. As soon as this process is complete, the tapes will be destroyed. I will enter study data on a computer that is password-protected. To protect confidentiality, your real name will not be used in the written copy of the discussion. There are some reasons why people other than myself may need to see information your child provided as part of the study. This includes my research supervisor and the program instructor and Wilfrid Laurier University that are responsible for making sure that the research is done safely and properly. If you consent, quotations will be used in the write-up of results and will not contain information that allows you to be identified.

I consent for my (de-identified) quotations to be used in the research. I can be contacted at _____ (email address or phone number) to approve the use of all quotations.

I do not consent for my quotations to be used in the research.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

The results of this research will be shared with the program coordinator who may choose to share them with the participating youth, parents, staff and the agency (Rapport) but no personal information about any of the people who were included will be part of any of the reports. If you have any questions about this research or your participation in the study you are welcome to speak to the program coordinator, Syed Bukhari or Dr. Bree Akesson. We can be reached via phone or e-mail.

Syed Bukhari

647 781 6563

Bukh2780@mylaurier.ca

Dr. Bree Akesson

519.756.8228 Ext: 5345

bakesson@wlu.ca

APPENDIX D (continued)

REB clearance and contact:

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board (REB# 5758), which receives funding from the Research Support Fund. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Jayne Kalmar, PhD, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 3131 or REBChair@wlu.ca.

CONSENT

I understand that I am participating in research and that the research has been explained to me so that I understand what I am doing. I understand that I may stop participating at any time.

Signed Date

APPENDIX E

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY - INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Project Title: Impoverished Neighbourhoods & After-School Programs

Principal Investigator: Syed Bukhari, MA student, Social Justice Community Engagement

Co-Investigator N/A

TO BE COMPLETED BY YOUNG PERSON AND PARENT/GUARDIAN

PART A TO BE COMPLETED BY THE YOUNG PERSON

I agree to take part in the study on ONTARIO'S AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM and would like to take part in:

A focus group interview

I have read and understood the accompanying letter. I know what the study is about and the part I will be involved in. I know that I do not have to answer all of the questions and that I can decide not to continue at any time.

Name _____

Signature _____ Age _____

Date _____

APPENDIX E (continued)

PART B TO BE COMPLETED BY THE PARENT/GUARDIAN

I have read and understood the accompanying letter and give permission for the child (named above) to be included.

Name _____

Relationship to the child _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Confidentiality

If you consent, quotations will be used in the write-up of results and will not contain information that allows you (your child) to be identified.

- I consent for my child's (de-identified) quotations to be used in the research. I can be contacted at _____ (email address or phone number) to approve the use of all quotations.

- I do not consent for my child's quotations to be used in the research.

APPENDIX E (continued)

Date:

Address:

Dear Parent:

Syed Bukhari, M.A student of Wilfrid Laurier University, Department of Social Justice and Community Engagement, invites your child to participate in a research study entitled *Impoverished Neighbourhoods and After-School Programs: Ontario's After-School Program*. You and your child are being contacted because your child currently attends the after-school program at Dunrankin public school in Malton.

INFORMATION

I would like to talk with your child about how his/her experiences and activities at the after-school program. Attached with this letter is a list of questions all participants will be asked. This discussion will take place in a group interview format where other children from the same grade as your child will participate. The focus group interview will take place in a group setting and no child will be interviewed privately. The purpose of this study is to analyze the structure of the program and the activities your child participates in. This discussion will evaluate the program and how it benefits the participants. This discussion may also help improve the quality of the program and it is implemented by understanding the views of the participants in regards to the program. I plan to ask 10 - 12 children currently attending grade 5 to participate in my research.

If you agree, your child will talk to an interviewer about topics such as program activities, school habits, time spent in the program, time spent at home, activities at home and friends. The focus group interview will be conducted at Dunrankin public school and facilitated by the program instructor. The focus group interview is expected to take roughly an hour to complete. The interview will be audio taped.

RISKS

Your child's participation in this study may expose him/her to the social risk of being repudiated due to an answer he/she may provide. Your child may experience anxiety (emotional risk) about providing a response that may make the program appear poorly run. The following safeguards will be used to minimize any risks/discomforts:

All children will be informed of such risks before being interviewed. All children will be instructed to respect the answers of their fellow participants. All children will be notified that their participation will be terminated from the focus group because of ostracizing behavior towards their fellow participants. Ostracizing behavior may include but not limited to negative comments and making fun of the responses of their fellow participants.

APPENDIX E (continued)

BENEFITS

While your child may not directly benefit from participating in the interview, I hope that this study will contribute to the improvement of the after-school program and future initiatives.

COMPENSATION

As gesture of appreciation, your child will be compensated \$ 10 dollars

CONFIDENTIALITY

To keep this information safe, the audiotape of your child's interview will be placed in a locked file cabinet until a written word-for-word copy of the discussion has been created. As soon as this process is complete, the tapes will be destroyed. I will enter study data on a computer that is password-protected. To protect confidentiality, your child's real name will not be used in the written copy of the discussion.

There are some reasons why people other than the myself may need to see information your child provided as part of the study. This includes my research supervisor and the program instructor and Wilfrid Laurier University that are responsible for making sure that the research is done safely and properly.

If you consent, quotations will be used in the write-up of results and will not contain information that allows you (your child) to be identified.

PARTICIPATION

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline your child's participation without penalty. If you allow your child to participate, he/she may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Your child has the right to refuse to answer any question or participate in this this study. There are no repercussions by participating or not participating in this research.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

The results of this study might be published /presented in a thesis. The results of this study may be shared with the program coordinator and Rapport. No child's name or identity will be published or revealed in the study. Any reference to a child's response to a certain question will be recorded in the following format: "Child "A" in the boys focus group said.....".

The program instructor will call you to make to inform you of the date when the focus group discussion will take place. I hope that you will be willing allow your child to share his/her experiences with us.

APPENDIX E (continued)

If you have questions about this research or about your child's payment for participating, you can contact Syed Bukhari (647) 781-6563, bukh2780@mylaurier.ca or Dr. Bree Akesson (519) 756 8228 Ext: 5345, bakesson@wlu.ca

Sincerely,

Syed Bukhari,
Wilfrid Laurier University
Social Justice and Community Engagement
73 George St, Brantford,
ON N3T 2Y3
(647) 781 6563

Dr. Bree Akesson (Assistant Professor)
Wilfrid Laurier University
73 George St, Brantford,
ON N3T 2Y3

REB clearance and contact:

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board (REB# 5758), which receives funding from the Research Support Fund. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Jayne Kalmar, PhD, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 3131 or REBChair@wlu.ca.

APPENDIX F

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY - INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Project Title: Impoverished Neighbourhoods & After-School Programs

Principal Investigator: Syed Bukhari, MA student, Social Justice Community Engagement

Co-Investigator N/A

INFORMATION

You are being invited to participate in a research project by student Syed Bukhari at Wilfrid Laurier University (Brantford, Ontario) supervised by Dr. Bree Akesson. The purpose of this study is to analyze the structure of the afterschool program and the activities you host at Dunrankin public school in Malton. This discussion will evaluate the program and how it benefits the participants. This discussion may also help improve the quality of the program and how it is implemented by understanding the views of the participants in regard to the program. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are the program coordinator of the after-school program at Dunrankin public school in Malton. I expect to be working with two more staff members and ten grade five youth who attend the program.

You will be asked to participate in a semi structured interview with me (Syed Bukhari) at the program site at Dunrankin public school. The interview should take between 30 to 40 minutes to complete.

RISKS

There are no anticipated risks as a result of your participation in this study.

PARTICIPATION

You are under no obligation to participate in this research, it is your choice whether to be a part of the study or not. You may decide not to be a part of the study and even if you have accepted to participate in the interview you may stop and leave the interview at any time. There will be no bias or penalty from the agency, or Wilfrid Laurier University Brantford if you decide not to participate or if you decide to stop participating in the research. There are no repercussions by participating or not participating in this research.

BENEFITS

You may benefit from the study by getting a better understating of the program and how the participating youth perceive the program. A better understanding of the program may help you reshape certain things and better execute the program. This study may allow important research to be done in the future for an improvement in the construction and execution of afterschool programs in Ontario.

APPENDIX F (continued)

CONFIDENTIALITY

To keep this information safe, the audiotape of your interview will be placed in a locked file cabinet until a written word-for-word copy of the discussion has been created. As soon as this process is complete, the tapes will be destroyed. I will enter study data on a computer that is password-protected. To protect confidentiality, your real name will not be used in the written copy of the discussion. There are some reasons why people other than myself may need to see information your child provided as part of the study. This includes my research supervisor and the program instructor and Wilfrid Laurier University that are responsible for making sure that the research is done safely and properly. If you consent, quotations will be used in the write-up of results and will not contain information that allows you to be identified.

I consent for my (de-identified) quotations to be used in the research. I can be contacted at _____ (email address or phone number) to approve the use of all quotations.

I do not consent for my quotations to be used in the research.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

The results of this research will be shared with you and you may choose to share them with the participating youth, parents, staff and the agency (Rapport) but no personal information about any of the people who were included will be part of any of the reports. If you have any questions about this research or your participation in the study, you are welcome to speak to Syed Bukhari or Dr. Bree Akesson. We can be reached via phone or e-mail.

Syed Bukhari

647 781 6563

Bukh2780@mylaurier.ca

Dr. Bree Akesson

519.756.8228 Ext: 5345

bakesson@wlu.ca

APPENDIX F (continued)

REB clearance and contact:

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board (REB# 5758), which receives funding from the Research Support Fund. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Jayne Kalmar, PhD, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 3131 or REBChair@wlu.ca

CONSENT

I understand that I am participating in research and that the research has been explained to me so that I understand what I am doing. I understand that I may stop participating at any time.

Signed _____

Date _____

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